



IDENTITY CRISIS LEADING TO PSYCHOLOGICAL REPRESSION IN BROKEN IMAGES BY GIRISH KARNAD: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

*The main focus of this paper is to examine how identity crisis leads to psychological repression. The selected play from Girish Karnad's gallery is a simple but outstanding play that is filled with all kind emotions within a single act. This paper attempts to show how **Broken Images** as a mono-drama written in single act with a single character exposes the inner conflicts of many Indian writers writing in their own mother language and the search for proper recognition and the extreme quest for one's own self will lead to a great psychological repression by focusing on such ideas as 'fragmented identity', 'parental neglect', 'sibling rivalry' and most importantly 'intellectual inferiority' with a particular focus on "Identity crisis leading to psychological repression" which is proved at the end of this paper through relevant use of instances drawn from this selected play namely **Broken Images**.*

Key Words: *Identity Crisis, Virtual Reality, Escapism, Psychological Repression, Feminine Sensibility, Monodrama, Celebrity hood.*

Man with his enormous mental wealth started presenting all his happiness and sorrows through writing. They started teaching moral values and life lessons through his works. We live in times of constant change. As India is ready to launch itself as a super power, the traditional Indian life is being threatened. The idea of simple living and high thinking that has characterized our way of life for several generations is gradually being replaced by a materialistic generation which worship mammon. Stress, a relatively unknown factor in the Indian society until recently, has become common among people in all walks of life. Stress, repression, psychological upsetness are given expression to in literary works. Those recorded works are then put into a broad category called literature. Even though there are four main genres in literature, drama plays a great role in exposing human life into limelight. Drama originally had its origin in Greece as a part of a festival celebrated to praise the Greek God of fertility, Dionysus. Drama was originally called as "goat song" because the best performers in the play were awarded with goats. One more reason for calling it as 'goat song' is that, the actors in the plays wore goat masks during their performance. This is how this genre came into existence. Later during the fruitful young period of literature, this genre took a great development and became an inevitable part of literature. R. K. Dhawan, a modern critic, comments about how a success of the theatre encourages a playwright to write more,

It is a well known fact that the real success of a play can be tested on the stage. A playwright needs a living theatre to put his work on acid test, evaluate its total effect on the audience and thereby get a chance to improve upon his performance. This handicap has not allowed him to pursue playwrighting, in a systematic and uncomprehensive way (P 19).

Drama in India effected its origin and start from folk tales which people used to stage as street dramas and later it was registered in written format too. The development of cinema brought drama a down fall but however, the written dramas have gained greater reader-audience than the staged ones. In India, drama is considered as the fourth wall that projects people's plights and happiness to the society. M. K. Naik, has rightly commented about the status of drama in Indian English Literature thus:

If Indian writing in English is the Cinderella of literature in English, Indian drama in English has always been, along with criticism, one of the twin Cinderella of Indian writing in English (180).

The origin of drama in India dates back to Christian era. The great sage, Bharat says that once all Gods prayed to Bhramma, the creator of the universe to produce a thing of great entertainment possessed with the qualities of the visual and the auditory senses which can be enjoyed alike by all sections of society. Bhramma, then took the nectar of all the four Vedas-plot from the Rig Veda, music from the Sam Veda, acting from the Yajur Veda and Rasas



from (human emotions) from Adharva Veda and thus mad the fifth Veda namely 'drama'. Indian drama in English is not a new thing but a link in the continuation of its rich heritage. The immortal works of Tagore and Aurobindo are steeped in poetry and romance recalling the sprit and flavour of the distinct dramatic type exemplified in different ways of Bhasa, Kalidasa and Bhava Bhuti. The other playwrights whose works merit our attention much are Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, T. P. Kailasam, Barathi Sarabhai, P. A. Krishnaswami, Asif Karrimbhoy, Pradap Sharma, Nissim Ezekiel, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Gopal Gandhi, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanaban, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, etc, along with a few theatre directors who all did a marvellous work in presenting their words into actions. Indian drama reaches greater heights through these enthusiastic writers and directors. Not all these writers write in their own mother languages and they also gained greater reader-audience. Some of their works are translated into many different languages according to the content and moral wealth. Commenting on modern Indian drama and Indian stage production, K. R. S. Iyengar observes:

Modern Indian dramatic writing in English is neither rich in quantity not, on the whole, of high quality. Enterprising Indians have for nearly a century occasionally attempted drama in English but seldom for actual stage production (226)

Girish Karnad, one of the most famous playwright, actor and director in Indian literary circle. He gains greater familiarity through his powerful words and daring projection of strong characters that questions even the unquestionable. He has written plays on mythology, history and some strong plays that project the contemporary issues and present socio-political conditions prevailing in India. All his plays deal with some strong social issues in a casual way. Even his historical and mythological plays deal with present problems and human relationships. Karnad, a master in projecting problems in human relationships and throwing the issue of identity crisis to the readers and allowing them to find a solution at the end of the play. He being the contemporary writer, knows the present day status of human mind and he projects ideas in an excellent way. His usage of history and myth in his plays gives it a standard appearance.

