

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

Logical Straddles between the Real and the Tech-Simulated
World: A Critical Study of Girish Karnad's *Wedding Album*

¹Dr. G. Arputhavel Raja,² Dr. K. Muthuraman,³ Dr. V. Gnanaprakasam,
⁴Dr. M. Madhavan

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English Annamalai University

²Dean, Faculty of Languages Professor of English Annamalai University

³Associate Professor, Department of English Annamalai University

⁴Assistant Professor, Department of English Annamalai University

¹Dr. G. Arputhavel Raja,² Dr. K. Muthuraman,³ Dr. V. Gnanaprakasam, ⁴Dr. M. Madhavan, *Logical Straddles between the Real and the Tech-Simulated World: A Critical Study of Girish Karnad's Wedding Album -- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(9). ISSN 1567-214x*

Abstract

Girish Karnad's *Wedding Album* is a modern myth, which incorporates both actual and tech-simulated universes. It is hoped that the Indian wedding would unite the community in unity and shared interest. Yet the collision of fears and resentments that have been hidden inside the family's bosom is well established. The main theme of the game is its counselling of sexual, conjugal, caste, class and aging behaviours, egotistical and sacrificial attitudes and behaviours, chastity and trade, and obedience and authority, all of which are integral to the modern Hindu marriage. Karnad represents a fusion of cultures and his systematic studies are much more comprehensive than those of some of his peers and undoubtedly are far more effective.

Keywords: Marriage, Cultures, Family, Tradition, Myth, Modern

Introduction

A multidimensional personality, Girish Karnad has earned international acclaim as a dramatist, actor, director, critic, translator and cultural administrator. He is without a doubt one of the greatest dramatists and one of India's leading creative practitioners. He has

written, directed and acted in various Kannada, Hindi and English plays, feature movies, documentaries and TV series. His works, first written in Kannada and then translated to other languages, including English, have brought him a number of recognitions, both nationally and internationally. Since he translates his own plays into English, he has a lot of freedom than a translator of others' works.

Kanad's contemporary new play, *Wedding Album*, explores the traditional Indian Wedding in a globalized, technologically advanced India. In an interview with Chronicle, Karnad says: "I've been thinking about writing *Wedding Album* for over forty years now. I first thought about it when my sister got married in 1963" (2). The subject of this game is love. It is a familiar sight of a Hindu family, a festive experience as people come together to rejoice and reaffirm their loyalties also sparkle long-suppressed suspects, zealous, angry and violent behind the photo perfect and smile.

Indian Marriage

The *Wedding Album* is much concerned about a common occurrence in India today's urban middle-class that it was the basis of countless TV serials and commercial films: the imminent "arranged" marriage of a girl to an adequate boy. It is predicted that the Indian marriage would bring the clan together in unity and mutual interest. Yet the fusion of fears and resentments long buried in the bosom of the family is known to be enlightened. Forces around the world still have their very own tensions: the older generation feels lost in the new technological upheaval; young people are filled with hopes for simple wealth and ideals of personal liberty; visions and desires, passionate but only in vague terms. Karnad creates a funny, poignant, and highly troubling play in one of the most insightful intellectual explorations of the situation in modern Indian dramas.

Karnad never fails to surprise his readers as he is always unpredictable. While most of his earlier plays go back in time, wending their way through the annals of history and the labyrinthine recesses of oral and written mythology. In *Wedding Album*, he transports us back into the present with a resounding thud. No longer are we told those beautiful stories from Chitradurga, the darker tales from rural India or tales from Hindu mythology. Instead, he presents a surprising and vivid picture of the urban middle-class, persuading us to confront our realities as we hurtle forward into newer times and generations. In this essay, Karnad re-invents his writing with a new visual instrument-- one of technology, which investigates the psyche

of a writer. He uses technology throughout typical circumstances in the *Wedding Album*.

The play begins with a video bio-data--a replacement for the written bio-data, which a girl has to pose in a typical arranged marriage in the future. Her brother Rohit is captured by camera here by the 22-year-old Vidula Nadkami, who belongs to the typical Saraswat tribe, as she introduces herself to her future NRI groom, Ashwin Panje, a guy she still hasn't met. As you get into the heart of wedding preparations, Karnad introduces other Saraswat Brahmin Nadkami family members. The Nadkami household has a feeling of hope for the impending arrival of the bride, Ashwin, and a sense of trepidation, as disparate relatives alternately express concern and optimism about the successful marriage of two women, who had never seen each other in person before. The various characters are introduced through their reactions to Vidula's situation and we are soon familiar with their opinions and prejudices, loves and hates. Vidula's conservative older sister, the expatriate Hema, who is settled in Australia with her husband and family and who has flown to India, for the impending marriage is juxtaposed poignantly with a more practical and at times progressive mother, while Rohit himself, the seeming rebel with a Christian girlfriend Isabel, chooses arranged marriage over love for better career prospects.

