

A Brief Study of Girish Karnad's Play *Bali: The Sacrifice*

Sunita Yadav*

Assistant Professor, Modern Indian College of Education Pali, Rewari

Abstract – It was first brought out into Kannada in 1980 by the name of Hittina Hunja. It has been taken from an ancient Kannada epic, Yashodhara Charite. Though the play is based on an ancient epic, yet it deals with the issues that are relevant today as they were many centuries ago. The plot of the play consists of four characters-The King, The Queen, The Queen Mother (the King's Mother), The Mahout. The confrontation between the two traditional ideologies, violence and non-violence, associated with two religions namely Hinduism and Jainism are presented through the play. The Queen-Mother and the Queen are the representative perspectives of the ideologies. To present his idea, the dramatist has selected a royal family instead of a normal one because it is a centre which exerts influence on common people who just imitate the king and his culture and enlarged the scope of the play.

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The Queen-Mother is a traditional Hindu woman. She has full faith in her religion. She is an orthodox and conservative in her attitude. She believes in violence and sacrifices the animals on the name of the goddess. It is very difficult for her to separate herself from her faith. It is her way to worship her deity. She is following the custom which is imparted to her by her ancestors. She has dominant nature. She wants to hold full control over her son. That's why she can't tolerate her son's betrayal to her and shook her faith by tying a knot with a Jain girl and accepting Jainism for her sake. According to her, he is a man and he should not accept her wife's religion. She says, "You were not born a Jain. You were born my son. But you betrayed me and my faith. Instead of choosing the woman and bringing her to your faith, you chose hers" (B98). It highlights that the woman is not bound to follow man; the man also can follow a woman. This is the greatest reason for which she dislikes her daughter-in-law. How can she tolerate that woman who takes her son away from her faith? The king has betrayed his mother and her faith which is something different to the social codes. Sumita Roy points out in the article titled "Ideological Spaces in *Bali: The Sacrifice*", "Love, loyalty, emotion, support, family traditions and various other issues are raised through that single word "betrayed". These are important ideological principles which govern familial and social contexts where a son is supposed to care for the mother, a wife is supposed to "sacrifice" all- name, form, possessions, and beliefs-for the sake of her husband"(286). The Queen also accepts it, "And I can't blame her. Because of me you deserted her faith-her mother goddess" (B91). But she is a mother and she can't forget this fact. That's why she becomes very happy at the news of the Queen's pregnancy. She blesses her son, "May you beget a son whose glory

blinds the eight directions" (B94). She wants a grandson not a grand-daughter. Not only the Queen-mother wants a grandson but the King and the Queen also want a son not a daughter. In the words of the King, "She's wanted a grandson as badly as we've wanted a son" (B95). They expect a son to run their kingdom not a daughter. In *Yayati* too Chitrekha desires a son as an heir for Bharata dynasty and in *Bali: The Sacrifice* too they desire for son as an heir not daughter. The gender disparity is clearly hinted through this.

It is the responsibility of a woman if she bears a child and then loses it. Same is the case with the Queen, she has lost her child and the king blames her for it for not following his mother. The King says, "If we had listened to mother we may not have lost our child..." (B113). The Queen is a Jain that's why she has no belief in The Queen Mother's sacrifices of the animals in the name of gods. The King blames her for not following his mother's orders. At this the Queen says to the King, "I lost my baby because I didn't follow your mother's orders? Because I didn't kill and maim" (B 113)? The queen bears a child very late. Every people of the kingdom thought her barren. At last she gets the occasion to keep the mouth shut of everyone. But when she lost the child before its birth the King and the Queen-Mother made her responsible. She complains to the King, "Late in my life, I become pregnant and I have a miscarriage- and you are saying that was a punishment meted out to me for my defiance" (B 113). Once she had an illusion of being pregnant, but when the reality came to her she had to feel humiliation. That's why when she becomes really pregnant; she feels that the King and the Queen Mother also has the doubt of her pregnancy. They

don't have belief in her. That's why after losing her child she wants to make it clear to the King, "Sometimes I've felt- I had to abort to prove to you I was pregnant. To show you the truth" (B 114). After her miscarriage she can't bear a child. She blames for that the goddess of the Queen- Mother and says, "That's why I haven't become pregnant since then. Your mother's goddess in her wrath has made me sterile and all those years you have agreed with that-God! How I loathe you and your mother and your whole-"(B 114).

The Queen is a lover of music. One night she hears the song of the Mahout which is very melodious. In its attraction she forgets herself and her position. She goes to the Mahout and commits adultery in the attraction of the song. When she comes to consciousness she finds herself with the Mahout. The Queen-mother reacts very violently at the news of the Queen's adultery. She has full faith in violence and says, "Kill the harlot and her lover. If you won't do it, I'll do it" (B107). It's a great crime in her eyes and the punishment of it is death. She also wants to avenge on his son for the betrayal of her religion. She presents hypocrisy. On the one hand, she wants her son to make a sacrifice for the Queen's sin but on the other, she wants the Queen, "Don't agree to the sacrifice. Refuse. Let him plead. Don't yield. That's what I've come to tell you. . . the more you refuse, the more will my son suffer. Let him" (B114-115). Here the mother is taking avenge from both her son and his wife very tactfully. P. D. Nimsarkar points out about the Queen-Mother in his book *Women in Girish Karnad's Play: A Critical Perspective*, "It is not that she really wants to target his son but she intends to teach him a lesson so that he could come out of his wife's influence" (178).

