Representations of Childhood in Art and Literature

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Introduction

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Kanak Kanti Bera
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Childhood: biology vs sociology

Who is a 'child'? What does 'childhood' mean, and what does it consist of? A search for terminological meanings in the process of morphological derivation of 'childhood' from the root 'child' is sure to deprive us of the rich philosophical connotations associated with them. While the term 'child' is often biologically defined, 'childhood' is hardly a scientific nomenclature. Besides science, childhood as a philosophical concept draws heavily upon both humanities and social sciences. While science tends to define 'childhood' with reference to a specific phase in our life cycle, humanities and social sciences put emphasis on a set of experiences and behaviours to define it. Of late, as an outcome of this debate or the inter-disciplinary ramifications, the concepts of children and childhood have lent themselves to some serious inquiries in the field of academia and the arena of scholarships.

As hinted above, the whole concept of childhood is an evasively ambiguous and complex one. In medical terms, childhood is the post-infancy period that ends with puberty. This concept equates childhood with non-adulthood in terms of the state and growth of a person. But, rather than a medical or physiological condition, childhood turns out to be a sociological and philosophical construct. As soon as the discourse on 'childhood' goes beyond this scientific periphery, it starts losing its concrete definable character and turns into some intangible entity. But this intangibility is never a form of refusal to be investigated and explored. Rather, it yields enormous

opportunities for the thinkers and theorists to redefine and discover 'childhood' anew. For example, a number of Western philosophies down the ages and across the diverse cultures looked upon childhood differently, thereby pointing out both the paradigmatic and syntagmatic evolution of the concept.

Various notions and interpretations of the term 'childhood'can be assumed as the socio-cultural and philosophical responses to the diverse preoccupations or needs of the epochs. There are several hypotheses regarding the genesis and evolution of this concept. In his *Centuries of Childhood* (1960), the French historian, Phillipe Ariès argues that the idea of childhood did not exist before the early modern period. Nicholas Orme, on the other hand, supposes the Middle Ages in England to introduce the notion of childhood and children's culture in his essay "The culture of children in medieval England" (1995).

If childhood and adulthood are polar opposites, and when the depiction of childhood in arts and literature has mostly been done by the adults, questions of biased portraiture, inequalities and injustice to children are quite an undeniable reality. The story of evolution concerning man's attitude to childhood bear enough evidence for this fact. The mediaeval age looked upon children as mini-adults, and childhood as the early phase of adulthood (Ariès). In fact, since the 16th century, childhood was considered a primary phase of human life, a kind of preparation for adulthood, as John Locke contended. The 17th century started drawing a demarcation line with respect to clothes, education, or healthcare. The Victorians could see and realise the existence of childhood. But the cult of childhood came with a stronger march of progress, and it is only the modern era that does not only 'see' but also 'hear' and recognise childhood and its rights. In this present century, huge critical attention is paid to childhood by both society and media.

Two contrasting definitions of childhood became equally popular as they evolved across different forms of arts. These can be summarised as, 'faulty adults' (to be corrected and disciplined) and 'icons of innocence' (which brings childhood close to divinity). This picture remained unchanged, more or less, till the early 19th century.

A report from the Children's Society, published in 2006, shows how childhood in the true sense of the term is slowly 'disappearing', being under threat from the adult world. An overdose of surveillance and supervision by that adult world is a huge threat to the essence of childhood — its innocence, spontaneity, and creativity. Our modern culture, as represented by the parents,

guardians, governesses or schools, rarely allows children to enjoy any unsupervised games or sports, or to have any kind of self-designed recreation. Children, in fact, represent the worst of minorities pathetically subjugated to multifarious oppression everywhere. At home, they are rigorously trained to become ideal (and successful) adults in the future. A number of schools, especially those run with commercial objectives, often treat them as guinea pigs as a part of their utilitarian experimentation. Adding to their misery, there is now the marketing industry, which often falls to exploiting the susceptibilities of children, prioritising business purposes over children's welfare. This sector is critically judgmental of the basic skills these children acquire from their guardians and teachers. Most of these adult agencies profess to working towards the physical, psychological, social and moral well-being of the children, but hardly attach any value to their original thoughts, emotions, creativity, or desires. It would not be hyperbolic to say that such treatment of childhood is a reflection of the deep-rooted indifference of a particular section of a society that is self-indulgent and judgmental. In fact, society as a whole needs to be properly groomed in the art of treating childhood; and different forms of art can live up to the task of providing us (individuals, or these social agencies) with much-needed orientation through proper guidance or admonition. The paintings of Hermann Gross, a German expressionist painter, have successfully offered this orientation, primarily by capturing the quintessential qualities of childhood. His paintings exhibit how art can potentially offer deeper insights into childhood to all caregivers belonging to this risk-averse society. Clearly pointing out that childhood is endangered when it is never encouraged by all these adult agencies, Gross' art warns us as a society against the possible loss of this precious childhood.

