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**HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS AS DEPICTED IN GIRISH KARNAD'S
 BOILED BEANS ON TOAST**

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Abstract:

Girish Karnad is a leading contemporary Indian English playwright who has given a new dimension to the literary world by converting simple folk themes and historical evidences into fine existential plays. The present paper "Human Relationships as depicted in Girish Karnad's Boiled Beans on Toast" portrays the transformation in the human relationships in the contemporary Indian society by considering the lives of the people in Bangalore and accurately depicts life in Bangalore's vast growth in the last 10 years. Boiled Beans on Toast mirrors the life exactly as it is lived by the residents of Bangalore. In this play, Karnad has made use of various characters belonging to diverse sections of the society to highlight the entire spectrum of human encounters and experiences of city life.

Keywords: *Transformation, contemporary Indian society, human encounters.*

Girish Karnad's *Boiled Beans on Toast*, the most recent play published in 2014 is partly based on the formation myth of Bangalore. This can be considered as a new addition to the dramatic composition of Karnad. The play indicates the transformation in the human relationships in the contemporary Indian society by considering the lives of the people in Bangalore and accurately depicts life in Bangalore's vast growth in the last 10 years. The play highlights the enormous city containing a mixture of individuals with aspirations, yearnings, zest, dreams and determination. It acts like a mirror of the real world, a display of the social frame-work and politics of the existing society. Bangalore is a city of despair and disappointment, of wild hopes and dashed dreams, of rapid development and environmental pollution. The city is said to have attained its name through a king's thankfulness for a bowl of boiled beans and here we see that the name of the play is extremely symbolic in sense. It clearly presents that identity crisis, existentialism and loneliness closely knit in the lives of almost all the characters of the play. India is primarily known for her traditional familial bonds and mutual expression of love. However, Karnad very aptly points out the detestable outcome of contemporary urban life which endeavors to threaten our familial bonds.

In *Boiled Beans on Toast*, he portrays the life exactly as it is lived by the residents of Bangalore. He has made use of various characters belonging to diverse sections of the society to highlight the entire spectrum of human encounters and experiences of city life. These multifarious characters are quite different from one another, belong to different social status, and hail from divergent geographical regions. Starting their lives under a common roof, these lives spread out in different directions, get twisted in the spin of life outside where they gradually fail to track themselves. They start separating or unexpectedly meet and lurch off each other. Anyone who is aware of life in a modern Indian metropolitan city will instantly sensitise to this depiction of urban conflict, aspirations, groping for nothing and violence. A composed old lady suddenly develops an extreme passion in horse-racing and is not against to deceiving her own family; a youngster committed to his family is carried away by vision of sudden success; a reliable servant working for many years is seen moving homeless on streets; not a very-intelligent young maid grasps how to combat for survival within the limits of a kitchen. What we come across in modern city life,

the different funny, tender, shadow-shapes moving, never-ending search for happiness, success, filled by endless emotional essence.

Boiled Beans on Toast, a two-act play majorly focuses on the central character, Anjana Padabidri's life. In the first act, the play introduces us to the characters by giving a clear indication of their attitudes while communicating with each other. Firstly, we are introduced to Anjana, who volunteers at Karunashraya, a rescue home for cancer patients, and also Dolly Iyer who serves as an English elocution teacher and declares to help ambitious people like Prabhakar to develop in their career. We come across Anusuya, Anjana's mother-in-law who is addicted to betting on horse-races and Kunaal, Anjana's rebellious son who is passionate of playing Guitar instead of Veena as a rebellion against his father. Characters like Vimala, the senior servant in Anjana's house, who has conquered the heart of her mistress through her hard-working nature and the junior maid, Muttu who is laborious and soft spoken are introduced. Later, we are also introduced to minor roles like Muttu's brother, mother and Sundara Rajan.

In the Second Act, we come across the various problems that the characters encounter and the way they deal with them. As instructed by Dolly Iyer, Prabhakar reaches the office of Wipro and feels very nervous when he came to know that his interviewer is abroad. He informs Dolly regarding the situation and she assures to call him back. He creates turbulence in the office when Dolly doesn't respond him soon and quits the office in desperation. He understands that he has been deceived and challenges Dolly, targeting her when she is alone. He blames her of misleading him but still he plans to fulfill the dream. Later Dolly is seen persuading an ambitious dancer, Asha, to leave her present job assuring her a scholarship in England. In the case of Muttu, she and her family members were insulted by her brother Shankara for neglecting him and for exhibiting their modernity and influencing his children to hate his village. The argument finally comes to an end with Muttu's husband rescuing her mother from Shankara's attack. Kunaal sees the questioning of Vimala in the police station and is totally impressed by Vimala's spontaneity, tact and her talent of concocting lies on spot. He understands that she is the thief, however that truth does not bother him, rather he lauds her for her skill and welcomes her back to work in his house.

