



Depiction of Children by Indian Short Story Writers

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Abstract : Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. It is rich in variety, form, style and language.

The topic of our research project is “Depiction of Children by Indian Short Story Writers”.

The first story dealt with is “Kabuliwala”, written by Rabindranath Tagore. It basically focuses on the psyche of a five-year old child, Mini and her relationship with Kabuliwala. Psycho-Analytic Theory has been applied.

The second story is “My Father’s Trees in Dehra”, written by Ruskin Bond. The story is very suited for the application of the

theory of Ecocriticism. The protagonist is Bond himself and the father-son relationship is showcased beautifully. Thus, the story has an autobiographical touch.

The third story is “The Silver Lining”, written by Chaman Nahal. It is analysed using a Psycho-Sociological Approach. The story revolves around a physically challenged girl named Promodini and it explicitly shows how she is at the periphery of the society.

All the three short stories effectively depict children and their childhood with variations in setting and plot.

Key Words: Psycho-Analytic Theory, Ecocriticism, Short story.

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Introduction :

The concept of **psychoanalytic criticism** has developed from the scientific and therapeutic methodology of psychoanalysis which means to cure the mental disorder by investigating the interaction of “conscious and unconscious elements in the mind”.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) an Austrian psychologist, is the first to develop the techniques of psychoanalysis in his work ***The Interpretation of Dreams*** (1900). In this work we find the first example of applied psychoanalysis with Freud’s interpretation of William Shakespeare’s play ***Hamlet***. One of the key terms used by Freud was

“Repression” which means forgetting or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires of traumatic past events so that they are forced out of the conscious awareness to the realm of the unconscious.

A related process is termed “Sublimation” in which the repressed material is promoted into something grand or is disguised as something “noble”.(Carson *et al*/77)

“Transference”(Carson *et al* 631) is the redirection of emotions towards a person who is a substitute of some other figures.

Displacement is defined as “discharging pent-up feelings, often of hostility, on objects less dangerous than those arousing the feelings”(Carson *et al*/77).

Ecocriticism basically focuses on the relationship between literature and environment.

Cheryll Glotfelty in her essay, 'Literary Critics and Environmental Crisis', says that “the relationship between literature and physical environment is called ecocriticism.” (Fromm *et al* 153).

In the opinion of Scott Slovic, "Ecocriticism is the study of explicitly environmental texts(including literature, film, music, visual art, and popular media) from any critical perspective or the application of various environmental lenses (ranging from scientific ecology to the language and terminology of environmental justice scholarship) to any kind of “text,” even material that presents no obvious statement about the more-than-human world or the relationship between the human and the non-human." (Shukla *et al* 23)

It is noteworthy to find that eco-critics re-read literary texts with an eco-critical viewpoint, trying to investigate how natural world is represented in them. The arena of ecocriticism encompasses factual writings like essays, travel writing and regional literature. The American

transcendentalists and British Romantics have worked in this domain. The main objective of the concept is the inter-linked relationship between ecology and society.

The concept of Ecoliterature has been propounded by Wang Nuo and Zang Bigui. In their opinion, ‘it is a kind of literature which includes ecological holism as its ideological base. It represents the relationship between nature and man. It explores the social roots leading to the ecological crisis.’ (301)

Its outstanding features are ecoresponsibilities, criticism of civilisation, eco-ideal and eco-warning.

Objective :

Through this research project, we aim to investigate a child’s worldview presented in Indian short stories. This research project also analyses the literary texts under study through the lens of Psycho-Analytic theory, Ecocriticism and Psycho-Sociological Approach.

The project proposes to make a study of the selected short stories through the theories mentioned above.

The stories are “Kabuliwala” by Rabindranath Tagore, “My Father’s Trees in Dehra” by Ruskin Bond and “The Silver Lining” by Chaman Nahal.

‘Kabuliwala’ and application of the Psychoanalytic theory

Kabuliwala left his home country in quest of employment in India. He is the protagonist of the story and is called Rahmun. Rahmun was popularly known as Kabuliwala and he sold almonds and raisins. Nothing much is told about him personally in the beginning but as we proceed we come to know that he had a family in Afghanistan and his daughter whom he missed a lot. The centre of attraction in this story is the beautiful relationship which bloomed between

Mini and Kabuliwala changing from that of a complete stranger to one of a friend. Rahmun identified his daughter with Mini as she was of the same age when he left Kabul. Though during his stay in India he was not in touch with his daughter at all. In spite of this her memories did not fade away from his mind. The sight of Mini reminded him of her and he showed his affection to her as he would have to his daughter. The bond he shared with her is highlighted in the story.

He is committed to seeing her every day, bribing her with almonds and raisins. Gradually Mini comes very close to him and spends most of her time with him listening to his stories and chatting. Later he went to prison for a murder, which euphemistically, Pathan calls “-in-laws house” where they are fed, have a place to live and are taken care of. He lost contact with Mini but memories of sitting and gossiping with her lingered on. On his release, the first thing he did was to go and meet Mini, who he never thought, would not come out to chat with him- she did not. Her parents were reluctant to let a murderer see their daughter. He believed that time has stopped and she was still a little girl like his daughter in his memory. The sight of Mini, in bridal clothes kindled in him the memories of his daughter, who he never thought would grow up like Mini. This brought tears in his eyes. This bond with the girl is a representation of the bond he wished to have with his own daughter. Mini’s father identified himself with Rahmun, and gave him a banknote, so that he could go back to his country and see his little daughter whose finger prints he carried with him all the time.

