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A Study and Analysis of Select Characters in Paro Anand's 'Like Smoke'

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Abstract

Today, in the present scenario, many writers are working on children's literature. Children are the future of their nation and therefore, society holds a responsibility towards moulding and shaping the personality of them. At times, children face embarrassment, humiliation and non-acceptance of society. And in the lack of healthy environment they tend to undermine themselves. This paper deals with several events in the socialization of a child and it also highlights the basic responsibilities of various sectors of society in the development and growth of children. Presently, many contemporary writers are dealing with the issues of children in their works such as Ruskin Bond, Ranjit Lal, Mohit Parikh, Paro Anand, Saumya Rajendran, Himanjali Shankar, Payal Dhar and many more. Paro Anand has tried to present the darker side of children's lives in her literary works. Her short stories reveal the untold desires of the characters. 'In The Shadow of Greatness', Paro Anand portrays a character who suffers with the problem of stammering. Being a stammer her life is not as easy as the life of others. Though,

she is unique in her own way but still her identity is known by her mother's greatness. In her other work, 'See You Shortly', the story of difference, Anand describes her character who is short but an amazing basketball player. This character never ever thought that her height might become a big barrier in her success. So she faced many problems in her life. Next is, 'They called Her Fats' a short story that depicts the life of an orphan child in her orphanage. She is bullied, embarrassed or ignored and is considered by everyone a destructive trouble. As she never gets any appreciation so she feels disappointed, frustrated and hurt. This paper attempts to present some of the major issues of children in the present time.

Keywords: Humiliation, torture, aggression, embarrassment, primary agents, stakeholders

Introduction

A well-known writer, Paro Anand is an author of children's fiction, plays, novels, novellas and short stories. She is a renowned story-teller in many parts of India, UK, Switzerland and France. She has been awarded the Bal Sahitya Puraskar for her acclaimed work '*Wild Child and Other Stories*' which is republished with new title '*Like Smoke*'. She has always raised her voice against child violence, child abuse, sexual assault and many more issues. Her writing, projects the critical condition of children and focuses the contemporary issues of teenagers. Literature, constantly comes up with new ideas and methods to entertain children for instance - *Aseop's Fables*, *Panchatantra Stories* and *Jatak Tales* etc. In an article, 'An overview of children's Literature in English' by Tulika Publication, a Professor of English Literature in England said, 'Children fiction is the imaginative creation of a cultural space in which writers find ways of exploring what they want to say to-and about-children: an arena in which children and adults can engage in various kinds of shared and dynamic discourse.' Children's literature is gradually evolving and is occupying a prominent place in the field of literature. The family has a major involvement in Paro Anand's works as they play an important role in the upbringing of children. Therefore, there are many stakeholders who have a significant role in socialization of a child. These stakeholders influence them and shape their value system. Neighbours, friends, peers, schools, communities, relatives and caregivers are the primary agents in socialization of any child. They all are responsible for their mental, physical and psychological growth and development. Most of the parents handle their child in two ways; either they try to control them or leave them free. It is aptly said, 'Both too much and too little control threaten the optimal development of children'. Parents should give a healthy environment to their children so that they are able to share their feelings and thoughts. It would not be an exaggeration to say that 'People live for loving and being loved.' Although love cannot be seen, smelt, touched and heard

but it can be felt and experienced. The real meaning of love as described by Clare is, “the complete absence of fear”. This paper deals with three short stories collection ‘In the Shadow of Greatness’, ‘See You Shortly’ and ‘They Called Her Fats’. This paper also tries to discuss the issues such as lack of self-identity, self-esteem and self-dignity in the child characters.

The short-story ‘In the Shadow of Greatness’ begins with Ramona Bagchi’s photo shoot who is actually a very famous actor. She loves acting, enjoys her career and has a very positive attitude towards life. Her lovely daughter observes everything from behind the curtain. She is just like her mother, beautiful and talented, but totally awkward in some ways, for she has madly frizzy hair and is a dreadful stammer. She really likes acting, imitates the characters very well and is willing to become an actress. But, unfortunately she cannot share her desires. She cannot speak properly because of her stammering problem. This loses her self-confidence and due to which she suffers every minute. People laugh at her and comment scornfully such as, “You are beautiful in your own way” (23). In such case, she considers herself just like a consolation prize with a stammer. She wanted to live with her father, who has already divorced her mother and has disappeared from her life. Even she would like to live with her step siblings. She really wanted to shine out of her mother’s greatness.

This paper depicts many aspects of Ramona’s daughter’s character. She is intelligent, ambitious and hard-working. She puts herself into different characters and practices in front of the mirror. She feels that she could be a good actress someday. She practiced again and again in her bedroom where there is no audience other than her ownself and she doesn’t stammer that much. She wanted to act in her school’s annual function but they always offered her non-speaking and non-descript role. Her school organized a mythological play, the story of Satyavan and Savitri. Her good friend, Prashant was selected for Satyavan’s role and she wanted to play Savitri’s part but her drama teacher gave her Satyavan’s mother’s role because she was blind and mute. She started learning the lines of Savitri and tried to get into that character. Her heart cried when she watched Cora, who was actually selected for Savitri, spoiling the whole character. And finally when she got the character of Savitri, she did fabulous acting. Everyone was surprised, her drama teacher was shocked when she came to know about her. Her mother was thrilled although her happiness was of another level. The play was well performed, everything went well and she found her place. This feeling is appropriately described by these lines: “The play was glorious.

