

GLIMPSE OF CULTURAL CLASHES IN THE WEIGHT OF HEAVEN BY THRITY UMRIGAR

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Abstract

There are varieties of cultures throughout the world and also cultural clashes among the society. Culture can be defined in the matter of knowledge, belief, tradition, morality and class discrimination. Here it is classified as Indian culture and Western culture. Culture is prior in every society. It plays vital role in the life of human beings. It is the identity of a person with whom he belongs. The present research paper is spotlighted on cultural clashes in Thrity Umrigar's The Weight of Heaven. Cultural clash means variety of dissimilar cultures. Thrity born in India belongs to Parsi community. She is the author of many novels, famous for The Space Between Us and The weight of Heaven. She is popular for writing traditions and emotionally attached stories. Here, she focused the cultural clashes of the main characters Frank and Ellie. The difference between American culture and Indian culture highlighted through the story. Their sufferings after the lose of their seven years child, Benny. They experience grief due the gap of two cultural disparities. The book received Cleveland Arts Prize in Literature. It is an attempt to put forward the issues related to culture in this novel.

Keywords: Cultural Difference, Emotions, Sufferings, Clashes, Marriage, Society.

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The world culture has many meanings and can be categorized in many ways. The word can be defined as customs, traditions, rules, standard of living of the persons living in society. Culture is the central part of every religion and society. It has some values. There are many religions throughout the world. Every religion has its specific culture. It varies in many ways. Culture differs from country to country, especially Western culture and Indian culture. The difference is in persons, society, behavior, wearing, and thinking's etc. The identity of a person is recognized by his culture, in which society and culture he brings and brought up. Simultaneously the economical status of every person plays very important role. It is classified as poor and rich. Mostly the poor are sufferer due to poverty. In this situation education take prior place in person's identity. If the person is educated, his way of thinking automatically changes.

The present research paper is based on the topic of Glimpse of Cultural Clashes in *The Weight of Heaven* by Thrity Umrigar. Here the cultural clashes are between American culture and Indian culture. Due to dissimilarities in culture, many times clashes take place. Culture can be defined in the matter of knowledge, belief, traditions, morality and class discrimination.

Thrity Umrigar is an Indian- American novelist, journalist, and critic. She belongs to the Parsi religion of India and practices Zoroastrianism. She took her education from Bombay University, Ohio State University and Kent State University. While studying she got Niemen Fellowship for one year at Harvard University which is given to the journalist of mid-career. She writes for *The Boston Globe* book regularly. She has written for other magazines also named *Washington Post* and the *Cleveland Plain Deale* and regular writer for national newspaper. At present she is working as a lecturer at Case Western Reserve University and teaches Critical Writing. She wrote her first novel *Bombay Time* at Harvard in the year 2001. Then onwards she continues her writing with *The Space Between Us*, *The World We Found*, *If Today Be Sweet*, *The*

Story Hour and The Weight of Heaven. She is recognizing for the memoir, *First Darling of the Morning*. Thrity is the recipient of many prestigious awards like the Cleveland Arts Prize, a Lambda Literary award and the Seth Rosenberg prize. Her books are published in fifteen countries and translated in many languages. *The Space Between Us* reached in final round for the PEN/Beyond Margins award while *If Today Be Sweet* was a Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle selection. Her memoir was a finalist for the Society of Midland Authors award. She used to write to express her feelings and emotions which are reflected in her works. Further she says:

I probe my own life—with all its dents and bruises and its moments of grace and beauty—to understand the human condition. It is always my hope that by writing as specific and honest a novel as I can, I can illuminate some aspect of human behavior for my readers. (Web)

