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Interplay of Economy and Human Relationships in Gurcharan Das's *9 Jakhoo Hill*

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Abstract:

9 Jakhoo Hill is the last play written by well known contemporary and prolific writer, Gurcharan Das. This play is different from his two earlier plays, i.e. *Larins Saheb* and *Mira* in that it is set in the contemporary time or period. *9 Jakhoo Hill* (1996) betrays the socio-economic and socio-political conditions of Indian society. About the play, Gurcharan Das himself says: "After writing two plays based on historic personages, I thought that I would turn to contemporary concerns. Hence my next play is set in recent times." (Das, 16) It is, perhaps, its setting in modern time what makes the play, *9 Jakhoo Hill*, the most responsive and fascinated among the audience as well as the reader. Being a play, written on contemporary concerns, as Gurcharan Das made it clear in the "Introduction", all celebrated modern issues, for example, gender related issues, sexual norms, institution of family, issues of conventional morality etc. have been betrayed in detail in the play and constitute the famous themes in the play.

Keywords: Economy, Human relationships, morality, ethic, 9 Jakhoo Hill, Theme.

Interplay of economy and human relationships in Gurcharan Das's *9 Jakhoo Hill* constitutes the main theme presented through the story of two migrated families of Lahore after the partition. Here Gurcharan Das tries to explain how economy reflects in human relationships and thus constitutes the prominent theme in *9 Jakhoo Hill*. The great economic and political questions of the time, the play set in, was to eliminate poverty through economic reforms and social changes. As happened in the European countries after the Industrial Revolution, so is experienced in the post independent India in terms of socio-economic changes. As the consequences of the economic reforms, introduced by India in 1960s -70s, there was the rise of new middle class in Indian society. The rise of middle class, which is famous for its materialistic and money minded approach to life, brought drastic changes the socio-economic set of Indian society and in turn, also affected the human relationships. In this regards, Gurcharan Das has a point when he asserts: "The most striking feature of contemporary India, is the rise of a confident new middle class, which is full of energy and drive and is making things happen." (17) The noticeable effect of economic changes on human relationships is that the relations, that are traditionally used to be based on emotions and feelings, start disintegrating after they came under the influence of materialism. Now what constitutes the relationships is not love and affection but money and what makes the thing

happen in the modern world is all money. People have become selfish in their relationships. Emotions and human bonds are missing in the human relationships.

In the play, the family of Deepak and his mother Chitra represents the rising new middle class, that is much affected by economic changes and modern materialism. Gurcharan Das presents Chitra as money monger who warns his son, Deepak, not to marry Ansuya, only because the family of Ansuya is no longer as rich as it once used to be:

Chitra: Stop it Ma? All these years I've been teaching you: don't marry beauty: don't marry for love; marry a rich girl.

Deepak: Yes, Ma, I heard you.... Marry money: But, on the train up here, you said yourself that you wanted me to think of marrying Ansuya.

Chitra: That was before I found out that they had become poor.
(191)

This dialogue between Deepak and Chitra is the conspicuous example of how modern man becomes so mad after money and status that he no longer gives weight to human feelings of love and passion. Chitra does not seem to care for the feelings of her-son, Deepak, who urges her that he loves Ansuya and wants to marry her. On the contrary, she compels him and make him agree to marry a girl whom Deepak never met. Thus, Chitra is not only the Chitra of *9 Jakhoo Hill*, rather there are so many Chitra in society who makes the whole humanity looks down through their inhuman activities fueled by the greed for money and status. Ladies like Chitra auction their sons in the name of their marriage for the dowry:

Chitra: All right, I will tell you Deepak, Rai Sahebhas a niece. I think she is just the right match for you!

Deepak: Who?

Chitra: Rai Saheb's niece! Look Deepak you won't find another match like her. Beta,beta, thande dimag se soch. My guess is the dowry is not going to be under two lakhs. And may be they will also give a car, a fridge and an air conditioner. Uff! Main to khushi se paagal ho rahi hoon! (192)

Also, the most pious relationship of mother and son has negatively been influenced by economic factors like money, business, status etc. In the process of making their son successful in material terms, parents try to hold on their sons and consequently make them even the victims of their imposed wishes. Most of them interfere in their son's personal decision makings in the fields like marriage, love, jobs etc. In the play, Deepak is the victim of mother fixation who sometimes feels a kind of suffocation in the ubiquitous presence of his mother. And reason behind this is simple, in the modern age of materialism, where money and status dominate the human life, parents usually want their son to be on the top in every field. In the process of making their sons all rounder in life, they forget to fulfil their emotional demands. It further results in the disintegration of the human relationships. Chitra, no doubt, succeeds in making his son a man of status and a perfect businessman, but ironically, she fails to give him the real

motherly love. It is the love and affection and not money and status in the human relationships that provide it the strong base:

