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PATHOS AND ANGUISH OF THE UNWANTED

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ABSTRACT

Disintegrating values in the modern times are leading to serious problems. Recently neglect and abuse of the elderly is on the rise. Rohinton Mistry has aptly focused on this issue in his shortest novel 'The Scream'. The mesmerising monologue of the old man is replete with hard-earned wisdom and ways of the world. It is a reminder of our frailty in old age and mortality. It makes us reflect on our attitude towards the aged. Enlightening and helping us understanding the viewpoint of the aged and their expectations from the younger generation.

Keywords: assaulted, contemplating, worthless, dissimilate, malice.

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The Forgotten Father
A gray old man sits all alone
Unloved, uncherished and unknown sitting
beside his broken door.
Dreaming of days past long ago, when
children played about his knee
Filling the air with childish glee tended by him
with loving care
Knowing the blessings of a father's prayer but
now they have gone, each of his life
A girl to her husband, a boy to his wife,
forgetful is they of him who sits here
Silently wiping a tricking tear, for striving for
things in a life so brief
Blind their poor eyes to a dear
Father's grief but does he upbraid them in
word or in mind

Nor does their neglect to him seem unkind
He'll forget and forgive all
Unkindness they've shown this poor old
father who sits alone.

A man's life is divided into five stages namely infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. In each of these stages an individual finds himself in different problems. Old age is viewed as an unavoidable, undesirable and problem ridden phase of life. In age, physical strength deteriorates, mental stability diminishes, money power becomes bleak. But the most traumatic experience of age is the negligence from the younger generation. An aged person is able to cope with his physical infirmity. But the ingratitude from the children and loved ones shatters him and he turns into an emotional wreck.

Indian society is undergoing rapid transformation under the impact of industrialisation, urbanisation, technical and traditional change. Consequently, the traditional values and institutions are in the process of erosion. Result can be seen in weakening of intergenerational ties.

Nuclear households, characterised by individuality, independence and desire for privacy are gradually replacing the joint family which emphasises the family as a unit and demands deference to age and authority.

Literature holds the mirror which shows the beauty and the ugliness of the society. It forces us to think, ponder and reflect over serious issues. It shakes us from our stupor to be vigilant for what is going around us.

Rohinton Mistry is writer of the short novel 'The Scream' draws our attention to this sensitive, ever confronting and timeless issue. Mistry belongs to the Parsi community. It is closed society where people are family centred. Due to this background, he understands the importance of family relations and blood ties. He highlights familial values and human relationships, gives appropriate space to these kind of relationships, human behaviour and universal human nature. It is a reminder of our frailty in old age and our mortality. It is a universal soliloquy which depicts the agony of age, physical and psychological.

'The Scream' written by Rohinton Mistry is a short narrative of an old man's complaint and silent protest against the younger generation. It is a strong visual image of the frustrated struggle against time and aging. It is in the form of a monologue narrated by the old man who is at the fag end of his life.

The story opens with old man believing that he has heard the scream of a man who is probably being assaulted in the alley behind his apartment. He is haunted by the scream he hears. Contemplating on the agony and injustice done to this man, he starts re-examining his whole life.

He has been alienated from the family members. Physically displaced from his own bedroom to the living room. How he regrets the comfort and luxury of sleeping in a bedroom amidst his loved ones

as he says, "so comforting to lie amidst warm, albeit noisy bodies when one's own grew less and less warm day by day."(6)

He sleeps under a piano on a discarded, torn, stained and lumpy mattress. The mattress is symbolic of his own state. He has been disposed off by his family members. He is cursed and screamed at if he stumbles in the dark. He constantly fears that if he falls and bruises his knee or cracks his forehead. He starts keeping bottles for the purpose of urinating as day by day his body system seems to weaken. He used to empty the bottles in the toilet bowl in the morning. However, being afflicted by Parkinson disease he loses his grip on the bottle. It slips from his hand only to the annoyance of his family members. When the old man wants to be taken to the doctor he is told that the disease is incurable. He feels that probably, "The others were only too glad to see me go."(7)

He states, "All his life he feared mice, starvation and loneliness. But now the loneliness has arrived, it's not so bad." (6-7) If a mouse brushed his hand or feet, the usual disgust and revulsion of youth now followed the pleasant sensation. No one dared to approach or touch the old man. The soft touch of the mouse made him happy for some time. But he fears murine amputations but the other members of his family don't care. He is laughed at because for them whatever he says is a laughing matter, worthless, rubbish. He states "I am worthless, my thoughts are worthless, my words are worthless."(19)

Being neglected and outcasted by the family he cannot even read. He is advised that his old eyes are too weak to read past midnight. He should rest or he will go blind. He dreads to think of this state as things would go from bad to worse. Sleep is a rarity for him. He passes his time sitting on a cement ledge. The cement is cool to touch symbolic of the attitude of his family members. He craves for warmth and affection from his loved ones.

He looks out of window and sometimes spots a chanawala approaching from Chaupatty, from the beach. He smelled quantities of gram and peanuts in the basket. Along with this the vendor carried chopped onions, coriander, chilli powder, pepper and

salt along with a slice of lemon. Its aroma stimulated his senses. But his old age forbade him to eat spices.

"They gave me food insipid as my saliva. And it always has too much salt

or no salt at all, deliberately. In the beginning it made me a little cross.

I would yell, throw the dinner about. Then I realised this was what they wanted, to starve me to death."(21)

The family members even deprived him of medicine, ignoring the schedule prescribed by the doctor. When his hands and feet shake violently, they say "See how sick you are, let us take care of you. Be good, listen to what we say."(23)

he scream heard by the old man is symbolic of his own pain and agony. When his children think he has dementia, he becomes even more sure of himself.

"They think at my age, I can no longer separate

The genuine from the spurious, the real from the acted,
so why bother in elaborate efforts to dissimilate.

They will learn when they are old like me that untying

the enemy's skin of deceit becomes easier as time goes by."(7-8)

The old man is able to identify with the scream as he is undergoing the pain of being neglected and cast off by the family. The scream is symbolic of his own pent up feelings for family. He prefers to remain quiet outwardly but inwardly he is full of malice for the treatment meted out to him by the youngsters. However he draws the conclusion that there is "No wisdom like silence". He has choked his throat lest the scream be audible to his family members. He realises that his shriek will place havoc and his condition will deteriorate even further.

Ultimately he reconciles with his present and forgives his family. He awaits the justice of the providence when the members of his family will also face the threat of age.

"Their day will come. Their night will come. Poor creatures. My anger is melting. All will be forgiven."(35)

A common thread that runs through is the relationship between individual and society. He points the weaknesses of our social order. This story upholds the status of universality. It highlights the pain precipitated by a state of non acceptance. The relationship between individual and society is dealt with great concern. It is a warning that if this problem is not taken care of, it can turn into an epidemic. If not arrested in time, it will turn into malignant cancer eating human society from within. Our society devoid of compassion and humanism will be a jungle full of skeletons too painful to visualise.

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