Childhood: Paradise Lost

For all of us, as individuals, one thing universally common is that we all passed through childhood. We left it behind (or rather, had to) quite a few years ago. With all the mature years weighing hard upon our shoulders, we all dream of time travel, at least once, to that pristine phase of our lives, even though it was not all a fairytale for every one of us. An unfortunate few may be haunted by the nightmare of childhood (as happened to Dickens' David Copperfield); a lot may have lived a childhood synonymous with poverty (like Majidi's Ali). But for the vast majority, childhood is like a dream, a rare sense of wonder, a time of pure spontaneous imagination, even amidst poverty, hunger and loss (as it was for Ray's Apu and Durga).

Irrespective of what exactly the memories of childhood uncover, it is hard to find an individual who is not keen for time travel to those early days of life. But let us ask ourselves (and, of course, all our readers) the question: even if we were blessed with an opportunity for time travel, could we view childhood now with the same childlike sense of wonder? After being burdened for so many years with all these sweet and bitter experiences, can a willing suspension of disbelief be ensured at all? If the reply is 'No', and we cannot help having only a matured critical look into the mysteries of childhood, then this book can offer exactly what our readers might look for, i.e.. critical exploration into the different aspects of childhood.

Inquiries into childhood: Philosophy to art

The social or sociological perceptions of childhood, along with various ideologies associated with them offer a widely varied range of works in literature, philosophy, psychology and other forms of arts. A plethora of academic writing on childhood is based upon the works of philosophers, historians, and theorists, such as John Locke in the 17th century, (concerning the development and education of children), Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century (maintaining that children are innately innocent) and Philippe Ariès, contending a distinctive separation of childhood from adulthood. This trend of childhood scholarship continued until it gave way to the recent pluralistic approach, including the deconstructive trends of the 1990s and 2000s.

Since the time of its adoption as one of the subjects of creative inquiry, childhood has ever retained a huge fascination for the artists, irrespective of form and genre. In the world of painting, children hardly had any thoroughfare until the 17th century, other than the figure of Jesus as an infant, the principal image of childhood in art. As late as the time when the French impressionists were at the helm, childhood came to hold the centre stage of art. The *avant-garde* French painters of the 19th century gave a new dimension to this new subject matter. The 20th century *avant-garde* painters like Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso brought a new freshness to the representation of childhood. Their immortal creations, like the figures of Marguerite and Pierre painted by Matisse, and Picasso's Paulo, came to be recognised as the first modernistic enterprises that represented childhood in art. The 1969 Picasso masterpiece, *The Painter and the Child* finally broke all the shackles, and firmly established the 'child' as a metaphor to stand for the integrity of the art.

When it comes to celluloid, childhood has continued to fascinate the minds of all concerned since the very beginning. The medium reinforces the idea that childhood is never a biological condition. Rather, as an ambiguous metaphor, it is now larger than this, then much lesser. The great filmmakers exploit the awareness that comes with maturity in order to reflect the 'undoubted otherness of youthful experience'. Those films that 'approach childhood with adult acuity', are held to be the greatest, as Pasquale Iannone aptly reviewed in the April 2014 issue of *Sight and Sound,* an international film magazine.

The greatest problem with childhood is its inevitable confrontation with, and a constant monitoring or strict surveillance by, the adult world. Not only is childhood constructed by the adult world, but its whole definition and existence are also defined by adults. A writer or a painter, himself being an adult, hardly allows childhood to define and rebuild itself. After childhood is filtered through the experienced eyes of the artist, it is served to the palate of adult readers and connoisseurs. In short, childhood in art is reduced to what the adult world allows it to be. While a writer or a painter serves here as the individual initiator, in cinema more adults are present (the producer, the scriptwriter, the director, the actors, and so on), to perform their self-proclaimed duty to tamper with the picture of childhood.

