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Review of *Shuggie Bain*: The 2020 Booker Prize Novel

Title: Shuggie Bain (Paperback)

Author: Douglas Stuart

Publisher: Picador

Year: 2020

Pages: 430

Language: English

ISBN: 978-1-5290-6441-4

Price: Rs. 499

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"Flames are not just the end, they are also the beginning. For everything that you have destroyed can be rebuilt. From your own ashes you can grow again." (Douglas Stuart)

A debut novel by the Scottish American writer Douglas Stuart, *Shuggie Bain* creates an amazing portrayal of intimacy, courage and love. It describes the wrenching story of a young boy who experiences humiliation from society as well as struggles in living a life

along with his alcoholic mother Agnes. His mother's alcoholism and his mystifying sexuality contribute to it to be a heartbreaking work of addiction, sexuality and love.

The novel is set in Glasgow in the 1980s in a post-industrial working-class society. It tells the story of the protagonist Shuggie Bain, the youngest of the three children, who leads a depressing life with his mother Agnes. But his love for his mother never ceases. Even though she makes trouble and does not behave as a mother should, Shuggie understands and looks after her till she dies.

Shuggie Bain is a Bildungsroman, a coming-of-age story, describing the life of Shuggie from childhood to his old age. It begins with a fifteen-year-old Shuggie who is living in a boarding house in Glasgow. He wishes to be a hairdresser while working shifts at a supermarket deli. The novel takes us to the flashbacks of Shuggie's life after the description of his present time. Then we see Shuggie as a five-year-old living in a tenement flat.

The main cause of his mother's alcoholism is his father. His mother, Agnes, had two children with her first husband. He later abandons the family which drives her reliance on alcohol. He also misses his school by being a caregiver of his mother during her hangovers. He is often bullied at school and in the neighbourhood for being effeminate. Still, Shuggie takes care of her amidst all the troubles and difficulties. Then she is encouraged to attend Alcoholic Anonymous meetings and manages to stay off from drinking for a year. It is then she meets Eugene, a cab driver who makes her drink again. Put off by alcoholism, Eugene leaves her. Thus, a family's battle for alcoholism, taboos of sexuality and constraints of domesticity begins.

Douglas Stuart established his mastery over writing through his first novel *Shuggie Bain*. He chooses his birthplace, Glasgow, as the setting of the novel. It vividly inhabits the city's atmosphere, its dialect and vocabulary, a tale of dependency and ruined dignity. Stuart takes us through the rough streets of Glasgow in the 1980s that is affected by economic hardship. The author evokes societal suppression and points out the life of such a family which has been ruined by alcoholism.

The main theme of the novel is love. The love of Shuggie towards his mother is something that captures the heart of the readers. Despite her being excessively drunk, Shuggie remains loyal to her by being her caregiver until her death. Moreover, he even sacrifices his education and is bullied at school for caring for his mother. Abandonment is another major theme where Agnes is abandoned by her husband. He is always busy at work and has other affairs.

Alcoholism is the major reason for the family to split apart. Agnes, Shuggie's mother, is always depressed and unhappy. She does not do the duty of a mother and spends her time drinking. She hopes for more wealth and glamour in life but eventually, she dies from alcoholism in the novel.

Being inspired by his own life, Stuart exposes the brutality of those times horrifyingly- though it is sometimes funny. *Shuggie Bain* was awarded the 2020 Booker Prize and the novel was also a finalist for the 2020 National Book Award for Fiction. The book is an interesting addition to the passionate readers who want to explore post-industrial repercussions. The language is easy to understand. The price is affordable. Stuart makes his first impression through his debut novel *Shuggie Bain* capturing the hearts of many passionate avid readers.