

Homogeneous of Family Dynamics and Heterogeneous of Cultural Values in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Last Burden and Way to Go*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the essential ethos of classic values. There are many human values such as cultural, moral, spiritual and ethical values which are following by the Indians. It has been practicing from the traditional sanctity to the modern vicinity of life. The focus is the analysis of homogeneous of family dynamics and heterogeneous of cultural values in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Last Burden and Way to Go*. There is humongous information which can be excavated in Chatterjee's novels. He presents the myriad interconnection of family and culture in India. His novels seem to celebrate the cultural values which are attached to the Joint family system. Chatterjee portrays that the love of the family and culture is never ending through the character of dying Urmila and missing Shyamanand. His novels teach a lesson to other writers in the world how family as the major theme is treated in the literary works by the Indian writers. At the same time, his novels deal with the representation of Indian culture. The main objective of the paper is to delineate the multidimensional perspectives of family and cultural values in India. It describes theoretically and empirically through the narration of Jamun's family.

1. Introduction

There are many human values such as cultural, moral, spiritual and ethical values which are following by the Indians. It has been practicing from the traditional sanctity to the modern vicinity of life. The focus is the analysis of homogeneous of family dynamics and heterogeneous of cultural values in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Last Burden and Way to Go*. There is humongous information which can be excavated in Chatterjee's novels. He presents the myriad interconnection of family and culture in India. His novels seem to celebrate the cultural values which are attached to the Joint family system. Chatterjee portrays that the love of the family and culture is never ending through the character of dying Urmila and missing Shyamanand.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the paper is to delineate the multidimensional perspectives of family and cultural values in India. It describes theoretically and empirically through the narration of Jamun's family in Chatterjee's *The Last Burden and Way to Go*.

3. Statement of the problem

Human beings in the modern world suffer from the negative impact of modern culture. Characters in the novels of Chatterjee are either victims of modern culture or victors of family life. They become victims and vulnerable to such an extent that they start losing their inner moral stamina and physical strength to survive in the materialistic world. The researchers in the modern world have started their studies in various fields in general and in literature in particular for they

have concern and compassion in the fellow human beings as the issue has become burning problem.

To eliminate such problems both the individual and the community ought to understand the fact and act of modern society and let stand firm against the modern illness such as disconnection, fragmentation and alienation. Joint family system and traditional cultural values can be used as an apt theory to fulfill the requirements of what an individual and a community requires in order staying in touch with one's own self in the present materialistic world.

4. Study Description

Indian value system is the prime and supreme noble quality in the world values education system. Unarguably, it has the best and foremost leading cultural values. There are many human values such as cultural, moral, spiritual and ethical values which are following by the Indians. It has been practicing from the traditional sanctity to the modern vicinity of life. Fundamentally Indians who believe these values were sprouted from the ancient family system of India. The values are inculcated to the Indians from their ancient forms of living. There are many scriptural and textual evidences such as *The Bhagavad Gita, the Vedas, the Upanishads* teach to human world to be relevant and tolerant. The Indian family values have unique principles like kindness, love, sincerity, fraternity, integrity, unity and honesty are deeply rooted. The foundation of Indian strategic thoughts is arising from their family system of living. India is the mother of all the nations. The American Mississippi writer, Mark Twain once wrote in his work *Following the Equator* (1897),

This is indeed India! the land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendour and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants and Aladdin lamps, of tigers and elephants, the cobra and the jungle, the country of a hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods, cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend, great-grandmother of tradition, whose yesterdays bear date with the mouldering antiquities of the rest of the nations — the one sole country under the sun that is endowed with an imperishable interest for alien prince and alien peasant, for lettered and ignorant, wise and fool, rich and poor, bond and free, the one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the globe combined. (XXXVIII)

The Last Burden (1993) is one of the most commemorated novels by all the Indians. *The Hindu* newspaper speaks very extremely of the novel as it writes, “*The Last Burden* is one of the most honest novels of Chatterjee’s generation”. It deals with the basic structure of Indian society- that is, the family. ‘Burden’ is the theme. It portrays the family as the nucleus of Indian society all through the ages. *The Last Burden* connects with the middle class Indian family that settles down in a new place after partition. Urmila and Shyamanand both government servants are not very happy as a couple and as a result, their two sons, Burfi and Jamun grow up amidst endless parental bickering notwithstanding their public school education. Burfi has a Christian wife named Joyce. And their two sons Doom and Pista are irreverent to their grandparents. Urmila dies of heart attack and Shyamanand chooses to live with his other son, Jamun who considers it “not a beginning” (352) as is indicated in the closing line of the book.

