

Wishful or Wistfulness of Social Class in the Post - Independence India: A Study of Gurcharan Das's 9 Jakhoo Hill.

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Abstract: Every literature has a relevance to society and has a message to give that is conveyed through its story but it is also true that the literature is the composition of the writer who owes the credit of everything. He pens something that shows the concern for the society and endeavours to bring the mirror image of the realistic aspects of the society. Such compositions are called realistic compositions and such writers are called realists. One of the realists is Gurcharan Das (1943-), a man whose family had struggled in the Indo –Pakistan Partition and later resettled in India as refugees and the one who retired as the Vice President and Managing Director in Procter & Gamble Worldwide and held to writing literature.

Gurcharan Das brought various writings like *A Fine Family*, a book of essays, *The Elephant Paradigm*, and anthology, *Three English Plays* including *9 Jakhoo Hill* which proves that Gurcharan Das is a committed artist who has a great concern for the political and social conditions in India. His play *9 Jakhoo Hill* shows the causes and effects of the post partition political events upon the people living in India mainly of old aristocratic class and old middle class. It discusses the occurrence of psychological and social changes in the above classes in the Post-Independence India and shifts that take place in their status. It also observes the wistfulness of the old aristocratic class that binds it to the past and on the other side wishful old middle class which detested to be nostalgic and rose to become neo middle class.

In the light of these factors, this paper attempts to study Gurcharan Das's play *9 Jakhoo Hill*, a realistic attempt to portray the nature and tendency of people of different classes in the Post-Independence India.

Keywords: Gurcharan Das, Indo – Pakistan Partition, 9 Jakhoo Hill, Neo Middle Class, Old Aristocratic Class, Old Middle Class, Realistic, Realism.

I. Introduction

When India got independence, the natives could not attain the happiness fully as next they had to strive harder through partition of India and Pakistan. When two nations got somehow resettled, the people living in India had got their first Prime Minister Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, the dreamer. He had dreamt of making India modern irrespective of the fact that she had not come out of the old rooted problems and tedious survivals in the past. Then Indo - China war took place in 1962 and China invaded India due to Nehru's mismanagement. It was a depressing war that brought turbulences in the mindset of the people and a loss of faith on Nehru. Anjana Rajan in her article 'A View from the Hill' too states that the flux in Indian society today may be a parallel to the throes of change experienced in the late 1950s and '60s, when the war (with China) ended our age of innocence and our Nehruvian dream. [1.]

At the same time, these political scenarios also brought a change in the social order for example the old aristocratic families lost their shine and remained as mere nostalgic traditional parts of the society. The uncongenial circumstances caused the men of the aristocratic families to wail of the past life and had only wistfulness as they could not tolerate the sudden trauma of decline in their wealth and status. On the contrary, the low middle class rose higher and consistently upgraded itself as a high or new or neo middle class. The sudden shift in the low middle class was seen in the midst of political situation and mainly economic reforms as they lost no opportunity to gain access of and to mobilize to reach to wider areas.

The post-colonial Indian middle class transformed itself rapidly, in Gramscian terms, as a "fundamental class," thus contributing to the forging of the hegemonic Nehru-Gandhi ideology; and, as with any fundamental class, its main task was the defense of its own economic interests. (32, wcfia.harvard.edu) [2.]

These ups and downs in these two classes are best depicted in Gurcharan Das's *9 Jakhoo Hill*, the play set around 1962, during the time of Sino- Indian War. This play was first staged in 1996 by Yatrik Group and until then it remained unnoticed. Garima Sharma in 'Study of Characters: 9 Jakhoo Hill, A Play by Gurcharan Das' mentions:-

9 Jakhoo Hill is a modern Indian play in Indian English. The plot of the play is placed in Jakhoo hill, Shimla in 1962, when China invaded India and shattered the dream of first Prime minister and an intellectual, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. [3.]

