



INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS VALUES AND MATERIALISM IN VIVEK SHANBHAG'S NOVEL GHACHAR GHOCHAR: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

With the globalization, developing economies like India are facing increasing materialism. The Indian culture has been influenced by materialistic way of life through western countries. The existence of multiplicity of ethnicity in Indian culture could not avoid the effect of consumerism and the Western way of life has found place in the country. Vivek Shanbhag's Ghachar Ghochar is a tale that employs the material progress of a family to create a haunting story of greed. Shanbhag has a more personal tone while addressing social evils. The novel evaluates the psychological effects of capitalism, the darker and brighter side of the contemporary urban set-up in India. Financial security and independence followed by disintegrated families, broken marriages and dysfunctional relationships are some the issues that the novel shares with us while being meticulous not to reveal too many details. The novel is a powerful indictment of the often negative impact of wealth especially one that is newly acquired and its repercussions in society.

INTRODUCTION

Materialism has been defined as one's devotion to material needs and desires which diverges from spiritual premise. The changing relationship between Indian society and consumption culture in the country the affiliation between the two gets underlined in the study that includes changes in consumption patterns of middleclass, shift from joint to nuclear families, changing role of women in society, changing appeal of consumer goods sector etc. as ingredients of new culture of India. Indian writer Vivek Shanbhag has set his novella called Ghachar Ghochar - a story whose every page is limited means in a small town to traversing the country for a multinational firm allowed Shanbhag deep insight into modern India and the various complications of rapid economic growth.

The novel highlights a story of a Bangalore based family that lives on a meagre salaried income and gradually, with the start of a family business, there is an upsurge of money in the household.¹ The narrator's father is a salesman who supports his wife and two children along with his younger brother, whom the narrator calls Chikkappa. After the father loses his job as salesman, the two brothers start a spice business, which brings in unprecedented money into the household. Desperate, the father gambles his retirement benefits on a scheme his younger brother proposes to start their own spice company Sona Masala. At the

opening of this novel, which jumps around in time, that gamble has paid off and made the family wealthy, but it's also cost them in ways that are hard to quantify. Chikkappa never marries and lives with his brother's family. Suddenly, the Bohemian lifestyle becomes a norm for the family followed by the divorce of narrator's sister and his own troubling marriage with Anita who is a daughter of a teacher. The author is highly critical of the nouveau riche class.

"It is not we who control money; it is the money that controls us. When there is only a little, it behaves meekly; when it grows, it become brash and has its way with us."²

Shanbhag explores human relationships and changing social patterns in today's fast-paced, capitalist society. During the festival time, there is a special dish in the narrator's house called 'Akka rotti'. They had all come together and averted a calamity. The four narrator, his uncle Chikkappa, sister Malti, his appa sat in kitchen in a row on the floor, their plates in front of them, when his amma provide rotti to them they tear it in four and eat a piece each. But in contrary the impact of money had changes a lot now they do not eat together and even Malti who start eating outside, and there would begin a tussle between Malti and Amma. How the materialism affects the bond of family and arise a lot of conflict among family members.

At the heart of the book is a small, middle-class family, huddled together to protect itself against the economic forces which swirl around it. Five of them used to live in one of those teeming lower middle class areas of Bangalore. Small houses, all packed together. The front door from inside and be on the road in four steps.³ In their house had four small rooms, one behind other, like train compartments. We could see right through the house if we kept all the doors open. The first room was just big enough for the wooden bench it contained where his uncle slept. There was hardly any furniture; size of their rooms accommodated very little: a cupboard and a table for the gas-stove in the kitchen; two green foldable metal chairs in the living room; a bench in the front room. There was no question of fitting beds into that house; everything was done on the mats laid out on the floor. Their morning alarm was the sound of Amma sweeping.

