

Research Article

Girish Karnad's Wedding Album A Mockery on Indian Arranged Marriages

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Abstract

Marriage is a primary social institution of Indian society; it has been the license to the conjugal relationship in Indian society for ages. The transformations gone through by this institution have given way to various deviations from the usual arranged marriage such as love marriages, register marriages, inter-caste marriages etc. However, the predominance given to arranged marriages hasn't reduced much. The play *Wedding Album* by Girish Karnad vignettes on the typical Indian arranged marriages. On the crust,, the play may look like celebrating the formalities of Indian marriages whereas at the core it is a mere mockery on typical arranged marriages.

Key words: *Conflict, Arranged marriage, Mockery, the mindset of youngsters*

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Introduction

Girish Karnad's *The Wedding Album* is a play exceptional from his usual style. Karnad is well known to deal with historical and mythological subjects in almost all of his plays. The keywords for most of the research done on him would be words like myth, folklore, culture, traditions, etc. However, the play *The Wedding Album* is unlike his usual plays of Karnad. Through this play, Karnad (2018,p.xix) registers his entry into the modern realistic domestic drama. This is evident in the following lines:

Wedding Album is Karnad's first full-scale entry into the mode of urban proscenium realism and its quintessential setting, the middle-class family home, which have together defined an important and prominent strain in post-independence theatre.

In the play *Wedding Album* Karnad gathers some depictions from the typical Indian arranged marriages and tries to explore the traditional Indian wedding, especially in the urban context.

Marriage is one of the most important social institutions of the Indian society. While this institution can be claimed common to all the societies over the world, Indian marriages claim a special place because of their sustainability. It is tying the knot that binds the couple forever: the love, understanding, care, affection, attraction and all other expectation of marriage just come as an add-on.

Modern society has progressed into seeing love marriages as normal and agreeable. Love marriages are are not any longer considered as a rebel-wish or a threat to the society. In fact the acceptance has by-passed various levels such as inter-caste marriages, inter-religious marriages, register marriages and it has started seeing newer phases such as live-in relationships, agreement-to-marriage, and even LGBTQ relationships. People have become open-minded and weigh their children's happiness as superior to their social status and religious bindings. Love marriages are becoming common in every nook and corner of the country. Despite this change in attitude and acceptance of love marriage, it is still noticeable that many people prefer arranged marriages. So the reason for youngster turning away from love marriages inspite of the favourable opportunity is simple. It is trust. Youngsters trust and love their parents to such an extent that they allow them decide their future. They believe that their parents' experiences and wisdom would considerably count while determining a long term relationship. They instantly agree. Why wont they ? In this regard Tazree Kadam (2015, p.25-26) views that:

Parents want grooms to be well educated and settled with a secure job, but for brides, grooms' parents feel it is most important for women to have good morals 26 and the ability to adapt to their husband's family. Because Indian cultural norms generally require the bride to move in with the groom's family after the wedding, this final consideration is taken very seriously. Here again, women are expected to conform to the wishes of an external party in order to preserve group cohesion and uphold significant cultural traditions.

Treatment of arranged marriages in *Wedding Album*

Karnad had chosen a completely new approach in his *Wedding Album*, he has moved from his usual stereotype of mythological and historical topics. In this play, he has touched urban domestic issues as his theme. This is evident in these lines for the introduction part of Karnad's *Collection of Three plays* (Introduction .p.xix.)

The play also registers the evolution of Karnad's own thinking about the elements that makeup realist domestic drama, and gives the urban Indian home a twenty-first-century identity in sociological, economic and psychological terms.

The very purpose of any drama is to attract the audience, such being the case, in the modern era Karnad has amended his style to gain this publicity among the modern audience.

This research article intends to explore the arranged marriages and thebehin them as visible in Karnad's play *Wedding Album*. This is a play written by Girish Karnad and was published in the year 2009. It was originally written in Kannada as *Maduveya Album*. The marriages of two generations of Saraswat brahmins are portrayed in the play. The marriages of both generations are in a way sacrificing and compromising. The focus, however, is on the younger generation marriages, especially the arranged marriages. The play oscillates between the timespan in which three siblings of the Nadkarni family get married. The Nadkarni family comprises of a father and mother whose names are not mentioned in the play and their three children. They have actually had four children whereas one child had been mentally retarded and died due to unknown reasons. The play begins with a video shoot wherein Rohit who aspires to make a television serial is ready with an autobiographical script of his own family story. The scene is that of video shooting his wedding-ready sister, Vidula, to fetch a suitable groom from the US. The play further runs to and fro in time showcasing the three marriages of the family. Vidula is the female protagonist of the play and she has known her fiancé Ashwin only through the videos share by Rohit. On the outside, the marriages of Vidula and Ashwin appear like any normal arranged marriage in present-day India. The rapid changing global forces seem to only affect the arrangements made for the marriages but has nothing to do with the consent of the couple. Though arranged marriages seem to be a rare event these days, the reality is that the younger generation children of middle-class families still prefer arranged marriages. The whole family sees marriage as an opportunity to upgrade