We got a standing ovation when Prashant and I came out at the curtain call. I had stammered. A bit. But it hadn't mattered. Not one bit. I knew I'd found my place in the sun" (32).

This paper focuses on the surroundings, environment and family. In her surroundings, there was super sweet Nana and Nani and a loving Masi who was more a friend than Masi and of course, her superb mother, who was too great in many ways. She was a darling daughter of her mother. She believed herself to be a plant who shines in the shadow of her greatness. She had always learnt too many things from her 'ideal' mother, for instance, she helps the strugglers, producers and finances the production house. She never refused to take any role and her presence made the movie 'sleeper hit'. Her mother always came as a chief guest in her school's annual function. Her mother was so happy when she heard about the school play and said to Prashant, "She's really, really good and I had no idea, no idea she even wanted to act at all. I always worried that she was under my shadow, unable to grow. But I'm so glad she is in no one's shadow. And I believe I have to thank you for that" (31). Her good friend, Prashant made her realize that she can be a better Savitri as compared to Cora. She did it well and proved that nothing is impossible. She was different and unique. Finally, she earned the moral support by teachers, friends and family and shined on the stage.

In the short- story 'See You Shortly', Anita had gone through mental trauma, humiliation and aggression. Her appearance ruined her. 'Height' is a big obstacle in her career. The journey of shorties is not easy, every day they have to compromise with their dreams. Anita faced it every day, felt humiliated when people judged her on the basis of appearance. Her best friend called her 'Shorty'. She was surprised, humiliated and did not want to accept her explanations. She became aggressive and boiled from inside when Ana said, think 'Big' and her feelings are aptly described here, "big did you say? I've just made a first class idiot of myself for being so small, and you say, think BIG? Honestly Ana, have you taken complete leave of all your sense and good manners?" (70). Ana and Anita both were best friends. Her school teachers were never ever happy with their friendship. They warned them umpteen times and instructed them to be separated from each other. They said, "it'll be good for both of you" (64). Finally, they were separated in different sections. Now Anita was in 8A and Ana in 8C, they only had lunch time to friend. Another humiliation she faced when Mr. Choudhary who was new coach of basketball did not include her name in the selection team. He said, "One of the Specialities of the Game is that

of—HEIGHT” (67). She understood she was not designed for this game as it required only tall people who could easily jump higher and higher, closer to the basket.

Mr..Choudhary said, I had never seen any short player. Somewhere he was making her realize that there is no scope for her. She felt like a handicapped and had feeling that it was impossible to become a good player or a useful player. She lost her confidence and she accepted that she was good for nothing. Still she had a trail and she played very badly. She groaned inside and, “Tears of humiliation prickled behind her eyes” (69). She wanted to get out of that humiliating situation and feels sad for Ana who fought for her. She wanted her in the team and didn't want to give up easily.

This paper projects the feelings of self-identity, self-esteem and self- dignity through the characters. Anita was not happy with her name. Her father was a poet, so he had a better poetic name for her like – Sohini and all. Coincidentally, her Nani named her Anita, though it sounded boring and creepy. Search for good name was still continued. One day, Ana (Anamika) called her ‘C.U.Shortly’. It was so weird. She thought what a grand name finally she has. It has dignity and a difference. Later on, Anita asked Ana about the meaning and she cooked her well by the illogical explanations, for example, ‘Crusty Upper’ ‘Cute Urs ‘and ‘Cut Up’. And the new coach's reaction was not good. He stared her all the time and did not want her in the team. Anita was a good player but the coach was an Arjuna Awardee, well experienced and sharp. He once stated that if the player was short, it would be impossible to become good in basketball. Anita felt that her existence was not countable on this earth. She broke down and still wanted to become a good basketball player. Her dignity shattered around her and she collected all her grin without any expectation. She didn't want to request or needed any kind of sympathy, concern and pity. She just tried to get out of that place, without any justification and accepted her reality whole heartedly.

This paper presents the beautiful friendship of two friends, a ‘LONG’ and a ‘SHORT’. Character Ana was tall, she had a long appearance with a long wide face, her shoulders were flat triangular. On the other hand, Anita was short just five-foot. Actually, she kept her hair really short because she didn't want to stand in the category of four inch as it would only emphasize her short appearance. Ana was just like a lamppost and Anita, a postbox. They were childhood friends and were partners in each crime and punishment. They studied together from class nursery. They were just like carbon copies with different appearance. Every time, Ana took stand for Anita, when

new coach Mr. Choudhary didn't include her name in the team, she demanded for a fair chance. In fact, Anita accepted her reality and didn't want to humiliate herself again. She expressed her feelings to Ana by saying, "Face it. Thin people think thin and short people think short" (71). But Ana did not give up easily, she thought again and again and finally she got a solution which was new and never tried by anyone. She proved her friendship and made a new history. Ana immediately dialed a call to Anita and instructed her to play 'short' goal because she was short player. Anita was puzzled throughout the night and tried to read her mind but failed every time. Next day, Ana met Anita with a big smile or a kind of victory on her face. She got permission from her parents, sports teacher and Mr. Choudhary. They both started practicing the whole day, Anita started playing short, she bent lower and lower and Ana with all her tall height could not get the ball. On every afternoon, they used to practice and work hard for their school team and finally made it a history with a good example as is mentioned, "And THAT is really the long and SHORT of it" (74).

