



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

(Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal)

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.828 (SJIF 2022)

Problematizing Familial Relationship and Racial Conflict: A Study of *The Human Stain* by Philip Roth

Sarojakanta Nayak

Research Scholar

Utkal University of Culture,
Bhubaneswar (Odisha, India)

DOI No. **03.2021-11278686** DOI Link :: <https://doi-ds.org/doilink/03.2022-78955272/IRJHIS2203014>

Abstract:

In Philip Roth's work The Human Stain, this study attempts to depict the familial bond and racial problems. The study is primarily concerned with the treatment of family and racial problems. Its goal is to figure out how Roth used this novel to try to study various aspects of human relationships. Roth has harped on some of the most critical aspects of human relationship as a great artist with amazing vision. The main subjects of his writings are usually American society and Jewish identity. Philip Roth's main concern is to bring about reform in American society in particular, as well as in all human relationships in general.

Keywords: Family, Racism, Identity, Reformation, Sexuality, Power, Gender roles

Introduction:

With *The Human Stain*, the third volume of Philip Roth's trilogy, which analyses the interplay between public and private life in America during the second half of the twentieth century, the trilogy comes to a close. Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's chosen persona, serves as narrator in this work, as he did in *American Pastoral* (1997) and *I Married a Communist* (1998). Zuckerman records his recollections of the main character's past. Throughout the narrative, present American social issues are addressed. Within the context, insightful analysis is provided on a variety of subjects. Race, society, and family are all prominent themes in these books. The depiction of these concerns in the setting of a college campus offers cultural politics a lot of dimension. Themes such as sexuality, power, gender roles, the search for identity, the value of family, and the need for honesty weave across Roth's writings, particularly in *The Human Stain*. As Paul Gray ascertains in his review "one of his more intriguing aspects has been his refusal to tailor his work to anyone else's expectations" (49).

Another review by Rebecca J. Davies: “An American Dream Gone Sour” asserts that Roth has pioneered the production of a “compelling mix of a social commentary and fiction that has afforded a portrayal of a nation corrupted by moral and political bankruptcy, undone by a spiritualism that smacks of Reaganism at its worst” (644).

The Human Stain uses the scholastic environment to parody and remark on a time when society is mired in political correctness and moral ambiguity. The setting for this narrative is a little town in northern New England. The town is home to the prestigious Athena Campus, and both the town and the college have a Puritan New England feel to them. Nathan Zuckerman, a writer who has escaped to the outskirts of town to get away from mainstream society, is the narrator of the novel.

There is a revival of present and past of the central protagonist through the voice of Zuckerman. Zuckerman is the first person narrator who constantly tries to enter into the past of the main protagonist. The fact that Coleman Silk, a crucial figure throughout the novel, is dead at the outset adds to the story's complexity. The majority of the novel's events are told in Zuckerman's voice. It was Nathan's conversation with Coleman and his sister makes Nathan to get a clear-cut idea about the mis happenings of Silk's life.

Coleman Silk and Nathan Zuckerman meet for the first time when Silk wants Nathan's assistance composing an account of the absurd racism claims leveled against him. Zuckerman's chum, Coleman, is a close friend of him. One of the many documents from Coleman's case is delivered to Zuckerman, revealing that one of his students was forced to leave out of Athena College because he couldn't generate the confidence to attend class because of his white teachers' prejudice. Silk wants to memorialise the events that led to his resignation as a classics professor at Athena College, as well as the death of his wife, according to him. *As a result of the attempt to produce this article, a friendship blooms, and Zuckerman learns a lot about Coleman's way of life. However, it is only after Silk's death that Zuckerman learns the real story about his friend.*

The reader learns everything there is to know about Coleman through Nathan Zuckerman's flashbacks, including the fact that he is a light-skinned African-American who decided to pass as a white man for the rest of his life after graduating from college and joining the military, rather than a Jewish man, as many people believe. Following that, he decided to break all contact with his family. Coleman has made white identity only because of the welfare of the family. But this identity creates all sorts of difficulty in his day to day living. His identity is not only unknown to the whole society but also to his family as well. He marries a lady who believes he is a white person over the following forty years, as do his children, acquaintances, and anybody else he comes into contact with. A discussion about societal and moral standards actually took place through these flashbacks.

Just like *American Pastoral*, Roth presents a real situation happened to one of his college friends. Name of his friend is Melvin Tumin, nick named as Mel. *Mel has been a sociology professor*

at Princeton for over thirty years. His friend had recently passed away. While taking the class roll one day in the fall of 1985, Mel saw that two of his pupils had yet to attend a single class, despite the fact that it was the midst of the semester. Mel asked the students about these two boys he had never met after finishing the roll. Mel asks: "Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spook"? Mel's life was changed forever by this comment regarding those two youngsters. Mel's social status was completely altered as a result of this event, and the word "spooks" conjures up all kinds of misery and despair in his life. He was summoned by university officials to justify the usage of the term "spooks," because the missing students were both American, and "spooks" was once a derogatory term for black people in America, spoken with less venom than "nigger," but nevertheless humiliating.