"Amma and I went to each house to tell them we were leaving. They all said, 'Don't forget us. Keep visiting.' At the age I was then, this seemed absurd. I had grown up among them - how was it even possible to forget these people? Now I see what they meant."⁴

In contrary the new house was two stories in which everyone has their own personal room. The kitchen had a counter on both sides, so all the cooking would have to be done standing up. There was no scope here for sitting on the floor. Now all the things that they brought with them from old house like cupboard, gas stove table, the bench which Chikkappa used to sleep were useless and sent into the storeroom. Everything they had from the old house is now scattered even the moral values and family bond was also scattered. The story is told through two houses whose very different personalities reflecting the changing status of the family. The transition is rapid, almost sudden, and the unexpected product of the family's first crisis.⁵

"Wealth should not strike suddenly like a visitation, but instead grow gradually like a tree"⁶

This is a novel with a lightness of touch rarely found in our fiction. It is short, and the narrative is suffused with a gentle irony, with an undercurrent of pathos and humour enlivening the events which are presented in a few delicate, deft strokes. The novel strikes the irony of the income, firstly the house ran on Appa's earnings whatever they needed like new clothes and household things but they knew exactly how much they could spare and what cuts would have to be made elsewhere. Narrator's Appa earnings and finances were known to all of the family. The result was that they simply did not desire what they could not afford. They consulted each other when money was to be spent, gave precise accounts. But all that changed overnight. There was enough now to buy things without asking for permission or informing anyone or even thinking about it. Appa's hold on the rest of them slipped. And to be honest, they lost hold of themselves too.

"If we wanted new clothes, we knew exactly how much he could spare and what cuts would have to be made elsewhere. The result was that we simply did not desire what we couldn't afford. When you have no choice, you have no discontent either."⁷

The newly wealth spoiled the marital life of Malti because she had a deep effect of money on her mind. She expected the same life which she lived before her marriage. She had got used to having whatever she wanted and this diminished her capacity for the inevitable compromises that accompany marriage. The only wealth had spoiled her class values and respect for the people which brought her in a broken relationship. Here the novel shows what is going on in Indian middle class how they are suffering from broken relationships. The relationship bonds are becoming weaker day by day; this is not only Malti's case but it is a serious issue. The satirical conversation shows the real impact of materialism on Indian middle class.

"you can't buy graciousness. It's something that's handed down the generations. They say the newly rich carry umbrellas to keep moonlight at bay..."⁸

In the first of the houses, swarms of ants periodically appear and infest the house. The protagonist's mother uses all kinds of traditional methods to drive them away but they prove ineffectual. In the second house, with greater economic security, it is the women who cause anxiety. Ghachar Ghochar is a sensitive analysis of how our middle class existence is defined by a single shruti: anxiety. Almost every incident in the life of this class is prompted by anxiety, shaped by it and ultimately ends up contributing to more of it. Characteristically, the family members, despite perennially clinging to one another, never make any attempt to discuss the source of the anxiety or ways of tackling the problem. To the narrator life seemed to be richer emotionally, back in the old days, when, as he says,

"The whole family stuck together, walking like a single body across the tightrope of our circumstances."⁹

Shanbagh's preoccupation with arranged marriages and idealism is crucial and relevant in the case of many Indian families, while we see that in India, compatibility on the basis of caste, religion, status etc. is over-rated; the discrepancies of occupations and personal values often takes a back seat. This is evident

in the marriage of our narrator who lacks discipline in his routine while his wife is a strict disciplinarian. He realizes their differences of values and addresses this:

“There is a vast difference in the moral underpinnings of a business family and the household of a salaried teacher. I feared right then that her presence at home would be the cause of much turmoil. The biggest disappointment for Anita was the matter of my unemployment. She asked me in Ooty itself: How much leave do you have?”¹⁰

The author is highly critical of the newly rich class. The narrator, for instance, does not have to work for the money he gets regularly in his account. This non-working, non- aristocratic and newly moneyed class finds itself at the fringes of society. Economic prosperity means that new needs and new norms enter the home. The protagonist’s wife, who is educated and dares to question many major issues of the novella like the income source of protagonist and cruelty with which the stranger was treated, does not mind that such questioning loosens the very foundations of family existence.

CONCLUSION

Vivek Shanbhag has a more personal tone while addressing social evils. He is a writer with penchant for literature and contemporary issues in India have acclaimed great success after the English translation of his novella Ghachar Ghochar (2015). The book is a powerful indictment of the often negative impact of wealth especially one that is newly acquired and its repercussions in society. This study shows the contemporary post liberalization society in India that faces various social challenges. It represents the relationships, vulnerable social institutions and displaced individuals. The only fiction can effectively capture the complexity of change this country has gone through in recent decades. Ghachar Ghochar is a knot that engenders suspense and a kind of uncertainty in our lives in the wake of modern advancements.

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