

THE FRACTURED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHER AND SON AS REVEALED IN INDU SUNDERASAN'S TAJ TRILOGY

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Abstract

Disintegration of families and the fading of filial love is a common phenomenon in the postmodern life. The relationship between the father and the son has been a problematic and complicated intriguing. The generation gap between them creates a lot of strife and misunderstanding. Even in the Mughal Empire, the father and son often clash against each other, mostly for securing power and crown. In Indu Sundaresan's *The Twentieth Wife*, this crisis is examined very closely. Moreover, the children, denied parental love and attention are misled by rebels who use them for their own selfish profits. Often these royal children are used as tools by the enemies to rebel against the father figure. Thus a wide gap is formed between the father and the son. But the royal women especially the daughters are denied political power. But, such struggles for power do not enter into the woman's Zenana. They remain faithful wives, daughters and sisters. This is exemplified through the novel *The Twentieth Wife*.

Keywords: Parental love, addiction, estrangement.

Family structure is a basic unit of a society. Family helps one to build his or her communal feelings and consolidate one's identity. It plays a vital role in formulating one's essential character. The love provided at home nourishes a man and brings out the potentials in him. A healthy, happy family produces children of extraordinary strength and mental caliber.

The inner space of a man is activated by the mother of a family who contributes a lot to the emotional, physiological wellbeing of a person. Indu Sundaresan has analysed the vital role of family and its impact on the psyche of children. Her *Taj Trilogy* is a symbolical representation of postmodern situation in families, where there is a strained relationship between father and son.

In *Twentieth Wife*, family is symbolized by the monarchical system where the Emperor happens to be the head and he controls the lives of all children and his wives. The Padsha Begam is the queen who takes a secondary position, but she rules the harem where the Emperor's ex-wives, concubines, children, relatives, eunuchs and slave girls co-exist under a single roof. Emperor Akbar, in a secular spirit, admits people of all races, religions and nationalities in his harem. The Emperor never interferes in the matters of the harem and the Padshah Begam has to be efficient and must be a shrew, so that she can settle the squabbles among the servants. As they live together, their children are allowed to mingle with other children without any inhibition and prejudice. They are not possessions of a particular woman and they are allowed free access to everyone.

When Salim, the son of Akbar was born, there were so much of celebrations and festivities in the court. Salim is much petted and pampered by Akbar as he is expected to be the promising successor to the throne. But he falls into bad companions and becomes addicted to wine and opium. His associates goad him to rise against his father Akbar. Even when Akbar is alive, Salim gets into a mad desire to usurp the kingdom from his father by any means. Salim nourishes secret desire for his father's death since his presence does not allow him to get the crown. He devises foul means like poisoning his father through the court physician. When his scheme is found out, it leads to bitter relationship between father and son. Ruqayya, another Akbar's wife decides to engage Salim in some constructive activity, so that he can become a

responsible Prince. Ruqayya, a sensible mother is able to read Salim's psyche: "There is only one way to find out, your majesty. If he is to be your Emperor after you... he must be prepared. After the Humam incident, his value has dropped among the nobles of the court. They must have confidence in him" (*TW 128*). The mother figure being a compassionate soul in the hard environment, wants to elicit some constructive behaviour from Salim. Though Ruqayya is not Salim's biological mother, she shows motherly tenderness to him and appeals to Akbar to forgive his son. Salim is assigned the most challenging job of defeating Rana Pratap Singh, the Rajput king of Udaipur.

Mahabat Khan, Qutubuddin Khan Koka and Sayyid Abdullah are the confidants and friends of Salim. These friends are governed by selfish motives and lust for power. Using their influence on Prince Salim, they wish to rule the kingdom. Beneath their calm and unruffled demeanour, Salim's cohorts nourish secret motives. Salim, encouraged by their words chooses to rebel against his father and storm the royal treasury at Agra and acquire the wealth of the empire as Mahabat Khan assures him of Salim's power to rule the empire. Thus the loving son is estranged from his father by the temptations offered by the royal nobles who wage a war against the Emperor through his son. Salim engages his attention on these dissenters as he also suffers from uncertainty to succeed the throne due to the presence of his brother Daniyal. Only by forming alliance with the potent nobles at court he can find an entry into his dream of becoming the Emperor. The poisonous words of Koka make the prince ruffle his ego: "You reached manhood ten years ago. But does the Emperor admit it? No, instead, he treats you like a child. He gives you no responsibility" (*TW 142*). The powerful persuasive tongues of these nobles push Salim into frenzy. This plot of seizing of the treasury has been cleverly outwitted by Akbar's

imperial forces and Salim has been humiliated at his defeat. The very presence of his grandmother Maryam Makani has disabled his rebellion against his father.

