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## **Exploring Girish Karnad's *Wedding Album* as a Blend of Anxieties and Resentments Deep Rooted in Indian Marriage Institution**

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Girish Karnad's *Wedding Album* is a blend of anxieties and resentments deep rooted in Indian marriage institution. According to Amrit Srinivasan, the play is a constellation of sexual, conjugal, cast, class and age related behaviours and attitudes of selfishness and sacrifice, chastity and commerce, obedience and authority, all integral to modern Hindu marriage institution. Karnad has artistically woven all these threads into the theme of *Wedding Album*. His wizardry in entangling these different threads to account such a common event in the day to day life of a middle-class family deserves all the praise. *Wedding Album* reveals the rainbow feelings of condensed logic of Karnataka based Saraswat Family. The Nadkarnis are not only representatives of a middle-class Hindu family but the theme applies to any caste, creed and religion in India and this makes the play relevant in any context, a perfectly contemporary. To

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think rather differently it is a blend of Indian Culture and techno-savvy modern culture. The scattered personalities reveal the discontentment of human selves in the world of globalization. The brooding of some characters takes the play close to the theory of existentialism. At times, *Wedding Album* encourages us to examine the growing fundamentalism of the Hindu middle-class family which is largely missing from social science scholarship on India today as has been stated by Amrit Srinivasan in the foreword to *Wedding Album*. The aim of the researcher has been to explore *Wedding Album* as a Blend of Anxieties and Resentments in Indian Marriage Institution and an overall evaluation of the play at various levels. Charge laid against Karnad that he is preoccupied with history and folk myth and evades contemporary Indian reality is reversed by him in his *Wedding Album* where he dealt with contemporary Indian reality effectively and turned it into a modern myth. Karnad's *Wedding Album* also displays new woman, as Manju Kapur's Astha. The play represents the marriage theme which is considered a gamble by Indian families. His woman is contemporary, 'new' woman in search of identity in the society which secures freedom to female sex on a par with male counterpart. The present play also throws new light on the psyche and behaviour of these new women. The mother, Hema, Vidula, Pratibha and even Radhabai are new women in the true sense of the term. Their lives are full of anxieties and resentments while facing the mental, psychological and emotional hardships of life.

The first splendid scene of the play displays the anxiety of an Indian brother concerning the marriage of his sister and resentment of the sister in reciprocation who is getting married. Actually the sister reveals particular trait of an Indian woman who is going to get marry. It becomes apparent through the following dialogue between Vidula and Rohit where he insists his

sister to smile a bit and to look cheerful while she is being shot in a video for the purpose to show it to her fiancé.

VIDULA. I am Vidula, Vidula Nadkarni. I am twenty- two. Twenty- two and a half, actually. I have done my BA in Geography. Passed my exams last year. I am not doing anything at the moment. Worked for travel agency for six months.

(Stops. Looks at Rohit)

I got bored. If I come to the US, will I need to work?

I am really not very good at it.

ROHIT (offscreen). Why don't you smile a bit? Look cheerful....

ROHIT (offscreen). But don't go out of your way to make yourself unattractive. (5, 6)

Vidula's resentment and nervousness seems clear in the above dialogue. She wants to be a sincere woman to tell her fiancé that she is not glamorous at all. She is not exceptional in any way and don't want him to be disappointed later. And she denies to reshoot later, inspite of insistence by her dear brother who seems utterly caring for his sister, the most usual picture of any Indian household. Her brother is excited while Vidula is enraged. In her enragement, she goes on telling the real family truths while Rohit shoots, she giggles in between by making jokes to relieve herself. But when she tells some facts related to family truths Rohit disagrees asking her if she is trying to impress him or scare him off. But Vidula is firm to tell the truths to her fiancé. It has been a great curse of the marriage institution that truths are never told by either sides or if at all they are told, they are not accepted by either sides and this leads to the settlement

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of marriage based on bare falseness which results into an unhappy conjugal life after marriage. If humour in Vidula's dialogues is kept aside it is a sincere attempt on her side to tell the truth about herself to the would be husband. Pratibha Khan admits:

PRATIBHA. I must say I like your sister....

I like her. Very much. But I don't think.

