



The Values of Modern Middle Class: A Study of Gurcharan Das's *9 Jakhoo Hill*

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Middle class has a phenomenal rise. Along with other academic disciplines – sociology, economic, political science, anthropology – literature has summarized the values which are concerned with the middle class. A shift has taken place from old aristocrats and upper middle class to new modern Indian middle class. This newly empowered class is, for the first time, showing signs of inspiration out of its social burrow. “Traditionally, the members of the middle class have shown little enthusiasm for any cause beyond their immediate ken of interests. They have largely lived at the level of individual fulfillment of needs, and kept away from larger public issues or community matters” (Varma15).

The new middle class, although in many ways qualitatively different is, essentially, a product of a larger continuum and it is essential to study its evolutionary profile in order to understand its likely behavior today. The essential elements of this moral high ground were the belief in an ethical public life, self denying leaders, disdain for material wealth, the noble pursuit of education, and a conscious shunning of the ostentatious life. The absence of strong moral imperative for social altruism resulted, under the care of unethical leaders and opportunistic politics, in a depressingly bloated unconcern for society itself. The end product was the acceptance of a certain kind of lifestyle – insular, aggressive, selfish, obsessed with material gain, and socially callous. Literature has its own reaction to this experience. The post colonial Indian middle class has transformed itself rapidly. Its main task was the defense of its own economic interests. This transformation reflected in Gurcharan Das's play *9 Jakhoo Hill*. Gurcharan Das a graduate in philosophy from prestigious Harvard University America, former CEO of Procter and Gamble, is a dramatist and a non fiction writer. He has written three English plays namely *Larins Sahib*, *Mira* and *9 Jakhoo Hill* and a novel *A Fine Family* (1990). His *9 Jakhoo Hill* presents that modern Indian middle class stands on the verge of a social revolution where an old order dissolve to a new order where everything is justified from materialistic perspective, where moral and social values have no importance.

The present paper is an attempt to define the values of the modern middle class in India as described in the play *9 Jakhoo Hill*. His play *9 Jakhoo Hill* betrays his sense of regret over declining moral and social values in our Indian society. With the passage of time materialism and the craving for a luxurious life has made people more self-centered, thereby creating a void in human relationships. In an Introduction to the collective edition of his three plays, Das makes clear:

The most striking feature of contemporary India is the rise of a confident middle class, which is full of energy and drive and is making things happen. That it goes about it in an uninhibited and amoral fashion is also true. ... The new class is street smart; it has had to fight to rise from the bottom and it has learnt to manure the system. It is easy to despair over its vulgarity, its new rich mentality and its lack of education. But weather India can deliver the goods depends a great deal on it. (Das 24)

When India got independence, the natives could not attain the happiness fully as next they had to retain harder because of the partition the people living in India had got their first Prime Minister Mr. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the dreamer. He had dreamt of making India modern without caring of the fact that she had not come out of the old rooted problems and tedious survival in the past. Indo-China was took place in 1962 and due to Nehru's mismanagement China invaded India. This dispersing was come with turbulence in the mindset of the people and a loss of faith on Nehru. Along with these political settings there was also a change in the social order for example old aristocratic family lost their residence and prestige and remained as mere nostalgic traditional parts of the society on the opposite side the low middle class rose higher and in a systematic manners continuously upgrade itself as a high or modern class. This transformation reflected in Gurcharan Das's *9 Jakhoo Hill*, the play set around 1962, during the time of Sino-Indian war. This play was first staged in 1966 by Yatrik Group and until then it remained unnoticed.

In *9 Jakhoo Hill*, there are two families which had shifted from Lahore to India during partition. The first represents the old middle class family which has a mother Chitra and her meek son Deepak. They settled in Bombay where Deepak works as a successful executive. Her husband is also living with them but has no importance because family has the domination of Chitra. On the other side the other family represents the old aristocratic family which has a character Amrita and her only daughter Ansuya. During the time of partition, Amrita's husband died and then she went to her father in Delhi with Ansuya. Unfortunately her father's house along with his three mills was sold off and such after such loss he died. Then they moved to Simla to *9 Jakhoo Hill*, only resident left. When they shifted to Simla house, Amrita's brother Karanchand had also come with them.



In this play, Gurcharan Das delineates the decline of socio moral values of the Indian middle class. Through this play he depicts the corrosive on the middle class reflected through the character of Amrita when she asked about her new sari:

Amrita: How do you like my new sari?
(And she turns around to show it to everyone).
Mamu: It's beautiful!
Ansuya: It should be. It is the most expensive sari in Simla.
Amrita: And how do you know?
Ansuya: Because Leela Ram's man delivered it this afternoon.
Amrita: And you saw the price?
Ansuya: Someone has to think of money, Amma.
Amrita: (Animatedly) the colonel complimented me on it, and Mrs. Dewan kept looking at it the whole evening. (Das 159)

Amrita's love for expensive things shows the corrosive influence of materialism on the middle class that how despite their financial problem they retain their love for luxurious life. Materialism and the craving for luxurious life have made people more self-centered there by creating a void in human relationship. Now they no longer care for anyone else whatsoever the person may be. The growing competition has eroded the ethical and moral insight differentiates man from a beast. In the mad pursuit of money, the Indian middle class can go to any extent as for instance Deepak's mother Chitra made illegal relationship with Rai Sahib (Mr. P.N. Rai) ICS, secretary to me Government of India for the promotion of her son. She said to her son, Deepak, do you know what I have done for you today? Then:

Deepak: What?
Chitra : Main abhi kaha se aa rahi hoon, tujhe pata hai?
Deepak: Yes, yes, I know. You went to the club with Rai Sahab.
Chitra: Haan Rai Sahab ke saath gai zaroor thi. But not to the club. To his house. Ek ghanta unke saath bita kar aa rahi hoon! Samjhe?
Deepak: What? You mean ...? (The relationship of what she has done dawns on him.) (Das 201).