II. 9 Jakhoo Hill

In 9 Jakhoo Hill, there are two families found which had shifted from Lahore to India during partition. The first represents the old middle class family which has a mother Chitra and her meek son Deepak. They settled in Bombay where Deepak works as a 'successful executive'[4.] Her husband is also living with them but has no role to play metaphorically also because the family has the domination of Chitra only. On the other side the other family represents the old aristocratic family which has a character Amrita and her only daughter Ansuya. During partition, Amrita's husband died and then she went to her father in Delhi with Ansuya when she was young. Unfortunately her father's house along with his three mills was sold off and soon after such loss he died. Distraught Amrita managed to move at their only residence left at Simla. When they shifted to Simla house, Amrita's brother Karan Chand had also come with them.

The second family that now contains Amrita, Ansuya and her Uncle (Mamu) - Karan Chand is living at 9Jakhoo Hill, Simla, the only abode left but it is next for the auction after their house in Delhi and their three mills had already got sold off. 9 Jakhoo Hill is the object that basically symbolizes the retrospective notion of Amrita's past that is during the colonization when it would represent the magnificent aristocracy and the state of affluence of her family. During the play we are given the glimpses of its luxurious beauty which it possessed in the past that implicates that once this home was richly maintained and was a huge fascinating premise for the ministers before Independence. It occurs in the first act when Ansuya reminds her mother that their home in Simla is on the verge of being sold off:-

Ansuya: And now, even this house will be gone.

Amrita: No...it won't.

Ansuya: Everyone seems to know about it except us.

Amrita: (Pointing to the drapes) See those drapes, Ansu? Your father brought them from England, and they were the talk of the town that season. Oh, the parties we used to have, Ansu! The servants were forever polishing the silver. Why the whole Nehru's first cabinet must have dined here sometime or another. [5.]

The above lines are evident of the richness of their home before Independence and show clearly that they were amongst aristocrats. However it also indicates Amrita's love and passion for her past life and how she rejects her present state of adversity about which her daughter informs her repeatedly. She does not want to embrace the present condition and does not wish to face the adversity rather she amuses herself being the wife of dead aristocrat. She even resumes her aristocratic mannerism that reminds her of her past life every time showing her nostalgia.

Amrita: How do you like my new sari? (And she turns around to show it to everyone.)

Mamu: It's beautiful!

Ansuya: It should be. It's the most expensive sari in Shimla. [6.]

Ansuya, the protagonist visualizes their decline but fails to make her mother comprehend about it. She is the one in the old aristocratic family who is fed up of her magnificent past life and now seeks to trace new life which is full of joy and happiness. She whispers to herself in Act -1, when she is sitting with her Mamu. 'I want to go far, far away to a place where no one knows me. I want to work and work where everyone is busy and no one asks questions.' Her mamu (Karan Chand) is also the narrator of the play. He introduces Ansuya by saying that she was not born to lead a staid, conventional life. Lonely withdrawn, but with an almost fierce vitality, she wants to live fully and passionately [7.]. She tries to evade herself from her past and for this she hopes that her long standing friend Deepak whom she loves will take her to Bombay yet the aftermaths of her past pricks her badly and wounds her up to the extent that she becomes poignant at the end.

In the beginning we are informed that Amrita had invited Chitra and her son Deepak to celebrate Diwali in Simla and they arrive at their residence. Ansuya is enthusiastic when she hears about their arrival. She becomes vivacious and regains her vitality and keenly waits for Deepak. It can be seen when her Mamu alerts her of getting hurt by Deepak. She ignores him and defiantly says:

Ansuya: Well, he is coming tomorrow.

Mamu: I know he is coming tomorrow. Why is he coming tomorrow?

Ansuya: Because Amma invited them and... I want him to come (Defiantly) [8.]

She is so anxious to see Deepak that she is not able to understand the whole witty cause of their arrival. The real purpose of theirs is not to celebrate Diwali but to get the license for Deepak's company from Rai Saheb, the IAS and secretary of government of India who is the good friend of Amrita also and they hoped that latter would assist them in getting the license from Rai Saheb.