Akbar, the compassionate father is disappointed with his disobedient rebellious son who has set up a court in Allahabad defying his father's powers. The novelist deals with his predicament: "After he had spent so many years carefully nurturing his son, Salim had rebelled – and all this for the throne of the empire" (*TW 157*). As soon as the Emperor Akbar forgives his son and orders him to go to Agra, Salim is held up by the scheming nobles. Fearing the integration of the father and son, they foresee their downfall. Hence, they work out strategies and segregate the son from the father's hold. Koka suggests them to murder Abdul Fazl, Akbar's close friend in order to annoy the Emperor. Using Bir Singh, a mercenary, they murder Fazl. Akbar is pained to see his son emerge as his potent enemy without any rationale.

The butchering of Abul Fazl by Salim's mercenary fills Akbar with shock and frustration. Indu Sundaresan describes the trauma of a father:

Akbar buried his face in his sleeve. Three days had passed since the news of Fazl's death, and he had shut himself up in his apartments, seeing no one, talking with no one.... What had he done to deserve such son. Murad was dead. Daniyal was a dissolute youth given to drinking and opium, and Salim he had done more to break his father's heart than either of his brothers (162-63).

In spite of the father Akbar's deep love and affection for his son Salim, Salim has repaid him with rebellion and humiliation. The novelist deals with the psyche of a father Akbar who had been a ruler for fourteen years without any heir to succeed the throne. He visited a Sufi saint and then fathered a child Salim, as a boon. As a token of his happiness, he even constructed a

city in Sikri. Akbar taught him how to give order and follow orders, his principles and swimming too. But the present situation seems bleak: “Like Fatehpur Sikri, their bond seemed to have been left to dry out in the sun, to be overcome by dust, dirt and cobwebs. He had abandoned the city he built for his son; now his son had abandoned him” (*TW 166*). In his emotional breakdown, Akbar’s wives Ruqayya and Salima offer him sustenance and hope. Akbar is oppressed by his friend’s death and Salim’s hand in the murder. The enmity between the father and son is seen as an opportunity to disrupt the harmony in the kingdom.

The vacuous, rebellious prince Salim is brought to home by Salima, one of the wives of Akbar. She has been successful in her mission even without the use of army. As the father and son reconcile after a period of bitterness, Emperor Akbar breaks down emotionally and says “We have missed you at court” (169). Then he places his turban on Salim’s head implying his willingness to enthrone Salim. As Salim’s relationship with his father is mended, another threat for Salim comes in the form of Salim’s son Khusrau’s rebellion and his claim for the throne.

One can see the archetype of princes competing their fathers in many histories. The same pattern repeats itself in Mughal history also. Like Salim, his son also tries to ascend the throne overriding his father. In Khusrau’s case also, only eminent men like Mirza Aziz Koka and Raja Man Singh are behind the scene, operating the young callous prince Khusrau to rebel against his father. Indu Sundaresan parallels the postmodern filial relationship with the relationship between Khusrau, the son and his father Salim. The novelist analyses the situation: “What was Khusrau doing but following his father’s example? But it was not as simple as that. Khusrau he had barely seen during his childhood; he had been brought into Salim’s presence briefly on special occasions, to be shown to him, and then whisked away to his nurses and attendants. Salim did

not even like this son of his very much mostly because he had never really known him” (*TW 172*).

In the postmodern era, families do not have close access to each other. Children are part and parcel of a family. Their close mingling and mutual understanding promote a peaceful atmosphere at home. Only when children are placed under the safe custody of parents, they will emerge stable and healthy personalities. In the absence of parental care, children are easily misled by miscreants. Moreover, children learn from their parents. Father is a role model for the children and they invariably follow their parents’ values and behaviour. In Khusrau’s life, there is none to teach him the cultured ways. Only the wet nurses with little knowledge of their life problems rear the royal babies. Their hold on the children is flexible and they are exposed to evil designs of other greedy men. The absence of communication among the family members does not foster any feeling of love or friendliness. Thus, they remain strangers to each other, unexposed to each other’s feelings and thoughts. Thus Khusrau, the naive youth is mishandled and manipulated by selfish men with vested interests. Counting on the unpopularity of Salim, due to his rebellious nature and his involvement in Fazl’s murder, Khusrau is posited as an alternative heir to the throne.

