

Alienation and Affirmation in the Works of Ruskin Bond and Ian McEwan: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: The popular themes like 'Affirmation' and 'Alienation' are mainly seen in the fictions written for adult readers. But with the growing insensitivity of people and cutthroat struggle of human survival, fictional characters of children too are found sinking in it. The protagonists who lie in the category of children's literature also started incorporating the themes of affirmation and alienation secretly and trying to find temporary balance in their lives. This research paper critically examines the existence of both the themes in the children's novel of Ruskin Bond and Ian McEwan. Besides, a subtle review of the characters in the context of their genders will also be presented. The two selected novels of Ruskin Bond's *Angry River* and Ian McEwan's *The Daydreamer* is attempted to evaluate through exploratory research method and observed the existence of protagonists' adjustment and loss of interest in the real world. Both the writers, Ruskin Bond and Ian McEwan tried their hands in presenting the sensibility and emotions of children's insensitive age groups. Besides, this paper will also present the diversity of culture and circumstances of children of the same age groups.

Key Words: Children's Novel, Affirmation, Alienation, Themes, Ian McEwan, Daydream.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Children's literature is mainly written with the perspective to empower the imagination and aesthetic ability of children. A writer like Ruskin Bond who brought up and lived in India captured the core and daily activities of children in his works. Ian McEwan is seen engrossed in presenting the unconscious of children in the genre of Children's fiction. Ruskin Bond's *Angry River* is the first children's novel written by the author where he presented a female character named Sita. *The DayDreamer*, written by McEwan, is a novel about a child who mainly prefers to live in his imaginative world. The selection of both works is dependent on the criteria where unknowingly the protagonists are struggling in their lives. The irony of the work has consisted of its plots where the struggle of children is presented in their age of enjoyment and carefree lives. According to Nancy Anderson, there are six categories of children's literature. The prominent feature of selected children's text is its incorporation of pictures. Both the authors, the Anglo-Indian Ruskin Bond and British Ian McEwan have presented their fictions with the picture that not only made the book interesting but also captures the reader's attention in retaining the stories.

The previous research analysis is usually summed up by concluding the technique and theme used by the writer. This paper is an attempt to study the struggle of children in the contemporary world in their respective situations. Ruskin Bond's *Angry River* is dealt with the theme of 'Affirmation' through the character of Sita. The protagonist of this children's novel Sita is seen in the situation where she accepted her situation and tried to come out of it. The word 'Alienation' denotes isolation from the contemporary world. In McEwan's novel *The DayDreamer*, the protagonist Peter is depicted in his imaginative world, mostly unrealistic one.

2. MATERIALS and METHODS: The following material and research methodology applied to achieve the objectives of the research paper:

- Ruskin Bond's novel *Angry River* and Ian McEwan's *The DayDreamer* are used as the primary sources of the paper.
- Keeping in mind the objective of observing the children's characters in the light of Affirmation and Alienation, the Observation technique is used to analyse the character's perspective and actions.
- Apart from the secondary sources like already published research papers and journals on children's literature, Ruskin Bond and Ian McEwan's works are also taken into consideration for reaching accurate findings.
- Besides, the Modern Language Association 8th edition style is referred for proper alignments and citation of this research paper.

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

Angry River by Ruskin Bond is a novel where affirmation is portrayed through the character of Sita. The female protagonist of the novel is not literate to understand the societal norms and weakness of her role as a feminist gender. Sita is a girl who outperformed the expectations of the reader and presented in a didactic manner. Due to the absence of parents, Sita is seen living with her grandparents. There is no weakness of gender is shown in the character of Sita as she was able to do all the works of her place. Being the only girl on the island, Sita never gets the opportunity to attend school. The novel itself began with a dark and clouded monsoon which connoted the readers the horrified future of Sita. The monsoon rain was heavy and the grandmother showed severely ill. Undoubtedly, it was difficult for the poor grandfather to take grandmother to the city hospital at Shahganj, leaving Sita behind all alone. Seeing the deteriorated condition of the grandmother, it seemed necessary to take the grandmother to the hospital. Despite being the only child on the island, Sita is not afraid of the thought. But she seemed quite unsure about the weather's ferocity and river's risen level. The novel presented a protagonist who possesses all aspects seen as a weakness in society. Sita is a girl, illiterate and poor. But contrary to its surface idea and depiction of character, she turned out as an intelligent and reasonable child. Sita's intelligence and apt use of her skills made her survive in flood all alone on the island.

Barefoot and barelegged, Sita survived on dried peas and warm goat's milk but the rain did not stop the whole night. Accompanying her doll Mamta as the only friend, Sita is shown her fear of flood and the safety of household things. There are times when children learn through their hardships and struggle of their lives. The same instance is illustrated by Sita when she affirmed her goodness of river as a natural resource and decided that if river level rises:

'What will we do if it comes into the hut?'

'We will climb onto the roof.'

'And if it reaches the roof?'

