

Loud Silence, Left Unheard: Understanding Egoistic Suicide of Amar in Anees Salim's *The Blind Lady's Descendants*

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Abstract: Anees Salim's *The Blind Lady's Descendants* is a poignant fictional tale that weaves many contemporary themes through the narrative of a twenty-six-year-old narrator Amar. One of the many intriguing subjects is the unhealthy relationship between parents that create a huge void in the hearts and lives of their children. The author who subtly introduces characters and pictures their relationships, portrays the mismatched couple in impressive ways. The scope of this paper is to showcase how Amar's parents were more like individuals than as a couple and how this attitude has impacted Amar personally and socially. However, this paper is limited to major focus on Amar among other children of the couple. It is Amar who chooses not to live anymore and this paper attempts to cull out the reason behind it, with Durkheim's theory of suicide working in the background. Through a study of Amar's behaviour, it is clear that his case falls under what Durkheim calls as egoistic suicide, which is a result of deteriorated social and familial relationships. This paper has aimed to put into limelight how the inefficiency in parenting can also be the grave cause of unpleasant consequences, and not the only one.

Key Words: blindness, communication, influence, marriage, suicide.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Amar, who is the fourth and youngest child of Hamsa and Asma, is the narrator who pictures his life at different phases, thus segregating each phase as a part in the book. If the titles are considered, then the most intriguing part is the fifth and final one titled as the *Beginning*. This gives rise to interesting questions like how beginning is at the end? Is the beginning the end? Is the end the beginning? etc. Only when one realises Amar's statement that the book is in fact a "farewell note" (Salim 2) does the title of the fifth part trigger curiosity. Adding to this is the irony in Amar's name itself. A boy whose name means 'live long' has made up his mind to end it abruptly. In that case, the title of the last part seems ambiguous and meaningless. However, no word uttered by Amar in this chronicle is without meaning. It is because even the very first paragraph dumps a load of information.

2. PARTS OF BOOK AS PHASES OF AMAR'S LIFE:

A reader might be misled into thinking that the book depicts Amar's life as any other individual's life, for the titles are sequenced so. However, the titles correspond to others more than to Amar himself. In *Birth*, one is introduced to the major characters, thus justifying the title as the birth of all characters in the story. In *Wedding*, a scrutiny of the concept of marriage is done through the weddings of his sister Jasira and his mother Asma. Though *Love* brings about Amar's romantic fantasies, it never blossoms into a reciprocal relationship, thus leading to its demise. Nevertheless, *Heartbreaks* display not the plight of Amar, but that of other characters. This crucial part in the book pertains not to the heartbreaks caused by romantic desires, but to the cracks in the familial relationships. Finally, *Beginning* as the final part does not culminate but only remains incomplete, for Amar's life has been filled with "many questions, no answers" (Salim 211) by then.

3. THE SYMBOLIC BUNGALOW AND ITS INMATES:

In the book that involves a rearranged landscape from the author's hometown in Kerala, Amar is the narrator of what he calls "a farewell note of indefinite length" (Salim 2). He perceives himself to be the unluckiest, youngest child of the couple Hamsa and Asma. Referring to them as a mismatched couple who should never have crossed paths, he introduces his siblings Jasira, Akmal and Sophiya. The four siblings were the children of the big house called Bungalow, which Amar identifies as "a house of undefined unhappiness" (Salim 14). The permanency of unpleasantness is indicated in these heart-rending words of Amar. In a way, the Bungalow stands as a symbol of their lives, wherein the deterioration

of the physical building is juxtaposed with the declining faith of Amar in religion. The image of a dilapidated Bungalow is brought in when Amar confesses to his family, except his father, of his decision to become an atheist. It indicates a collapse of the traditions of the family.