their social and economic status. The Nankarni family too is no exception to this. The girls of the family are mentally prepared to marry the groom of their parent's choice. Totally trusting their parents' instincts, women daringly chose to marry a stranger after very brief courtships or as in Vidula's case without even any. Sure, some arranged marriages don't really work but most women consider it a bliss adhered with their parent's decision of an arranged marriage. As a bride women also have a big expectation to get a lifelong partner who is financially stable and can afford a posh life. The major areas of investigation for arranged marriage are economic status, social status, religion, caste, etc. It is the same in the case of Vidula's marriage too. All that Vidula knows about Aswin is that he is from the US, they haven't spoken or seen each other directly, they only exchange videos. Rohit is so desperate in impressing Aswin through the videos, that he tries to hide all negatives out of it. The following lines from the play depict the strategies used to impress Rohit

Rohit (*offscreen*): Listen! Are you trying to impress him or scare him off?

Vidula (*to Rohit*): Let him know the whole truth. Perhaps he is a believer in genetics. Heredity. (*To the camera*) You know how it is. There are some things no one talks about in the family. (2018. p.83)

The youngsters prefer arranged marriage despite the mental turmoil they undergo, the reason for this is that Indian parents prefer sifting out prospective groom's family based on their financial stability, designation of job, reputation of their workplace and some basic behavioral characteristics. Affordable parents even go to the extent of hiring detectives to know more about the bridegroom and his background. Considering the enormity of the available knowledge, girls would be very much ready to marry the groom or bride chosen by their parents. In this regard Tazree Kadam opines :

However, in India a more fluid notion of love enables one to understand how arranged marriages have remained an integral component of Indian societal norms. As we will see, this fluid notion of love may constrict women's autonomy through prioritizing the love one has for their elders, parents, and culture over individual preferences. This notion of love leads to women's self-sacrifice in order to preserve and maintain group harmony. (p.19)

In most of the arranged marriages, the parents of the girl typically choose a groom based on the religion, caste, ethnicity/nativity, social and economic background and judge if it is a wise decision to get their daughter married in that family and to that person. The parents however, make sure their gives her approval. In the case of Vidula, it is noticeable that though she

has not even seen Ashwin she agrees to marry him without any force from her parents. In fact her sister Hema insists on letting the bride and groom talk and get to know each other. But Vidu blindly agreed. She sees Ashwin as a passport to go to the US and upgrade her lifestyle. Even after knowing that Ashwin is totally opposite to her expectation Vidu agrees to the marriage.

There is a particular procedure for almost all the modern Indian arranged marriages. For both the bride and groom, the parent or a close relative looks for a prospective pair and scrutinizes from a list to find the most suitable pair. They often do this through various networks such as social groups , friends circle, community committees or matrimony sites and newspaper matrimony columns. Initial meetings in family gatherings are arranged, after which the couple has a few opportunities for supervised courtship for a brief period of time. At this point, if both parties are satisfied with the match, they are allowed to spend some time together alone. If things go well, then it is time to make the decision. It is not unusual for the process from the initial introduction to the final yes/no decision to unfold within a few days. But the play *Wedding Album* is more a mockery of the actually arranged marriages of India. In this regard Suresh.V says that:

On the surface, it's a familiar picture - a joyful event when members of the clan come together to celebrate and reaffirm loyalties, but behind the picture, perfect smiles, simmer long suppressed suspicious, jealousies, frustrations and aggression. (Suresh. V, 2018, p.20).

Trust is the keyword here, youngsters blindly choose to marry the person of their parents choice without a second thought, often after a very brief period of acquaintance. Sure, some arranged marriages don't turn to be successful, yet most women that claim that their marriage was an ultimate bliss and it was appropriate to abide by the decisions made by their parents in connection with their marriage. Tazree Kadam(2015,p. 26-27) further says:

While Netting's study confirms that some young, modern Indian men and women are more open to the prospect of a love marriage, many would prefer to preserve familial cohesion through accepting an arranged marriage and guarding against unchecked emotions. Even though some women felt love marriages would provide a more egalitarian relationship, they still agreed to live with their husband's family after marriage and take the necessary, traditional precautions, in order to maintain harmony within between families. (P.26-27)

Vidula's family members want her to have a life partner who is almost a perfectionist. According to them, the formula for perfectionist is, someone who is settled in the US, has a good job, belongs to the same religion and caste, good family background and best of all doesn't want dowry. The family does every investigation and perfectly analyses the core requirements such as financial stability, societal reputation, outward behavioral characteristics and more. When all these come with an add-on package that is without dowry, it is considered more than a blessing. In this regard, Dr. Karuna P Deshmukh (2014, p. rightly states that :

The play in that sense emerges out as a palimpsest of the Indian culture; strong passions and desires layered underneath the outer layers of fun, irony, and mood of celebration pertaining to a 21st century arranged marriage between an Indian middle class Saraswat Brahmin girl in Dharwad supposed to be a meek, simple, shy - a good girl in whom an expat American young man who having fed up with the West seeks comfort spiritual satisfaction and stability; in his own culture and traditions which quite ironically have no longer been remained that pure, great, and glorious.

