



## DEGENERATION OF FAMILY VALUES IN THE LAST BURDEN

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper attempted a critical study of the novel The Last Burden by Upmanyu Chatterjee, which may function as attack on the spirit of modernity and materialistic tendency of becoming judgmental in the name of rational and real. The novelist has pointed at the changed attitude of the young and new generation who are too much formal in the act of carrying out the responsibility. Chatterjee has skillfully alighted the burden of ties in the title itself calling the caring and looking after of the old age people to be the last burden.*

**KEY WORDS:** Degeneration, Sardonic, Modernity, Materialistic, Judgmental, Patrilineal.

### Introduction

Values are invaluable personal and societal resources. They give dispersed populations a sense of identity, purpose, and direction in addition to integrating them into society. The values, which are the result of long-standing experiences with shown effectiveness, provide otherwise chaotic human lives with an understanding of purpose. Despite differences resulting from various historical and cultural evolutionary paths, true values in every society strive for the ultimate well-being of both individuals and the group.

The foundation of our social structure for a long time was made up of naturalist and humanist principles. The most prized social standards were honesty, integrity, truthfulness, sincerity, compassion, diligence, piety, and selflessness. The public was particularly drawn to the righteous, saints, and sages, who were the focus of admiration, inspiration, and social attention. But as we rush toward materialism, we are abandoning the moral principles that have earned us the title of "crown of the creatures." Degenerative cognitive and behavioral tendencies are replacing

the high ideals that have long defined our civilization. Values, human worth, and dignity are becoming muddled and eventually transformed into harmful societal claims. Individual identities are increasingly being invaded by toxic tendencies based on false and self-centered beliefs. Morals and manners are fading. Social interactions are progressively being invaded by philistine and avaricious impulses.

Norms of selflessness and altruism are being destroyed by the fire of prejudice and jealousy. The foundation of our civilization is being nourished by the plague of violence and hubris. Faith, politics, and religion are becoming lucrative businesses. The public's worries, hopes, anxieties, and systematic deprivations are being exploited. Instead of valuing honesty, simplicity, and piety, we like becoming friends with dishonest and crafty people. Philosophers and devout people are not as respected by us as well-known and powerful thugs are. Duplicity, sycophancy, and hypocrisy are the most lucrative virtues of our day.

The most significant institution that has endured over time is the family. India is a collectivist culture

that prioritizes family connection, loyalty, and integrity, much like the majority of other older, less industrialized eastern nations. C. Harry Hui and Harry C. Triandis (1986) defined collectivism, which is the opposite of individualism as, "a sense of harmony, interdependence and concern for others" (p. 244). To be more precise, collectivism is demonstrated by a stronger willingness to work with family and extended kin on issues that impact the majority of life, such as marriage, partner selection, and profession choice (Hui and Triandis 1986; Triandis et al. 1988).

A prominent institution in both individual and communal life in India has been the family (Mullatti 1992). Kinship relationships and extended family are very important to Hindu families. Families in India have familialistic value orientations, support conventional gender role preferences, are patrilocal, adhere to a patriarchal worldview, and follow the patrilineal law of descent. According to Mullatti and Shangle Indian families are robust, stable, close, resilient, and long-lasting. In India's past, the joint family has been the ideal, preferred, and conventional family structure. In addition to kinmen, a joint family often consists of three to four living generations, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, nieces, and nephews who reside in the same home. It is a collection of several family units residing in different rooms of the same home. These members worship the same idols, share a shared income and property, consume meals prepared at a single hearth, and are linked to one another by kinship. According to Chekki (1996) and Sethi (1989), the family gives stability, a sense of solidarity and unity, cares for widows, unmarried people, the disabled, and helps during times of unemployment. In Indian culture, the joint family has traditionally been the ideal family structure, and the majority of Indians have lived in a joint family at some time in their life (Nandan and Eames 1980). The mixed family structure is becoming less popular among younger generations as a result of urbanization and modernity. According to some academics, the modified extended family has

supplanted the conventional joint family since it lacks a hierarchical power structure and does not need physical closeness or professional engagement (Nandan and Eames 1980; Mullatti 1995; Shangle 1995).

Regular visits, financial support, help and support with childcare and housework, and involvement and participation in life-cycle events like births, weddings, funerals, and festival celebrations are all encouraged by this new family structure. As a result, the kinship and familial ties are preserved. The nuclear family is deeply ingrained in the extended kinship matrix, and many functional extensions of the traditional joint family have been preserved even in India's more modern and nuclear families (Nandan and Eames 1980). The modified extended family is still popular in modern India, despite the many adjustments and adaptations to a pseudo-Western society and the middle and upper classes' shift toward the nuclear family.

