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should not expect more employment generation and better standard of living of the workers in manufacturing sector. The government functioning needs to be more efficient to make Indian manufacturing globally competitive.

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ALIENATION AND CRISIS OF IDENTITY IN UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE'S *THE LAST BURDEN*

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Abstract

The Indian fiction in English witnessed a new crop of writers who, equipped with idiom, strove to assert themselves and strained to express their observations summative of the human situation in their writings during the 1980s. The novels bring to the fore a new cosmopolitanism in its exploration of the complex nature of the human experience. Upamanyu Chatterjee presents man as a solitary being by nature, who is unable to enter into any relationship with other human beings. His second novel *The Last Burden* portrays the frightening reality of the identity crisis and alienation in today's youth and also the total loss of traditional values in the society. Chatterjee projects a family that is peopled with human deeply despairing, lacking in warmth and divided. The burden of love, ties and possession is most evident in the relationship between husband and wife and parents and sons. The protagonist Jamun is frustrated in life and has not found a true happy relationship. He does not want to take up the burden of taking care of his father. But at the end of the novel he accepts his

responsibility. It is an indifferent acceptance of the burden which society has thrust on him.

There is a sense of dislocation and a general meaninglessness, as a result, the protagonist's search for identity is sometimes pathetic and ridiculous. Jamun is unhappy with his surrounding but he prefers to languish in it. The novel explores the collapse and disintegration of familial ties and values in an average Indian family at the end of the twentieth century. Alienation has significantly affected the Indo-English novels. The problem of alienation is ultimately related to the loss of and quest for one's identity. In this novel a deep anguish, a sense of purposelessness of life, isolation and despair are seen. The major impact of the novel emerges from the fact that Chatterjee deals with universal situations and relationships because in a rapidly changing society search for order, alienation, disintegration affect one and all in similar fashion.

Introduction

The Indian fiction in English witnessed a new crop of writers during the

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1980s. They expressed their observations of the human situation in the Indian subcontinent in their writings. They moved Indian English fiction away from the 'complexes' which influenced their predecessors and changed its content and aspect. Upamanyu Chatterjee comes under this group of writers who emerged as one of the 'new voices'. The novel of the 1980s depicts a new cosmopolitanism and its influence on the people. It explores the complex nature of the human experience. Its projection is on the human struggle to come to terms with a cosmopolitan reality. This type of writers portray man as a lonely being by nature, who is unable to enter into any relationship with other human beings. Upamanyu Chatterjee's works depict this human condition. He portrays the basic solitariness of man in the society. His works represent the reality of the modern world where men undergo the problem of alienation.

Alienation and crisis of identity

The concept of alienation has been found in theology, philosophy, politics and psychology for a long time. But the feeling of alienation has become prominent in the age of modernity. Man experiences alienation because of the harsh realities of modern life. The sense of despair, loneliness and purposelessness is prevalent in the whole ethos of modern age.

Existentialist philosophers and thinkers have written about the crisis of identity of modern man and his mal-adjustment in society. The existentialists

Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich and Jean Paul Sartre used 'alienation' in their own way. Jaspers used the terms 'fremd' (alien) and 'fremdheit' (alienness) frequently. According to the existentialists alienation is a permanent feature of man's existence and they also believed that it is not possible to lead an authentic existence always. Contemporary existentialism is deeply influenced by the Hegelian concept of alienation. Hegel analyses the process of alienation by employing the word 'experience'. Alienation has significantly affected the Indian fiction in English. The problem of alienation is closely related to the loss of and quest for one's identity.

The loss of identity that results in alienation, is a perennial suffering for the modern man and a sense of identity has become a creative force in a writer. The problem of loss of identity is at the centre of all problems including alienation.

The modern world witnesses growing hostility, mechanization, urbanization, changing values, disorganization, rootlessness and discontent and the resultant problem of alienation has become part of human life. A novel in the modern world deals with the sufferings undergone by modern man and the writings of Indian novelists are no exception to this. They have changed their concern from the outer world to the inner world to explore the essence of human living. Upamanyu Chatterjee is exception to this trend of the contemporary Indian English fiction.

The Last Burden

In recent years, many novels have focused on the family and Upamanyu Chatterjee's second novel *The Last Burden* comes under this category. It portrays a modern man's journey from rootlessness to maturity. The novel emphasizes the 'burden of family ties'. He vividly portrays the destructive relationship between father and mother and the two sons and between the sons and the elder son's wife. This novel is about the middle class family and its familial ties in a fast changing socio-economic scenario which is created by the modernity in society. The novel brings out the way in which values and relationships are suddenly seen as burden and how they affect one's individuality.