Out of all Karnad's plays, **Broken Images** is something different that it is his only play written with contemporary setting. Karnad writes in Kannada even though it is not his mother tongue as it is evident that his mother tongue was Kongani language. He himself translated this work into English too. One more pride that this play earned was that it is directed by Karnad himself when it was staged first time. He being the Rhodes scholar, plays with English in this play.

This play is not like his other plays where he presents speaking dolls, gorgeous costumes and elaborate settings. In this play, he has used very limited items for settings. A plasma screen, few system screens, a table and a chair was the materials used to create a setting. He has created a TV station interview hall as the setting of this play. Karnad describes the setting of this play thus:

The interior of a television studio. A big plasma screen hangs on one side, big enough for a close-up on it to be seen clearly by the audience. On the other side of the stage, a chair and a typically 'telly' table-strong, wide, semi-circular. At the back of the stage are several television sets, with screens of varying sizes (224)

This play was a complete Monodrama with one act, one setting and one character. The announcer appears in the play but only on the plasma screen. The whole play is driven by a single character, Manjula. There are many themes in this play which are to be discussed in relevance to the topic. It is more important to know the significance of the title first. The title **Broken Images** itself is a big hint to the theme of this play. The phrase 'broken images' could be interpreted in many ways. First of all let it be seen from the audience point of view. The phrase shows them the idea that the image of the protagonist was broken at the end of the play. From Manjula's perspective, her parents, sister and husband's image on her mind was broken. For Manjula, her own self-image also gets broken up at the end of the play. From Malini's point of view, her own image was broken by Manjula by stealing her work and publishing it in her name. Malini being the physically challenged woman, she could not come out of Manjula till her death because loved or hated she has to live in Manjula's help. These are some



assumptions which may be the reason for the title of this play. The major themes discussed in this play are, (i) The conflict of languages, (ii) The quest for completion, (iii) The suppression of memories, (iv) Identity crisis, (v) Reality Vs virtual reality, (vi) Celebrity-hood.

The main theme discussed in this play is the conflict of languages. From the beginning Manjula shows her uncomfortable feelings with English. Even though she is confident inside the interview hall, her hatred towards the social systems was exposed through her voice. She guesses the first question that the audience wanted her to answer. The question was about the language that she used to write her novel. She says that writing in English is not a crime. She confesses the reason for writing in English that, of course, it is to earn much but the Indian writers who write in English will not kill the Indianness of the text. But at the end of the play she accepts a big reality that the novel in English was not written by her but by her sister. She defends herself for writing in English as,

I have been accused of writing for foreign readers. Accused! As though I have committed a crime. A writer seeks audience where she or he can find them! My British publishers said to me: We like your book because it's so Indian. We receive any number of manuscripts from India but they are all written with the western reader in view. Your novel has a genuine Indian feel. (BI 227).

The quest for completion is a next important theme to be discussed in this play. Manjula runs all over her life in search of completeness. She was projected as a longing girl for her parents' love, longing sister for her sister's love, longing wife for her husband's love and a longing writer waiting for reader's recognition. She was not complete in anything. She goes in search of her own image till the end of the play. Even at the end, she could not find herself because she was taken over by Malini and her thoughts. Malini also had a quest for completion in her mind. Even though she was intellectually complete, her physical condition makes her long for freedom. She could not be alone anytime. She must live in someone's assistance and so she also longs for completeness within her.

Suppression of memories is the most important theme in this play. Manjula deliberately suppresses her memories in the interview. The speech that she gave in the interview is completely a lie. All her memories were taken over by the imagination of her brain. She feels guilty of publishing her sister's novel in her name. But she managed to speak defending the novel in the interview. Later when she faced her own image on the plasma screen, she starts speaking all her suppressed memories. Her mind unconsciously starts speaking with her heart. She questions her own self and speaks to it in a harsh manner.

Identity crisis was the usual theme discussed in the majority of Indian novels and plays. Karnad uses this theme in a careful manner. He brings all his characters into this theme. All his characters lose their identity at least once in the course of the play. Manjula, the protagonist faces this problem at every single frame of the drama. Her loss of her own self was deliberately expressed in her facial reactions and her tone.

Next important theme is reality Vs. virtual reality. Karnad through his special usage of some kind of super natural effects such as image on the plasma screen creates a sense of virtual reality. What artificially created virtual reality questions the reality and brings out the truth at the end. Manjula did not long for being a celebrity but she wanted to improve her living status. So she decided to publish her sister's novel as hers. This presents her a celebrity-hood too. She carefully handles her fame and answers all the questions with patience. But when the image questions her, she loses her temper and starts shouting. These are some other themes that are focused in this play.

