

Locating Commonalities between Idealism and Realism in Girish Karnad's Dramatic Monologue, *Flowers*

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ABSTRACT

Realism and Idealism, the two philosophical systems of thought are seen as pole-apart in reference to their approach towards the modes of interpretation about the world. The discussions on 'realism' and 'idealism' suggests that there is a basic conflict between the two arrangements. The conflict between the approach is that 'realism' tends to interpret events and their effects by rejecting the faculties of mind, such as imagination and beliefs. On the other hand, 'idealism' cannot envisage the world without spiritual and mental representations. This discussion creates a doubt, whether 'realism' and 'idealism' are conflictingly pole-apart or the two approaches have common meeting points, complementing and indicating towards some other profound aspect of human life. Therefore, with special reference to Girish Karnad's play, *Flowers*, the present paper is an attempt to locate these common points where 'realism' and 'idealism' seemingly share parallel grounds in human life.

Key Words : Idealism, Realism, Girish Karnad's Dramatic Monologue, *Flowers*

INTRODUCTION

The present paper is an attempt to analyse Girish Karnad's dramatic monologue, *Flowers* with reference to the philosophical ideas related to 'idealism' and 'realism'. Generally, 'realism' (*Dictionary of Philosophy*: 2005) is claimed to be following an attitude of hard-headedness, signifying that the follower is not yielding to imaginations and illusions. The attitude indicates that a realist author in its literary creations would prefer to keep a firm grasp on the actual cases, events and facts. 'Realism', as a literary theory too, emphasizes that a certain category exists which is independent of mind. The theory validates to the entities which exercise effects independently, of what is generally or specifically believed or felt by the people (520). Therefore 'realism', in the arts such as drama, tends to depict an accurate and unembellished nature of contemporary life by rejecting imaginative idealization in favour of a close observation of outwardly happening events. However 'idealism' (*DP*: 2005), according to Plato rejects materialism and naturalism to favour a religious, spiritual or value oriented

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world-view. This world-view appears to be emphasizing upon the idea, that only minds and mental representations exist and there is no existence of independent external material world (292). Thus, 'idealism' in philosophy stresses upon the central role of the ideal or the spiritual in the explanation of an experience. It may also project that the world or reality exists essentially as spirit or consciousness and ideas or laws are more fundamental than sensory experiences.

The above discussion on 'realism' and 'idealism' suggests that there is a basic conflict between the two philosophical systems of thought and both the arrangements seem to be pole-apart in reference to their approach towards the modes of interpretation about the world. The conflict between the approach is that 'realism' tends to interpret events and their effects by rejecting the faculties of mind, such as imagination and beliefs. On the other hand, 'idealism' cannot envisage the world without spiritual and mental representations. This discussion creates a doubt, whether 'realism' and 'idealism' are conflictingly pole-apart or the two approaches have common meeting points, complementing and indicating towards some other profound aspect of human life. Therefore, with special reference to Girish Karnad's play, *Flowers*, the present paper is an attempt to locate these common points where 'realism' and 'idealism' seemingly share parallel grounds in human life. The chief reason for the selection of the play is, that the plot of the play revolves around a pious priest who gets caught in the quagmire of contradictions between his '*Dharma*' and his '*Kama*'. '*Dharma*' is an appropriate representation of 'idealism' because its practices can only be performed by holding firm beliefs and ideal manners. On the other hand, '*Kama*' is an exact representation of the realistic desire, carried by all the human beings.

Another reason for considering 'realism' and 'idealism' lies in the fact that people often tend to behave in realistic manners and at desire to project themselves as the follower of some idealistic approach. For instance, And the reason for considering 'drama' in the present analysis emanates from B. Gaut's essay, "The Ethical Criticism of Art", in *Aesthetics and Ethics Essays at the Intersection* by Jerrold Levinson (2006, 182-203). She emphasises that philosophy through the arts, particularly drama and theatre, is manifested in the dramatic acts, which in fact are frequently social and thus intrinsically not only ethical but philosophical also. This involves the recognition of, attendance to, and synchronization with others, which suggest that theatre and drama develop a dramatic arena for philosophical dialogue. In recent debates, critics like L. Zuidervaart, Noel Carroll, J. Levinson, and many others, have contested the role of dramatic art in relation to the realistic and idealistic inclinations of people. They have attempted to investigate the forms of art, which establish their approbation with the philosophical ideas related to 'idealism' and realism. These critics have established that there is a 'turn', directing the theorists towards the philosophical. L Zuidervaart states that first, there occurs a turn towards the philosophical discourse, led by Jürgen Habermas, Albrecht Wellmer, and their colleagues and students.

