

POST- INDEPENDENCE LITERATURE: ISSUES AND CONCERNS DISCURSIVE SPACES: JUXTAPOSING SPATIAL ENTITIES IN GIRISH KARNAD'S "WEDDING ALBUM"

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Abstract

This paper will analyze the play Wedding Album by Girish Karnad in the light of the precepts of "Space" (141) and "Heterotopia" (Grbin 305- 312) by the social theorist Michel Foucault. The play is a post - colonial reverberation of the common issues that find a voice depicted through the middle- class South Indian family trying to cope up with the double standards of life that the confusion of a post- colonial world landed each one of us. The paper will focus on the issues of gender as signified by the precept of "space" enumerated by Michel Foucault which raises the question of the place of women and her spatial identity and the configuration that differentiates and demarcates her existence as something different and alien to our cultural set -up. and also, the underlying concern of the playwright for giving a position to women in our social canvas. The analysis will be based on the concept of "space" (141) as enunciated by Michel Foucault in his work Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison and also the concept of Heterotopia as analyzed by the researcher from the papers read online on the same topic. The paper will try to analyze the relation of space and power and how its configuration effects and stamps the life of women in general. Girish Karnad was a renowned name in the post- independent Indian Writing in English. The play takes a dive into where and how far our issues concerning our social set up have been raised or resolved post independent era.

Keywords: Space, Heterotopia, power, gender, spatial configuration, knowledge.

Wedding Album deals with a South Indian middle class Brahmin family. Vidula Nadkarni is all set to marry a suitable boy from the US and whom she has never met before. She does not mince her words while describing about her details to her prospective husband in the video tape recordings that her brother, Rohit, makes for her. Her elder sister, Hema, has settled down in Australia after her arranged marriage to a bank executive and is the mother of two children. Rohit, their brother is struggling in his profession and has an affair with a catholic girl. Rohit has to conform to a marriage arranged by the parents of the girl. The parents of these three have their own past misgivings. The household help, Radhabai, has her own problems of poverty, need and the burden of an abandoned daughter whom she fails to claim for fear of losing a morsel of food.

The present paper seeks to establish the female characters around Michel Foucault's concept of space, an entity that signifies the concepts of power and knowledge resulting in disciplinary discourses. Space is the terrain for the exercise of power and our knowledge of it in the implementation of disciplinary regimes. Girish Karnad's plays set an example of excellent craftsmanship, exquisite imaginative heights and a zeal for transformation, whether it be the genre of drama or society at large. Myth has been very deftly handled by the playwright. Wedding Album has been termed as a "modern myth" (Srinivasan ix). In Wedding Album, Karnad has been very skillful in giving a unique perspective to a middle- class family life with an altogether different outlook about life and the institution of family. Contemporary theatre cannot be thought about without a look at the plays of Girish Karnad. Folk theatre has been Karnad's forte. Karnad's style is a beautiful blend of the traditional and the modern. His plays are a repository of the rich oral cultural tradition that have been brought to a fruitful utilization. His long association with films, both as an actor and a director, has had a magical influence on his technique of playwriting. The traditional aspect can well be seen on the subject matter of the plays and the western influence has enriched the form and structure of his plays. Playwriting has been very limited as Karnad also thought about becoming a poet or a novelist. There was hardly any theatre in India at the time when Karnad started writing plays. His play Tuglaq has been inspired from the character inspired from history. The plays like Nagamandala and Hayavadana are inspired by folk tales. His play Yayati is inspired by the theme of existentialism. The plays like The Fire and the Rain and Bali: The Sacrifice are inspired from his association with the themes of myth and religion. Karnad's ideology has been shaped by the amalgamation of his traditional middle- class background

with that of the western form of education. History and myth have been successfully employed by the playwright to voice the existentialist and absurdist way of thought.