Karnad deftly weaves multiple threads--sub-plots such as 13-year-old Vivan's passionate and pornographic notes to Hema who is old enough to be his mother, Radhabai the domestic cook's pathos-filled story and an elderly couple who try to lure Rohit into marrying their daughter. Thus, not only does Karnad whiz between time zones, but also across the socio-economic spectrum. He introduces family intrigue also by insinuating that Vidula may not be her father's child but, rather, his estranged brother's. Then, like the soap opera that it is turning into, Karnad turns his story into a pitch for a television serial. We move forward in time to see an older Rohit's attempt to sell his family saga to a production house. In the meanwhile, he has sacrificed his Christian love for an arranged match that has helped finance a trip to Germany. In a bizarre twist of fate, his ex-love, who is an employee of the same production house and now that his wife is away at her maternal home for the birth of their first child, Isabel once again becomes the object of his desire. To the parents, meanwhile, life continues to be the fuzzy unknown that they have always known it to be. While the mother experiences the modern mother's dilemma of

wanting to live out her dreams through her daughters; to the father, “marriage is a gamble.”

Karnad also introduces various contemporary concerns and issues, when the television producer Pratibha, a Hindu married to a Muslim says, “There’s nothing. I don’t know about harassment” (3) or when Vidula’s secret life as an anonymous cyber-sex kitten at the sleazy neighbourhood internet cafe is exposed and hushed just as quickly by the Saraswat moral brigade, the playwright opens a Pandora’s Box of new age crises. Karnad is here bold enough to raise this contemporary malady of cyber pornography afflicting the youth. Meanwhile, the character of Vidula continues to surprise us with its alternating traditional and contemporary avatars, its unconventionality within a broader framework of traditional mores. If her illicit virtual lover and feisty reaction to the moral brigade surprise the reader, so does her submissiveness to her NRI husband when she states: “I will never divorce Ashwin I trust him. He is my husband, after all” (4). However, Ashwin, the video groom, fits the stereotype of the American NRI who plays the field in the land of opportunity, but returns to India at the behest of his parents for his top pick among demure Indian brides. To him, America is both, the land of opportunity and the NRI’s burden as he exhorts his new bride to view their marriage: “not merely as a marriage but as a mission” (5).

The play is about a middle-class urban Saraswat Brahmin family. This family is educated, liberal, and modern. The Saraswat Brahmins accord a high value to marriage and worldly, house holding life. For a girl of their community, marriage constitutes the single most important life-cycle ritual. The pressure on a boy to marry is strong, not only for personal purposes, but for societal benefits, to serve a social responsibility to the women of the society. The pressure is immense. A girl from the neighbouring village has historically married a child. This neighbourhood can be every corner of the world in the globalized village or region. In the past, the bridal couple have often been on the podium for the first time. Today, a million e-mails, text messages, telephone calls, videos and scanned pictures are provided. But one aspect of the story is unchanged, and the pair consents each other into an unfamiliar, unknown territory.

In the play *Wedding Album* the girl is getting married to the boy of the same community, who lives in America. This marriage is arranged by elders of the family. The bride and bride-groom have met face to face only during pre-nuptial ceremony. Earlier they know each

other only through video and email. Vidula, the bride does not exhibit her real self to the groom and as we have seen does not reveal her past. Karnad brings out the problems and dualities from the life of other siblings also. In this two hour, nine scene plays, the dramatist makes “distance” technology almost a character in the play. The women’s emotional pain and self-endurance is voiced at different points in the play. The relationship between each character within its self and with others is carefully presented. The father, an old patriarch who is busy arranging for daughter’s wedding is tired of life and hoping that things will turn out smoothly. The mother is unsatisfied with the idea of bride groom’s arrival just before the wedding, the elder daughter Hema has arrived to be a part of the wedding from Australia leaving her family behind. She is not interested in anything and worried about her children and husband back home. Vidula the bride is still not sure about the marriage, Rohit who is in love with a Christian girl Isabel is pressurized by his relatives to marry a girl from their family and Ashwin Panje the bride groom is having certain idealistic expectations from Vidula. Radhabai, the cook has her own painful story of her own daughter who is mentally deranged and abandoned by her. All these characters are sketched deeply throughout the play. The entire play takes place in the living room, kitchen, and the courtyard.