Discussing about Anjana's character, she is upset about the cutting down of the big tree which stood in front of her house to provide a new underpass. Muttu discloses the deception of Vimala about how she has been giving various things to a neighbor without taking Anjana's consent. This action results in Vimala's dismissal from her job. Vimala in her furious mood visits Muttu's house to tell her that Shankara, Muttu's brother has been living nearby in Bangalore and admitted to a hospital. She takes revenge on Muttu by revealing the name of the hospital in which Shankara was taking treatment and thus makes Muttu's mother's life regretful. Anasuya gives away all her jewellery to arrange money for betting in horse-races. She does this without informing her son and daughter in law. Instead of taking up family responsibilities she tells Kunaal against his father that Anjana lost her voice for singing after marrying Mr. Padabidri. Anjana clarifies to Kunaal that she lost her voice after attempting suicide. Finally, Kunaal realizes for the first time that how he went closer to death but still survived and understands that everything would have continued to exist even after his death. It instigates him to compose a song dedicating to Bangalore.

The play is an ideal display of desires followed by the ambitious pursuits leading to disappointment and resentment in life. The misinterpretation of ethics and morality due to problematic circumstances and wrong notions of success are ample. The play has a divergent but assembling a group multitudes utilizing the opportunities emerging with accelerated urbanization while managing with the resultant stress. Almost every human being in the world wishes to be loved and therefore wants to develop a sense of belonging. Love is a connecting factor which relates human beings.

The story line of "Boiled Beans on Toast" moves around the character of Anjana. In fact, this play cannot brag of a single protagonist. However, all the characters in the play are related to Anjana. Her friends, family members, and maid servants are presented in this drama. Quite surprisingly, almost all the characters in the play suffer from alienation. Anjana Padabidri seeks affection from her husband, Mr.

Padabidri. His ambitious nature keeps him away from his family most of the time resulting in Anjana Padabidri intense desolation. To come out of her loneliness, Anjana starts to sing out loudly which aids her to find a Bengali friend, who resides next door to her. Therefore, their passion in singing brings them closer. The young man's words while vacating his room hurts Anjana and she becomes very disappointed - "I don't wish to be trapped into a relationship with a married woman" (78). The word 'trapped' disturbs her completely and makes her feel heartbroken, desperate, and results in sleeplessness.

When Anjana understands that her emotional needs are not fulfilled, she tries to commit suicide by taking sleeping pills and feeds them to her young son. She fails in that attempt and the thief steals her sweet voice. She discloses her past to Kunaal---

ANJANA: ... I ground some sleeping pills in milk and fed them to you. I swallowed the rest. I then prayed to the gods, clasped you to me, and went to sleep... never to wake up again. (*Pause.*)

I don't know how long we were sleeping like that... But I suddenly opened my eyes and sat up. Bright and wide-eyed. I was alive and so were you. Death had cheated us both. (*Boiled Beans on Toast 78*)

To come out of her loneliness, she develops friendship with her neighbor. After many years, she joins the group of Karunashraya, a cancer hospice, to guard herself of the loneliness and regains her voice for singing there when a patient in his last days requests for a song. She says,

"I suddenly found myself singing...."

(*Boiled Beans on Toast 78*)

Anjana loves her son Kunaal and gives him freedom to choose the way he is interested to live, but feels muddled between her husband and son because, Mr. Padabidri uses her as a means to handle Kunaal about various issues. She is very exhausted of the continuous quarrels of the two and expects some peace of mind when she is at home.

The young man Prabhakar is totally obsessed in achieving his ambitions and reaching great heights in career that he becomes a victim to Dolly's claim to aid to get a job with an MNC Wipro though he doesn't possess the required qualification and training for the job. To fulfill his dream, he is ready to move abroad leaving his family at his native place:

PRABHAKAR. Where's the fourth box? Ah! Yes. What's this, Sumitra? Why are you being so silly? It's a question of only a month. Then we'll all be together in Singapore.

SUMITRA. I don't want to go to Singapore. I was so happy when you got a job here. Our own house. Our own life. No parents or parents-in-law to breath down our necks. No interfering relatives. We were so happy. What more do you want?

PRABHAKAR. No, Sumitra. I'm rotting in this place. I must thank Dolly for making me realize I'm wasted here. I deserve a better job. I can't go on forever with this grind.. (*Boiled Beans on Toast 34*)

As Prabhakar comes from a rural and quiet area, which makes him crave for the cadence of traffic, large crowds, and noises of construction in the city. He appears like a foolish character but is a familiar blend of ego and despair that possibly marks the struggle of the miserable low-cadre IT professional. He fails to build strong bonding with his family in pursuit of success in his profession.

