

Disintegration in Familial Relationships: A Study on Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Last Burden*

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Husband and wife relationship is a very sensitive relationship and it plays a major role in every person's life. It is a relationship that brings long lasting joy and happiness in one's life. To have a good relationship between each other there must exist true love among one another. The children in the family learn a lot from the relationship of their parents. In this novel *The Last Burden* the relationship that exists between Shyamanand and Urmila, lacks the true bonding but exists superficially. Though Shyamanand and Urmila are together for more than thirty five years, they have yet established a meaningful relationship between them.

According to S. Chitra and S. Kalamani ,

"Man- Woman relationship is the most important human relationship. Literatures of all countries celebrate this human relationship as it has the most significant role to play in the family life. But this relationship suffers when one fails to recognize the merits of the other. In patriarchal society this relationship is based on man's domination over women. This is most apparent in India where woman performs all the works, submits to the demands of her husband and becomes a child bearing machine". (69).

Shyamanand and Urmila have never been comfortable with each other. Though they live in same house they don't have enough understanding between them. Shyamanand always searches for a reason to quarrel with his wife Urmila.

"Urmila and Shyamanand comfort themselves like two uncongenial hostlers constrained to room together for fifteen years". (165)

Mandeep kaur a scholar states,

"Shyamanand is presented in the novel as a complaining and aggressive old man who exploits his wife both psychologically and physically. He hates to spend money on her medical treatment and wants every member of the family to share medical expenditure incurred on her illness. (845)

The struggles of Urmila as a 'wife' is that of many Indian middle class women living with strained relationship. Shyamanand as a husband is responsible to spend for the treatment of his wife Urmila but he wants his sons to share the expenses for her treatment. The genuine desire for the well being of his wife seems doubtful.

According to s.chitra and s. kalamani

"Shyamanand is self centered, inhuman and offensive. Urmila is self- pitying. They both are intolerant of each other but dependent on each other" (70)

Shyamanand, being the head of the family, fails to fulfill the responsibility of bidding the family with love, for he is not even able to express his love o his wife Urmila. This lack of binding is seen in his sons too, who love their own self centered lives.

Sohail Ahmed comments,

The novel also exhibits the inner friction of a middle class family where every individual appears to be thinking about his or her own self. The bond of love seems to be totally missing. The relationship between Shyamanand and Urmila too exhibits their lack of understanding for each other. There are times when they too are seen to be at odds. Urmila feels that

Shyamanand doesn't like her being in a comfortable state. (24).

This is a common situation in many Indian middle class families. It is the strain and burden that dominates the family rather than the joy of togetherness. 'misunderstanding' and lack of communication prevails in many families leading to a meaningless relationship. The author vividly reflects the Indian middle class family with all its weakness and helplessness. The situation of the women in the family becomes worse where she has to cater to the needs of all the members as well as try to earn in order to meet the ever-existing financial needs of the family. Urmila, in the novel undergoes such a situation where she struggles to fulfill all her roles

After the death of Urmila, Shyamanand was totally changed and feels weak and isolated. Though he is the head of the family in the absence of his wife he realizes her importance. The failure to exhibit love in a husband-wife relationship ruins all the happiness that could have been enjoyed. "Doubtless, Shyamanand misses his wife, but for sure not in the manner that his sons wish him to. You're going to bounce back. You are going to snap out of this. Shyamanand is gabbling clenching Urmila's shoulder like a predator..." (252).

Seeing this Jamun gets irritated and tells his mother not to take care of his father Shyamanand but Urmila did

not care to listen to Jamun in this matter and takes care of Shyamanand, and does all the work for him. Thus Chatterjee brings out the emotional attachment between husband and wife. Though they do not seem to have a good relationship there exists a love that is not obviously seen.

Works Cited

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