'We will climb the peepul tree. The river has never gone higher than the peepul tree.' (17)



Fig. 1. Sita in heavy rainfall, *Angry River* (40)

Bond's plot of presenting Sita's affirmation is shown in her believes in Lord Indra. A strong religious Indian believes are existed in the novel through the prominent character Sita and her survival. Sita tried to save her three hens, a cock, grandfather's *hukkah*, grandmother's stick, and other essential stuff in a trunk to make it heavy and not drown in flood. The river of water pushed the thresholds of her room and came inside. Sita undoubtedly was full of fear but affirming the situation; she used her reasoning and dealt with the situation for survival. *Angry River* is a story of a children's survival where Sita is depicted as an epitome of courage. This female protagonist is an evident amalgamation of courage and sensitivity. In amidst of facing an angry river and saving essential things, she has forgotten her doll Mamta behind. Sita became emotional over her forgetfulness of her companion Mamta and expressed it as "...if I can be careless with someone I've made, how can I expect the gods to notice me, alone in the middle of the river? (39). Besides, her faith over the gods' power made her accept the crisis and give unless she survived.

Ian McEwan is a writer who is always known for his skill of presenting a dark plot. But after several reviews and analyses of his works, the versatility of the writer depicted his deep interest in human relationships and thoughts. McEwan has written two children's fiction among which *The DayDreamer* is published in the year 1994. *The DayDreamer* is divided into eight chapters where each chapter is about the daydreaming or an unrealistic imagination of the protagonist Peter. The hero of the text is ten years old who used to be considered a difficult child by everyone

around him. Peter, a child, who has possessed amazing imaginative skills and mainly seen, lost in his daydreaming almost in every situation. Peter is bombarded with various discouraging tags in the chapters but there is hardly anyone shown in the work that made efforts to the reason for it.

Peter's habit of day-dreaming is seen as his carelessness. This research paper analyses that Peter is a character who deliberately alienation in his life and started finding joy in his daydreaming. Peter is always called a difficult child to handle that Peter understood because of his silence in behaviour. But based on previous research, McEwan's works are hardly so straight and direct and the same observed in the case of Peter. It seemed significant for the scholars to find out the reason for Peter's alienation from the unrealistic world. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic technique is suggested as the most appropriate tool to study Peter's behaviour. Various incidents in the chapters showed Peter's day-dreaming is not deliberate or usual. In chapter one, Kate a seven-year-old sister is forgotten by Peter on the bus due to his day-dreaming despite various warnings and reminders by his parents. Moreover, When Peter accepted that he liked Kate than other family members.



Fig. 2. Peter, "Chapter 3The Cat" *The DayDreamer* (56)

In another chapter entitled "The Dolls", Peter imagined a broken as "The Bad Doll" (23) and his imagination led him to dark things like broken body parts, blood, etc. In chapter four, Peter's day-dream turned out so horrific where he applied a vanishing cream on all the family members of his family. Peter's accepted that he loves his mother. But his fearful imagination that she has to go from there through vanishing cream is not given any positive signals of sources of imagination. Peter's day-dreams now and then made him analyse through Freud's dream interpretations. On brooding over his tag of a difficult child, Peter does not seem difficult as:

Apart from all vegetables except potatoes, and fish, eggs, and cheese, there was nothing he would not eat. He wasn't noisier or dirtier or more stupid than anyone he knew. His name was easy to say and spell. His face, which was pale and freckled, was easy enough to remember. He went to school every day like all other children and never made that much fuss about it. ...As far as Peter was concerned, he was quite easy. What was difficult about him? (2)

Peter is truly a character who deliberately adopted 'Alienation' in his life at such a tender age. In any of the chapters, a ten-year-old boy is neither shown cheerful nor spending quality time with his family. Peter is strongly a character where an adjustment in the realistic society is seen as a big issue for him. The character of Peter is opposite to Bond's Sita who was courageous and confident. On contrary to Sita, Peter is a timid and silent boy who facing difficulty regardless of family, education, and materialistic pleasures.

4. RESULTS:

This paper is mainly found the variety in situation and approach of both the children. In *Angry River*, Sita is seen as the girl who fought with natural disasters all alone in absence of her guardians. She is portrayed as a girl of a strong mindset that affirmed the situation and initiated self-help. The theme of affirmation is not directly depicted in the novel but the actions of Sita in protecting herself and essentials for survival connoted it in the novel.

The other selected novel by Ian McEwan's *The DayDreamer* is turned out as the appropriate instance of the theme of 'Alienation'. The child showed in the novel Peter is not seen as happy in any of the circumstances. Peter's skill of imagination is undoubtedly a matter of appreciation that could not be understood by the people around him. At various times it is observed that children generate the feeling of shyness at a certain age. But it is important for the people around him not to insult the child with discouraging tags as in the case of Peter. The journey of Peter is itself found his reason for creating an alienation from the real world. Both the protagonists of the novels strongly supported the idea of the pioneer of child psychoanalysis Anna Freud. She once said, "I was always looking outside myself for strength and confidence, but it comes from within. It is there all the time."

5. CONCLUSION :

It is believed that a human being's personality is based on his brought up and childhood environment. The importance of children's environment is undoubtedly increasing day by day. A mandatory appointment of counselors in the schools is one of the examples that support the importance of a healthy environment. In the selected works, both the protagonists Sita and Peter are found their ways of survival in the reality of their situations. On one hand, where Sita is used her reasoning to get escape from the flood and survived, on the other hand, Peter started finding his joy in the impossible imaginations of his mind. Both the characters are portrayed adjusting happily in their respective situations and by dealing with them in their ways. But the limitation of the research paper is laid on the fact where the effect of adverse situation and alienation from reality need to be studied thoroughly.

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