Akbar’s another two sons – Murad and Daniyal meet with premature deaths, due to their consumption of wine and opium. Indu Sundaresan narrates the cause of the premature death of Daniyal: “Daniyal spent his days and nights in a drunken stupor, cavorting with his wives and slave girls” (*TW 174*). Akbar, the father strictly orders him to starve him of wine and opium. But the Prince Daniyal takes to drinking the liquor smuggled through his musket. As it mingles with the rust in the barrel of the musket, he falls sick and dies.

Two religious factions vie with each other in patronizing the future Emperor. Of the two, the Portuguese extend their support to Khusrau as he is likely to be more sympathetic than Salim for their cause. In the power conflict between the father and son, other external forces come to play their roles in disrupting the peace of the country. Khusrau's mother loses her balance of mind because of her son's agitation against her husband and commits suicide at last. Neither the father nor the son remains loyal to each other as each one views the other as a threat. The young generation exhibits impatience, impulsiveness and rash behaviour. The old generation represents liberalism, humanism and noble culture. Khusrau, being the eldest of Salim, is assured of his right to the crown, but he is restless and grows impatient to wait for long years before he can assume the power. He represents a confused, misguided youth. Khusrau's natural love for his father Jahangir is drained by his narcissistic attitude. He believes in securing the crown through violence and brutal power. A notable psychologist Horney observes about teenagers narcissism thus:

By seeming powerful than others, or more loved or more independent, a person may hide a core uncertainty about personal worth. An unhealthy self focus and self-admiration constitutes 'narcissism'. In less than one in a hundred people, narcissism is severe and impairs the person so much that it can be diagnosed as a mental disorder, 'narcissistic personality disorder'. People who suffer from this disorder are extremely self focused; they don't have much empathy for other people's experience. Their sense of being special, that they deserve special attention and admiration, leads them to use other people as admiring audiences and supporters, instead of as separate individuals. (172).

As Khusrau's rebellion against his father ends up in failure, he meets his eternal doom. The novelist holds a picture of a defeated son: "Khusrau wept on, in loud chiccuping sobs. The last few days had been too much for him.... Khusrau was only nineteen. For too long, covetous men in the empire had filled his head with tales of kingship and power. He had not really had a childhood, and as he stood weeping in front of his father it seemed he would not even have adult life" (TW 243). Though Khusrau's followers outnumber his father's army, the rebels do not have the discipline and training of his father's army. The lack of maturity and worldly wisdom accounts for the defeat of Khusrau's rebellious faction.

The old generation accommodates all sorts of people in the society, but the young generation is assertive, individualistic, egotist and vain. Indu Sundaresan observes: "A monarch cannot exist without the support of the people, but the young Salim did not realise this. The Prince was even alienating the Zenana, whose members had always doted on him and supported him" (TW 176-76). If the young inexperienced Prince Khusrau is allowed to rule, it will lead to anarchy, regency and disintegration of the empire. A vast country like India requires a powerful matured Emperor who can control its borders and people of diverse cultures. The old generation looks down upon the youngsters like Khusrau, "To the Emperor, Khusrau was still very much a non entity, a child, more a pest than a real threat, He could not countenance putting Khusrau on the throne over Salim, so he ignored him." (TW 180). Akbar, who stands for the old generation abides by law of his ancestor Timur the Lame. But the new generation rebels against the established hierarchies and norms and tries to put forth their selfish interests. They are malleable, impetuous and unscrupulous in dealing with their personal relationships. It is evidenced through Salim's cruel act of blinding his own son Khusrau and murdering his six thousand followers on a single day on stakes. There is complete dearth of love in the heart of Salim, the father while

punishing his son with eternal darkness and solitary confinement. It is Khusrau's wife who is committed to her marital bond with him, that sustains his lonely life.

Khurram is a promising son of Jagat Gosini and Salim. Ruqayya, being the Padshah Begam exercises her power over her husband Akbar and snatches away child Khurram from his mother Jagat Gosini with the command of Akbar, the Emperor. Jagat is deprived of her motherhood and moral rights over her son. Jagat's request to address her as 'ma' to her son Khurram is denied by her own son and it plunges her in deep gloom. Till the end, Ruqayya dominates over Jagat and keeps herself as a mother of Khurram. Thus the filial love of a mother is unrequited and wrestled away by some other powerful women. Such deprivations and exploitations occur in the postmodern society. There is a conflict between two women over a boy's love.