In *The Last Burden*, Upamanyu Chatterjee seems to celebrate the values attached to the Joint family system. “I wish I could go home... When your parents pass away, you have no home at all- only your children do... Home is the hanky-panky of memory-honeyed, quilted – a fabulous once-upon-a-time lull (08)”. The narrative runs through three generations of Jamun’s family and explores the complexity of the relationships between people of different generations. It revolves around the lives of Jamun’s father Shyamanand, his two sons Jamun, Burfi and his grandsons Pista and Doom.

Shyamanand and Urmila have swerved from their kin; hence, Burfi and Jamun are barely acquainted with their cousins. Among the kith that they’ve infrequently come upon over the years, they can’t tally more than three names and faces, or deduce who has spawned whom. The next generation of Pista and Doom are not even aware of the existence of their father’s kin, though they’re notably chummy with their maternal cousins. (107)

The Last Burden is a very good family and history book. The novel has a profound exploration of Jamun’s life and his family. It interweaves the childhood memories of Jamun, the

passing of family’s Aya, the dying of Jamun’s mother, the paralyzing stroke of Jamun’s father, the concomitance of fretfulness over money between Jamun and his brother Burfi, unresolved frustration, traumatic experience of family members and the other general uneasiness of life. The novel is focused on unbalanced nature of the characters, entanglement of dilemmas, loose of morals, anti-heroic qualities of Jamun, quick wits of incidence, irrational reaction of the characters and complicated ways of life. At the centre of the novel, the family consciousness of struggle emerges between the two sons of Shyamanand because of expenditure of Urmila’s illness:

My attitude to money isn’t the issue, you bugger- the question is, what’s Baba doing with his cash? Both of us, at different times, have hissed at him, with varying intensities of rage, that we won’t miss his money. Maybe we won’t really even though a windfall of money is one this world’s appealing things- because somehow we’ve made it, even you, you fussy- even though you angled for really weird deal with Baba, ha-ha. You remember? You can’t forget! He was so non-pulsed when you proposed. “You make over your money to me, and I’ll remain with and foster you and Ma for the remainder of your lives, but I’ll need to be financially independent’- some compact for a joker in his twenties! Of course he refused- “Don’t be so slothful” – and you gravely pronounced, while everyone else was holding his sides, “Even when I urgently need money? I shall not thumb yours. When you feverishly need me, I won’t be within reach, “a forecast that didn’t awe Baba much! (66)

Struggle is a common issue in day-to-day life. When it comes into families, major sufferers are the middle classes. A simple conflict in a family will destroy the relationship between parents and their children and it will create a bareness and nonexistence of love for each other in family. Shyamanand senses his own incapacity to earn money for his sons. He wants to leave them but his inability does not allow him to alienate himself from his family and house. However the sons fight with each other, they think of mother’s suffering and father’s inability. In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy clearly delineates it, “When you hurt people, they begin to love you less” (158). *The Last Burden* obliquely explains why the majority of populace walks out on the traditional joint family structure in favour of a nuclear one and it also deals with the tensions in the relationship between people in a joint family system.

Chatterjee portrays that the love of the family is never ending through the character of dying Urmila. Urmila is not afraid of her death. But she scared about her husband to leave alone and her family. She expects to meet her son Jamun who is far away from home. Urmila’s expectation is to see Jamun and to join him to her family. “But it’s good that the whole family is together. Except you, of course. Like the joint family of an earlier generation” (06). Urmila says to Jamun:

‘I so wish I could go home,’ she tells Jamun in her bumbling Hindi, and grins – ‘home means parents, of course. When your parents pass away, you have no

home at all – only your children do. Home is the hanky-panky of memory – honeyed, quilted – a fabulous once-upon-a-time lull'. (LB 08)

The Last Burden opens with Jamun's reading of Robert Payne's *Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. Then he gets the telegram from his family informing him about his mother Urmila's heart attack. Jamun returns from the town to his village to see his sick mother. The novel explores in depth the relationship between mother and son. More than representing the general contradictions between the city and the country life, Upamanyu Chatterjee focuses on how the familial ties are affected in these two contrasting milieus. While Jamun hopes to find a home in the city he is constantly drawn by the memories of his home in the village. He finds solace in the memories of his mother while living a life of alienation in the city. "You are good. You must visit me and not always only Satyavan. If you don't come and visit me, then I'll visit you" (11). Chatterjee's protagonist is a representative of the middle class youth of India who desires for a life in the glamorous urban world while at the same time being unable to feel at home in the city.