The play **Broken Images** is filled with a lot of minute images that question one's identity. Travelling along with Manjula creates a lot of scenarios where the readers could find clear instances of identity getting faded away. The question and answer session in the TV channel makes her express all her emotions in front of camera. The three extremely different characters in the play move in their own way. This play could be taken as the best example for a monologue containing multiple themes. Focusing on the different ideologies leads to a complex whole and thus makes a worthy work of art.



Escapism is a tool that people use to run away from real bitter situations and get trapped into a different story where they literally never exist. Protagonist of this play deliberately uses this tool to expose herself as a happy woman to the society. She tilts and turns every real situation and creates a beautiful imagination which she actually wants to be real. Manjula, the protagonist of this play, lives in such a situation which she accepts but never wants to expose. This single act play is a monologue by the protagonist. She reaches a peak of helplessness when her intellectual inferiority was kindled. She could not expose her true identity to the society because no matter who the person is, society tears them little by little by always pointing out their mistakes and calls them incomplete.

Manjula's speech at the television interview exposed the point that she was helpless from the beginning. She did not had any support from her family, a recognition as a writer and also as a wife. Above all, her sister Malini's love with Pramodh, her husband made her life more complicated that she could not even show her true face to the society. Her reality presented only a harsh bitterness to her so she selected a way to escape herself from all those stuffs and show herself as a successful woman writer. The problems in her life put her to an extreme complication and confused her like who she wants to be, who she should be and who she actually is. Unable to fix her life in reality, she has created an imaginary world where everything was good. Manjula undergoes a sense of insecurity throughout the play. Karnad expresses his concern over the cultural identity of Indian writers in the contemporary India through this play.

Dealing with the problems makes someone entirely tired both physically and mentally and this would force them to create a situation to escape from the reality. Manjula when she was introduced to the audience by the announcer he also speaks about the importance of creative writers in India. When he questioned her about the reason for her writing in English she answers him that her thought process is in English and she gets her ideas in English. But the fact is that writing in English would serve her financially. Translated works served financially than writing in one's own mother tongue. Her sister Malini wrote in English because she had acquaintance with an English lady nearby. Manjula's answer to that question was,

I wrote the novel in English because it burst out in English. it surprised even me. I couldn't understand why it was all coming out in English. but I did. That's all. There is no other explanation. (BI 227).

It is evident from the course of the story that her English works were written by Malini with the help of Pramodh. But Manjula claims recognition for those works. Manjula lied because she could not get proper reward for writing in her own mother language, she was with the opinion that the writers who writes in English could get recognition even from the west. Manjula says that all the writers write for some meaningful purpose. She tells that in Kannada as 'Arthapoorana', in which 'Artha' also refers to 'money'. She tells indirectly that writers write for some meaningful purpose and more for money and fame. According to her, a Kannada proverb says,

"A response is good. But a meaningful response is better.' Meaningful: Arthapoorana. The Kannada word for meaning is Artha-which also means money! And of course, fame, publicity, glamour...power." (BI 228).

Psychological repression is a serious result that a person faces when he/she attain an extreme level of identity crisis. Manjula was at a condition that her parents were there but they didn't support her, her sister was there with her till her death but she was not able to help Manjula. Her husband was with her but he did not had any affection on her but he was affectionate towards her sister Malini. Above all she loved to write in her own mother tongue but she could not do it because the intellectual creative writer like her was not encouraged by the readers when she writes in her comfortable language. This condition made her more pathetic and so she underwent a strong mental depression. Being a woman who is starving for her identity has to be highly secretive. Manjula pretends to be happy but the reality is that she wants to hide her true reality to the world. This was evident from the words of Manjula when she speaks to her Image. The words are:

But you are right. I wouldn't. They left me with grandparents in Dharwad. An affectionate young couple. They fussed over me. But no substitute for parents. When vacations approached I could



barely wait to get to Bangalore. And once I finished college, I found a job in Bangalore and came and lived with them. Those were the happiest days of my life! Halcyon! But then I met Pramodh. We got married and settled down in Jayanagar. Father helped with the house but he left most of his money in her name-for her care. She was always the focus. Naturally (BI 233).

Through Manjula, Karnad speaks much about Indian writers who write in English. Karnad always chose Kannada to produce all his works but his protagonist was projected in a way that she confesses that she creates all her works in English. Through her speech Karnad exposes the mentality of Indian writers who writes in English. He says that it is the mentality of writers to get local as well as international readers. It is more important for them to get global audience so that they would get recognition worldwide. Their mixed feeling of stress anxiety and a sense of fear was expressed by him through Manjula.

Manjula being a good creative writer expects good recognition from all around. But everything that happens in her life was a kind of tragedy. She could not overcome the truth about her life. Karnad's way of exposing Manjula's character and appreciating the flaws in her was more interesting. She did not get the love of her parents, sister and husband. The powerful speech that she made at the TV station is too bold and expressive. It is true that the interview gave her a chance to expose her true identity to the world. Thus the extreme uncontrollable search of identity by Manjula made her a victim of severe psychological repression.

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