Another noticeable arranged marriage in the play is that of Rohit. Though Rohit's marriage is in many ways a contrast to that of Vidula's, yet there seems to be some similarities as well. The first visible similarity by itself is that it is an arranged marriage. Rohit had been in love with Isabel a Christian girl and is quite too determined to marry her even if it is against his parents' will. Except for Vidula, everyone else in the family is totally against it. There are heated arguments between him and his parents regarding the marriage.

Hema: who is this Isabel?

Vidula: His girlfriend.

Hema: A Christian?

Vidula: With that name, what do you think?

Hema: Weird.

Vidula: this is a new thing he has started. Catnaps. Whenever there is a problem, he jumps into bed.

Hema: couldn't he find a suitable match within our caste? (Karnad. 2018.p.105)

The incident where the Sirurs come home intending to talk about Rohit's marriage with their daughter Tapasya is not a happy one for Rohit. It ignites further and there is trauma in the family relationship. However, in the first scene itself, the audience comes to know that Rohit hasn't married Isabel.

Though the turn of events are not show in the play, as an end result it is evident that Rohit has supposedly had an arranged marriage.

Rohit: no,no She was a nice girl.

Pratibha: Ah! That's you definition of a 'nice girl' then?

Rohit : Why not? She was genuine . No one stopped her from having

boyfriends. I had a girlfriend. Catholic. No one minded. (Karnad. 2018.P.85)

Hema's husband seems to have built his career all by himself and Hema carried grudges on her parents for not having helped him initially. Though Hema doesn't have major problems with her husband and family, she seems to have anger on her parents for their money-mindedness during her wedding. Her parents prioritized finding a man who doesn't ask for dowry and works abroad. But when things go a little out of their expectation they do not backup.

Hema though initially disapproves of the attraction that the neighbor boy shows towards her, but later in the play, she tries to conceal the letter by Vivan from Vidula. Vidula starts reading the letter thing it is from her brother-in-law and says that the letter is so romantic. This shows that Hema too has at some point in time accepted Vivan and has started approving such letters from him which further proves that Hema might have some regrets in her marriage due to which she has approved this relationship.

The case of Hema too can be considered under the family's arranged marriage. The exact fact of whether Hema had a love marriage or arranged one is not clearly revealed in the play. However, there are hints of usually arranged marriages. Her husband had not asked for dowry, her parents were not willing to give much as well.

None of the marriages are forced arranged marriages, yet the force comes for the situation and the society. Vidula's mom and siblings intend to call off the marriage in the last scene of the play. However, he is worried about the society and situation

MOTHER. He thinks we are so desperate for him? Just tell him the proposal is off.

VIDULA. No, we can't. We'll become the laughing stock of the town.

We agreed to all this. Now to break off for no reason! I can't face it.

FATHER. No reason? I met your mother only a couple of times before we got married.

But at least we had met. (Scene Two p. 26)

In fact her siblings even advised her to get a divorce in case he cannot handle things but Vidula says she can handle

ROHIT. What she is trying to tell you is if at any moment you wish to divorce Ashwin and come back, don't hesitate to do so.

HEMA. Leave him and come back if you feel like it. You are timid. We don't want you to suffer in silence for fear of what people here will say. Or what we will feel. We are with you on anything you decide. (Pause)

ROHIT. We live in a modern world. A divorce is okay. It's no shame. (Scene Nine p. 86)

Conclusion

Wedding Album is an evidence to show that Girish Karnad is all capable of setting his foot into writing new contemporary comic drama. The play explores the impact of globalization and technological advancement on the traditional Indian Wedding. On the rim, it's a portrayal of a perfect and typical Indian marriage. The wedding seems to be a joyful event when members of the frat bind together to celebrate and bless the couple. However, while getting deeper there is a contradiction in every idea of an Indian marriage. The picture-perfect happiness is a camouflage to hide worst feelings like doubt, jealousy, frustration and belligerence.

A family which is educated, liberal and modern still chooses to uphold traditional practices. Each double image, with the shadow of a hidden life. One side of them sticks to their caste and tradition while the other moves to modernity and convenience. This dilemma is shown in a hilarious spectacle by the master playwright. The play is ultimately the victory of arranged marriages over any other relationship.

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