The Bungalow is in apparently similar to its inmates and their feelings towards each other. The *blind lady* in the title refers to Amar's Grandma who is literally blind. Yet, she is also figuratively blind towards other things in her family. This blindness is often taken as an advantage by others. This is apparent during incidents when Jasira and her husband move intimately in Grandma's room, when Asma does not respond to her mother's call to escape a chat even when present in the same room and when Asma pretends to read a self-written letter as one received from Kasim, her brother. Additionally, Grandma is also blind towards the plot of Asma to sell the house. Asma's mother, the blind Grandma of the story, is not on good terms with Hamsa. She always talks ill of him and is particularly unhappy with her daughter's married life. She is agonised to see her daughter live in poverty. Once when Amar informed her that his mother's eyes water while looking at the television, Grandma frankly commented that her eyes started to water the day she married her off. Such is her attitude towards her daughter's marriage with Hamsa. Throughout her life, she had only been a "disgruntled wife" (Salim 146). Moreover, the blindness – that is attributed to the Grandma – is also a reference to the people around Amar who are blind to his sufferings and inklings about suicide. They are ignorant enough to see it coming.

Amar is the youngest of the family after a series of miscarriages of his mother who had by then become a "veteran of childbirth" (Salim 85). He is not particularly happy about being the youngest, since he does not enjoy any privileges of being so. The astute Jasira is never on good terms with Amar while the devout Akmal maintains a good distance from Amar. As Jasira perfectly knew how to confiscate the freedom and privileges, it contributed to Amar's growing hatred towards her. However, Sophiya is the only soul that pays heed to him and in whose company, he finds solace. Nevertheless, this company is short-lived as she drowns while on a school excursion. With that, Amar becomes a standing example of a quotation given by Michael Josephson that says: "I am not alone because loneliness is always with me." Thus, it is apparent that neither the Bungalow is in a good state nor are its inmates with good bonding.

4. RIPPLE OF PARENTS' INFLUENCE:

Through the eyes of Amar, his parents Hamsa and Asma remain as a couple "who should never have met, and least of all, married" (Salim 2). Introducing his parents as a couple who should never have become a couple in the first place brings the theme of unhealthy familial relationships in the limelight. Such prevailing relationships might not be uncommon, as the character of Nietzsche in the film *When Nietzsche Wept*, had said: "Nobody has a perfect childhood." But Amar's view on his parents is reflected in every phase of his life. Analysing the ripple in a child's life caused by parents is pertinent since parents are mostly a fixed presence in one's life. The concept of marriage is finely drawn throughout the narrative. It is apparent that the influence of Hamsa and Asma as 'parents' is felt greatly on their children. As for Amar, this influence is not the *only* driving force to choose the fatal path he took. However, one cannot deny that it is *also* a factor – a crucial factor.

The influence of parents is felt on the child even before they meet. The connection is believed to sprout from early pregnancy. It is often misconceived that the growth of a child commences only after its birth. However, it is a continuous process starting from its phase as a foetus. When Asma was pregnant with Amar, she was always anxious and alone. On one hand, her husband was mostly away from home due to a business trip. On the other hand, her brother Javi who was to assume Hamsa's role while the latter is away was out of his mind and had already posed threat to the toddlers of the Bungalow. So, Asma had a strained and uneasy pregnancy.

In one study by Curt A. Sandman on the impact of psychology of pregnant mothers on developing foetuses, it is revealed that pregnant mothers who have anxious and depressing pregnancies are likely to give birth to children with neurological or psychiatric disorders in the long run. There is a special mention of Asma's pregnancy with Amar as the one which she expected to be the "most agonizing experience" (Salim 85). She anticipated that that foetus would undergo such endless torments. As expected, Amar suffers in his life. Researches on the impact of calm music on the development of the foetus have proved that the mother's mood is tapped by the foetus in her womb. In the same way, Amar too would have shared his mother's experiences. The pregnant Asma underwent depression and anxiety which in turn is later reflected in Amar. In this way, Asma's role as Amar's mother has started from early pregnancy.