The age-old relationship between cinema and childhood started long back, probably with the 41-second-long movie, *Baby's Breakfast* by Louis Lumière (1895). Lumière's film provides a strictly adult view of childhood, as the renowned film-lecturer Pasquale Iannone remarked in his 2014 article "Age of innocence: childhood on film". "This early cinematic snapshot of childhood was made by a filmmaker who was nonetheless rigidly 'adult' in the approach to his material" (Iannone).

Georges Méliès represents a different position with his presentation of the true senses of innocence, freedom, and the beauty of childhood. While *Baby's Breakfast* shows childhood from the outside, the Georges Méliès film, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) does it from the inside out. On the other hand, Pete Docter's Oscar-winning animation film *Inside Out* (2015) or Andrew Stanton's *Finding Nemo* (2003) can be said to have applied both these viewpoints. Both films have an almost similar relationship construct, i.e. a child growing up and maturing in the world of adults who invariably keep a wistful watch from the sidelines on this gradual evolution and final amalgamation with the world. In the article "Age of innocence: childhood on film", published in 2014 Iannone argued that the best way of exploring childhood is, of course, to deploy both methodologies simultaneously:

> … the best childhood pictures are those that have found ways to harness both methods, films that manage to approach childhood with adult acuity while in some way reflecting its undoubted otherness. The presence of a child often allows filmmakers to depart from conventional modes of storytelling, to wriggle free from the strict demands of plot. (Iannone)

In his article, Iannone reviewed childhood as depicted in different films from both outside and inside, *vis-à-vis* their experiences of the crudities of life — sense of loss, rebellion, criminality, alienation, or destitution. Docter's film *Inside Out* is about just that, applying both the inside and outside views, as Jen Chaney explained in a 2015 article: "In *Inside Out,* Pixar gets mature about growing up". According to Chaney, point of view is far more important than the plot of the film. The theme of Riley's meltdown has almost been subjugated to the way it is presented; to all the "sophisticated views of the mechanisms behind". To quote the author,

> For the first time, a Pixar film is confronting how much it hurts when a child realizes her childhood will end — *while it's still ending.* It literally gets inside her head, then bluntly announces that being a kid hurts because it doesn't last. That feels refreshingly candid, even for Pixar. (Jen Chaney)

In some way or the other, the 'adult' filmmakers seem to be more occupied with the task of portraying the child attaining psychological maturity in a hostile world. Much greater focus is put on the interaction between childhood and the social environment, since, it's generally believed, a child's development is influenced by the social experiences he/she goes through across different developmental stages, as Erikson contended in 1950 (Svetina 2014). The Harry Hook movie based on Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1990) is a supreme example showing the different stages of a child's psychosocial development, as described by Mariga Marig in the 2019 article, "Childhood psychological development in *Lord of the Flies*":

> Themes such as self-esteem, gender stereotyping, personality development and emotional intelligence are comprehensively depicted in the film, which makes it easier to understand a child's development. It is notable that environmental settings, along with social interactions, are imperative in influencing childhood psychosocial development. For instance, Ralph and Jack had to form different and opposing camps due to conflict in their social interactions, particularly without the guidance of adults or parents. (M. Marig)

Adding to the narrative method employed therein, there are enough intersections between the introspections both from within and without.

These contrasting viewpoints often overlap, complement, and endorse each other.

The design of the Persian movie *Children of Heaven* (1997), directed by Majid Majidi, is mainly based on a child's point of view, which is also seen as an 'innocent' point of view. Mostly, the use of a child's point of view is generally accepted, more so when trying to avoid government censorship of movies. However, the inclusion of a child's point of view turns out to be more surprising than it should have been. For example, there seems to be a fairer representation of the 'sweet' life, even in the wake of hardship.