Agonies of Women

In the play *Wedding Album* Karnad has painted the feelings and agony faced by women clearly. Vidula who is an important character among others never shows the real face of hers to the boy whom she is going to marry. Her interaction is only through email and video chat. She does not reveal her true self and gives a different picture of herself to the boy whom she is going to marry. We can see Vidula’s outer self through scene one where she is speaking directly to the camera. We can see Vidula is extremely self-conscious and ill-at-ease. Every now and then she is interrupted by her brother Rohit who is handling the camera. Vidula leads a secret life. She willingly submits herself as Kuchla the Jezebel to the disembodied randy voice of Swami Ananga Nath, the Bodyless, in a darkened Cyber Cafe, or is seen transmuting her guilt at being found out into hysterical rage, screaming “sexual harassment” to make her moral tormentors run away. She is resourceful enough to find herself a surrogate swami, a flesh and blood stranger to help her work her way through the hopeless desire. Vidula’s addiction and her visit to the Internet cafe is discussed in scene two. During the wedding preparation Rohit tells

Hema not to let Vidula to visit the Internet cafe as Vidula spends much time there, rather than preparing for her wedding.

Non-dual ascetic erotic images play hide and seek with the audience throughout: cross-cousin marriages reveal themselves in every nook and cranny of the play; adolescent sexuality flip-flops with intellectual precocity; reality mirrors someone else's fiction only to be exhumed as reality once again. Vidula plays sex games indulging in cyber sex while chatting with Swami Ananga in the Internet Cafe, which is presented in detail explicitly in scene six. The point to be noted here is Vidula playing the role of Radhabai the cook's "kept" daughter Savitri's identity--Kuchla the Jezebel in cyberspace only to be resurrected at the end in her true abandonment. Vidula does not feel degraded by this game. The subjugation she seeks in her secret, erotic world can after all be served as well through man and marriage and to higher purpose.

The story of *Wedding Album* shows us difficult and uneasy truths. The orthodox Indian families are over protective towards unmarried girls--shielding them from the opposite sex. Yet, these girls indulge in erotic experiences through older male servants or relatives or through escapades in cyber space assuming fake identity. The moral policing by self appointed guardians of the society, who have no respect for law or personal privacy, is also depicted. The play exposes the duplicity in their behaviour as they are showing mercy and condoning if the victim is from their caste while vandalizing others. Women's emotional pain and self-endurance is voiced at different points in the play, only to underline the complete invisibility granted to such domestic sacrifice on the public plane. Unlike her mother Mrs. Nadkami, who spends most of her life in the kitchen. Vidula, the heroine of the play shows herself as not knowing cooking at all and to have "given up eating fish," while waiting to join her husband in the USA--a symbolic affirmation of her ascetic resolve to stay committed, despite the frightening, incommunicative, and arrogant side of her husband Ashwin, which has made itself apparent in India itself: "I will never divorce Ashwin" (8). She breathes fiercely to her worried siblings, driven by their anxiety to even suggest it on the eve of her departure from India. The will to serve and subjugate herself through a life decision she has willingly made, remains metaphorically outside the kitchen, but nonetheless it is a purely private resolve, invisible in its worth, even to her brother and sister. In contrast to Vidula's character, there is one more character Pratibha, a modern, self-made Oriya woman who has taken hard, personal decisions like marrying a

Muslim to being a successful producer of television serials. She rejects Vidula's story as a possible theme for a future episode. She feels modern audiences may believe it but they won't like it.

Difference in the attitude of the pragmatic and westernized Indians

The dramatist shows the generation gap and the difference in the attitude of the pragmatic and westernized Indians and the orthodox tradition-bound Indians. While Ashwin, the bridegroom wants a simple marriage, minus all the frills, the bride's mother wants all the traditional fanfare at the wedding. Vidula's mother is in a hurry to get her married off as she has found a suitable boy who lives in US who matches their status according to her and does not want to take a chance. The Mother wants the boy to arrive early and spend some time with the daughter to know each other well and wants all the rituals to be performed in the wedding ceremony. On the other hand, the bride groom is in a hurry to complete the wedding ceremony in a short visit to India:

MOTHER: But that's - that's - how is that possible? It was all agreed. He has to meet Vidu. Spend some time together. And only if they liked each other, only then, we were to go ahead with the wedding. I mean, that's what *he* proposed. If he comes that late, when is that going to happen? We have to print invitations, inform our relatives. I can't...