(Pause)

ROHIT. Don't think what?

PRATIBHA. That anyone will swallow it today (8)

Pratibha rightly suggests that nobody will swallow it in today's world that a girl from an educated middle-class family- a graduate- agrees to consider marrying a man whom she has never met. The boy turns up, all ready to jump on to the altar, without ever having seen her, in this day and age! Pratibha Khan, the producer of television serials is not ready to accept Vidula's honest story as a plot for her television serial because she thinks exclusively commercial and is not ready to take a risk. She moves on to the story of Radhabai which could provide more meat according to her. Pratibha's character is a revolutionary one who has married a Muslim man Irfan.

The anxieties related to being pure and innocent are effectively dealt with by the playwright. It has become possible for Karnad because he discusses "women's sexuality and adultery with such honesty, treating them as 'normal human response' and not as something sinful."(20-Women in Girish Karnad's Plays- A Critical Perspective) The urge to be treated as an

equal being is fully imbibed through each of Vidula's remarks. It appears as if Karnad demands the niche for woman which is equal to man in a society. Vidula finds fault in her brother who thought that she must impress her fiancé in every possible way. For this she has to pretend what she is not. Her views about marriage have grown strangely due to the forceful behaviour of Rohit who wants all the time that his sister must present herself beyond her original strengths. Vidula is fed up of all these anxieties and wants to relax herself by joking even in the serious situation. For her, marriage doesn't mean something spiritual. She is ready to accept marriage as a gamble by keeping away her enagement.

As the play begins the Nadkarnis are all busy in arranging the auspicious marriage ceremony of their dear Vidula. The excitements of the Nadkarni mother are pertinent when the family prepares for wedding. The Indian marriage institution and the myths and realities concerned with the marriage ceremony are effectively revealed through the dialogues of the mother with different characters like father, her elder daughter Hema, the younger daughter Vidula and son Rohit. Marriage is the finest opportunity for all kinds of shoppings so did enjoy the Nadkarni family. The selection of saris, bridal garments, garments of family members, and relatives coming to the marriage and humour generated through these incidences are very typical features of Indian marriages. The mother is persistent about taking revenges upon her relatives who haven't treated her upto the mark in their household marriages. She is ready to settle the scores with the relatives who have been very easy going and hostile towards her. The following dialogue between Vidula and the mother reveals such vehemence of the mother towards one such relative:

(Vidula picks up a sari)

VIDULA. This one for Indira Aunt, do you think? And that, perhaps for Mitrakka?

MOTHER. Such fine sari for Indira? She has never bothered to invite us home for a meal. Not once in nine years. (10, 11)

The purely humorous episode of Mukti's sari given to mother is a climax of the Indian marriage which raises the audience to hilarious laughter. A very different shade of the relationship of mother-daughter is expectant through mother and Hema's reciprocal behaviour, which is one of the peculiar characteristics of mother-daughter relationship in Indian context. The biases and prejudices of the mother-daughter relationship are clearly visible through mother and Hema.

The Nadkarni mother is a typical incarnation of selfless attitude and sacrifice. Woman's struggle in the contemporary Indian society is to find and preserve her identity as mother, wife and most important of all as a human being is expectant in the character of mother. She once might have expected to be emancipated but she could not, because of her family obligations. To peep into mother's mental and emotional make up one needs to have a deep insight into her psychological realism. This relationship has taken intricate shape, the reason being biased treatment given to Hema from her childhood days which reached to the highest peak in her marriage according to her. Mother shows her disapproval over Hema's behaviour.

MOTHER. It has nothing to do with your wedding. She is always like that!...

(Vidula follows Hema into her room.)

One waits all year long, pining to see the daughter's face...I don't know.

(14)

The play now shifts towards the tension of coming of Ashwin, the fiancé. The tensions concerned to his coming to meet Vidu and the upcoming wedding arrangements are apparent when Rohit makes it clear that Ashwin has postponed his coming to India for few days. Worried eagerness of the family members is increased to the utmost, the starting being from mother. She becomes ready even to break up this relation if Ashwin has no time to arrive in time in India.