The fierce competitive spirit alienates the father Salim from his son Khusrau. Akbar even aggravates such a rivalry spirit by conducting an elephant race between the two opposite factions. Khusrau is activated by Koka and he acts according to his instructions. So when Koka suggests to imprison Salim, his father, Khusrau accepts to it. Thus Khusrau's followers make an attempt on Salim's life, but Salim fortunately escapes. Though Salim is assured of his crown, he is constantly exposed to threats from his own son the accuses Koka: "You are guilty of a great sin; You have alienated a father and son, you have interfered in the sacred relationship between me and my son Khusrau" (*TW 210*).

It is a common knowledge that only sentiments rule the world, not the hard fast rules. The death sentence given to Koka by the Emperor Salim is withdrawn due to the interception of Salima, the stepmother of Salim. Confinement in prison does not deter Khusrau from pursuing his dream project. When he gets an invitation from his mentors to escape from the prison, he

flees to Lahore to capture the fort. The irony lies in the situation when the father finds his son guilty of the same offence, of which he himself has been accused of. While Akbar has been generous enough to forgive Salim, the disloyal son, Salim does not absolve her son of his crime. He says, "I have been contemplating a suitable chastisement for these dissidents. Their punishment will fit their crime. They have dared to rebel against their lord and Emperor. For that, the sentence is death" (TW 245). While the life of Prince is spared, his followers have to face gruesome deaths. The cruel punishment of Salim, the father, does not make the son remorseful, rather he becomes more aggressive and strives to break his prison and further his motives. But Salim, the Emperor has foiled his plan and eventually blinded Khusrau and put him in alienation, on knowing his son's plot to kill him on his hunting expedition.

Loveless matching engenders disharmony and disloyalty. Salim's marriage with Jagat Gosini is engineered for political reasons. Hence, there is no conjugal happiness in their marital life. Jagat has always tried to please him to retain her position in the *Zenana*. There is no blossoming of genuine love and unfolding of hearts. Hence Salim's mind yearns for some real love. The warmth of love offered by Mehrunnisa revives his dead senses and he pursues her madly for love. Khurram's marriage with Arjumand Banu is the most fruitful one. In order to eternalise their love, he has built the Taj Mahal, a wonder in marble. All these instances prove the fact that love is the cementing factor in the marital relationship and in the relationship between father and son.

In *Shadow Princess*, Indu Sundaresan exhibits the psyche of Aurangzeb who longs for motherly love. In the absence of motherly affection following his mother's demise, he looks for some love from his eldest sister Jahanara, the surrogate mother. But her affections are with Dara and her father Shah Jahan. Aurangzeb tries to befriend his brothers, but he becomes a but of

ridicule for them. Even his father does not extend any love or place trust on him. He hardly shows any recognition for his hard work. The father who has to divide his love equally among his children is biased here. While favouring Dara, Shah Jahan rejects Aurangzeb and condemns his enthusiasm and ambition. Jaganara is loved by her father, whereas he grows cold and indifferent to Roshanara, his younger daughter. This discriminatory attitude leaves deep scars in the mind of his son Aurangzeb. In a mad desire to capture the crown of his father, he arrests his father and keeps him a prisoner in the fort till his death. The father's failure to share equal love and recognise all the children culminates in the emergence of a cruel son with demonic plans to torture his father.

Indu Sundaresan portrays the women characters being very forthcoming, constructive and coordinating in their male counterparts' engagements. Jaganara is instrumental in operating the empire as the father Shah Jahan is struck with mental depression following his wife's demise. He cherishes the comforting presence of his daughter and he is revived and nourished by the encouraging words of his daughter, while his sons engage themselves in competition to win the power, the daughters are no longer a threat to the father. Thus Mehrunnisa also is able to establish a solid rapport with her father Ghias Beg and takes the honour of erecting a monument for her father. Jaganara follows her father's steps till his death like his shadow. Even in the most trying moments in prison, Jaganara stays by his side, offering him support and comfort. Indu Sundaresan's heroines exhibit themselves as lovers of their fathers just as Jane Austen's heroines are shaded by their father figures.

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