Post- independence theatre emerged as a powerful medium reverberating with the ethos of an indigenous cultural reconstruction. The stories have been fished out of myths, history, folk narratives that dealt with socio-political issues at large. The present play in question that is the Wedding Album has post- independence period as its timeline. It is a very modern play that caters to the present- day scenario of our middle- class society. Contemporary urban theatre is characterized as “... social realist, existentialist, absurdist, Brechtian...” (Dharwadkar, 6) Our nation has long been dominated by an alien culture. We cannot claim a natural peaceful growth that has been marred from time to time by alien attacks as well as a submission to the Britishers. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Aparna Dharwadkar, “Much of the oppositional energy in contemporary theatre, in any case, is not directed against the colonial experience but against the oppressive structures of nation, patriarchy, caste, class and tradition.” (Dhar 12) Such structures have formed their outlet in the writings in regional languages that led to the establishment of what Dharwadkar calls, “... multilingual postcolonial national tradition.” ((13) We are still carrying the burden of history on our individual self that is reflected in our everyday life. Dharwadkar focuses on the words, “endangered unsustainable construct” (15) with reference to the house and the members of the family that inhabit it. Dharwadkar also upholds that nationhood and cultural traditions grew side by side that found their profoundest expression through the native literature. We are still weighed down by historical burden. Still, theatre is an important element for a change in a society. Its influence as a valuable element in reforming our value system as well questioning those values that lack equilibrium cannot be overlooked. Karnad’s art has very successfully blended that traditional theatre with the alien technique in order to reform and reinstate traditional household situations that need a rethinking and a reworking towards a uniformity in the much- needed value system of our society.

The literature review gives a peep into the theme of the institution of marriage as recurrent in almost all the plays of Girish Karnad. The present play in context looks at wedlock as an opportunity sought by the prospective young women as a possible anchor to their lives. Sangeeta G. Avachar in her paper “Exploring Girish Karnad’s Wedding Album as a Blend of Anxieties and Resentments Deep Rooted in Indian Marriage Institution” (2012) discusses the institution of marriage in an Indian context and the truth about this system. She adds that Indian marriages are all about pretensions, half- truths and covered up past. She explores the anxieties and resentments associated with the theme of the marriage with respect to this play. (1-14) Dr. Challa states in his paper “Reflections of modernity in Girish Karnad’s The Wedding Album” (2018) that the play talks about cultural transformation and globalization and he also looks at the play trying to grope for space between traditions and modernity. V. Suresh in his paper “Cultural Complexities in Girish Karnad’s Wedding Album” (2018) looks at the play from the perspective of the differences in the attitude between the older and the newer generation of people towards the institution of marriage. The paper looks at the present- day perspective of the middle -class life. (19-20) S. Rajarajeswari’s paper “A Cyberflaneur’s Life in Girish Karnad’s Wedding Album: A Cultural Study” (2019) discusses the hidden issues related to the routine day life of the characters in the play. Chasity as a patriarchal tool is also discussed with reference to the play. (218-222) D.A. Nagane’s paper “The Women of Wedding Album: Reading Vidula, Amma and Hema” (2021) discusses the hidden desires, resentments and conflicts in the minds of the women characters. A search of identity on the part of the women characters is brought into focus in this paper. (59-66) Shalaka Vijay Kadam’s paper, “ Girish Karnad Imagines His Women Characters in “Wedding Album” looks at the institution of marriage for the women to base on sound footings and the need to adapt themselves according to the requirements of their marriage.(45-47) Akansha Watts in her paper, “ Treatment of Love in the play Wedding Album “(2018) looks at the love triangles in the play.(82-85)Dr. Rao’s paper, “ Re-inventing Tradition : A Study of Girish Plays” (2018) talks about the creation of new humanities for a better understanding of mankind.(1-5) Ruchi Sharma in her paper, “Marital Discord and its Assonance in Girish Karnad’s Play Wedding Album “(2013), talks about the marital discord and the failure of marriages due to negotiations.(1-12)

This paper will deal with Michel Foucault’s concept of space or “enclosure” (141) as a regulatory element in relation to social and cultural praxis and the meanings connected with the concept of space. His book Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison, enumerates the idea of space with respect to power. According to Foucault, space does not pre- exist. It is the production of space and its relation to power that is at stake. As according to Foucault, “Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual.” (143) Foucault’s concept of power and knowledge considers space as the medium and the instrument for the practice of power. Such power, he says, is inherent in the knowledge pertaining to space craft. Power and knowledge are practiced in, through and by space. Disciplinary spaces result into divisions and the consequent distribution of bodies. The very idea of space and its imprinting with discipline assures to locate individuals in order to “interrupt others”(143) Disciplining ensures the circulation of bodies while distributing them in a network of relations.(146) Foucault added that the positioning of bodies might be moving or fixed and this demanded an obedience on their part.(148) He says, “ The individual body becomes an element that may be placed, moved, articulated on others.”(164) Space, according to Foucault, in general has been considered as a formidable part of our day to day life in a given culture. He says, “...space is fundamental in any exercise of power.” (Rabinow 252)

