

Representation of Familial Change and Continuity in Upamanyu Chatterjee's The Last Burden (1993)

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Abstract

Much like a cellular unit assigning due shape and stability to the structural framework of an organismic body an individual as the smallest structural and functional construct ensures a well-ordered foundation of constitutive pillars of socio-cultural entity. Central to the proportionate growth of a person both from physical and cognitive standpoints are formative privileges of a family designated as a defining and determining force conditioning a child's socialization and intellectual orientation. The traditional joint-family system in India is something glorious to boast in comparison with other countries. But some global and local phenomena such as diasporic experience, cultural globalization, global economy, industrialization and urbanization collectively cause a drastic change to joint family system. Such changes are mirrored microscopically against the backdrop of the day-to-day familial experiences in *The Last Burden* (1993) by Upamanyu Chatterjee. Chatterjee's professional identity as an administrator allows him an access to social proximity to familial issues of the country. The objective of this paper is to insist on how emergent and dominate cultural forces exert a deleterious impact detrimental to the ingrained family ties. The traditional family roles, values and cultural practices are subject to continuous change in diaspora, and even visible as an intergenerational cultural change. Although the family undergoes a drastic cultural evolution in diaspora, the traditional pattern of power and role allocation is well indicative of the continuity in the intergenerational transmission of the patrilineal and patrilocal traditional family of India.

Keywords: Indian family, diaspora, tradition, change and continuity, globalization

It is the prehistoric protective interaction between the humans and the nature that necessitates a compelling acclimatization to ever changing environmental settings. They remain in consistent and desperate need for developing befitting survival protocols to fight the strong onslaught of disastrous natural phenomenon. From the time immemorial the human being happens to prioritize the grouped living as an important way of surviving different adverse situations. This historic way of living together afterwards gives birth to family system that keeps

our civilization in order over the course of centuries. Even in the wake of 21st century family is a structural and functional unit what the society as a whole is made up of. The universal contribution of family to the fulfilment of greater national interest is assumed on global level and more importantly family as an important social institution is subject to scholarly analyses beyond any spatio-temporal specific. Family in particular across the world underscores a committed promise in assigning due shape and stability to the skeletal framework of any society within the context of which an individual's shared and collective consciousness about social and cultural values grows up. Central to proportionate growth of an individual both from the physical and cognitive standpoint are the formative privileges of a family designated as a determining and defining factor conditioning a child's socialization and intellectual orientation. The national concerns such as poverty and illiteracy spring from family system functioning as the epicenter of prosperity as well as backwardness. The internationalist body like the United Nation assumes an ever increasing importance of family to effective execution of both national and international agenda. In an article "The Crucial Role of Families" submitted by IFFD, an important part of United Nation the role of family is acknowledged in this way: *'In effect, the very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of these goals'*. So in order for any nation to ensure a strategic materialization of empowerment policies it is to put the primary emphasis on family as a key supportive means of initiative implementation. The world contains a variety of families with structural plurality but they uphold the functional uniformity in playing some major common roles. The countries across the world position the family in the first place of national importance. India is by no means an exception in this case.

According to Oxford English Dictionary a family is *'a group of one or more parents and children living together as a unit'*. The gravity of togetherness in Indian family makes the country appear different from other countries in the world. The prolonged family system with members of multiple generations characterizes the core Indian joint family. Within the context of India, we prioritize the role and importance of family over an individual and it is regarded as the first institution assigning convincingly enduring sense of love, care, affection, security and responsibility. The Indian extended family is marked by an exclusive familial sustainability in a complex network of interpersonal communications. An enduring sense of mutuality and inextricability in the relational bondage among the grandparents, parents and married persons in the same family is something to boast of. Sarah Lamb makes an identical observation in an essay of 'The Indian Family in Transition' by Sanjukta Dasgupta and Malashri Lal: *'There is a complex range of values including fellow feeling, supportive interdependence, patriarchy, crowded hearths, plentiful time, and moral-spiritual order'*(81). The grandparents, and parents do take the responsibility with strict ethical obligation to socialize the children. They are encultured on how to conform to the symbolic languages of the given society such as social, cultural and religious practices. But this glistening glory of traditional joint family is running the danger of getting dismantled by some emergent global and local phenomena. Indian family is subject to gradual evolution. A major change came to the cultural and religious dimension of Indian family with the arrival of Renaissance in Bengal in the second half of nineteenth century. It is the British colonial