In the next short story, 'They Called Her 'Fats' Fatima, an orphan child, was abandoned by her parents. She was not adopted like other orphan children. She also wished for love, care, and pamper. She was totally lost and became aggressive, violent and rude. She never allowed anyone to see her tears and grief. She always stood strong and faced everything boldly. She loved her solitude and enjoyed her own company. She did not want to interact with anyone because her surroundings completely ignored her. People falsely accused her and never even tried to understand her feelings. This was one of the reasons behind her unhappiness in life. Fatima loved her loneliness; she walked and ran at night in the ground generating a rumour that she knew dark magic. Her warden started observing her behaviour and asked about it several times and warned her that it would not be tolerated in future. Fatima was silent; there were thunders in her mind because no-one was going to give her any attention as is clear, "She stood still and silent. Over the years, she had trained herself to speak only when spoken to, and then only in uncommunicative monosyllables that discouraged conversation" (90).

This paper delineates and examines the behavior of non-acceptance by society towards children and how much society is responsible in the upbringing of any child. Fatima was not actually 'Fat', as the boys had named her. They coined the nick name for her –'FATS' and "They referred to it like a Mafia underworld underling. Like 'Bugs' or 'Lefty' (87). They hated her and bullied badly, made new stories against her, like – she is a witch, loved to drink blood, eat cockroaches and wants girlish charm for male attention. She was humiliated and

emotionally broken from inside. Some boys taunted her half-boy and half-girl. She was angry, hurt and tortured. She was blocked by the girls in common room, they didn't want to sit together with her. Fatima was just hungry for love and respect. Even her teachers never made any effort to understand her and they also thought just like others. When Margaret Whitbread told them about Fatima's training, they were surprised and advised her that she would be a trouble. In reality, Fatima wanted to express her inner feelings, "She wanted, so desperately needed, to tell of the pain she felt when the girls sniggered, at the humiliation of them whispering, 'Shhh! Here comes Fats to bite your tongue out!'" (90).

This paper conveys us a message and shows a lovely bond between the teacher and student. Mrs. Margaret Whitbread was impressed by Fatima in first meeting. She was sports teacher and a former British international javelin thrower. Fatima held the pole tightly and her grip was good. Everyone was surprised and girls started taunting her meanwhile Mrs. Whitbread started taking her side and stopped them immediately. She wanted her to participate in sports and for the first time Fatima got interested in any game. Fatima followed every instructions, she concentrated herself and listened everything carefully regarding making the grip of javelin. She learns to balance the body and use full strength before moving forward. And she did fabulous in her first attempt and it happened like, "thrill shot through her as the javelin soared, zinging through the air. And landed with a perfect TCHACK!" (95). Both eyes were beaming and she felt confident or motivated. Mrs. Whitbread advised her to avoid all nonsense talks, as they tried to instigate her. She further instructed her to just focus on the game. Fatima listened everything patiently because she felt genuine concern of her teacher towards her, not any kind of sympathy. She observed her teacher saying that Fatima can be a good javelin player. Her teacher asked her, "Fatima, I was wondering, would you like to take special javelin lessons?" (98). Fatima readily agreed to it. The bond of teacher and student beautifully comes out here and Fatima started reacting less on irrelevant gossips. When girls taunted her for her biceps, she ignored them and understood the reality. Mrs. Whitebread discussed everything with her family, she expressed her love for Fatima and cared for her. She knew well that she was really talented. Her son suggested her to adopt Fatima and give her a family. So Fatima was adopted and finally got a loving family at the age of fourteen. Fatima played internationally, won the Olympic bronze medal and made new records as is mentioned in the story, "In 1986, the World Championship, making five of the six longest throws in history and shattering the World record" (102).

Nowadays many writers are involved in writing for children. They are highlighting their issues and trying to give a proper direction to the readers. We need to understand the responsibilities of primary agents and family towards children. They should give a healthy environment to the children. They need to appreciate and motivate them. This paper discusses the situation of different children in different manner such as psychological disturbance of an orphan child named Fatima, her suffering, grief, pain and her isolation from society. So there must be a positive attitude of society and government towards these kind of children. Most of the single child face psycho- social problems. Around 38% children are facing these kind of problems who have no siblings. Children of single parents also face the psychological issues. They are mostly introvert personality and isolate themselves from the society. Now government is planning to give reservation to orphan and special children so that they can develop their identity in the society. Many schools or colleges are now appointing a counsellor in their camps for such purposes and voluntary sectors or social workers are too actively contributing to help these children.

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