Sudeep Kumar in his article "Value-Concerns and Contemporary Indian Drama: A Study of Gurcharan Das's 9 Jakhoo Hill" also affirms that Gurcharan Das focuses on the degradation in moral ethics of new Indian middle class through Deepak and Chitra. The latter one is portrayed as an epitome of money mongers. To get a license for her son, she does not have any inhibition of flout the sanctity of her own material-bond and even sacrifices her own son's love for Ansuya.

There is no emotional bondage are remained in modern Indian middle class. Deepak and Ansuya were in deep love with each other. Even they reflected the young generation of modern Indian middle class who has sexual relationship before marriage. This aspect of declining of the moral values is reflected in the play:

Deepak: (Holding her in his arms.) It's going to come true.
Ansuya: You mean it!
Deepak: Come here.
(They Kiss)
Ansuya: I still can't believe it.
(They kiss again.) (Das 182-183)

They wanted to marry with each other. Ansuya belonged to old aristocratic family but now her family is no longer rich. Deepak's mother Chitra wants Deepak to marry with a rich girl for the dowry. So she rejected Ansuya. Deepak also rejected Ansuya because of his mother. He is a mumma's boy. There is a loss of faith, love and emotions in modern middle class which is clearly depicted in the play.

The most shocking aspect of the play is dissipated relationship. For example Ansuya, do not call me 'Mamu', you can call me by my name, call me Karan. One day in this play he says, "I like holding your hand, Ansu. It feels so warm. (He kisses her hand). Ansuya, there's something I've been wanting to tell you..." (Das 156).

It is true that Mamu stood by Ansuya's family in worst times and went to extent that he left his job as university professor to take the charge of their drowning mills. Ansuya and Mamu are emotionally very close to each other, but whatever, incest is incest.

In the drama *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov has a similar aspect of the degraded moral values of the middle class that can also be traced in Gurcharan Das's 9 Jakhoo Hill. The drama takes up the issue of the auction of the cherry orchard that is an asset of Ranevskaya family. As in the play 9 Jakhoo Hill the ancestral house remains the focal point of the play in the same way the cherry orchard remains the focus of the play *The Cherry Orchard*. In both the plays, the focus of the plot, that is, the ancestral assets are at stake that are to be sold in order to improve the economic condition of the families. In 9 Jakhoo Hill the ancestral house of Amrita's family becomes the centre of the play and faces the same predicament as the orchard in *The Cherry Orchard*:



The Orchard is the focal piece in the play, hence the name 'Cherry Orchard'. The Orchard is to be sold in a month after Madam Ranevskaya's arrival. Lopakhin believes that the only way the Orchard estate can be saved is by chopping down the Cherry trees and breaking up the properties, which he intends to if he buys the Orchard. ("Cherry Orchard")

Old aristocratic Indian middle class always remain evocative about its rich ancestral past where they lived a luxuriant life during their fortunate period. Memory plays a significant role for Indian middle class as in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, Ranevskays is haunted by the memories attached to the orchard because it is the place where her son died which saddens her most, as well as it is the place where she spent her childhood days. She recalls the childhood days of innocence that she spent in the lap of the orchard. Similarly in Gurcharan Das's *9 Jakhoo Hill* Amrita too recalls her luxuriant life spent with her husband before the time of partition.

Amrita: (Pointing to the drapes.) See those drapes, Ansu? Your father brought them from England and they were the talk of the town that season. On the parties we used to have, Ansu. The servants were forever polishing the silver. Why the whole of Nehru's first cabinet must have dined here some time or another.

Ansuya: Its over Amma this house is as good as gone.

Amrita: No! (Covering her ears with her hands.)

I don't want to hear about it.

Ansuya: But Amma you can't keep running away

Amrita: (In tears.) Don't say it! (Das 160)

Above all Indian middle class as Ranevskays in *The Cherry Orchard* and Amrita in *9 Jakhoo Hill* are emotionally attached to their respective ancestral assets as both feel emotionally shattered at the thought that they have to part with them. For Amrita her ancestor house is not just a building where she used to live instead that house became a home for her. This class of aristocratic people fails to realize that their time is gone.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the play portrays the degraded social values of new aristocratic middle class and their changed mindset in the port independence India. This emerging class believed in the futility of relationships and also prefers 'the use and throw policy'. As Deepak maintains incestuous relationship with Ansuya and later rejects her without caring of her emotions. And Chitra also makes use of an abusive language for Ansuya and blames her totally without saying a word to her son, Deepak. Hence, *9 Jakhoo Hill* realistically represents declined social and moral values of the rising middle class that is always in search of taking ample advantage of everyone for their selfish interest.

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