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THE POSTMODERN DIMENSIONS IN UPAMANYUCHATTERJEE'S *THE LAST BURDEN*

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Twentieth century witnessed the rise of modernism and postmodernism. Amid the two world war struggles people get angst on the values of the society because the overmuch influence of wars and materialism. Postmodernism is a complicated term. It is hard to define, because it is a concept which appears in multi disciplinary studies such as literature, arts, film, music, theories, feminism, paintings and etcetera. Postmodern literature is literature which is concerned with various narrative techniques such as fragmentation, paradox, irony, destabilized meaning, and the unreliable narrator and so on. There are a bunch of features that already exists in the postmodern text. The postmodern text tests the boundaries of pre-modernism, modernism, postmodernism and post-postmodernism. It simply delineates what is happening today.

Postmodernity can be classified into a range of kinds like hyper modernity, hyper modernism in art, meta-modernism, post humanism, post materialism, post-postmodernism, and post-structuralism. Postmodernism can be isolated from postmodernity, because it deals with the study of anthropology, archaeology, architecture, art, Christianity, criminology, dance, feminism, film, literature, music, philosophy (anarchism, Marxism, and positivism), social construction of nature, psychology, political science, and theatre. The criticism of postmodernism is the central issue which always deals with several notions of alter-modern, anti-anti-art, hypermodernity, meta-modernism, neo-modern, neo-modernism, new sincerity, re-modernism and trans-modernism.

Postmodern fiction presents a diverse challenge to the reader. It helps to engage the readers in active creator of meaning and thoughts rather than a

passive consumer. This is true postmodern fiction deepens the knowledge of its readers and to interrogate the commonsense and commonplace assumption. There are different characteristic features in postmodern fiction. They are: random play rather than purposeful action, open ending rather than closure ending, surface rather than depth, scepticism rather than realism. There are innumerable practitioners in postmodern fiction such as Samuel Becket, John Fowles, Angela Carter, Julian Barnes, Peter Ackroyd, John Ashbery, Paul Muldoon, Vladimir Nabokov, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Paul Auster, Salman Rushdie and Jeanette Winterson.

Upamanyu Chatterjee is a postmodern writer. His novels and short stories depict the anguish and conflicts of postmodern Indian characters. *The Last Burden* is a postmodern Indian English novel. Jamun is the central character in *The Last Burden* and its sequel is *Way to Go*. *The Last Burden* touches on many topics including family relationships, love, financial, social and emotional problem, childhood memories of Jamun, illness of his mother, father's affection of his wife, etc. The title signifies the struggle for their identity in the society and in the family, which creates a new level of tension in their life. So, the quest of whole life is struggle for them. The quest for identity is an often recurring theme in the postmodern texts. Some of the essential postmodern texts which reflect the theme of identity crisis: John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*.

The postmodern identity crisis projects the subjects and complex series of intellectual, social,

cultural and political changes indicative of major transformation in the postmodern era. During the past seventy years, the identity of postmodern crisis presents the existence of world and its meaning depends on the presence of the subject, a world of absolute subjectivity. The subject inhabits both nature and the mind and which drives both inconsistent and contradictory usages of postmodern narratives. The theme of postmodern identity defines the subject rather than the objects. It sustains and transcends the difference in the postmodern character. This development in the novels by postmodern practitioners brings a sea change in the character of contemporary politics, the fate of personal and social life in a society. In *The Last Burden*, the identity crisis of Jamun is negative identity about his monotonous of life and mundane of love.

The Last Burden is the burden of family ties. The novel assimilates the values of joint Indian family system. It also tries to reveal the account of Jamun's life and his dying mother. Chatterjee brings out the oedipal relationship in *The Last Burden*. Chatterjee's mother died while he was writing this novel. This novel centres on two main characters such as Jamun and his mother, because Jamun's mother is dying. So, the relationship between mother, Urmila and her son, Jamun is intertextually connected to D.H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*. In *Sons and Lovers* Paul Morel is a young man who is basically controlled by his mother. She is unhappy in her own marriage and she is also jealous of her son's lovers. But Jamun's love of his mother depends more on mental agony to separation, because she is going to be died. The postmodern text always emphasizes the existence of Freud's oedipal constructions of the mind between mother and son. Chatterjee is aware of Freud's theory and *The Last Burden* famously uses Freud's Oedipus complex as its base for exploring Jamun's lovable relationship with his dying mother. Jamun's mother advised him to lift her but Jamun nauseates to touch her:

Urmila asks Jamun to palm her upper chest. 'See, it's loose, floating about.' He is extremely unwilling to touch her. Something'll snap, he is certain, and life will rush out of her as out of a balloon, she'll shrivel to a scrap of puckered rubber in his hands,

because of him. 'No, Ma, my thumbing it won't help. I should inform Haldia at once.' (Chatterjee 111)

The postmodern philosophy emphasizes the concept of death. The whole family of Jamun is waiting for Urmila's death. Jamun reluctantly returns his homewhen he received a telegram about his mother's heart attack. He goes home not to meet his mother but his old love Kasturi, who is now married and pregnant. The milieu of the novel is imbued with morbid techniques. The scene of 'dying' connotes love, empathy, and sympathy. In the five days Urmila has spent at the ICU, Burfi's Christian wife Joyce who has not visited ever once. She is bored with parents-in-law and with their relationship. Instead she justifies that she may be correct in her action and feels alienated in Burfi's family. After a close textual analysis, through the concept of death, Chatterjee vividly describes the myth of family togetherness and the true nature of family relationship is exploited by modern world.

In Postmodernism, the centre is not the centre. The centre of dying mother creates the burden to Jamun and it decenters him. The family restriction does not allow him to enter into a responsible and independent life. The emotional bondage of Jamun in his family restricts him. In fact, he enervates in parental relationship. After the period of ritual rites of his mother, he visits Kasthuri's home and stays few days there. She is his friend and lover. She bears a child by someone. The postmodern Indian English literature generally foregrounds the breaking of tyranny of the straight line and interrogates the values of traditional social life. *The Last Burden* not only questions the values of traditional social life but it also interrogates and breaks the religious norms. Jamun's brother Burfi married a Christian girl Joyce. They lead a life and they become parents to be Pista and Doom. Logically, postmodernism has a tendency towards the reflexivity of logical ideas to break the views from traditional ideas and norms. At the end of the novel, Jamun is isolated and he finally longs his mother's love and he takes care about his father and stays with him.

Throughout the novel, Chatterjee portrays the aspect of Indian family system such as number of members in the family, educational background, type of family (lower or middle class) and so on. In India, the joint

family system is orthodox and still it is practiced. The novel talks of the three different generations in the same root of the family. Chatterjee tries to show family love between the three generations: the father Shyamanand, and his two sons Jamun and Burfi; and his two grandsons Pista and Doom. Chatterjee through his fiction presents the blurring of conventional boundaries between the relationships of the same family. The novel portrays the daily lives of the middle class Indians life. It encompasses the Indian reality in a postmodern way. The postmodern way in the sense, it is concerned with irony, parody, pastiche, wit, stream of consciousness and with cynical effects.

In *The Last Burden*, Chatterjee delves deep in the postmodern ethos especially because of his heightened sense of uncertainty in contemporary societies. This is well brought out in his novels. The principle of uncertainty is the major element in postmodernism. *The Last Burden* illustrates how Jamun has reshaped the Indian culture and tradition and also how he becomes an uncertainty in his marriage. His uncertainty continues not only in his marriage, but also in his life. So he is a representative of the wastelandish character of lower middle class family. The novel's title is quite relevant and prominent as it largely centres on the theme of life and death which is uncertainty. The novel touches upon the successes and failures, love and life, hopes and despairs, past and present, fair and foul, traditional and modern, and nature and culture. Chatterjee presents the Indian scenario and reality of contemporary urbanizing modern India through the historical compass of human labour. The social realism of Chatterjee turns its focus to the issue of sordid environment of emerging relationship in an ordinary middle class family.

Postmodernism always emphasizes the grand narration and its subjectivity. The postmodern texts gives significance to raises the rhetorical questions on grand narrations such as related to religious, traditions, cultures, and the narration of grand books like the Ramayana, the Bible, and the Koran. Christopher Butler acknowledged in his book *Postmodernism: A very short Introduction*, "Postmodernist liberally opposed all holistic explanations" (42). *The Last Burden* tries to claim the

breaking of the religious explanations through the incident of marriage of Burfi. It also questions the familial ties, cultures, traditions of India. The protagonist Jamun's brother Burfi breaks the marriage system and religious rules. Burfi marries Joyce, who belongs to the Christian community. Like Burfi, Chhana is against the culture that she smokes after her mother died. Jamun introduces Chhana: "Chhana, my cousin, and my father's niece" (35). The postmodern practitioners try to find out the logical thinking in their thoughts and demonstration of certain subject matters. They also concentrate on new ways of thinking by breaking the views of traditionalists. The questions of postmodernist never find answers.