The central character Jamun who is a bachelor lives away from his family. When his mother Urmila is hospitalized, he returns home and then he decides to stay for some more days. There is another reason for Jamun's stay and that is the presence of an old friend Kasturi. Though Kasturi is married to another, may she is bearing Jamun's child. After the mother passes away, there is a sense of relief among the family members. After some time, Jamun decides to leave for the town where he works. Jamun's brother passes on the burden of looking after his father to Jamun who accepts the proposal. Upamanyu Chatterjee uses the technique of flashback and flashforward to project the ideas. It is a powerful exploration of the changing face of the Indian family system

its culture and its tradition. It looks funny but a bitter and true portrait of family ties. Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels reflect the dull and monotonous cycle of existence. He portrays the 'existential' crisis of modern youth. The author studies the mysterious working of the human mind and brings out the complex problems of the modern age in the contemporary society. The novel travels around the hero's changing moods and flow of his emotions.

Jamun feels quite at home in his work place in the company of his friend Hegiste. He lives in an urban society which is physically clean but socially and spiritually dead. Jamun tries hard to reproduce the home atmosphere by buying the same brand of refrigerator and geyser at home. His story revolves around the modernist desire for the city. This story projects Jamun's learning to build a halo around him and his place and finally he loses these halos in the process of finding himself and understands that his story is what had been lived by his parents and it would continue forever.

This novel tries to bring out the state of familial ties in the fast changing economic scenario. The novel shows that the joint family is replaced by nuclear families due to modernity. Since the traditional values get distorted due to the importance given to materialism in modern society, relationship has become a burden to modern men. Because of the change in social and traditional values, Jamun believes that parental love is a burden. Eventhough Jamun has a sense of guilt for

neglecting his duties, he is not able to rectify the situation. Chatterjee ridicules the lives and aspirations of the educated middle class people who do not want to have any responsibilities. The whole family of Jamun waits for the death of Urmila. There is no room for love or tenderness. During that time there is a quarrel between Shyamanand and his sons on money matters and on the will which is supposed to have written. Jamun and Burfi quarrel over the expenses and what should be done with Shyamanand when Urmila away. Chatterjee projects the true nature of the family relationships which is decayed and avoids responsibilities. After Urmila's death, Jamun thinks about her existence. What had her life been for? Why had she come to life, and why had she survived for over sixty years? Surely, at bottom for nothing. The aspiration of her existence had for sure not been happiness, [...] to be one feasible vindication for living, the single glow amongst the anguish, malevolence rancor and range. [...] drab childhood, her toilsome youth or her catastrophic marriage. (255)

The characters Jamun and Burfi reflect the decaying atmosphere. Through choice of names like Jamun, Burfi and Pista the author ironically indicates that the life of these characters are not at all sweet. The joint family set up, which is a cherished institution in the Indian society has lost its value and has come to reveal the rotteness which has steeped in.

There is no change or development in the life of any character in the novel. They

pass through the cycle of existence with quarrels and misunderstandings. The fights are mere diversions for the family members who otherwise lead a dull monotonous life. Chatterjee reveals the break-up of a joint family system and it is clearly evident when Urmila and Shyamanand are against abortion and Burfi feels that it is because of their child that he and Joyce have married, revealing the fact that the child was born out of wedlock. As he talks to Jamun about his son Pista, there is no sign of affection (102-103).

The middleclass has a great role in the Indian political conditions and it is this class which tries very hard to adhere to the traditional roots. The middle aged people in this social setup are the real conservers of traditional values, but they are also affected by mid life crisis. There is a suffering of man's existential loneliness which triggers the anxiety associated with his ultimate helplessness. All these aspects are portrayed well in the character of Shyamanand. After the death of Urmila he is seen reminiscing: "In Shyamanand, alongside this caring, her departure appears to have planted a more persistent acrimony, so that when one heath leads him to reminisce of others in his long, undistinguished life, [...] - more the comfortless, bitter sensations kindled by each event" (254).

The novel deals for the most part with wasted aimless lives and it becomes a metaphor of contemporary youth's search for self-realization. The only positive aspect

in the book is a slight trace of maturity in Jamun's character.

The Last Burden which is a novel of narration rather than action revolves around the character of Urmila, the mother of the narrator protagonist Jamun. Her illness is a symbol of maternal malady at the heart of the Indian family. It leads Jamun to a questioning journey to find the remedy elsewhere outside himself, his family and his brother.