Emotions spin the plot of this story. This story is a manifestation of parental love. Though physically separated, the memories sustain the love for one’s child. Only a spark is needed to light up the subdued memories. Such was the case with Mini who becomes a substitute for Kabuliwala’s daughter.

The sentiment of yearning for what cannot be and seeking to bring it into existence with what is in front of us is heightened when Rahmun takes out a small piece of paper with the handprint of his daughter. It is at this moment the speaker and the reader understand the pain and pangs of separation that Kabuliwala experiences. His wandering is not physical as much as it is emotional, to find some semblance of personal contentment in a world that is predisposed to not giving it to him.

Rabindranath Tagore attempts to distil the sense of longing felt by those who are displaced from their ancestral land, giving play to dreams of a different existence in the distant and wild mountains in case of Kabuliwala. “There were autumn mornings, the time of year when kings of old went forth to conquest; and I, never stirring from my little corner in Calcutta, would let my mind wander over the whole world. At the very name of another country, my heart would go out to it.....I would fall to weaving a network of dreams: the mountain, the glens, the forest...”(27)

Ecocriticism and Ruskin Bond’s “My Father’s Trees in Dehra”

The narrator is Ruskin Bond who begins this short story revealing subtle attachment to nature which is the main theme of the story. The setting is Dehradun. After reaching there, he recalls the bungalow built by his grandfather during the twentieth century. He takes his trip to his ancestral house as a pilgrimage. Feeling of nostalgia is rekindled into his heart. After visiting the bungalow, which was now being owned by some other person, he came across a poor vendor who was old and racing against time. For providing some financial relief to him, Bond buys some of his commodities. The riots of 1947 is also reflected as the partition phase and is dealt with in the story.

Ruskin's grandfather had great admiration for flora and fauna. His personal life is also emphasised upon when he lost his father due to malaria in Calcutta.

But Bond is optimistic by nature. He realised that his father's dreams had come true as the trees were growing and he is contented.

The story has basically five phases. The first is the feeling of nostalgia in Bond. He remembers the trees and the animals he found in garden of his old home when he was a child. He regrets the loss of greenery, but is thrilled to see the old jackfruit tree thus expressing the close bond between the natural and the human world. The second phase deals with the old man, who represents a person of the bygone era. He is described at one place as an old withering tree. Here a metaphor from the natural world is applied to the human world. The third one deals with the partition of India which depicts a recollection of tragedy. The ecological parallel is the loss of habitation – human in this case. The fourth phase showcases the inter-personal relationship of father and son. Bond's father says that if people continue cutting trees there will not be any forest left. This is a kind of message which inspires one to plant trees with greater enthusiasm. The last phase finds Bond in a desolate place in introspection. He is overwhelmed to find the once dry rocky place blooming with greenery and vegetation.

This story reveals Bond's strong attachment to nature and how he responded to his surroundings through a biocentric lens.

“The Silver Lining” and Application of Psycho-sociological Approach

The September 21, 2010 issue of 'The Economic Times' reported that the differently-abled among the age group of 6-14 years form 5-7% of India's population. A small number it may

seem but the actual number appears to be greater. A survey by the same newspaper points out that many of these children go unnoticed. Thus problems and difficulties start early for these children. First, they are already a minority and to add to it they may not be given attention, which then decides whether or not they be privileged enough to avail the benefits mentioned to them by the constitutional law. Whatever the circumstance, these children get isolated from society. They start seeing themselves as different from the normal human beings which fuels several complexes within them. They start feeling inferior to the so-called normal human beings. This complex psyche in a child develops a sense of insecurity regarding their future and life.

“The Silver Lining” by Chaman Nahal is a story of one such child- Promodni, unable to hear and speak. She is the daughter to the couple owning the guest house where the author first met her. The whole action takes place in this guest house. The author has beautifully pictured Promodni's life: her meetings, interactions, reactions, emotions, miseries. We are told that every time a stranger approaches her and initiates a talk, she gets afraid and tears come rolling down her eyes(the author notices she is pretty). The girl keeps herself busy by playing around with servants all time. That's the only pass time she enjoys for she has no friends of her age in the society. This is one aspect where life turns very rude to her. For we know, a child develops properly only in healthy conditions, playing with children their age, making mistakes and learning from them. Only now the readers understand why Promodni was afraid of approaching the strangers. She feels self-conscious and is fully aware that it is she who is the topic of conversation. Promodni pities herself. The discriminating attitude of the society comes to the forefront also when the author writes she never

went to school because there were none to cater her needs. The author has also tried to show that a special child can be understood by a person equally special.

It is this equally special stranger David, whose effortless efforts make Promodni let out a shrill of laughter after years. He comes in as a 'silver lining' to the guest house in Bhandari's life as we come to know later that he plans to open a school for special children and would be glad to have Promodni as his first pupil. A special child needs special teachers like themselves who are able to understand their language and in whom they might confine.

Conclusion :

From the study of the three short stories- "Kabuliwala", "My Father's Trees in Dehra" and "The Silver Lining" through the lens of "Psycho-analytic theory", "Ecocriticism" and "Psychosociological approach", what we can conclude is that the authors have presented childhood in their stories differently. But one thing common to all is the positive attitude. The child has been shown in a positive light in all the three stories.

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