MOTHER. No, I tell you, Let's just call it off, Tell him. Right now, Our Vidu will get a hundred boys better than him. We didn't go to them begging for a bridegroom. They asked for her. They took all the initiative. And now at the last moment ...(26)

Hema even expresses her resentment in the same manner.

HEMA(excited). But that's absurd! That'll leave us no time! It'll give them no time. I mean they need a week together at least, surely. (24)

On the contrary, though anxious, Rohit is optimistic exclusively that the things will go right and Vidu's wedding will take place definitely. It's sound from Ashwin's point of view but making situation tense from Vidula's family's point of view. Hema is more concerned about the arrangement that the family has to make for the marriage purpose.

HEMA. My god, Rohit, this is the twenty-first century. And we call ourselves educated... I would have said let's not... (25)

The discussion afterwards proceeds to the printing of invitation cards, the Wedding Hall and the expenses for that. Every family member is utterly anxious about his or her role to be played during the Wedding, but nobody is concerned to the mind-game of Vidula who is going to be a bride. Her bridal tensions are not understood by anybody. Father is concerned about the hefty advance given to the Wedding Hall. Rohit assures about not losing that. Vidu reacts to that:

VIDU. Is that what we are worried about? For goodness sake. I can't sleep at night. I sit up suddenly in the middle of the night, Shivering. It's like having ice water poured into my entrails (26).

Vidu's resentment shows that her family members lack an attitude of understanding towards her bridal impediment. Her father as usual retorts to accept everything because he says, "Let's face it. Marriage is a gamble." (27) Whatever maybe Vidu's attitude towards her family members, she is a careless young lady unaware of her official matters. The important matter of applying for birth certificate hasn't been dealt seriously by her. Her dignity is related in spending hours together in an Internet Cafe. She hasn't even photographed herself for the sake of passport and visa. Rohit and Hema both scold Vidu for being frequently to the Net Café. But Vidu strongly withholds by saying that she listens to sermons by Swami Ananga Nath ... But Rohit knows the



real fact that she plays video games there. She is crazy about them. Net has been greatly misused in today's world for adhering to pornography and heinous entertainment and Vidula is no exception. One more quality of modern youth is expectant through Rohit's behaviour. His habit of catnapping has become a popular vogue of today's youth when are confronted by problematic situations in life.

Problems are unwilling to leave the back of Vidula and one more problem puts the whole family into great excitement. Hema brings Vidu's birth certificate, but for the surprise, of one and all, there is uncle Ramdas' name instead of father's name. It was a great mystery whether it was done by mistake or deliberately. Uncle Ramdas was sent to register Vidula's birth and it has happened that instead of father's name there was his name. The mother is enraged at this trick. Her anger is clearly visible through her dialogue:

MOTHER. Don't you see? This wasn't a mistake. That's not possible. This was deliberate,... The rascal! (48)

Mother added that probably he might have done that to settle the scores with his brother. But the father who loved his brother desperately would die of shame if he knew it. This episode is regularly seen in Indian households, where the brothers try to settle the scores with each other in the joint family. Vidula feels polluted, dirty, and filthy to know this act of her uncle and she looks at this matter from different angle. She thinks that her uncle has his eyes on Ma. Vidula shows her anger over this like:

VIDULA. I am sick and tired of these endless complications.(51)

Mother wants to keep the name on the certificate as it is, because she didn't want to hurt her husband but Vidula is not ready to accept this lie.

VIDULA. But her saying we should live with a lie! (55)

This episode turns into remembering the grievances against Ma by Hema which Hema is not ready to forget. Rohit asks her to forget those old grouses but Hema retorts: 'Why should I?' (55) Vidula's techno savvy attitude is clearly visible from her use of Internet. She like, rest of the youths of the modern world has become an addict to Internet. She misuses it. When asked by sister Hema she befools her by telling that she listens the sermons by Swami Ananga in the Cyber Café. Yet Rohit knows the fact that she plays video games there. Her secret self is revealed when she goes to the Internet café. Every human being in this universe possesses a secret self like that of Vidula, There is no doubt about it, this self may be partly good, partly bad, but certainly everybody possess it. Vidula's secret self is revealed where it seems that she is haunted by pornography. She willingly submitted herself as Kuchla the Jezebel to the disembodied randy voice of Swami Ananga Nath the Bodyless in that darkened Cyber Café. The girls in this world of globalization are engaged in all types of lust, pornography, and even love affairs by forgetting the purpose of their lives to build up a good carrier by getting good education.