Another paradoxical aspect of childhood is that it is basically a promise never to be kept to the full. It constitutes a gradual process of baptism into the adult world. Dickens' David or Oliver were confronted with the brutality of the heartless mature world being pitted against them; the socio-political adversities. In the Indian context, this baptism took place through a less corrosive, but more productive mechanism. Bibhutibhushan's Apu, Durga (in *PatherPanchali,* made into a film by Satyajit Ray), Gopal and Chotu (in *Sahaj PaatherGappo,* 2016, a Bengali film directed by Manas Mukul Pal on the basis of Bibhutibhushan's short-story "Talnabami*"*) are grand specimens to represent childhood, the beauty, the purity of its innocence. Here childhood and adolescence are shown as more engrossed in the environment, with an almost naturalistic agendum. Apu and Durga have their autumn beauties of *kash, jatra* in their village, the musicality of the trains running across the green fields, the blue autumn sky*,* and the purest forms of flora and fauna*.* Gopal and Chotu are perfectly synonymous with the beauties of rural Bengal, the landscapes, the river flowing, fields verdant, and the lush greeneries. But everything is not always so bright for these siblings either. Though not on the Dickensian scale, socio-cultural adversities threaten to take a toll upon the integrity of their lives too. They become initiated into a world of disease, death, hunger, malnutrition, the indifference of the adult world and so on. However, neither of these have been depicted by Bibhutibhashan the author, or the filmmaker (Ray or Pal) as forces to chastise childhood. Rather, the primary objective here is palpably to bring childhood into a natural phase of transition —from ignorance to knowledge, from innocence to experience — without soiling the essential integrity of being or disturbing the inner self.

The medium of film and the problem of point of view

As pointed out in the above comparison between *A Trip to the Moon* and *Baby's Breakfast* in terms of their narrative styles, one of the problematic

issues in the representation of childhood in art and literature pertains to the point of view. More often than not, the pictures of childhood we come across have been depicted from the adult perspective. The representation itself is by adults, and for adults, mostly.

The cinematic expression gives a new dimension to the presentation of childhood. Both Bibhutibhusan in his novel *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Road*) and Satyajit Ray in his film adaptation presented Apu and Durga's love for nature, their extraordinary sense of wonder at every natural phenomenon. It has been aptly pointed out by Sudipta Datta in her article "Looking Back at *PatherPanchali*", published in *The Hindu* (November 2 2019):

> The idea of distance, in general, enchanted him (Apu). . . .The high blue arch of the skies above, the disappearing speck of a flyaway kite, the misty indigo field he had seen as a child . . . all of it made him think of the nebulous adventures that were happening at that very moment, in land that lay just beyond an average human's reach. (Sudipta Datta)

In addition to this, the medium of film and its cinematic expressions helped Ray look deeper into the child psyche. While the novel presented the children's impressionistic view of the world, Ray's film version with all its visual and musical effects could make this sense of wonder more appealing and the pathos more appalling. Ray made the least use of words and conversation, but much of silence and non-verbal sounds. These sounds and nuanced visuals not only resulted in some profound poetry of the natural world, and a greater poignancy of effects, but helped Ray perform the miracle of capturing the experiences of the protagonist caught between his romantic imagination, and the ways of the world; between the beauties of nature and its devastations, between his sense of wonder and the reality of death. The cinematic charisma of Ray is at its best when the parent's heart-rending lamentation over their daughter's death trails into strong and tortured musical screeches, and it communicates everything to Apu in an instant. More strongly than ever, the child figure of Apu, his sense of beauty and wonder, became challenged, and forced him to wake up to the real world, as one who has just grown up.

Childhood and Literature

Childhood, being an age-old object of interest globally, is nothing new as a stock theme in literature. As a critical concept, it has gathered momentum only in recent times, with significant contributions to childhood scholarship

made by thinkers and philosophers, such as Philippe Ariès, Stephen Wilson, Michelle H. Martin, Kate Capshaw, Anna Mae Duane, Jacqueline Rose, Marah Gubar and Robin Bernstein, and many others. The whole corpus produced by them simply leads us to the point that we need to understand the philosophical idea(s) of childhood, as they have evolved gradually since the time of ancient fables transmitted orally, from nursery rhymes to the age of the e-book.

Literature reflects both the paradigmatic and syntagmatic shifts, both the evolution and variances in the representation or perceptions of childhood in its own way. Constructions of childhood in literary works explore the ways in which strangeness turns into familiarity in the process of growing up. It also serves the author to relocate the 'lost self' by stressing the distance between childhood in the past and the reality of adulthood, as Susan Engel suggests in "Looking Backward: Representation of Childhood in Literary Work" (1999).