Jamun could never find any compatibility with his father and brother but he is emotionally attached to his mother. Her agony has no measure. She "had to combat her hypertension, her piles, corns, arthritis, heart, marriage, her mind" (4). She unfolds her "emotional self", her "alienated self" and "isolated self" to him. She knows:

All family narratives are despicable hideous – if they're faithful to the essential life – aimless rancour for one another, the most guileless even, milk from us, our watchful malice – living together merely to thrill in unkindness, marrying, mounting and spawning because we're all afraid of being corporally alone. (55)

In this novel, all are in the 'alienated world'. They experience alienation in the family itself. Both Jamun and Burfi are alienated from the family. Urmila suffers from loneliness and alienation: so does the father. Shyamanand fails in his relationship with his wife and his sons. He is at loss to deal with his sons when he needs them most at the crucial moment of

Urmila's heart attack. They seek to him: "brand-new and alien, in jeans and T-shirts of dubious shades, and articulated puzzling species of English; whereas Urmila and he had ripened in a earlier, illusory genial world [...]" (108).

The life of Shyamanand and Urmila and their two sons Burfi and Jamun and Burfi's Christian wife, Joyce and their sons Pista and Doom, set in a city becomes an almost painful but necessary incursion into a world that is palpably real. It is a family with people who are deeply despairing, cynical and divided but not without their small redeeming arts that at once is uplifting but tragic.

The burden of love and ties are clearly seen in the relationship between Shyamanand and Urmila. They have not been able to establish a meaningful relationship and continue to live in a destructive atmosphere. Both sons wait eagerly for the death of at least one of the parents. Jamun undergoes of struggle to be free from the burden of relationships. This he could do only by relating himself to Kasturi and Kasibai. He keeps himself away from everything that would bind him emotionally, be it a family or parents, or a wife or a friend. All protagonists of Chatterjee's are seen cutting themselves away from the society and family in the same way as Jamun.

The problem of dispossession and displacement is at the base of the family tensions in the family. The migrant experience with its advantage of unlimited

prosperity sharply followed by a failure lies at the heart of the family.

Alienation has various implications. It includes an extraordinary variety of psychological disorders like ambiguity, dread, despair, anxiety, loneliness, nothingness, isolation, pessimism, absurdism, loss of faith and selfhood, rootlessness and meaninglessness. These sufferings are evident in the character of Jamun. *The Last Burden* is a true portrayal of the harsh realities and degradations facing Indian middle class life in the modern society. According to Nilufer E. Bhruca: His first novel, *English, August: An Indian Story* had created ripples with its explicit writing about sex mainly auto-erotic and drugs. Shock value apart, that text was rather self-egrossed and even self-indulgent. *The Last Burden* shares the technical brilliance and linguistic experimentation of the first book but not its drawbacks. It is a powerful and mature exploration of the changing face of the Indian family and notions of filial responsibilities (72).

In the family, all are alienated from others. There is no bondage between husband and wife and parents and children. Jamun suffers from the existential problems of hopelessness, rootlessness and frustration towards life. The major impact of the novel arises out of the fact that Chatterjee deals with universal situations, problems and relationships because in a rapidly changing society search for order, alienation, isolation displacement and

disintegration affect one and all in similar fashion.

Exile as a human situation always implies a relation between two fundamental categories for the course of common existence. One is the place where human beings are located, as well those into which they have moved because of different reasons; and the other is the travel that directed from one place to another, which develops a specific notion of parallel time that distinguishes the past from the present. The opposition normally means consideration of differences existing between both spatial and temporal levels. There is an exterior exile and an inner exile. There are ample causes that concern exile, political, social, economical and so forth. It is a question of time and of place. These two fields define the exile, together with its characters.

In *The Last Burden*, the sons, Burfi and Jamun have grown up into westernized, rootless individuals in their own way. They are unable to form lasting relationships. The attitude of Burfi to his parents seems to be worse. But Jamun shows some concern for his parents because according to his mother he is unmarried. The cruel relationship between sons and parents is revealed early in the novel. Jamun's attitude to his father is much more cruel than his attitude to his mother. Jamun experiences dislocation and a general meaninglessness as a result of his search for identity which is sometimes pathetic and ridiculous.

Jamun is frustrated in life. He longs for modernized and city life. His family is not a happy and lovable one and Jamun, when he was a teenager "feels for his parents a love that is only the tenderness of remorse, just a sorrow, a shame at their unhappiness" (198). Jamun has not found a good and happy relationship. His early love Kasturi remains a friend, but she is married. Jamun's deep emotional bondage to his parents is not allowing him to enter into a responsible and independent life of his own. The novel ends with hope as Jamun finally decides to take up his responsibility; "For the millionth time in his life, he suddenly, in a panic that time's running out, wants to expiate himself before his parents for the wrongs that he must've done them, years to convince them that he, despite his vulnerabilities, is truly grateful to them for the gift of life" (193).

