

REFLECTION OF FAMILY DISINTEGRATION IN SIDDHARTH GIGOO'S SHORT STORY "THE PILGRIMAGE"

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Abstract:

Siddharth Gigoo is a short story writer. His collection of short story titled "A fistful of Earth and other Short Stories" focuses on many themes related to human existence and its low value in the modern world. He points out how the current generation is running after money giving no importance to human values, long cherished human traditions, shunning the responsibility towards their family. After going through the short stories one comes to know that Indian family structure is at stake. New generation is neglecting their responsibilities towards their parents that is causing many basic issues like lack of communication, feeling of loneliness and isolation, fear for the impending dangers and these issues are affecting the Indian family structure. The present story Pilgrimage points out degradation of basic human values in a family.

Keywords: Human values, lack of communication, Feeling of isolation, and Indian Family Structure.

Critical Summary of the short story:

Charukeswar who is a retired accountant, is the central character in the story. He has two married sons but they are expert at pretending that they care for their father, especially when he roams around jauntily in his house. There is no cordial relation between his two sons and their wives. Their wives give them menacing looks whenever the old man sits down for dinner in the living room, boasting of his glorious past and ridiculing the vagaries of modern lifestyles. The son's smiles approvingly like obedient children at their father's platitudes. Usually in Gigoo's short stories generation gap is highlighted. Here Charukeswar stands for old generation while his two sons represent modern generation.

After retirement Charukeswar has pooled his savings and provident fund to buy the house and a garage at the backyard has come along with the house. His wife has died three years ago of a prolonged illness. The elder son works in a bank and the younger one for an insurance company. Thus the readers are introduced to the Indian middle class family.

Charukeswar is shown as an ideal father in the context of Indian family structure. He invites people to his home to have discussion on various topics. He has tremendous appetite for socializing. He entertains his friends and neighbors at his house and zestfully indulges in heated debates about the affairs of the world and the community. He narrates his anecdotes about his adventurous youth and how he and his wife had sacrificed many comforts to raise their children and give them the best education. He used to be very careful about cleanliness. He regrets for the loss of the beauty of his family garden: 'Doesn't the garden resemble the one we had in our ancestral house at Nagbal?'(P-139)The generation gap and clashes over it are always practically exposed and seen in Indian families. The same thought runs through the writer's short stories and his central characters are seen regretting the loss of the past.

Then the readers are introduced to the common traits of human nature through Charukeswar's family that are generally seen in modern Indian families. When he plays chess, his daughters-in-law are mute spectators waiting for their husbands to return from work to pour out their anxieties. 'We have no freedom here', they complain to their husbands. (P-139). To respond their wives the husbands would say:

*We feel like tenants. This is not our house.
After all, what has he given us? If mother
Was alive, she would have divided the savings
equally between us to buy our own flats. (p-139)*

Thus the two sons are not happy with their father's presence in the house. They would say: 'A room is good for him. He will be happy. What else does he need?' He should go on a pilgrimage'. (P-140) The children's attitude towards their father seems to be like modern Hindu culture. In the 21st century children prefer to send their parents to seek God's blessings at religious sites or they are no longer in a state to bear the physical presence of their parents.

In the earlier days husbands were Gods to their wives but in the present socio-cultural life, the trends seem to be reversed. In the short story, the younger son's wife nags him every morning for his docility and subservience towards his father. One day Charukeswar overhears antagonistic feelings of his children and regrets that he has not been a good father to his sons. One of his friends has-been evicted from his own house by his sons, now he is living as a destitute in an ashram. The sons have taken everything and left their father a meager sum in a savings bank account. Only medicines keep him alive. Thus Charukeswar and his friend represent Indian fathers who are ill-treated by their own sons.

One day he asks his sons and daughters-in-law to assemble in the living room and gives them fifty thousand rupees each as a token of love. He asks them to go on a holiday. His offer surprises them; the wives, too, think about their father-in-law's offer. Two days later, they leave for the holiday. With their departure the father feels nervousness. When his friends and neighbors come by, he feigns illness and tells to go away. The house turns into a garbage ground: The household objects starts gathering dust, the flowers in terracotta vases

wilts, the mirror lose their shine, the utensils in the kitchen accumulates grime, a lizard comes from nowhere. Thus the house becomes passionless having no humans in the house.

One day a man comes to visit Charukeswar. It is not known from where he comes. The man signs some documents and at night they enjoy drinks. Readers don't understand who the visitor is. In Siddharth Gigoo's short stories the readers are left in vague. In the morning he wakes up, dusts the chairs, arranges the household things in a perfect order, takes a bath and offer prayers in the prayer room and lastly sits in a chair in the garden. Charukeswar's sons come back from their holiday. Upon arrival they come to know that their house is occupied by a strange man who welcomes them and offers tea to them. He hands over a letter to them given by their father. One by one, the sons and their wives read the three sentence letter:

Dear children,

Your things are in the garage. I have asked the owner of the house to keep them safe till you return to collect them. I am fulfilling your wishes by going on a pilgrimage.

With unbounded love,

Your father.

The letter raises many questions in the minds of the readers why Charukeswar sells his home without giving any intimation to his children, why he prefers to go on a pilgrimage unexpectedly and what will happen with his sons and his daughters-in-law as they have become homeless. As he experienced until now that his sons and daughters-in-law hate his physical presence in the house which is built by him. He decides to sell the property which he himself earned and he wants his house not to be occupied by his sons who also are not willing to bear him. By selling the house he sends the message to his sons that he doesn't want to leave any property back and make his sons independent to live on their life whatever property they have earned which is kept by him in the garage. In this way the writer just suggests through his short stories that human values and his feelings have no value in the present modern context. The generation gap is being widened in this fast-changing world and it is resulting in the family disintegration.

Reference:

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