Childhood has been represented in English literature with all its multifarious dimensions. The literary potential of childhood is evident in its inherent dualism, in the range of its association with the contrastive binaries — from innocence, purity and vulnerability to the negative, even the dystopian sense of 'evil'. This innocence is begotten out of the child's ignorance, but once it is gone, with the gain of knowledge, it paves the way to evil, eventually to 'adulthood':

> Their childhood is based around their innocence, whether that is defined as sexual, emotional or physical. Once their innocence has gone, so has their childhood, and once that has disappeared they are subject to the same pressures and difficulties as adults, whatever their age and whatever their understanding. They are entitled to no protection, no sympathy and no special pleading. They are no longer children. (Mary Jane Kehily 2010)

In consonance with this argument, the orphan narratives (that became very popular in the late 18th century) showed children and childhood as vulnerable victims of the system, which easily wins our sympathy. In contrast, books with strong moral instructions depict children with errors as bad role models. Fables and allegories dedicated to the cause of moral welfare (for example, the Buddhist *Jataka Tales* for the kids and children) took a middle flight. They frequently hint at the elements of evil in adult society which children can hardly escape, but also preach morality as a tool for these children to fight against evil and vanquish it.

Coming to English literature, we may trace the portrayal of children in a number of Elizabethan lyrics. In the neo-classical era, though it finds room in the works of John Dryden or Alexander Pope, a more serious preoccupation with the theme of childhood became almost a vogue in the 18th century with the rise of the English novel. Its prolific ramification followed. William Blake and Charles Lamb glorified children as meek, mild, innocent, beautiful creatures. Wordsworth showed the child as a symbol of natural piety and wisdom, and often went on to mystify it; Samuel Taylor Coleridge heaped his praises upon the same qualities, often breaking the boundaries between adulthood and childhood (Christabel being an embodiment of this 'adult' childhood). These Romantics, in fact, initiated the 'cult of childhood' in the 19th century. As Margarita Georgieva observed in *Childhood in English Literature* (2010), critical inquiry into childhood became essential, for the sake of a fresh critical perception and re-evaluation of the Romantic or Victorian literary production. Eventually, the 19th and 20th centuries witnessed the growth of different bodies of literature, both entertaining and didactic:

> The 19th and 20th centuries saw the steady emergence of a real literature for children, either for their instruction or entertainment. Thus, the child became either the central subject and/or object of a plethora of writing since the 18th century. These reflected the dichotomy of childhood which was seen as a symbol of growth and development on the one hand and as a symbol of regression and ignorance of the world on the other. (Georgieva 2010)

The body of literature written primarily with a didactic intention consists of fantasy, fairytales, nonsense verse and prose, limericks and science fiction. Despite the guise of childlike fantasy, Lewis Carroll's Alice (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) conveys a serious message. The girl has been used by the author as an instrument to challenge social conventions, and to raise questions about the behaviour and attitudes of grown-up people. This kind of admixture of fantasy form and didactic intention is highly enlightening, as well as entertaining, even for the young readers. Thus, besides the entertainment provided to children by modern writers of fantasy like J.K. Rowling or Roald Dahl, there are allegories, fables and nonsense texts with some serious propositions. The dichotomy of progression and regression that Georgieva talked about has been epitomised beautifully through the characters of Ralph and Jack in Golding's *Lord of the Flies,* where the presentation of childhood is explicitly drenched with a serious didactic message for the adults.

In this literary journey undertaken by the 'child' down these periods, childhood in English literature was sometimes viewed in contrasting lights,

with the child as either as a subject or an object. Kimberley Reynolds in his *Perception of Childhood* (2014) points out that childhood was considered a 'perilous period' before the mid-18th century, because of the Puritan belief that humans are born with an inheritance of Primary Sin. Since the mid-18th century, this religious perception of childhood was gradually replaced by a positive idea, associated with innocence, freedom, creativity, and spontaneity. The influence of Rousseau (*Emile* 1762) is discernible here. The works of Blake and Wordsworth have idealised the whole conception of childhood. A tendency toward such idealization remained prevalent in the 19th and the early 20th centuries as well. The novels of Charles Dickens, for instance, show an image of childhood against the backdrop of squalor and decadence of industrial London. The 'Golden Age' of children's literature, which features British and American texts produced during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries represents images of childhood firmly established in the contemporary cultural imagination. Figures of Alice in her Wonderland, Peter Pan, Mowgli, and Tom Sawyer, became popular motifs of childhood, embodying the adult who longs to be a child once more. Childhood continues to be a favourite theme in a bourgeoning number of genres. For instance, we may mention the depiction of children at times of war, looking at poems, diaries, and other writings by children, and exploring children's written experiences of their own childhood. While childhood was viewed as a preparatory period for adulthood in the earlier literary works, the new age puts emphasis on retaining childhood in one's later life, with all the elements of wonder, magic and volatility associated with it.