Deepak, the 'handsome man of 27, squarely built, full of energy and ambition' and smart executive working in TCS Company comes with Chitra. His enthusiasm and ambition represent his pride in his achievements. He is the finest representation of the young men of the rising middle class as mentioned in:

This new middle class is the heart of the thriving Indian private sector, and it has a very strong sense of self-pride in its achievements. [9.]

Ansuya is attracted towards Deepak whom she had last seen when she was ten years old only. She wears a sari to welcome him that depicts her enthusiasm getting uncontrolled. She is as innocent as she assumes that Deepak has come to propose to her only but layers get unfolded when Chitra says that Deepak needs a license for his company and for this he is required to meet Colonel Rai Saheb. Ansuya gets stunned by the other purpose of his visit but Deepak avoids the verity of the matter and says:

Deepak: I have to come to Simla to see you, Anu. (Goes up to her) But then I discovered that Rai Saheb was also up here, and I told ma, why not combine business with pleasure [10.]

He states Ansuya as 'pleasure' and she also feels degraded for a moment but at the next moment she forgets about it and enjoys his company to the extreme. This happens because she has consistent reverie about her new life which would sway her from her bitter past and in the optimism she does not understand that her childhood friend Deepak who used to belong to an old middle class family has now upgraded himself as the individual of new middle class family that basically wishes to abandon the past notions and practices and even finds no shame in breaking the emotional ties or perhaps finding the utility out of them. She is oblivious of the present scenario and does not realize how people have changed a lot after Independence. They have become highly wishful and have obtained the utility in their lives at the cost of emotions in order to reach at the epitome specially the people of middle class families like Chitra and her son Deepak.

When Deepak's work gets accomplished, Chitra plans to leave Simla. Deepak does not stop for Ansuya and leaves Simla. Nonetheless Deepak loves her, he insists his mother: - 'It's my one chance for an honest life. She is a fine person with ideals ma' [11.]. But it cannot be denied too that he is under the domination of his mother Chitra and is unable to take decisions independently or it may be due to the fact that Chitra had sacrificed a lot for his son's career and life. It is indicated when Chitra tries to seduce Mr. Rai Saheb and even goes to his house with him so that he does not deny assisting Deepak. She states:-

Chitra: ... Do you know what I have done for you today?

Deepak: What?

Chitra: Main abhi kahan se aa rahi hoon, tujhe pata hai?

(Where I am coming from now, Do you know)

Deepak: Yes, yes, I know. You went to the club with Rai Saheb.

Chitra: Haan. Rai Saheb ke saath gai zaroor thi. Yes, (Indeed I went with Rai Saheb) But not the club. To his house. Ek ghanta unke saath bita kar aarahi hoon! Samjhe? (I have spent an hour with him, understand!) [12.]

After hearing such unbelievable shameful act done by his mother, Deepak gets stunned that shows that he feels himself trapped under the obligation of his mother and has no guts to rebel against her. He even calls himself as her puppet whose string is under her control only.

(Deepak is made to say) **Deepak:** "You [Ma] taught me to go after success, Ma. And I did. You forget to warn me there might be others in the way. I'm your puppet, Ma. Pull the string. Pull it harder. Choke me." "You'll have your way! You always have!" [13.]

We can see Chitra is the perfect representation of the women of the rising middle class who as Garima Sharma in 'Study of Characters: 9 Jakhoo Hill, A Play by Gurcharan Das' is an ambitious lady who believes that nothing is bad to gain success. She is desperate to raise her lifestyle high in terms of her financial security and she despises the people who have not got high financial status or obviously have scarcity in giving dowry for his son. This is the main reason for which she denies Ansuya to be her daughter in law by criticizing her- 'She doesn't have a naya paisa (new money) to her name' [14.]. Thereby she imposes upon Deepak the niece of Rai Saheb who would definitely give a good dowry.

Chitra: Rai Saheb's niece! Look Deepak, you won't find another match like her. Beta, beta thande dimag se soch. (Think upon it with cool head my son!) My guess is the dowry is not going to be under two lakhs. And maybe they will also give a car, a fridge and an air-conditioner. [15.]