### **The Last Burden**

*The Last Burden*, a well-known work by Upamnyu Catterjee, painted a realistic portrait of Indian society. The state and treatment of the elderly are the same in both rural and urban societies. Both the affluent and the poor are impacted in various ways. The writer paints a humorous, gruesomely realistic, and striking picture of the immense weight of familial bonds while alternating between time and place and using a vocabulary of unparalleled depth and strength. In an interview, the writer explains why he wrote this amazing work of literature. "I wanted to write about the sufferings that family members inflict on each other and the terrible responsibility of emotional dependence, I wanted to observe the burden, I suppose of attachment." (Ghosh, Sagarika 5)

The novel was written in 1993, at a period of transition when family closeness was at its height. During India's early years of globalization, the preference for the core family over the joint family was discovered to be the result of a person's identity quest and self-centered attitude, which also served as the primary reason why the family bondage

broke. In the family of Shyamanand and Urmila, a middle-class couple with two sons, Burfi and Jamun, a daughter-in-law named Joyce, and grandsons, Pista and Doom, the book depicts the awful weight of familial bonds. Because he wears the newest styles in fashion, Jamun's demeanor and look reflect that of a typical youthful, modern generation. It appears that his older brother is a responsible son. But occasionally, he also shows his parents how self-centered he is. Being the eldest son, Burfi seems to be very self-centered, but in reality, he was less accountable to his parents, and his worries are limited to money.

The interaction between the family members, which seems very formal and dry, is examined and assessed throughout the story. Even the connection between Urmila and Shyamanand, the family's leader, appears to be arid, sardonic, or mysterious as they age. He handles her like the doormat or a dead machine. The origins of Shyamanand's self-centeredness may be traced back to his seeming macho chauvinism. About seventeen years have passed since Shyamananda and his wife ended their physical relationship. His marriage to his wife now appears to be aimless. He tended to act and treat his family members in a really strange manner most of the time.

Even during the time of his wife's illness, money has been his first priority. His wife's health is not as important to him as paying the medical costs. He found it extremely difficult to part with his money, to the point where he is unable to cover his wife's medical bills. He believes that his wife is his sons' only duty, thus they should split the costs. "Twenty-five thousand for the pacemaker. Does she need it? Can she bear it? We should consult a second specialist...I don't have twenty-five thousand in ready money. I will be forced to break a bank deposit, borrow or pay interest to the bank for using my own saving." (The Last Burden 63)

Even after forty years of marriage, they were unable to form a meaningful and solid link, and they have been living their lives in a destructive environment of accusations, backbiting, and

fighting. Shyamanand is such an egotistical person that he expects too much from others but never considers teaching them anything in return. The strongest tie between a husband and wife is formed in old age; they stay in frequent contact with one another and share feelings and understanding. It appears that moral support is so crucial that loneliness in old age is viewed as a misfortune for a husband or wife. However, Shyamanand's situation is neither typical nor representative of new age realism, which holds that a man's existence is restricted to himself. Shyamanand is extremely unfortunate in that he seems to be the family's burden while also failing to instill in the other family members a feeling of true responsibility. All members of the family develop a sort of low self-esteem as a result of his insults and humiliations. Although he is portrayed in the book as a pathetic figure, readers never feel sorry for him. The novel's events seem less made-up, but they seem to accurately capture the harsh realities of the times we live in. The family's early pillars appear to have been consumed by the worms of burden since they are so hollow. Burfi, the eldest son, lived by the maxim "like father, like son." He shared his father's conceit and selfishness.

In an imagined circle that was constructed around him and solely included his wife Joyce and two boys, Pista and Doom, he was leading a well-defined existence. He never makes an attempt to break free from the circle that has been created about him. He views everyone else, with the exception of his wife and children, as an unneeded burden, an impediment, or an undesired duty. He does not even invite his elderly parents to his sons' birthday celebrations, demonstrating how little he cares about them. The author sheds insight on the evolving work culture, the time and energy required by modern offices, and the much-discussed dead line by illustrating the type of family interaction.

The current generation is about to enter a stage where both the mother-in-law and the wife are employed. They are no longer able to handle the daily responsibilities of family life. Burfi appears to

be his wife's toy for the most of the book. He never deviates from his wife's desires. He never lets his wife down. Like his father, he has a strong financial bent. Everything he thinks about and rethinks from a financial perspective. When discussing residence allowances, he displays his meanness. "By staying here Joyce and I lose three thousand rupees every month as Residence Allowance! Baba should repay me that. Staying with them is screwing my marriage up." (The Last Burden 116)

### Conclusion

Upamanyu Chatterjee's ability to depict a figure like Jamun is a testament to his talent and insight. Jamun is a character from a generation that respects their parents to a certain extent but is never prepared to accept any interference with their easygoing way of life. Through "The Last Burden," Chatterjee exposes readers to this troubling socioeconomic reality. By introducing the adherence of tradition as recommended by the Aya, he attempts to close the gap between the ancient and the modern. Overall, the novel's topic is the

portrayal of elderly people living alone, while the younger generation is busy getting ready for old age and experiencing the same type of loneliness due to their avarice, desire, and self-centeredness. One of the best books ever written by an Indian author is "The Last Burden." In terms of language, the word "burden" maintains its impact throughout the novel.

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