Hamsa was a kind of part-time father who paid frequent visits to Malabar for spice business. It is not until after his death that the truth is revealed that he has started another family there and has a daughter Samira as old as him. On the other hand, his mother Asma was physically always available with Amar. Yet, no cordial relationship sprung between them. She called him to run errands, to contact her London brother in English and accompany her to her mother's house now and then. He did not even have the courage to reveal his embracing of atheism and from then on started having continuous conversations with himself.

Another key aspect is Asma's mentioning to Amar that she and her husband had not talked with each other for many years then. Even when Asma visited her blind mother to discuss Jasira's marriage and obtain financial aid through the sale of her house, Hamsa only approached Akmal who accompanied his mother to know the details and not his wife directly. As a child, nothing would have been more hurtful to Amar than to see his parents apart. It is proper communication among the members that brings harmony in a family. There is neither proper communication between the couple nor between the parent and child. Hence, a family like Amar's where the very pillars – the mother and the father – live poles apart is certain to be doomed. Research reveals that stony silences between a couple can scar their children emotionally. It will eventually make alienation and withdrawal a part of their lives, as happened to Amar. He also adds that they both never agreed on things, except when it came to ridiculing others. The distance between the couple living in the same house was so much that when they both were present in the same room once, it was unusual to Amar and he sees it as a rare occasion. Their distance between each other seemed larger than the Bungalow itself.

Growing amidst such a strained relationship in the family certainly has a negative impact on Amar and one might argue that even divorce would be less traumatising than this. It is apparent that their paths have met once for their marriage and never again. There was a relationship that turned silently sour and any comforting affection between them was sucked off gradually. They only remained as strangers. The only common thing between them was their children. But, being parents and being strangers are mutually exclusive. This is where their marriage collapsed. A popular belief is that children do not learn; they only imitate. Perhaps having a broken couple as his parents, he is influenced to ward off any serious commitment as marriage. When it comes to satisfying physical pleasures, he becomes complacent with reveries and fantasies alone.

5. DURKHEIM'S THEORY OF SUICIDE:

In the four types of suicide as categorised by French Sociologist Emile Durkheim, Amar's case falls under the category of *egoistic suicide*. This occurs due to broken social and familial relationships. Amar, being detached from both – family and society – decides to end his life. Durkheim also found that unmarried single males attempt this kind of suicide due to their lack of attachment with stable norms. Other types of suicide as listed by Durkheim are *altruistic* for greater good of a particular society, *anomic* due to insufficient social regulation and *fatalistic* due to over-regulation and unrewarding lives.

As for Amar, such inefficient parenting only pulled him away from emotions and pushed him towards material luxuries. He wishes to fly away from the Bungalow and its inmates to another life, "another land of happiness and sunshine" (Salim 220). He grew envious when one of his friends got adopted and Amar visualised him to be enjoying a nice European view from the window of his new house. He plans that if at all he is adopted, his shadow would be the only thing he would take to his new life. This presents the impact of detrimental parenting on the thought-process of the child. If only the story is told in the perspectives of other children, can one draw firm conclusions of the influence of the loveless relationship of the parents. However, one can be certain that the children's lives did not turn out to be good. Their first child Jasira, though married to the man of her liking and does not taste a tinge of poverty, had her share of property exploited by her parents to make their both ends meet. Their third child Akmal goes missing for reasons unknown while their youngest Amar plots his own death. This shows that Hamsa and Asma have failed as parents and one cannot help but agree when Amar stated that it would have been better if they simply shook hands and parted ways before bringing their children into the world. With this perspective, one can see the path on which Amar had travelled on that had made him desire to leave that very world.

6. CONCLUSION:

Life is not just a period between birth and death, but the essence. On one hand, though having such parents who care less about their children enables the child to be free and heuristic, on the other hand, it also means that there is no one to correct when something goes wrong or no encouragement when something good is done. It can be inferred that Hamsa and Asma as parents could not show love to their children because they cannot share something that they themselves lack. It is not very unlikely to expect unhappy couples raising unhappy children. Thus, the loveless marriage of Hamsa and Asma is one of the major reasons that has given birth to the lifeless child Amar.

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