She tries to concentrate on human feelings and behavior. Human beings behave in various aspects. The present novel *The weight of Heaven* based on human feelings, emotions and behavior. It revolves round a couple Ellie and Frank Benton who lost their seven year old son Benny. The couple suffered for the death of their only child. Every planning is shattered. Their house at Ann Arbor becomes unbearable for them. Fortunately, Frank gets an opportunity of job in India. The couple thinks they may forget the memories of their son by going far from Ann Arbor. Frank's employer launches a new plant of Herbal Solutions in Girbaug India which manufactures a remedy for diabetes. Ellie urge Frank to run the plant. So they decided to move to India. Actually they are escaping from the memories of Benny. Anyhow it becomes difficult for them to wipe out the memories of their son. After some duration, Ellie got new friend, Nandita, who is former journalist and works for improving the lives of villagers. Opposite to this, Frank could not match with the people and employees of Herbal Solutions in India. He engaged in quarreling, bribing, and death of an activist leader for using natural resources. It is tough for Frank to adjust the life in India compare to Corporate America. The only hope for him is his maid's son Ramesh. He is too much attached to this boy feeling as if he is in the company of his son Benny. But unfortunately Ramesh's father Prakash becomes jealous of Frank for loving his son and providing costly things to Ramesh. He hates westerners for their richness and making attraction to their people. They give valuable gifts to their children. Here Frank is doing the same. It's natural for Ellie and Frank that Ramesh is the alternate for Benny to them. Ellie is with adjusting nature but Frank's attitude towards Ramesh and India is not proper which disturb Ellie.

The characters are well portrayed focusing the reality after losing the beloved one. About this book *Kirkus review* says:

Filled with satisfyingly real characters and glowing with local color, *The Weight of Heaven* is a rare glimpse of a family and a country struggling under pressures beyond their control. Umrigar illuminates how slowly we recover from unforgettable loss, how easily good intentions can turn evil, and how far a person will go to build a new world for those he loves. (Web)

The story is full of emotions, sometimes feels pathetic towards the couple. Their married life was disturbed and the wound of their child's death will never be healed. Actually they moved to India to forget the memories of their son but unfortunately it becomes more troublesome because of Prakash. The writer here shows the difference of culture in a nicely woven storyline. She shows the experience of American couple in India. Frank is an educated person and when he shifted to India from America, he has to deal with low class uneducated workers. This becomes big obstacle to him in the factory. Frank is a wealthy American; his lifestyle is rich while in factory he could not adjust the poor uncultured employees. He made clashes with works and his job become troublesome for him. Already he is suffering from the familial loss of their child. Due to this he takes interest in Ramesh, son of their maidservant. He lives to be in his company. He start teaching him, giving basketball lessons, providing him books, toys and other necessary things and promised him to take him away to America for further education. Frank is that much close to Ramesh to conceal his grief. Ellie is a psychologist and engaged in improving the health of the villagers. Umrigar portrayed the characters of Ellie and Frank very real. She shows the effect of sorrow on husband- wife's relationship. There are many aspects of cultural clashes between wealthy America and poor India. Thrity Umrigar focused on two cultures. For the sake of job a wealthy American moved to India but he never changed his view about Indian people and never accepted the Indian culture. The article published by *Publisher's Weekly* says:

Umrigar continues her exploration of cultural divides in this beautifully written and incisive novel about an American couple's experience in India. Frank and Ellie Benton, grappling with the death of their seven-year-old son, move from Ann Arbor, Mich., to Girbaug, India, where Frank takes a job running a factory. While he tackles the barriers faced by an educated, wealthy American in charge of

a Third World work force, Ellie, a psychologist, makes inroads with the impoverished locals at a health clinic. Frank has a difficult time adjusting at work, and at home he takes an interest in their housekeepers' son, Ramesh, and begins tutoring him. While Frank buries his grief by helping Ramesh, he ends up in competition with the boy's bitter father, Prakash, and further damaging his already troubled marriage. Umrigar digs into the effects of grief on a relationship and the many facets of culture clash-especially American capitalism's impact on a poor country-but it is the tale of how Frank's interest in Ramesh veers into obsession and comes to a devastating end that provides the gripping through line. Umrigar establishes herself as a singularly gifted storyteller. (Web)

Umrigar brightens the relationships of people, their cultural complications with respect to geographical background. She portrays the characters of American man and woman with a very realistic manner. Their sufferings, their disturbed married life after the death of their child feel real. The story touches the heart of readers with pathetic touch. It goes very deeply in human heart. Frank blames Ellie for Benny's death. There are disputes in the couple but Ellie tries to save her married life. The novel is the portrait of parental mourning. Frank's sorrow turns into mania. It illustrates the vivacious portrayal of India.

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