Jamun is a character who experiences the predicament of being stuck between the modern and the traditional world. For example his love for western music and literature appears in juxtaposition with his love for native culture. He appreciates pop music, reads the *Classics Illustrated Comic of Cyrano de Bergerac* book and Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, and at the same time he is also rooted in his native culture. The complexity of Jamun's character is portrayed by building on the confusions and dilemmas that he experiences in the everyday rituals and relationships in the sphere of the home. Through the cultural dilemma experienced by Jamun, Upamanyu Chatterjee also tries to question the traditional values system and beliefs that Jamun's family adheres to. After Urmila's death, both the sons, Burfi and Jamun involuntarily take part in the last rites. Their ambivalent attitude about these misconception or bureaucracies seemed them only as conventional good for nothing practice. The novelist gives the detailed sketch of the major male trio of the novel who were returned home after the entombment of Urmila very aptly: "The three of them drive home in a kind of sad, relaxed quietness, as though they are returning from a railway station, to which they've frenziedly careered to get a beloved friend to board on time, fearful throughout the rush that they won't pull it off, and after they've made it, have thoroughly sucked out by the backwash of tension" (243). Sagarika Ghosh gives the review after read this line, "I wanted to write about the sufferings that family members inflict on each other and the terrible responsibility of emotional dependence, I wanted to observe the burden, I suppose of attachment" (05).

The Last Burden is imbued with cultural ideas and it revolves around the necessity of family love and teaches the absurdity of life without the relationship of family. His literary standpoints are always situated in both the impact of life and love. However, among Indian novels which are connected with family love, *The Last Burden* consistently appears on the top in the list of family studies. It is one of the best novels to teach the inevitability of family love that is the certainty of a good life. The novel aims at a truthful representation of contemporary life

and manners of Indians. Indeed, Chatterjee's objectivity and contemporaneity of knowledge glorify the human nature of love and its importance in family life.

The novel covers a wide array of topics with various traditional and modern cultural ideas including generation gap between the father and his son. Shyamanand is not a materially successful man. At the end of his wife's life, he is completely isolated-from his family, his friends, his grandson Pista and Doom and his own self. "Shyamanand is saddened, naturally, that his rapport with his eldest son crumbles with his marriage. Equally naturally, the birth of his grandsons- of Pista ten, of Doom four, years before – deflects his cognate concerns. Jamun secretly grieves whenever he notices his father trying to woo his grandchildren" (129). At the some point of time, Jamun does not care for his father's isolation. Instead, he is more willing to watch the porn films with his father and Dr. Mukherjee, who is the only friend to Shyamanand to get rid of his father's irksome situations. The author describes and reflects the absurdity of human nature through the conflicts of the situation and dissatisfaction of the parents.

The dissatisfaction with convention and the breaking of the social norms are not only exhibited through the characters Jamun and Shyamanand, but also through other characters life Urmila, his mother, Burfi, his brother and Chhana, his cousin. There are other characters who are equally rebellious as Jamun. "They seem brand new and alien, in jeans and T-shirts of dubious shades, and articulate a puzzling species of English, whereas Urmila and he had ripened in an earlier, illusorily genial world, wherein mawkish that he is, he reckons that the bonds of family had been sturdier and parents more revered" (108). Jamun's brother Burfi breaks the tradition by marrying Joyce, a Christian woman. Chhana, Jamun's cousin, starts smoking after her mother dies. After a close textual analysis, through the concept of death, Chatterjee vividly describes the myth of family togetherness and how the true nature of family relationship is exploited in the modern world. Jamun is the miserable protagonist whose conflicts in family life involve the reader into the pathetic state of affairs in a joint family system.

Way to Go (2011) is a sequel to *The Last Burden*. This novel narrates Jamun's search for his father both literally and metaphorically. While *The Last Burden* explored Jamun's relationship with his mother, this novel attempts to focus on the intricacies of father-son relationship. This novel consists of many comical and dark humour elements which are distributed in three parts. Jamun's father has been half-paralyzed in the last two decades. In the middle of the novel, Jamun has spent his time with his dying father and often they have gone to temples. The title is ironical because this novel is imbued with the tragic ending of Jamun's father in a comic way. Thus Chatterjee declares that this novel *Way to Go* is a black or dark comedy. This novel is also in nexus with searching of his missing father. Jamun tries to find his missing father in various places and he recalls the past memories about his father and mother. The narrative uses the flash back and flash forward techniques. While waiting in hospital verandah, his childhood memories come to his mind and Jamun recollects how they lived together in his house in the village. Jamun is occasionally

reminiscences the past moments like the character Agastya Sen in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*.