Girish Karnad's play, *Flowers* is a dramatic monologue about the story of a temple priest. The story is narrated in a single night. The main event of the play spins around this religious priest who gets caught in the crisis, when he encounters inconsistencies between his '*Dharma*' and '*Kama*'. He worships Shiva, the all-inclusive deity of the Temple, with great love and utmost care. In the temple several occasions of solitude take place when

none, except “*a squirrel or a sparrow, would come and go*”. It was during those appropriated occasions, the priest often sits near Shiva and close communications get established between them. The silence proves to be strongly articulate and with the passage of time and it advances into a strange companionship, which could envy even the Nandi, the eternal legion of God. At early in the morning, depending upon the season, the priest meticulously gathers flowers, such as Malligai, Sampigai, Thumbai, Mandaarai, Sevanti, and Champaka to decorate the God Shiva. While collecting them, he talks to the various growing shrubs and plants, managed by the gardener near the Temple pond. The priest would express his adoration for Shiva by distinctively decorating Him with innumerable flowers, on all saga events. He would create multitudinous patterns of floral motifs to enhance the beauty of God. Since, the priest continues to decorate Shiva in unique ways, with utmost care, and immeasurable love, so over the years, he had perfected an originality which is unmatched and thereby becomes a master in the art. The factual information is that there is the priest and he has mastered the art of embellishing the God Shiva with unique floral patterns. These worshipping modes and arduous embellishments are meant to please Shiva. Being Omniscient as well as Omnipotent, the God Shiva embodies perfection. This a common point, where the ideal figure in the form of Shiva and the priest as a real human being collectively create a contextual situation. The perfection in the art of floral decoration, which produces the eternally new and beautiful patterns, indicates that the real and dedicated efforts of the priest have yielded the unimagined ideal results.

The following events indicate towards the actual events taking place in the life of the priest and other characters in the play. Actually, the glory of the beatific Shiva and the eminence of the priest spread far and wide across the kingdom due to his dexterity to decorate the Deity with infinite possible floral motifs and patterns. The Chieftain of the regime regularly visits the Temple to attend the *Arthajama Pooja* late in the evenings. Obviously, the young Chief is overwhelmed while seeing the glowingly altered Shiva, projecting the heavenly ambience. Life progresses on with peaceful routines for the priest until, he sights the sanctified mole on the left bosom of Chandravati, resting just near the division between the two mammae. Since, Chandravati is a gorgeous wealthy concubine, so she owns more appealing in sights in the matters related to the fine arts. As a result, a sublime soul level communication between the priest and the concubine gets initiated and an obsessive longing develops between them. Chandravati's tantalising amusement, dark sensuousness and the royal demeanour aroused the sleeping passions of the priest. When Chandravati suddenly ceases her visits to the Temple, the priest turns restless, feels agonized and pleads to Shiva. The realistic state of affairs is that the priest falls a prey to the physical pleasures, which is a realistic natural phenomenon. However, among most of the social groups in different regions of this world, the uncontrolled natural passions are considered the dereliction from the virtuous and the ideal behaviour or the profanation of God. Therefore, these modes of evaluating social behaviour on the basis of social values appear to be creating supposed contradictions between the 'idealism' and 'realism'. Due to these evaluations, Chandra ceases her perambulations to the Temple and wherefore, the priest stealthily visits her residence. And this secret but truthful affair between them gives birth to the further unprecedented real events.

Then appearing as if possessed, carrying the '*prasha*' in his shoulder cloth, the priest hurriedly leaves the Temple to enter straight into the house of Chandravati. Chandravati was herself an authority over the matters related to the finer things of life. Her experiences of loving as the concubine and living as the rich had transformed her like that. The day she had visited the Temple, she longed for floral decoration of her naked body from the priest himself. Undoubtedly, Chandravati had been desiring to be transformed into a divine being and only the priest could fulfil her precious vision. As soon as the priest comes to now the cherished desire, the priest actively works to gratify her desideratum. Night after night, he accumulates the flowers from the pond or Shiva Linga before closing the Temple and goes on to embellish the nude beauty of Chandra. This practice of embellishing her nude beauty and love-making becomes the topic of discussion among the people of the town. However, the routine hardly affects the priest's married life because his wife keeps serving him so that he could incessantly embellish Shiva in the Temple. The real events, such as the priest's longing for Chandra, the extent of sincerity by the priest's wife and the guiltless display of her nude body by Chandra, seem to be indicating towards an idealistic dimension. All the three characters tend to exist in this plain of idealism. The priest derelicts the social conventions and ethics in order to enjoy the idealized form of female beauty. Here, Chandra can also be seen as the ideal representative of physical pleasures. Chandra desires that her nude body should receive the floral decorations as that of the God Shiva and she gets the same repeatedly. Her longing for the floral embellishment from the priest himself, is an indication that she too values the ideal perfections and wishes to live with them. On the other hand, the priest's wife ignores the sacrilege of her husband and thus observes herself as the ideal wife. Here, the idealism and realism find a perfect consolidation in these three characters.