The Queen presents a new kind of woman. She is not like those who are ready to accept everything for the sake of their husband. She is a Jain and marries to a Hindu king. Instead of accepting Hindu religion after marries she makes her husband to accept Jainism. In the words of P. D. Nimsarkar, "She is liberal in outlook and follows the principle of love and compassion" (179). It also conveys that she breaks the tradition to follow the husband submissively but she talks about give and take in this relationship. She wants to convert him according to her. Through her character, Karnad presents a different woman who is not traditional. Because of her religion, she has to suffer at the hand of her mother-in-law after marries. P. D. Nimsarkar rightly says about the behaviour of the Queen- Mother to the Queen in his book titled *Women in Girish Karnad's Plays: A Critical Perspective*, "The Queen-Mother does not feel belittled to humiliate his daughter-in-law without considering her position in the place and relationship just to humiliate her down and assert her identity" (178).

There is strong dislikes by the mother-queen to Jain Queen because she made her son a Jain. The Queen is full of imaginations. She is under the burden to

produce an heir to her family and in this situation she has an illusion that she is pregnant. Bearing a child is one of the duties of a wife and when wife is a queen the expectations are more. In this case also she needs an heir so that her position gets strengthened in the kingdom. Sudhir Kakkar points out the importance of motherhood for a woman in *The Inner World*, "It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman, and can make a place for herself in the family, in the community and in the life cycle" (82). But when the reality comes forward, she has to feel humiliation. The Queen Mother heard two maids giggling and making fun of the Queen, "a hen doesn't need a cock to lay eggs" (B100). But when she actually becomes pregnant then her mother-in-law also becomes suspicious about her pregnancy. But the Queen has lost her child before its birth. She wants to become free from this burden of bearing an heir for the family, that's why she says to the King, "You could have taken another wife...purely for bearing children. Then I could make love to you- for its own sake- to make love" (B95). Every woman wants to bear a child for her family but when she is unable to do it she is considered useless and she has to face humiliation at the hand of her family and society. Man may also be responsible for it but everyone blames her not the man. Same is the case of the Queen; she has to face humiliation for not bearing a child. The subject of the kingdom seems to her to humiliate her, she says, "For me they were my judges, my interrogators, tortures- all clubbed together against me."(B94).

The King can get married as many times as he wants because he is a man but the Queen does not have such right. She has to be faithful to her only husband otherwise she is not considered a good woman. In the play, the Queen -Mother wants her son to marry again because his wife is unable to bear a child. But once the Queen is attracted by the song of the Mahout and committed adultery, the queen-Mother suggests her son to kill the Queen. She says to her son 'What kind of a man you are? You have lost your manhood. You, you impotent...Then throw her out. Get yourself another wife" (B108). All this twist turn in the King's life shows that both the woman mother and wife are taking decision for him. He is unable to judge what is right or wrong. He cannot decide what is good for him? What he has to do? What are the reasons that his wife deceived him? He does not try to find out the answers of these questions. Sumita Roy rightly comments on him in the article titled "Ideological Space in *Bali: The Sacrifice*", "However hard the king tries to negotiate a truce, he is caught in the crossfire between these two women whom he loves"(286).

The Queen does not consider her adultery a sin. In her eyes, it is not a sin. In spite of all this, she has full faith in her husband. It is clear from the conversation of the Mahout and the Queen. After their relation, Mahout says for himself "better than your husband" (B78). She immediately replies, "My

coming here has nothing to do with my husband. He is a marvellous person-affectionate, gentle, trusting... He is the best of men" (B79). Like a traditional wife she is unable to bear a single word against her husband. She commits adultery without intention or in the attraction of the Mahout's song. She herself accepts before the king, "It just happened. Without my willing it. It just happened" (B119). She has no intention to do it. That's why she feels no shame for it. She wants to reunite with the king "I want to come back to you. I feel fuller. Richer. Warmer. But not ashamed"(B119). All these statements are too bold and secondly it shows that she considered the relationship of husband and wife above all. In one of his interview with Tutun Mukherjee Karnad said, "The Mahout is the catalyst who releases the repression of the different characters in the play, especially the Queen. He is ugly and crude but that does not matter to the Queen. She is seduced by his music and in forgetting all his inhibitions and barriers of decorum, commits adultery in thought even before their physical union. Likewise, she is shocked to realize that, not necessarily through explicit behaviour, one can be violent in intent or thought"(50). She is casual of the things that happened to her.

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Corresponding Author

Sunita Yadav*

Assistant Professor, Modern Indian College of Education Pali, Rewari