Vidula: ... I am not doing anything at the moment. Worked for a travel agency for six

months. (5)

Vidula: This is how I am. You know I won't be any better in the next take... (6)

Vidula: ... My cooking isn't great either... (7)

Vidula does not mince words in accepting in video tapes, to be sent to the prospective, that she is not doing anything worthwhile and is available for marriage. So prospective of marriage comes out to be an opportunity for her to engage herself into something called work. She seems to be an aimless wanderer who follows the instructions of his family to talk to a boy from the US she has never actually met. Vidula doesn't consider herself good enough to handle a kitchen. Her scant accomplishments find her in no position to decide her future. Vidula is even at loss to decide whether which place in life can be good for her. She is just a "body" waiting for the decision of an unknown visitor from abroad to give direction to her otherwise aimless life.

Pratibha: ... The boy turns up, all ready to jump on to the altar, without ever having seen her. In this day and age? (8)

Pratibha: She had no boyfriends? No affairs? (9)

Pratibha's response to Rohit's story about his sister Vidula about being a good girl and not having any boyfriend or an affair is shocking. The idea of a good girl is something predetermined in our cultural set-up and this is how a girl or a woman is placed in our cultural construct.

Rohit: ... She hasn't come home in the three years since her marriage. (9)

Hema, Vidula's sister married in Australia has come to her parental house after a long interval of three years. Her space has been confined to a disciplined life that revolved around the welfare of her husband and children. She finds her own self as a lost entity and can not even think about her individuality. She is actually an individual without her own place and a place she could never accept as her own as she existed on the periphery with her husband and children being the focus of her life. Hema never desired such a place, she desired being an integral part of her family life.

Mother: If you don't like it, why don't you say so? ... (13)

Mother: It's wedding custom, Australia or no Australia ... (14)

Hema's mother fails to find out that Hema was not in a position to respond to her finer details of life. The parents are unable to see that their daughter stopped living for herself the day they tied her to a man.

Hema: (as her eyes fill up): ...Who will wear that necklace in Sydney? (14)

Mother: ...A wedding means expenses- there is no getting away from that. (15)

Hema has no desire to wear a jewellery as it really doesn't matter in her hectic care taker role in the family. Parents in our culture are always over-burdened with the expenditures of the marriage of a girl.

Mother: ...I pleaded with your father. I almost fell at his feet. I said our daughter and son-in-law are going abroad, let's get some jewellery made for them. (15)

Hema: ...We Indian women, on the other hand, are obedient Sati Savitris, But I am in no better position than Ma. (17)

Hema words are a reminder to what Foucault says about the positioning of bodies that might be moving or stagnant and subjected to obedience and a strict adherence to the norms. (148) Hema finds her position as helpless as that of her mother so far obeying their male counterparts without questioning their wrong decisions is concerned.

In his research paper "Foucault and Space" (2015), Miloje Grbin, states that Heterotopia is a concept elaborated by Michel Foucault to describe certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow 'Other' (Foucault 126). Such places are disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory and transforming. Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, still upsetting about what lies beyond the boundary. Cyberspace, is also one aspect in the play in the present context, and there are several heterotopias within it. (309-311)

Space is a discursive structure as its absence or presence and the changes or the transformation due to utterances would create something different. Discursive structures bring hegemonic norms into life and are usually determined with power and knowledge. Space gives rise to new knowledge. Spatialization is used to partition the space or the object so that it can be analyzed more easily. There is appropriation of space. The appropriation results in the spatialization and localization of the body. Space appears as the medium and source of articulation.

Mother: ...You can't get male cooks any longer, that's the problem. (23)

Cooking still seems to be a woman's space as there is dearth of male cooks where the household cooking is concerned. The play raises the much-suppressed question of a girl child's protection in her own house when her family is not around and her house loses that spatial comfort when she is assaulted in her own house.

Vidula (shrugs): He would touch one in the oddest spots. (23)

Vidula talks about her discomfiture regarding the male cook they used to have in their house when she was a child. She has been able to talk to her elder sister now at the time of her marriage which leaves Hema in shock.

Radhabai: Then why don't you take over the whole business of cooking Ma?... (20)

There is a queer case of Radhabai, the female cook, who is ever at daggers with the mother in the house. There never-ending fight is for the possession of the kitchen. Radhabai had been given shelter in the capacity of the cook as her husband was poor and left her a widow. Radhabai's daughter has been forced to live with an old rich man who when dies leaves her daughter on the road struggling to find her mother. Appropriation of a woman's

body to meet one's desire puts into question the life of destitute, like Radhabai's daughter. Her wondering on the road reminds one of the heterotopias that we have created in our minds wherein we fail to give a breathing space to a human being unfortunate like her.