Feelings of boredom, loneliness, dread, anxiety and despair are the problems of the protagonist of this novel. Anxiety leads to the individual's confrontation with nothingness and it is impossible for him to justify the choices he must make. Jamun is exhausted with the reality: Nothing else appears to wriggle into his skull. This is the real life, he ruminates messily, this fatigue, these aching calves, this bedpan world. [...] this existence has trundled along for thousands of years, and will chug on till Time itself peters out, and its hellish and dreadful designlessness is at last immaculately clear when one witnesses, at close quarters, the sickness of death (225-226).

Shyamanand is the displaced and dispossessed patriarch who exercises his authority over his wife, children and servants. His character seems to be the source of all troubles in the family.

Urmila's predicament in life is exemplary of woman's life as wife and mother who is caught in the process of modernity and she has become its victim within the house. Burfi does not have any affection for his family members. When Urmila was admitted in the hospital, Joyce refused to stay with her: "Your mother hates me, Joyce screeched, why should I yarn about in a hospital watching a shriveled cow die?" (84).

In this novel, Upamanyu Chatterjee has painted a society where all the characters are filled with the same of disquiet and so there is no one to judge the protagonist and his activities. The characters who interact with the protagonist have no moral standards, they themselves are emotionally and physically isolated and so it is difficult for them to understand the problem of loneliness of the protagonist, Jamun.

The characters in Chatterjee's novels highlight the major tragical element of the twentieth century boredom. Boredom usually envelops societies that have lived long under foreign domination. Jamun does not find redemptive power in the society which he belongs to. For Jamun, it is the burden which society has thrust on him. Thus Chatterjee presents a very disturbing portrait of the contemporary society.

Burfi and Jamun participate in the rituals after their mother's death but their ambivalent attitude about these superstitions is clear. Burfi is worried that they have to eat plain vegetarian food and to slave off Urmila's spirit and that he has to wear iron next to the skin. Burfi and Jamun have nothing with which to replace the loss of traditional and cultural values and moral values. But Chatterjee suggests that it is at this point that the journey begins for Jamun from rootlessness to maturity. The following passage sums up the very essence of the novel revealing Jamun's realization of the eternal truth. The world is indeed composed of these cyclical, well worn tracks that every generation shambles about on, age upon age, that nothing that falls to one's lot is new, that maturing and growing old really signifies encountering, in the particular, what has already occurred numberless times in the universal.

[...] When one takes the family and not the individual, as the unit nothing shocks anyway, as though the fellowship of one's blood itself is a kind of cushion, a buffer, or a diluting agent, for all singularities (263-264).

Jamun can be seen as an archetypal hero who makes a lonely journey only to get more integrated in the society where he finds peace and salvation. These characteristics are present in Jamun who is unwilling to risk a journey to discover his inner self. Instead of taking a journey, he

internalizes his journey by pondering over aspects of his character and displeases others. He knows that his failure to accept the family responsibility is a major issue in the family but fails to do anything about it.

The present modern society does not have many ideals which can decide goals for achievement and development and so Upamanyu Chatterjee's characters remain in the orphan stage. Jamun does not want to take any decision unless a problem is thrust on him. Though he has an affair with Kasturi, he is afraid of taking a journey into the world of commitments. He is happy to see her married off to someone else.

Modern man becomes estranged from himself and hence is his tradition opposed to traditional values and disloyal to his cultural heritage. The modern man's existential struggle are portrayed and it can be best identified as the symptoms of an overall crisis of life. Jamun is a morally and culturally degenerated youth. In him moral values could be found. He rejects the values of life.

Man is a unique being who is ruled by his passions and driven by his desire. Man is free to act according to his choice in the world. Till the end of the novel Jamun keeps his relationship with Kasturi and when he is asked to pay for his parents he reluctantly agrees to have his father with him. There is no active participation on his part. He is never found regretting his life. He becomes a part of the shallow middle class and loses

his individuality in the process. When individuals realize that they are completely responsible for their decisions and actions, they are overcome by society. They try to escape from this society by ignoring their freedom and their responsibility. Jamun and Burfi do not want to take the responsibility of looking after their parents. Chatterjee seems to be suggesting that this is the state of India, which is rather difficult to believe. At first, Jamun rejects his responsibilities in the family. He does not want to spend money for his mother and waits for her death. There is no cordial relationship among the members of the family. But, as time goes on, he realizes his responsibility and is ready to look after Shyamanand in his old age.

Conclusion

Upamanyu Chatterjee is clear about the absurdities inherent in human life. He feels that man is incongruous with the conditions provided for his existence. He says that the individual revolts against life when he fails to find any meaning in it and faces the unreasonableness of existence, identity crisis, alienation and absurdity of life. No ethical or moral values are dogmatized in the novel. But the happenings and the behavioural changes of the characters show the positive and desirable ways of living. The novel shows that the existential angst does not defeat man. He struggles to come out of the troubles and tribulations and draws a meaning out of his life.

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