There is an ocean of opportunities for the girls like Vidula but they are not in a mood to utilize these opportunities for them and their family welfares! On the contrary Vidula transmutes

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 hopeless desire. The subjugation she seeks in her secret, erotic world can after all be served as well through man and marriage and to higher purpose.

Vivan episode is out of many of the children's problems that the parents and the world are facing today. Vivan is two years younger to Ketan, Hema's son and he is such an odd child who seems prematurely adult, who reads all the sexual, sensual literature like 'Madam Bovary', 'Lady Chatterley's Lover', the kind of books which have been banned for being sensual. He visits the Nadkarni family and borrows the books out of their shelves/ book racks. Vivan stands first in his class, a talent boy, again a laptop user and techno savvy but very much prematurely adult grown child who after reading 'Madam Bovary' and 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' starts loving Hema sensually and conveys her through letters also. He writes those letters secretly and puts consciously into the books which he returns to Hema and Nadkarnis after completing the reading. His letter given to Hema is read by mistake by Vidula. She reads it "Darling, you don't know how I desire to crush you in my arms... It's all right that she takes it to be sent by her brother-in law i.e. Hema's husband and becomes very happy that her sister gets letters of this type even after fifteen years of marriage. Vivan has gone mad after Hema. Hema is reluctant to have glance at the letters of Vivan but he threats to reveal those letters in front of others.

VIVAN. Go ahead! I'll tell her I love you. The moment I saw you the other day. I fell  
desperately in love,... (45)

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Vivan is absolutely beyond our consideration, a dirty boy who wants to have sexy relation with a woman of his mother's age. This is a moral lapse of our generation. This in my view is an effect of carelessness of parents towards their children. They have gone beyond their reach, from where they could not return! The parents are piling facility after facility to their kids completely unaware of the fact how they are using it. This is a curse in today's modern and globalized world. Technology would be fruitful if it is used in right way; otherwise the world is destined to be destroyed!

The expat boy Ashwin, Vidu's fiancé needs to be understood from the Indian point of view and also from expat point of view, as he reveals his dual selves to us. When Vidu meets Ashwin, he goes on talking. He is a confident expat boy who represents the Saraswat Brahmins in the USA. He inherits the trait of Saraswat Brahmins to accord a uniquely high value to marriage and worldly, household life. Ashwin wants his wife to be an honest Hindu Indian wife though he resides in America. A lady that perfectly suits into the roles of mother -wife - daughter. He is anguished about the US culture he puts it like:

ASHWIN. ...What am I anguished about then? I have drunk life in the US to lees.

Girlfriends, affairs, mistresses, one-night stands, and on the public stage, glamour, success, social connections. I have been through them all. And I have come to the conclusion that the whole culture is empty of values, not bereft of any living meaning. (80)

According to Ashwin, the western culture is shallow and glittering. The European Industrial Revolution began by rejecting religion in favour of material values. But today that legacy is strangling the West. They have no spiritual mornings left. They are adrift in a godless, amoral world. He loves the US but experience in US also threw him into depression, and he realized the importance of Indian civilization which is ancient, culture full of wisdom and insight. India should have the capacity to lead the world, yet when he looked back at his country, there was darkness. According to Ashwin, we Indians have to look into our hearts, and discover our ancient values afresh. There must be beginning at the beginning. His belief in India and Hinduism is deep rooted, so he came to Dharwad to look for a life partner it seems to Ashwin: “East or West, India is the best.” He says, “I have come here because I believe that it is in places like Dharwad that belief in innocence, the very idea of purity still survives.” (81)

Ashwin asserts that he would like Vidula to be his life partner in carrying the best of their spiritual tradition to the west and save the West. He is not ashamed or afraid to say, “Save the West.” This is the triumph of Indian Philosophy, Indian Culture over the developed culture of the Western World. The play sprinkles like a fountain the everlasting spiritual Indian philosophy throughout its course.

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