



Continuous issue-24 | April – May 2016

## Self-aggrandizement in the Short Story ‘The Only American from Our Village’ by Arun Joshi

### Abstract

*Today’s society is facing moral degradation because of the self – glorifying tendencies around us. But this can’t be applied to each and every younger person or with regards to this story each and every son. But this short story – The Only American From Our Village – by Arun Joshi shows the materialistic and rational view of Dr. Khanna; the son of this story. The anxiety and will to be in industrialization and urbanization shows Social realism and the effect of this on the lives of parents at the native towns focuses on the Psychological realism of today’s life elaborating the effects of self - aggrandizement.*

**Key Words:** Indian English Literature, Moral degradation, Self - glorification, psychological realism, social realism, materialistic values, deteriorating society.

“You see what I mean? May be you don’t. May be you don’t have villages like our in America but you must try to understand what it meant after the whole village knew you were going to send him a ticket. Did you send him a ticket?”

Mr. Radhey Mohan, the *ashtamp farosh* and a close friend of Kundan Lal, the father of Dr. Khanna - tells the above lines to Dr. Khanna when he finds him attending a function at his village school. Dr. Khanna had long been living at America with his wife and children. His father, Kundan Lal, was so happy to see his son successful and he even thought that his son would definitely send him a ticket to go to America. But his son did not send any ticket. Neither had he come on the death of his father, Kundan Lal. Here, at this point, when Dr. Khanna is applauded for his success at America, the *ashtamp farosh*, reminds him of his degenerated values and self – glorification which at the end killed his father.

Through the character of Dr. Khanna, Arun Joshi tries to show, how people get easily acquainted with modern / western values and standards and forget what their parents have done to educate them and give them a higher stage by putting aside their own comfort. Through the character of Kundan Lal, it can be seen that how the parents are fascinating towards the success of their children. Kundan Lal shaves daily and keeps himself always ready so that if his son would ever send a ticket to go to America, he will not have to

await and waste time. But his wish is never fulfilled by his son, not even on his death. Kundan Lal tells all the villagers about his son's success and how he will be getting a ticket to go to America but in reality he hasn't got a single letter even from his son, except the one he sends saying that he is supposed to attend a conference. Here, the son represents the younger generation, who in self – aggrandizement, forgets their parents and even their actual strata from where they have moved forward.

Dr. Khanna comes for a four week trip at his native with his wife Joanne and his two sons. His fame precedes him when he reaches, he even attends conferences and councils, his wife and children are worshipped by the village people and the Khanna family brings 'inexpensive gifts' like Gillette razors, pop – records and one dollar neck ties "for the relatives they had never met before." Yet these gifts were valuable to the villagers because anything that is foreign labeled is a prized possession for many of them. Here, the effect of western culture and urbanization is highlighted even in the uneducated and innocent villagers, who are, in reality, unaware about the Khanna family's motives and carelessness towards natives.

Kundan Lal and the ashtamp farosh – Radhey Mohan were school friends. In the summer time, because of no shoes, Kundan Lal used to tie dhak leaves "on his naked feet with a string and he would cross the sand" to reach to school. He did this for ten years because he had no money to buy shoes for himself. But his son – Dr. Khanna - had everything. But he could never realize what his father has suffered. Whatever his father did for him; did not mean anything to him. He was blind with self – aggrandizement. The story raises a question: "Is making money or holding a chair or presenting brilliant papers at seminars and conferences is more important and meaningful than performing the filial duties?" - For Dr. Khanna, it can be said that the duties towards his father were not important or meaningful for him because of his Western emancipation.

At the end of his life, Kundan Lal goes mad. He runs again on the hot sand without his shoes and ties dhak leaves on his naked feet and then after suffering with fever, the next day he dies. When Radhey Mohan tells this incident of Kundan Lal's pathetic death-

"Dr. Khanna winced but his training in the new civilization had been perfect."

He only says very calmly that-

"I was very sorry to hear of his death."

He did not come. He only felt sorry of his father's death. This madness of Kundan Lal is psychological realism faced by many parents who are left uncared like him by their lovely children and they sadly realize that their eminent children could spare no time or emotion even for their ailing parents. The modern youth like Dr. Khanna, could not care for their parents, not even in pathetic conditions and the more painful thing is that

they don't feel humiliated when they are reminded about their bad condition. The erosion of modern and western values due to rapid industrialization, urban development, technological progress and upsurge of materialism appears very aptly.

When Dr. Khanna returns to America, he could not work like before. He keeps on looking at his feet and complains about the burning sensation there. He seeks psychological help but nothing comes to aid him and then on –

“He has generally come to be known as the man who does nothing but stare at his feet.”

Dr. Khanna and Kundan Lal embody two different approaches to life and relationship. The story indicates the dehumanized morals of modern society. It also points towards the quest for natural love, because only love can sustain human existence. But obsession with self – aggrandizement leads to nowhere except towards the wasted life like the father's and that of the son's in this story. The story is open ended. It would be apt to say that Dr. Khanna is doomed to share and suffer his father's loneliness. And because of the open ended narrative whether Joanne would care back Dr. Khanna to normalcy is not certain because she is given American values and life style. The *ashtamp farosh* reunites the son with his father, if only symbolically.

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