Deepak: *Ma, don't you care about what I want? Don't you care about my happiness?*

Chitra: *Oh beta, I care only about your happiness. I always have-
Jab tu itna so tha, to din raat ek karke tujhe padhaya-likhaya-
khud bhooki rah kar tera pet bhara. Thuhe is layak banaya
jahan to aaj khada hai.*

Deepak: And this happiness?(191)

The question asked by Deepak to his mother i.e. 'And this is happiness?' explains how the materialistic thinking of modern man affects human relationships. This question by Deepak to his mother, is also to all those parents who want to see their sons successful on the cost of their son's personal happiness.

The comparative study of the two families of Chitra and Deepak and of Ansuya and Amrita, shows that the poor economic conditions of Amrita and Ansuya bring the members of their family more closer to each other. They support each other in the time of economic crisis. Though economic factors more or less, affected them also, they do not let themselves go down as happens in the case of Chitra. In the play, Amrita and Ansuya are emotionally attached to each other and also support each other in their economic crisis:

Ansuya: What difference does it make, Amma, what she thinks?
We have to learn to live without our mills and our lands. (159)

Moreover, towards the end of the play Ansuya wants to calm down her mother:

Ansuya: I've been thinking Amma. All day, I've been thinking.
I'm going to be strong. I'm going to look after you. This
house will never be sold. (196)

For the family of Ansuya, the economic crisis plays a special type of positive role. Economic crisis compel the family of Ansuya to give up their passiveness. Now after some economic jolts, they realize that if they want to survive, they will certainly have to be economically active.

No doubt, the negative aspects of economic reforms and rise of new middle class constitute the prominent theme in the play. But the positive Impacts of economy and business approach of the rising new middle class also is among the main themes in the play, *9 Jakhoo Hill*. Being a management guru, Gurcharan Das, in his play, *9 Jakhoo Hill*, seems to take the side of Deepak and his market and business oriented thinking. Though implicitly, he tries to glorify the achievements of the economic reforms by presenting Deepak as a successful professional. This glorification of the economic reforms and its positive impacts on the Indian society of the 1960s-70s forms the another important theme in

9 Jakhoo Hill. Describing about the opportunities for an educated man in India after the initial economic reforms, Gurcharan Das says:

After college we were ready to join the IAS or industry or the professions all the pleasant niches for which the older Indian bourgeoisie gloomed it's young. With secured jobs in our pockets, we were married off to good middle or upper middle class girl.³

To show the positive aspects of economic reforms on the life of people, Gurcharan Das has created the character of Deepak in the play, *9 Jakhoo Hill*. Now and then, Gurcharan Das seems to portray Deepak as the representative of the youth of modern India who are aware of all those opportunities in career and life which are provided and created by the economic reforms. Unlike the old middle class these people are much conscious about their career and are much more practical. They do hard work to attain what they want to attain in life. The following statement of Deepak shows how confident the youngsters are about the new opportunities in life:

Deepak: Sir I am proud of what I do and the company I work for... I believe we care more about our people than any academics do for their students. (167).

Thus, through Deepak, Gurcharan Das has tried to explain that the new economic and business approach of Indian youths is doing greater job for the Indian society. Now people like Deepak have many options to go in their career. According to Gurcharan Das, new economic conditions have opened the plethora of opportunities for the people. The most striking thing about the modern economy is that it infuses new guts and courage in youth and makes them go getters in life. They believe in always deriving something positive out of all negatives with the help of their technical skill, for example, Deepak has a plan for *9 Jakhoo Hill*, the house of Ansuya's family, to convert it into hotel so that they can make best use of it in their critical financial conditions. Deepak infuses a kind of enthusiasm in Ansuya by suggesting her:

Deepak :You can work. You could start by converting this house into a hotel ... I can see it 'Jakhoo Hotel'. (174).

Ansuya takes Deepak as her role model because of his activeness and positive approach in life. Ansuya accepts:-

Ansuya : Deepak you know, you remind me of my father. You smile like him. You have his same sense of life... and hope.

The clever thing Gurcharan Das has done in his play is that in glorifying the positives of new economic approach, he never forgets to highlight the problems of red tapism and bribes in the economic and administrative system of India. He highlights the drawbacks in government's economic policies. In *9 Jakhoo Hill*, he shows how difficult it is for a company to attain a license. With this he also exposes the reality of bureaucrats like Rai Saheb, who does not

hesitate even in making the necessities of others the opportunities for themselves for their personal benefits. Thus, we see the playwright attacks the red tapism in the economic policies of the Indian government and exposes the Indian officialdom where officer like Rai Saheb exploits the people sexually as well as economically, as Karan accuses Rai Saheb:

Manu: Will you (*Rai Saheb*) take a bribe in awarding the license to Deepak's company. (180)

These fundamental questions regarding bribe, red tapism, sexual exploitation, opportunism etc. which Gurcharan Das has focused on in his play 9 Jakhoo Hill, still have the social and the politico-economic relevance.