Throughout the novel, the narration continually skip from one incident to the other and it carries two incidents mainly: one is before the incident of his missing father and the other is its consequences. The setting of the novel is moving with the past and the present. This novel confronts the father and son relationship. The chapter "A topic to bond together father and son", deals with a bond filial between a father and son about their inseparability. Shyamanand's father passes away at the age of ninety five. Shyamanand was left alone after the death of his wife. His elder son Burfi went to Noida. Now there develops a bond between the father and son, Jamun not to separate from each other. Jamun felt that all were left from his father. So he decided that he should not separate from his father. But his father one day lost his walk. Jamun's character in *Way to Go* seems to be Humbert in Nabokov's *Lolita*, the protagonist who regrets the loss of Lolita. The missing person of imagination presents the sense of loss and

. . . realizes his culpability in the tragic loss of Lolita's childhood "the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord". The "Concord" in question is a product of several simultaneous sounds, a "a vapory vibration of accumulated sounds," a "vapor of blended voices, majestic and minute, remote and magically near" and "flashes of separate cries" origination in a "transparent" town that Humbert looks over while on a cliff suspended in "limpid" air. (Tonn 102)

Way to Go centers on the lives of Shyamanand and his younger son Jamun. Shyamanand plays a complicated dad's character because he is not willing to become a dad to Jamun and Burfi and more than that he never wants the role of a grandfather to Pista and Doom. Shyamanand just wants to escape from his family because the burden of himself should never create tension in his family. But Jamun does not compromise with himself because of his missing father. He searches everywhere to get his father back and he is not willing to stand at a clueless place. Whenever he has leisure time, he goes to find out his father. Place and time play a strong seminal role in this novel. The novel moves towards the adventure of strange places like Morgue, Police Station, Municipal Corporation, etc. When Jamun loses the love of his life with a missing father, then he is disillusioned with his surroundings and himself. Jamun suffers from mental illness and his father's past memories loom around so vigorously within himself. The novel never unlocks the mystery of his missing father till the end. At the end of the novel, Burfi and Jamun join together. They move together searching for their father with confidence. "They had walked and walked and there with their flesh seeming to fall off at the touch of the air like acid" (359). This incident of searching consistently prompts the readers to think of them as absurdist through the author's narrative *tour de force* between living and dying in *Way to go*.

The dead would always remain in service of the living.
The living would forever depend for succor on the

dead. To Burfi it seemed that he and his brother, standing motionless amongst the dead and the dying, had reached the end of the world—for his marriage, it was over and done with, its ashes he could not possibly rekindle; for his children, they had grown out of reach. . . . They had walked and walked and walked. . . (358-359)

Chatterjee's novels recollect the past memories and he uses his own experiences as a narrative thread to spin a yarn together in his novels. Chatterjee's way of thinking and feeling deal with the characteristics of the present social conditions; the basic devices of economic conditions and stresses the sociological context and content of Indian literary culture. These are revealing or untying the present situation and facts in the society. His novels convey the illusion of real life and attempt a frantically mental and emotional state of mind. There is an evidence in the first chapter when Jamun goes to the police station to give a complaint about his missing father, the police enquires about the identity of his missing father to which, and instead of describing his father to the police, Jamun merely stays speechless and after a while murmurs that to his father he is both a son and a father. Chatterjee's Agastya Sen in *English, August*, Jamun in *The Last Burden* and Bhola in *Weight Loss* are elaborately manifesting their frustrations of love for women, sensual feeling of parental love, intellectual love for reading the books and emotional modes of experiences. Firdaus Kanga correctly points out "Chatterjee is a mercilessly gifted observer". A chief concern of Chatterjee in his novels is to specify the central dilemma and analyze the diverse forms of relative values of Indian culture and status of the society which is deliberately schemed in all his novels. It is here inevitable to recall the words of Paul Ricoeur,

When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and consequently at the time when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with the destruction of our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just others, that we ourselves are an "other" among others. All meaning and every goal having disappeared, it becomes possible to wander through civilization as if through vestiges and ruins. (278)

Indian literature in English has a rich and long tradition of writings: poems, novels, short stories, essays and so on. The narration of the Indian writers gives glimpses of historical events of the contemporary society. Their themes express sharpness and dependence of great diversity of situations and characters. Upamanyu Chatterjee works are the central pieces of Indian literature which deal with the daily lives of Indians. As a novelist, he introduces various dimensions of everyday life of Indians, portrayal of their situations and diverse conditions of the contemporary society in his works such as *English, August, The Last Burden, The Mammaries of the Welfare State, Way to Go, Fairy Tales at Fifty* and *Weight Loss*. His works cover the plights of the life of an ordinary individual, bring out the anomalies in social structure and multidimensional views of culture which act as a tool to facilitate the narration of the novel rather than inhibit it.