So, it is the story of his intimate friend, brilliantly described in *The Human Stain*. It is not the story of one man but it is the story of every "nigger" people. It is our birth that makes a people black or white. This issue of black and white is responsible for all sorts of destruction in the society. Racism always creates distinction among peoples in the society. The depiction of his friend's life can make the people well aware of the situation that there is some difference between black people and white people. All men are equal. So we should live a life without any division that will be better on the part of a man. If the colour of the blood is same, why this distinction. This distinction always destroys social and moral value of men. So we should have joined hand for not creating a person like Coleman who is presented in an autobiographical manner. Through the personality of Mel we can conceive that life can be changed from good to bad within a minute or second.

Coleman grows up in a predominantly white neighborhood, excelling in school and modeling himself after his father's example of how to live a dignified life as a black man. He faithfully follows in his father's footsteps. Coleman's father, however, passes away during his first year at Howard University. After that a great deal of misfortunes enters into his life. He felt that he is the most unprivileged boy in this world. His first year at Howard College doesn't go well. In a Washington D.C. Woolworths, Coleman, for the first time has been called a "nigger". This incident haunted him deeply. He was confronted to racism from classmates and outsiders for the first time. Discrimination based on race, he believed, would limit his options. As a result, he found that if he doesn't indicate he's black, outsiders are unlikely to assume he is. He made the decision to be white, putting his heavy identity as a black man to rest once and for all. He is now free to live his life as he wishes. "Free to enact the boundless, self-defining drama of the pronouns we, they and I". (109). Coleman entered into a new life where there is no restriction for him in the society. For some time, there is a constant struggle between the body and mind of Coleman. But at the end mind won the race. Coleman's body has deceived him by putting a barrier between him and the life he desires; nevertheless, Coleman's body's betrayal has not been enough to allow him to practice betrayal in return; now, he is the creator

of his own identity. Coleman realised early on in his life that being a white man would benefit him in the racist environment he lived in. His boxing coach has boosted his confidence. Coleman abandoned his race during a boxing match at West Point when he was a teenager. He did so not by consciously pretending to be a white person, but rather because his coach, Doc Chizner, told him, “not to mention that he was coloured.” So, Coleman is totally conscious that he will not do something so that his identity will be vanished. Although, in early part of his life it proved beneficial but in later part of the life he thought why he did this act? That made him goes far away from his family relationship.

The narrator's voice brilliantly describes the ramifications of Coleman's action. Coleman's ethnic origin becomes a factor once more when he meets and falls in love with a white girl from the Midwest. Coleman continues to follow the counsel of his boxing coach De Chizner on the matter of his race, and the two have been dating and living together for almost a year. According to Chizner: “If nothing comes up, you don’t bring it up” (118). That means don’t disclose your real identity. But false thing doesn’t live long. Things go perfectly until they're on their way back to the city on the train, when Coleman takes her to meet his family, who are undeniably African American. Steena broke down and sobbed, "I can't do that," and then hurried away, never to return to his life. This statement or event is an example of a shattered relationship caused by his concealment of the truth, because true love is always founded on honesty. Without it, love – relationship cannot stand straight or can’t build up.

Conclusion:

The image of family and the issues of race are beautifully projected by Roth in *The Human Stain*. Some of the relationships are depicted with extreme exaggerations, while others are more realistic, all of them demonstrating the friction and anxiety that exists in today's families, which parallels the American family. Popular media has contributed to the notion by portraying unrealistic family images. In this novel, Roth hints at the reality that there is no such thing as the perfect family. In *The Human Stain*, the life of Coleman Silk scattered by his family. His family relationship has not made him perfect in the flow of time. So, we can say, *The Human Stain* basically analyzes Coleman’s relationship with his family, with Faunia Farley. Coleman’s fall from good fortune to bad fortune can clearly be seen in Athena College. This novel establishes a bridge between lower level life and higher level of life. This is a true and vivid picture of American family.

WORK CITED:

1. Roth, Philip. *The Human Stain*. New York: Vintage International Publication, 2000.
2. Sanford, Pinsker. *Climbing Over the Ethnic Fence: Reflections on Stanley Crouch and Philip Roth*. Virginia Quarterly Review 78.3 (2002).Pp. 472-80.
3. Paul, Gray. *Philip Roth*. Time 9 July, 2001. P.49.
4. Rebecca, J. Davies. *An American Dream Gone Sour*. Lancet 357 (2001). Pp.644-45.