administration and the intellectual movement of the Indian reformers that brought about certain changes to socio-religious dimensions of Indian family by ensuring the abolition of child marriage, the practice of sati and the endorsement of widow remarriage.

The patriarchal approach to gender socialization and the emancipatory reaction against the epic history of female oppression constitute the lead thematic essence of the first Indian English novel by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864). The socio-cultural dimensions such as female oppressions, child exploitation, caste discrimination, marital conflict find a recurrent expression in the Indian English fictions of subsequent centuries. Beyond any shadow of doubt family is a part and parcel of society as a whole. A society shapes and is shaped by family. So, it is tough enough to define the role and importance of family independently of given social set up. It is the breeding ground of multiple national concerns and right at the same time it is the key answer to a set of possibly insoluble drawbacks of a country. The transdisciplinary study of literature and sociology concerning family can amount to substantial threat reduction. Indian English Literature over a century continues to assume a strong didactic accountability to rectify the impurities the deformed society is infested with. The parenthood, child rearing, socialization, psychological orientation, marital conflict, kinship, family tie are some commonplace issues shaping the spine of thematic fundamentals in the literary works of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan, Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande and Upamanyu Chatterjee.

The present paper is set to insist on familial changes and continuity in the Indian joint family with special reference to Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Last Burden* (1993) followed by his seminal work, *English August: An Indian Story* (1988). The novel under discussion offers an honest projection of household narrative with reference to a stereotypical extended family. The novel from thematic standpoint revolves round the common familial subjects of infirmity, resentment, the burden of liability, adolescence, marriage pattern, marital conflict, and finance-based disputes. As is mentioned above, the novel is a fictional representation of an epic history of a poor middle-class family. In a book review in 2005 Danny Yee made an agreeable comment in relation to it:

'The Last Burden is a saga of expectations not met, failures of communication, unresolved frustration, and other traumas.'

The objective of the textual interpretation In the paper is focused on how global and local phenomena exert a pronounced impact on socio-cultural dimension of Indian joint family. Chatterjee's professional identity as an administrator allows him an access to a close social interaction with too many families pertaining to different ethnic identities. He has a first hand experience of how Indian joint families are undergoing a slow but assuring change into the conjugal families out of nuclearization. In the concerned review Yee made a relevant observation on Chatterjee's microscopic dissection of certain changes in the cultural values of joint family:

'Jamun is far from omniscient, but he and Chatterjee between them carry out a mercilessly honest dissection, unconstrained by propriety and filial piety.'

Family as a social construct is subject to gradual change. The socio-economic and cultural factors are held to be responsible for causing drastic changes to structural and functional dimensions of family. The intellectual movements and the regulatory amendment in the British administrative mechanism during the colonial encounter were partly instrumental in redefining the idea of Indian family. In the aftermath of independence a series of post-colonial phenomena such as globalization, diaspora, industrialization and urbanization leave a striking effect both with negative and positive connotation on the given family structure. The novel deals with a poor middle-class family whereby Jamun is marked by his desperate struggle over surviving the hostile capitalistic society which is the byproduct of globalization. In relation to it, sociologist, Malcolm Waters says:

'globalization caused an enormous increase in the power of capitalist class because it opened up new markets for it.' (8)