Changing social order and declining in social and moral values is the other prominent theme that makes the play more relevant in 21st century 9 Jakhoo Hill is nothing if it is not about changing social orders in Indian society with the rise of new middle class in the time period of the post independent India. Through the comparative study of the attitudes of the old middle class and the new middle class, Gurcharan Das has succeeded in exploring the social changes in Indian society. As Gurcharan Das, himself, says: "On one level 9 Jakhoo Hill is about the changing order the old middle class and giving way to the new."⁴ In the play, Ansuya and her family belongs to the old middle class and Deepak and Chitra's family to the new middle class. To make the picture more clear, Gurcharan Das brings these representative of the two different classes together and provide the reader or the audience an opportunity to make their assessments about the ideological differences between them. The ideology of the old middle class is based on the characteristics of being a unique class with full opportunities in education and career. Though the people of this class present the ideal view of Indian society who take interest in Indian history and its traditional values, Gurcharan Das criticizes them for their idleness and passiveness in life and all the above for their being an ambivalent class that has no real identity as nether they are fully Indian nor they are fully western. They are a bore and passive class and always cling foolishly to spent dreams:

Ansuya : Besides, Amma will be desperately trying to recapture her past. (145)

Moreover, Ansu feels bore because of the passive approach of old middle class to life:

Ansuya: Mamu, I want to go away. Away from this drab life. All we ever do is talk and talk. I want to do something. (146)

Now where the new class is emerging the old one is fading and giving the way to new one. This shift brings a change in social order. The class that has been so far rich and prosperous is now poor and hapless because of its inactiveness. Whereas the new middle class, represented in the play by Deepak and Chitra, is street smart. It is the class which believes in action. It is a confident new middle class which is full of energy and enthusiasm and making things happen. But Gurcharan Das criticizes this new middle class also for its amoral

way of life. As depicted in the play, *9 Jakhoo Hill*, to get a license for her son's company, Deepak's mother, Chitra even agrees to have an immoral and an extramarital sexual relation with Rai Saheb, an ICS officer:

Chitra: (*Her eyes light up*) Son it is done. Your future is *pucca* and your license *meri muthi men hai*....
Haan, Rai Saheb *ke saath gai zaroor thi*, But not the club. To his house *ek ghanta unke sath bita kar aa rahi hoon!* *Samjhe*.
 (193)

According to Gurcharan Das the wrong with the rising new middle class is that they so much are after money that materialism has become heavy on their minds. Under the influence of the materialism, they even forget the role of emotions and feelings in human relationships. They have become selfish in their relations also. They value all the things with money. For their profit, they can easily cross the moral boundaries established by the traditional values, as Gurcharan Das himself accepts in the "Introduction":

We may feel regret at the eclipse of the old bourgeoisie, especially because it possessed the unique characteristic of being a class based on free entry and capability. We may feel equally uneasy that a new class based on money is replacing it.⁵

This change in social order also brings some fundamental problems for the society with it. As consequently, after the change in social order, the decline in social and moral values became evident. The new middle class have nothing to do with moral and social values as it is clear in the evidence of behaviour of Chitra and Rai Saheb. The way they behave or the way they speak, there is a fall in the moral and social values. There is a devaluation of social manner in the way, Deepak speaks in English: "(*What the hell, yaar; Give him ten chips, yaar*)" (155). It seems that the character of Rai Saheb has been included in the play only to show how much we have declined in our moral and social values. Being an ICS officer, everyone expects Rai Saheb to behave elegantly and professionally, but what he does is exactly the opposite. The subject matter of his talks is always petty and of lower standard. He does not know even how people like him should behave in the presence of the people of the young generation:

Rai Saheb: ... I say, do you know that the Khana's ayah is pregnant?
 Ansuya: (*Fascinated*) What? Who is the father?
 Rai Saheb: (*smiling*) Naughty, naughty when I mentioned it to Colonel Khana this evening, he of courses went red. (150)

Thus we can say that Gurcharan Das's *9 Jakhoo Hill* is famous for its main theme of the interplay of economy and human relationships. It is for this particular theme that this play is still relevant in this age of 21st century because now a days it is economy which is playing most important role in deciding the nature of human relationships not only in India but also in all over the world.

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