However, the consolidation is challenged by tough situations and the lovers continue to live in the ideal world till, the arrival of the Chief is announced. Their point of fear is, that for the Chieftain a concession has been approved to open the Temple doors at anytime, even if the last *Pooja* has been performed. The priest hurriedly gathers the flowers from the nude decorated body of Chandra and rushes the Temple to dextrously re-embellish Shiva with the faded and used flowers. However, Shiva glows again with the re-embellishments. When the Chieftain takes one of the flowers as '*prashada*', a long hair sticks behind his right ear and he angrily shouts, "*I didn't know God had long hair*". He recognizes from the fragrance that the lock of hair belongs to the dangling plait of Chandravati. In addition, the nearby people troll the priest's wife for the sacrilege and he in complete silence looks at Shiva. The priest realizes a mysterious assurance from within himself and confidently utters, "*If we believe that God has long hair, He will have long hair!*" The Chieftain simply responds, "*Prove it*" and grants him time to affirm his utterance till the coming Full Moon. Here, real events seem to be challenging idealism by questioning its worthy presence and mysterious existence. These challenges are meant to test, whether the priest actually communicates with his ideal, the God Shiva or his popularity has been manipulated by spreading rumours and hoaxes about his communion with the Deity.

After the long twelve days and nights, the much anticipated Full-Moon night comes, but the priest incessantly prays to Shiva inside the *sanctum sanctorum*. Undoubtedly, his implorations are meant to protect his honour in the eyes of the Chieftain and the public. He

also blames Shiva for making him fall prey to his desires and cheating his mind. He pleads guilty before Shiva about his passionate love for Chandravati and the ethical paradoxes tangling in his mind due to moral concerns towards his family. These modes of the priest's behaviour, such as accusing Shiva and pleading guilty, reveal that he is an ordinary grumpy human being. However, his childhood intimacy with Shiva allows him the freedom to question the divine game plans of the God and to seek protection of his honour in the eyes of the Chieftain and the people around. Therefore, he surrenders himself to the will of Shiva. The priest's act of surrendering himself to Shiva posits him as an ideal devotee. In the presence of the Chieftain and the nearby people, the priest opens the *garbha grha* doors of the Temple and then with closed eyes performs the final *Pooja* before the Shiva Linga. Including the priest, everyone at once becomes dumb struck because Shiva had grown long tresses all over His head and these elongated locks of hair were floating and dancing in the air. Here, the ideal has entered in the realm of reality by responding to the challenges of the realism. Here, the indication is, though rarely, but the ideal can show his presence before the people of this world.

Since, the common masses do not comprehend the presence the ideal, wherefore to verify the truth, the officer in command seeks approval from the Chieftain to examine, if the hair on Shiva are exact or it is a cheap trick pranked by the priest. The commander first, himself examines the reality by holding and pulling one of the long locks and then invites muscular soldiers to pull out the floating hair. After struggling for a long time, one of the locks gets pulled out and 'Blood' seeps out from the head of Shiva. Fearing the consequences of the divine wrath, Chieftain along with the commander and all others seek forgiveness by falling at the feet of the priest. However, on seeing the Blood, the priest repents before Shiva and implores Him for clemency. The Blood excretion ceases, the *Ohm Namah Shivaya* mantra is chanted but the priest faints and falls unconscious. He is brought home, looked after and served food by his wife. The wife probably feels happy, as the chosen priest is her husband. The priest revisits the Temple and sees that the wound is still fresh on Shiva. Feeling completely restless, lost, guilty due to his total profanation and meanness towards the two women, his wife and Chandra, the priest quarrels with Shiva. The point of the dispute is, though Shiva had protected the priest from the public defamations and humiliations but, He left him as the derelict and morally corrupt in the eyes of these women. Presently, the priest neither imagines himself to be the saint of the state, nor desires to enjoy the glory of the new 'avatar'. Though he loved Shiva sincerely, yet the God did not provide the priest any appropriate answers to the love and devotion, showered on him by the two women. Being unsatisfied with this judgement of Shiva, the priest refuses to obey the terms and conditions of the God. In the end, the priest jumps into the pond to sink his head, not to test the limits of his lungs, but to get the answers, denied to him by the God, Shiva. Here, the priest's comprehension and interpretation of the ideal compels him to develop an expectation that the God would not only protect his public honours but also resolve the current paradoxes of his life. This expectation from the ideal proves to be a tragic flaw in the character of the priest. At this plain, the realism and idealism seem to be acquiring opposite stances.

The above discussion on the philosophical ideas about 'realism' and 'idealism', with reference to the play, *Flowers*, indicates that both the thought processes are inseparable

part of human life. The manners of the characters reveal that the ideals stand as the inspirational models and guide people to perform their acts, while having perfection in the focus. Such kind of performance makes the persons master of the art and aids them to build a stolid reputation, like that of priest. Depending upon the context of situation and intensity of dedication or devotion of the person, the ideals may provide a protection against public defamations. However, it would not be wise to expect that the ideals could perfectly resolve personal paradoxes as per the satisfaction of our desires.

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