The globalized liberal economy navigating faster and multidirectional flow of ideas, information, ideologies, technology, tools from one point to other is amounting to cultural and economic homogeneity. It makes a remote village look identical global cities from cultural point of view. Consequently, the lines of intra-social diversities are getting blurred under the unifying force of globalization. Instead, it advocates the social inclusiveness. In effect, globalization gives birth to hybrid culture spaces whereby orthodoxies are losing their indelibly rooted imprints. Waters rightly makes the assumption that globalization has the power *'to subvert, control, or bypass religious, political, military, or other power resources.'* (13)

Traditional Indian family is historically marked by its ancestral predisposition to the socio-cultural consciousness anchored on the common ground of caste system. Caste in India is an ideologically set determinant of hierarchical categorization of social status and professional identities. This prolonged discursive representation of human identities on the basis of caste system perpetuates the concentration of power and influence in the hand of the upper caste Hindus. This socio-cultural process of manipulation mechanism consolidates century-long maintenance of cultural dominance affecting the marriage pattern and other cultural interactions. A strict regulatory prohibition is imposed on the inter-caste marriage over centuries. The globalization has proved functional in bridging this cultural gap.

The family ecology is undergoing a certain degree of predicament largely because of the multicultural conflicts and competing ideological assumptions. The intergenerational conflicts in Indian family is undergoing a discernible increase in conflicting mechanism of child rearing and socialization. Shyamananda, the authorial figure of a joint family in the novel tries to predicate the child socialization on a traditional way confronted by his daughter-in-law Joyc 'an execrable mother of Doom and Pista. A more emergent change in Indian family includes the inter-religious marriage. The marriage partner selection is no longer controlled by parents. In the novel Burfi, son of Shyamananda undergoes an interreligious marriage with Joyce, a Christian on account of which Burfi gets invested with the designation of being a *'Hindu husband to Christian*

wife'(LB107). There is a competing prejudice in child socialization process. Shyamanada showcases his strong resentment in Joyce's 'anglicization' of both Doom and Pista. Even after the independence Indian family does not escape the colonial legacy and western cultural superiority becomes prominent once the children are given the name of Doom and Pista comprising of British connotation. Another crucial defining force affecting the drastically transformed cultural landscape is the rapid industrialization. The substantial increase in the manufacturing sectors since 1990s is widening an unactualizable gap between the society and individual. Concerning this global perspective of familial change Betty Hilliard rightly made an identical observation in an essay Family and Community pertaining to **Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology**:

'Industrialization along with its attendant features of urbanization and mobility has indeed caused an unraveling of the interpenetration of family and community'(1577).

The symmetrical gap between conflicting cultural values of successive generations comes prominent once Jamun and Burfi are asked to mourn over the death of their mother, Urmila. The industrialization has caused progressive increase in the diasporic experiences in the joint family system. The decline of consanguineal affinity in family is coinciding with the progressive rise in affective individualism by the time Burfi experiences physical dispersal in search of employment.

'Burfi is now distant, unlikely to return to the nest other than evanescently; in dull time Jamun will also take wing; then what have I struggled to erect the home for? '(LB188).

It is quite natural for any family system to undergo certain changes according to the law of spatio-temporal changes. Different socio-economic processes have caused a radical evolution on both structural and functional level of traditional family. But Indian family is subject to continuity in the intergenerational transmission of patrilocal and patrilineal family. Joyce, though a Christian, has to live a conjugal life in the patrilocal residence of Shyamananda. The intergenerational inheritance of parental property is well indicative of graduality in patrilineal family structure:

'A home is one's children. When Urmila and I die, who will occupy and care for this house? '(LB188)

Chatterjee imparts the readers a distinct philosophic approach to Indian family life in the novel. Such familial narrative finds a recurrent expression in his Way to Go(2011) the sequel to **The Last Burden(1993)**. To conclude, Indian traditional joint family is getting developed into the nuclear families. The satirical use of the title is symbolically indicative of changes in the gravity of struggle to escape the clutches of liability and the continuity in shouldering an endless burden of domestic responsibility.

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