ROHIT: He has already said he doesn't want all that. No rituals, no wasteful *tamasha*, nothing. If he and Vidula like each other, they'll go to the Registrar and sign. If they don't, they'll shake hands and part. He proceeds to Malaysia. Catches up his badminton team.

MOTHER (*enraged*): Then why is he coming even a week in advance? Why not on the morning of the Wedding? Tell him that. They have seen each other on the video. Talked on the mobile. Why meet at all beforehand? They can be introduced to each other in Registrar's office.

ROHIT: I have assured our relatives that it'll take place. Ninety-nine per cent. We'll inform everyone by email the moment Vidu and he gives the nod. (9)

The fussy meticulousness and sham associated with traditional Indian marriages is mocked by Karnad. He seems to deride the insistence on a suitable match from within the community even if it means selling a daughter to an unknown affluent stranger, begging him

to keep her happy and well fed. The playwright mocks at such people who in the name of maintaining the purity of the community break the hearts of innocent and good girls like Isabel. The third scene of the play shows the insidiousness of the collective forces of caste and community, who bring Rohit and his future wife Tapasya together. At last Rohit gives his consent and promises to marry a girl from the same community whom his parents have selected, ignoring and ditching Isabel, the girl whom he loved. The same Rohit wants to re-establish relations with her, when after marriage his wife Tapasya leaves for her parents' home.

Conclusion

Karnad takes the risk of locating *Wedding Album* in a dreadfully familiar space--the Nadkami's living room. The Bedroom is conspicuously absent as in traditional Indian homes, it is the kitchen, living room and the courtyard, where all the actions take place. It is compellingly for Mrs. Nadkami, Vidula's mother, the kitchen has become a parody--a battleground for class supremacy and control over Radhabai, the willing but competing female shadow in the kitchen, with whom she boxes away to no conclusion whatsoever, to relieve, herself of her sense of failure and unfulfillment vis-a-vis the family. The technique used in the second part of the play has photo effect, which gives the pictures one after another. Karnad has thrown light on the sensitivity of relations between two persons. Each snapshot shows its members frozen in a projection of respectability, but each figure has a double image, with the shadow of a hidden life.

Wedding Album is a fitting tribute to the family drama that revolves around every Indian wedding. Characters are like finely etched sepia portraits while the setting is the playwright's own home turf. The play was also the first to be written originally by him in his home language, Konkani. In the end, Karnad delivers the masterstroke by concluding with Radhabai's predicament: asking a question: whether grown-up daughter's can be kept at home. In that question lies the synopsis of the play, proving that modernity and social class have little to do with universal concerns and drama of the Great Indian Marriage.

References

1. Dodiya, Jaydipsingh. *The plays of Girish Karnad: Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1999. Print.
2. VIJAYARANI, A., and CATHERINE EDWARD. "MULTIPLE BETRAYAL AND CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION AND MAHESH DATTANI'S THIRTY DAYS IN SEPTEMBER." *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)* 6.6, Dec 2016, 47-54
3. Karnad, Girish. *Wedding Album*. New Delhi: OUP, 2009. Print.
4. Ranavaade, Vaibbhavi P., and Anjali Karolia. "The study of the Indian fashion system with special emphasis on women's occasion wear." *International Journal of Textile And Fashion Technology (IJTFT)*, ISSN (P): 2250-2378; ISSN (E): 2319-4510. Vol 6: 19-34.
5. ---. "Karnad's Take-On Drama." *Chronicle* May 30, 2008. Print.
6. Tripathi, Vanashree. *Three Plays of Girish Karnad - A Study of Poetics and Culture*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2011. Print.
7. LAD, ASHWINI, and PRIYA RUPCHANDANI. "SIMULATING THE COOKING PROCESSES BY USING SIMULATION AND MODELLING TECHNOLOGY." *International Journal of Computer Science Engineering and Information Technology Research (IJCSEITR)* 4. 2, Apr 2014, 37-42
8. Okokpujie, I. P., et al. "OPTIMAL DESIGN AND STRESS/STRAIN ANALYSIS OF WIND TURBINE BLADE FOR OPTIMUM PERFORMANCE IN ENERGY GENERATION VIA SIMULATION APPROACH." *International Journal of Mechanical and Production Engineering Research and Development* 10.1 (2020): 95-104.