Dr. Randeep Rana in his article 'Thematic Reflections in Gurcharan Das's 9 Jakhoo Hill' states that Gurcharan Das through Chitra has shown that for rising middle class the aspiration for money exceeds the ethical boundaries as well. Here profligacy is not a bane rather a boon, passport for success. Chitra in order to get the much cherished license for her son Deepak's company gets him married to Rai Saheb's niece willfully agrees/consents for sexual relations with Rai Saheb [16.]. Sudeep Kumar in his article 'Value-Concerns and Contemporary Indian Drama: A Study of Gurcharan Das's 9 Jakhoo Hill' also asserts that Gurcharan Das focuses over the downward trend in moral ethics of the new middle class through Deepak and Chitra. The latter one is portrayed as an epitome of money mongers. To get a license for her son, she does not have any inhibition to flout the sanctity of her own marital-bond and even sacrifices her own son's love for Ansuya. [17.]

Therefore through Das's 9 Jakhoo Hill, it is visible that the old middle class in the post-independence India wishfully left no opportunity to consolidate itself to the next status of high standards in terms of economical, professional and materialistic gains which were obtained by undeserving means too like breaking the old relations, devaluing the emotions and sentiments, and building the relations with those people where utility is best handled. Chitra crosses all the barriers and romances with Mr. Rai Saheb because she wants her son to

make progress which would benefit her too. In addition to it, she denies Ansuya as her daughter in law because she has no 'naya paisa (new money) in her life' and besides her family has become downtrodden too or we can say now she stands beneath her status. Deepak too is prone to victimization of rising middle class as he does not rebel against his mother's wrongful ideas and follows her consistently. It can be experienced that Deepak is lean towards rising status and he knows well that he would be benefitted by his mother not by the nostalgic family of Ansuya so he abides by his mother only.

But Amrita's family remains bound to atmosphere of wistfulness and unconsciously get stuck in its vortex. Amrita as we have discussed above is so much nostalgic that she does not realize the state of dejection in her family and persuades herself in fancy. Karan Chand is also the stereotypical who does not want to embrace the outside world and has a grunt of satisfaction in his home which retells him of his past life. In this stagnant passage of his life, he falls in the sinful aspiration of love with her niece Ansuya who later snubs him. So, it explicates clearly that the old aristocratic class remains nostalgic and is reluctant to abandon the aristocratic practices and lifestyle but at the same time it is not denied too that some individuals had little confidence to confront the situation of decline in their aristocracy and hope to amalgamate the skills of rising middle class. She is Ansuya who treads higher and away from her past life. It is true that she is deceived by Deepak of whom she had once hoped would show her the new world, yet she does not lose her last hope that was lit by Deepak only. Once Deepak asked her to convert the 9 Jakhoo Hill residence into a luxurious hotel:

Deepak : Why not convert it into an exclusive season hotel?...Give it to a professional company to manage it....And , I tell you, in two years , you could pay back all your debts and keep the house , too[18.]

At last, when she is left isolated, she ponders over his idea and affirms to change her residence into a hotel. This implies that she takes a resolution to not to survive in isolation rather she would also raise her approach and would live a better life.

III. Conclusion

Thus the play 9 Jakhoo Hill is the realistic representation of two classes in the Post-Independence India where first is rising middle class which takes ample advantage of economic reforms and moves ahead swiftly. On the other hand, the old aristocratic class remains bewildered in the wistfulness for the past that it becomes difficult for them to imbibe the new systems easily and in this manner make some awkward mistakes unconsciously like Amrita's conduct of herself like inclining towards her past and Karan Chand's intention for incest with her niece Ansuya and Ansuya's hope to marry Deepak who was her long standing friend and gave her hopes that he would marry her but falls back from his commitment later. In sum the play is the realistic picture of shifts in social order in the Post-Independence India and shows how the social classes transformed themselves into new classes of the society.

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