The play investigates into the brilliant life of young generation which lacks moral and social beliefs. The character of Kunaal which mirrors the current young generation which discloses their search for freedom from the values and traditions imposed upon them by the older generation. Youngsters have a misinterpreted idea of personal space and the mark between right and wrong is totally ignored. Kunaal who is in his teenage is a budding upcoming musician who is a part of a troupe which gives performances in restaurants and pubs in the evenings. He is a typical unruly teenager who is convinced of the opinion that parental economic support for all his luxurious possessions is his right, but he expects his father to not

enforce any parental power over him. He is not influenced by the distractions of the people around him and considers important matters in a strange manner. When his mother questions him about the nasty sexual bearings of a band member, he jerks it off by saying,

“.... Perhaps he is a transsexual. What am I supposed to do about it? He drums like a god.”(*Boiled Beans on Toast* 20)

In Vimala, the maid servant's issue, he observes the questioning of Vimala and finally Kunaal is convinced that though she is a thief she possess ready wit for framing lies. He starts appreciating her talent,

“... every word she uttered to the police and to me was a lie. A bright, white, brazen lie. And she knew that I knew and the police knew that she was fibbing. And what courage! What invention! She was leading us on, she was creating a story from one minute to another. I tell you. she's my heroine. I've never seen such such what the word creativity is! How could we've missed her brilliance! ... She's simply wonderful. I wish she was my girlfriend. I think I've fallen in love with her...”
(*Boiled Beans on Toast* 44)

Kunaal does not even consider it necessary to share this information to his mother, rather, goes looking for Vimala's house when she doesn't come to work and encourages her to return to work. In the case of his grandmother, he reveals his observation about her activities to Anjana when Raykar, the moneylender calls his mother to settle the accounts. He says,

“Grandmother didn't mind using our car when she went on her social rounds. But never, when she went to the races. She didn't want to disturb your schedule, she said, and always hired a cab from the taxi company. So I probed a bit. It was quite a routine for her to stop at Raykar's on the way to the races. So I went to Raykar. Grandma's been borrowing money from him. Regularly”(*Boiled Beans on Toast* 75)

The only matter which impresses him is that he could have been dead when his mother attempted suicide and fed him sleeping pills. His survival brings on a realization to him that the world would not have been affected by his absence in any way. He feels motivated to write a song about Bangalore and starts humming the lyrics,

“Big bang Bangalore is a big black hole”(*Boiled Beans on Toast* 80)

Anusuya, the mother-in-law of Anjana, is addicted to betting on horse-races. Similar to Kunaal she feels that spending her son's earnings is her right. Anusuya has never shouldered any responsibility of her family, rather seems irreverent and isolated. She makes a discussion with Kunaal about his passion for music. Instead of trying to settle the differences and building the relationship between Mr. Padabidri and Kunaal, she blames her son of being a cause for Anjana's loss of voice for singing. She never tried to exercise her authority over the family issues. When her grandson Kunaal tells his mother that he will not come home to night and he would stay back at his Nandita's house, she cannot restrict him in spite of being shocked:

KUNAAL: Mummy, if it gets late, I may not come home for dinner. I'll sleep over at Nandita's.

ANUSUYA: Who's Nandita?

KUNAAL: The singer in our band. She's absolutely amazing. (Startled, Anusuya looks at Anjana, who doesn't show any reaction although she has registered Anusuya's sense of shock.)

ANJANA: If I'm not going to see you before tomorrow morning, I want to have a word with you. Papa called. (Kunaal groans. Anusuya senses the tension in the air.)

ANUSUYA: I'll be off then.(*Boiled Beans on Toast* 93)

Dolly Iyer's character in this play is a figurative character that reflects those high-society women who seek pleasure in sneaking a look at other's houses, chatting about their issues and try to fool others by their false pomposity. Vimala and Dolly both are projected as negative roles in the play. Dolly thrives on showcasing herself to be a reputed woman maintaining contacts with high-class and powerful persons. In the play we find that Brigadier Iyer, her husband slaps her for her false pretence. His behavior is a sign of their loveless marital life. Dolly cooks stories of her contacts only to deal with her loneliness. She brings delightful flavor and luxury to her character but finally ends up as simply playful, instead of a more bothersome and revengeful woman.

The maid servants Muttu and Vimala in Anjana's house also suffer from estrangement from each other. They are continuously shattered by envy and a senseless disposition towards contentious aggression. When Vimala, the cook in Anjana's house does not turn up for a few days, Muttu, the maid, seizes her job. The playwright presents the working-class people, devoid of communal feeling, and focusing in back-stabbing. In the following discussion we see the survival impulse of both Vimala and Muttu:

VIMALA: MuttuMuttu

MUTTU: Oh, Vimala! How nice. Come in. Come in.