Rohit: ...No rituals, no wasteful tamasha, nothing ... (25)

Rohit: ... On the video, mobile... And according to him, there is still no firm commitment. (25)

Partitioning of space and categorizing it has the impact of social practices. It results in newer forms of power and knowledge. The external spatial configuration amounts to ban internal mental imagination. Spatialization gets influenced by social relations. It leads to isolation and individualization, thus, leading to the possibilities of control and surveillance. There is resultant self- internalization of implied norms. Internalisation(Bartky 77) achieved by the body in question by its own efforts on one's own is the result of diffusion of outer power and self- control. (Grbin 308)

Gopal: ...Actually I am your nephew from my mother's side... (30)

Gopal: ... For Tapasya to have us discussing her future right in front of her. (32)

Gopal: ... Why shouldn't we? It's for our only daughter. Why wouldn't we believe that everything would work out right for her? (38)

Parents like Gopal throw their daughters forcibly. For them it is the end of the world if a boy refuses to accept their daughter. Gopal forcibly prevails upon Rohit and his parents to accept his daughter Tapasya, in marriage. Marriage is that particular space where the girl lacks her say and she is not asked but told to occupy a particular house.

So, it is the manifestation of space and creation of disciplinary spaces. The division of the disciplinary spaces creates the division of spaces with respect to the number of bodies in question. These lead to a supervision of the conduct of an individual. These distributions are imprecise. The procedure to locate individuals forms the core. The location of an individual is marked by surveillance, interruption, judgements and a calculative estimate of an individual. The space is the area of analysis. As Foucault says, "Discipline organizes an analytical space." (143) Discipline is an indicator of power and space is the indicator of power. Foucault writes that experience of new way of life demands organization of space with the 'internalization of normalizing values'(141-149). Knowledge of space was employed to use it as a design and for the maximum functional efficiency of the regulation of movement. Foucault says that the production of space is employed for the appropriation of specific goals for the implementation of power. Foucault adds that "We may not see space as a normal or neutral category. Space is inclusive of cultural symbolisms and representations. (Foucault 141-149)

Hema: ...What do you do in that internet Café?

Vidula: ... so that I can forget about the wedding for a few hours. (28)

Internet café is the space created far from the reaching eyes of patriarchy or the outside world. This is the place that gives refuge to the values that can not be openly flaunted as they stand in sharp contrast to those with which female members in a family are brought up and expected to behave. Vidula's cyber space escapade is nevertheless interrupted by the youth who flaunt high ideal Hindu values. She is able to

Our cultural construction sees wide disparities between male and female. The social and realist picture of our Indian society still lurks large with women either on the periphery or confined to those heterotropic (Grbin 305) "Other" (Foucault 126) spaces which are either not visible to the eye or ready to be assaulted or censured any time. Aparna Dharwadker is very apt in pointing out the discrepancies in our cultural set – up with the institution of patriarchy gaining on uneven grounds. It is not the burden of a historical past but lack of equity in the treatment of two people sharing the institution of marriage or gender differentiations in general.

Mother: ...Has been content to be a housewife. You are capable of anything if you only make up your mind... (90)

The mother of Vidula and Hema talks about her times when she had to forgo her own dreams in order to look after her family. She rightly advises Vidula not to lose herself in the space circumscribed for women where only the progress of the male members of family is considered worthwhile.

Father: Marriage is a gamble... (89)

The above words are a reminder as well as a warning for the transformation required in our value system as marriage happens to be a limiting space for women, nearly ending up their own space required for their fulfilment and development. Spatialization installs the norms beyond the possibility of a change. If we are unable to contain the appropriation of space, how can we even talk about bringing equality of gender.

As Bartky quotes Iris Young's contention that, "A woman's space is not a field in which her bodily intentionality can be freely realized but an enclosure in which she feels herself positioned and by which she is confined." (67) The confining of spaces or enclosures meant for women are the instruments of power that refuses them a life just as another human being. Spatialization has only led to a severe criticism of a woman's way of life and hence her continued confinement. A Foucauldian way of thought never considered space as an independent entity or something neutral but that which when understood in typical cultural contexts found political representations in need of reformation. An oppressive history of discursive structures, have long marred our national tradition with home as the core of our cultural built up.

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