Jamun retains the essential ethos of classic values while he is searching for his father but at the same time he knows that it is impossible to escape from the effects of modern era. Carefully, Chatterjee plans on human love and its insistence upon the classic virtues of unity like parenthood, brotherhood, fraternity and the variety of modern life in a language that owed to frightening indictment on humanity. Missing father is a serious and foreshadowed theme in the novel. It depends more on searching for the universal interpretation of human love and other human virtues. The theme is a quotidian with a neat seeding in the novel and the naturalness of expression makes the novel more sentimental. The life of Shyamanand teaches the moral values to every common man in India and his son's way of living insists on the degraded lifestyle of modernity.

The study of Upamanyu Chatterjee particularly *The Last Burden* and *Way to Go* bring to light the several reactions of the cultural ideology. Shyamanand does not believe in love marriage. But his elder son Burfi got a love marriage especially he married a Christian wife, Joyce. But however Shyamanand is finally accepted. Through Burfi's marriage, Chatterjee breaks the culture and religion system. At the same time, he prefers to multiculturalism. India has always been the most culturally, linguistically and hereditarily diverse in geographical entity. India's democratic republic is premised on a national belief in pluralism and multiculturalism. Writers who have share their ideas about the history, language, culture, religion and spirituality for all the classes of people. In *The Last Burden* and *Way to Go*, Upamanyu Chatterjee is clearly elaborated the cultural values through the system of marriage. Indian marriage essentially believes certain customs and rites. There are several values, issues and obstacles in Indian marriage system. Marriage does not mean just the meeting of two individuals in a relationship; rather it signifies the amalgamation of two families. Chetan Bhagat in his preface, he clearly explains about marriage system in India,

Love marriages around the world are simple: Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy. They get married. In India, there are a few more steps: Boy loves Girl. Girl loves Boy. Girl's family has to love boy. Boy's family has to love girl. Girl's family has to love Boy's family. Boy's family has to love girl's family. Girl and Boy still love each other. They get married. (01)

So Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels can be read most meaningfully from a family and a cultural point of view. He proves that the family is indispensable even in post-postmodern era. Chatterjee signifies the family and his themes focus on the various ideas which deal with systems related to

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the family specifically the traditional, joint, modern and nuclear. The role of family is the most central theme in his novels. Chatterjee's novels can be termed as *Tripartite-generation* because his all the novels are explored three generations family system such as grandfather, father and son. *Way to go* is not an exceptional and it discusses the way the family sticks together and falls apart. It discusses how family love is obligated and just because families share the same blood, does not mean they have unconditional love one another. In *The Last Burden* and *Way to Go*, Chatterjee vividly describes it, though the family creates barriers for Jamun and his brother Burfi, they give support to their parents in some conflicting situation. His novels teach a lesson to other writers in the world how family as the major theme is treated in the literary works by the Indian writers. At the same time, his novels deal with the representation of Indian culture.

5. Conclusion

This paper attempts to examine the cultural and family perspectives in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Last Burden* and *Way to Go*. His novels provide the guidelines in examining the nature of culture and the culture of nature. Generally, the Indian writers focus on all the information around the world. Upamanyu Chatterjee's writings also deal with all the aspects such as the biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical and cultural phenomenon. In fact, he gives the readers an opportunity to peep into the state and condition of the present facts of the society. It is however to note that each of Chatterjee's works ends on a note of didactic lessons by the protagonists. Upamanyu Chatterjee has endeavored to establish the recent Indian English literary scenario and elaborates the different ideas of society, which relate to the cultural and family perspectives. He gives the special light of literature, life of Indians and history of Indian English through his novels. Chatterjee has a strong message morally, spiritually, and culturally through the depiction of amoral and dishonest characters. He depicts the capacity to alter the thinking of people through his writings.

6. Scope for further Research

The researcher concentrates only on family and cultural perspectives. Apart from family and cultural perspectives in Chatterjee's novels, the study opens an account for the future research with the various theories such as eco criticism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, quest for identity, westernized culture, cultural rootlessness, modernism, surrealism, existentialism, realism and etc.

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