VIMALA: No time to come in. Let's talk here. How're you?

MUTTU: Okay. As usual.

VIMALA (smilingly): Oh, better than usual, surely. You've got a promotion.

MUTTU (confused): What was I to do? Amma said you hadn't come or you weren't coming or something like that. Asked me to take charge till you came back. That's all.

VIMALA: And you got stuck for good. Very nice. I worked there for eight years. You've set yourself up for the next eight now. (*Boiled Beans on Toast* 97)

Muttu is seen worried about the security of her future. Her family includes herself, her daughter, her husband, and her mother. Her family's economic condition finds it difficult to provide food for nearly thirty people in their daughter's puberty ceremony. This is seen in her words to her brother Shankara when he forces her to celebrate the occasion in their own house at Karimangala, their native place. She responds,

“Husband said Karimangala would mean expense. The remotest relatives will turn up. In Bengaluru, we can have a smaller affair. More compact” (*Boiled Beans on Toast* 7).

When Muttu and her mother first came to Bangalore after the demise of Muttu's father, her mother made her living by mending mosquito curtains, darning, stitching, repairing window curtains and bed sheets for the Marwadi's. Muttu's mother recollects that—

MOTHER... We lived like beggars, like roofless orphans, in that monster city. And when I found a job 'twas as a seamstress, chained to that sewing machine eight hours a day. Often even ten hours. What happiness did I ever see? It was all for your children. (*Boiled Beans on Toast* 47)

Vimala, the cook in Anjana's house is deprived of the basic amenities. She does not have proper clothing, shelter, personal safety, and guarantee of the future. She manages in parallel jobs and works in two houses at the same time to meet her daily needs. When a person is hungry, appeasing his appetite is the main aim of him. In such case, we cannot expect sophisticated behavior from him. He or she may do anything for his or her survival. Similarly, Vimala is found stealing and lying. She hides her residence, so no one has an idea of where she resides. Even it becomes extremely difficult for the police to trace her shelter. The obscurity that the city offers provides a total cover to her identity. The constable expresses—

CONSTABLE: Arrest her? What for? What's the point? (*Laughs*) Our prisons have no spare capacity, Sir. Bengaluru's bursting with women like her. Where they live, how they live, how they move around—it's all a mystery. Impossible to pin them

down. Like scorpions, you know. They only have to see a slab of stone and they'll crawl under it and set up a house... (*Boiled Beans on Toast* 44)

Similar to Vimala, a lot of people in the modern society are continuing their life without any safety and security for their future. Despite knowing the truth, the police are helpless. The political parties and the government officials instead of blaming people could have served for the welfare of the needy who are struggling hard to survive in the city without basic amenities.

The play encourages the audience and the readers to ponder and have an open mind towards the facts of life. The play elucidates several segments of the contemporary life in a metropolitan city by making use of relationships as its core element. A general struggle for happiness and satisfaction is presented in the characters; while few characters display imprudent use of authority ignoring values, few others submit as willing victims of the existing system. The play remarkably portrays the insatiable desire for materialistic things and social prosperity which drives people away from their conjugal happiness. The play is satiric in a sense and the author appears very particular to showcase the flaws of the society and finally appeals his readers to reorganize it. We can observe abundant circumstances which evidence that everything in the current society is not satisfactory and a major transformation is required. The problematic life that the various characters live in the play is a genuine reflection of the society to which the audience and the readers belong to. Alarming social issues like unemployment, population growth, and struggle for existence due to economic constraints and other issues are discussed in the play. The maintenance of law and order in the city are unsuccessful in punishing the culprits indulged in minor cases like thefts. They indirectly caution people to take care of themselves as the police department is unable to safeguard them. The helplessness and lack of concern of the police is apparent to us. This also recalls the readers of the diverse forms of corruption which is seen in most of the organizations.

Nearly, all the characters in the play are disappointed in their lives. They are obsessed with impractical goals and as a result their life has become an endless search for fulfillment. The play makes an appeal to people to alter themselves for the development of the society by giving up self-centric deeds and trivial concerns. Karnad does not mean to guide his readers towards fallacious feeling of greatness, but tries to arouse them from dormancy by pleading them to think about economic, social, cultural and political challenges. He has accomplished in portraying his characters at the most essential times of their lives, their innerdilemma that infused their falsehood by giving us a clear view of their desires, disappointments and aspirations. He has scrupulously rendered his findings through references, suggestions and implications instead of straightforward disclosure. His motive appears to be leaving it to the discretion and judgment of his readers rather than enforcing his ideology.

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