The Last Burden begins with the postmodern concept of pastiche, the protagonist Jamun reading Robert Payne's life of Mahatma Gandhi with admiration. He gets the telegram from his family. It tells about his mother Urmila's heart attack. Jamun returns to see his mother. 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 is 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 said 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'. (08)

The story moves with flash back techniques. Jamun occasionally reminisces the past moments like Agastya Sen reminisces the past in *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*. The feelings about Jamun's mother and the words of grandfather slowly come to Jamun's mind while he stands at verandah in the hospital. "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). The story moves towards both the directions of past and future directions. In postmodernism, it is very common that the narrator of the novels is in contact with

various time settings such as flash back and flash forward. The time settings of flash back and flash forward are considered as the narratological techniques. The former one may be considered as analepsis or back-take. The latter one may be considered as prolepsis or fore-take. The various times setting of the novel is to create the stream of consciousness in the mind of the readers. It creates the postmodern sense through the plurality of the time settings.

Postmodernism always connects with the nostalgic notions because the sense of the past retrospectively tends to share more ideas thematically. The nostalgic notions are concerned with progressive ideas of the actions, deeds, and times in the novels. It also decides the happened situations already in the past. It tries to provide the additional information of the characters, incidents and plots of the novel. The past is the part of living culture. Chatterjee reminds the inevitableness of past Indian family generation system. He exerts the view of tradition in his ideas, thoughts and consciousness. He holds the past influence of family system and proves the present life of modern humanity. The modern humanity mostly depends on science and technology. But Upamanyu Chatterjee provides the knowledge on family life. It explores the conditions of contemporary human beings. However, the rich inheritances of Indian novels by Indian writers are somehow kept alive with new facts related to the society and its contemporary situation in the portrayal of life.

Postmodern psychology is a significant approach to analyse the psychology of mind in the postmodern world. In *The Last Burden*, Chatterjee puts forth the narrative of Jamun's psychology and its trouble of opposing of parental love. Jamun's psychology in this novel relies on using a range of different methodologies to lead his life and is characterized by dissociative states. Postmodern psychology always challenges the modernist view of psychology and it questions the ability to know ultimate facts and uses multiple methodologies in its attempts to know. Moreover, it is integrated with transforming psychology because it tries to accept knowing without knowing in certain circumstances. In *Way to Go*, Jamun is the character who unknowingly decides in himself that his missing father would die

during his search. So, the self that is itself decentered. The new mentality of the characters challenges the psyche and complexity of the reality. Simply, it may call self-contradictory psychology. Perry Anderson denotes Jameson's view of postmodern psychology in his book *The Origins of Postmodernity*:

For Jameson, this is a general condition of postmodern experience, marked by a 'waning of affect' that ensues as the bounded self of old begins to fray. The result is a new depthlessness of the subject, no longer held within stable parameters, where the registers of high and low are unequivocal. Here, by contrast psychic life becomes unnervingly accented and spasmodic, marked by sudden dips of level or lurches of mood that recall something of the fragmentation of schizophrenia. (57)

Chatterjee's *The Last Burden* is a great example of postmodernist novel because of its general fragmentation of narrative style, tone, plot line and the actual narration of blurring of emotions. Chatterjee cannot access the meaning of his narration logically but brings out the real and sympathetic appearance of Urmila in *The Last Burden*. "The skin of Urmila's face is fragile, slack, rutted, softened by brooding, the fatigue of age, and the recent, rare badinage with Burfi" (140). When Jamun looks at his mother, he understands the conditions of his mother and "realizes then that this probably the one occasion in the lives of his parents that they are rejoicing together" (89). But his logic thinking does not collect the self-assertiveness in himself. So this postmodern condition of conflicts and contradictions in Jamun does not stand him to take the correct decisions in his life.

Upamanyu Chatterjee typically portrays the peculiarities and unpredictable events of the social context and everyday life of his characters in his novels. This paper tries to depict the various dimensions of postmodernism and its ideology in the works of Upamanyu Chatterjee. The objective of the present paper is to highlight the boundaries of the postmodern texts and its types; classified the ideas of postmodernity and the postmodern fiction. The literature of Chatterjee is to retrospect the Freud's oedipal complex relationship between Jamun and his mother in a postmodern aspect. Chatterjee's literature insists deconstructing the centre

and grand narratives of traditional and religious customs. It is not surprising that his writing provides an extensive reflection of nostalgic notions and postmodern psychology are exclusive focus in this paper.

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