At present, a shift is discernible in the fields of children's literature and childhood studies toward questions of ethics regarding children, and the effects of categories of age. Such an approach foregrounds the scholarly works concerning matters of actual children, instead of an exclusive focus on the cultural concept of the child.

Children as authors and readers

As soon as the question of authorship comes into consideration, it is the adults who enjoy supreme monopoly, leaving no room for the children, irrespective of the form of art. Hundreds of women have authored feminist texts or talked about female issues. Authors like Forster and Orwell as colonial masters, or the likes of Achebe or Raja Rao have talked about the colonial experience. The queer writers or the black writers wrote themselves for their respective clans. But stories for children or about childhood are seldom written by themselves. On one hand, this mirrors the social need for

children to be guided and monitored by adults. On the other, this lack of children's authorship, or adult monopoly, in this sphere leads to some inevitable consequences — defilement of the picture of childhood through the adult lens, and marginalisation of the children, even as the readers. Children, while playing the roles of readers too, can hardly enjoy any liberty to make choices of text or even their meaning.

When the reader-response theory confirms the significant role the readers play in the construction (even reconstruction or deconstruction) of a text, the treatise on childhood as reflected in the world of art can never be complete without looking at children as the audience. In consonance with the arguments put forward in *From Work to Text* by Roland Barthes, a 'work' is 'closed' but 'text' open, and "the work is held in the hand, the text is held in language"; our present enterprise has harped quite well upon the linguistic aspect of the 'works' with some focus on childhood. Childhood can pervade both the premises — the 'work' space as well as the 'textual' one. Childhood is to constitute the content mandatorily. Though it happens to be there outside the work occasionally, it is found very much inside the text. Here, one of the articles by Bera & Bhaumik, dealing with the role of fairy tales in language learning and cognition in the early formative days of childhood, shows how the 'text' or the whole of the discourse can serve as a tool for language acquisition by children.

The collection and the objective

Concentrating on the theme of childhood as explored in the different art forms, this collection of critical essays supposedly takes this increasingly problematic and debatable topic a step forward. It addresses some of these critical issues discussed above relating to childhood inside the text and outside. Different critical perspectives have been adopted by our contributors in their analysis of salient issues relating to childhood. The articles touch upon almost all the major concerns relating to childhood, both the positives and the negatives, as mirrored in art forms such as literature, painting and films.

Whether a virtue or otherwise, this collection could not help putting major emphasis on literature. Articles on dramatic, poetic, or narrative representations of childhood have outnumbered heavily other entries focusing on film, artistic figurines, gaming, or language learning. The critical entries analysing literary texts include plays, poetry, novels and short stories.

Amit Mondal's article explores the extent to which Ishiguro's adult characters are aware of, and fulfil their duties towards, children. Delving into this issue through readings of Ishuguro's novels *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *When We Were Orphans* (2000) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), the article shows how these novels focus on the lives of certain figures who were denied their childhoods, with childhood becoming a tool guarded by adults.

Mitra Sannigrahi's article examines how T.S. Eliot's poetry sometimes reflectively reminisces childhood as the happier part of a person's life - a part that differs from adulthood even as the two merge. Evidently, as it is claimed, Eliot's poetry suggests that childhood experiences stick with people as they transition through their lives.

Against the backdrop of John Osborne's formative years, and the relationships he forged in the course of them, Twishampati De's article demonstrates how Osborne transposed his childhood experiences onto his plays to make them credible. It is, asserts De, in this transposition that the greatness of Osborne as a writer resides. Through a glance at Frank Cvitanovich's 1950s biopic of Osborne, *A Better Class of Person*, De suggests that Osborne's love for his father, and his disgust with his mother as a child, produced him as an unpleasant rebel.

In his article, Riccardo Gramantieri demonstrates how science fiction, as a futuristic version of supernatural fiction, adapts the pre-scientific myth of the changeling to modern scientific and socio-historical situations. Fleshing out the myth, Gramantieri explicates the historical beginnings of the figure of the changeling, and shows that science fiction's appropriation of this figure, though less delved into, needs to be taken into account.

Madhurima Neogi's article, concentrating on Rabindranath Tagore's poems and short stories, argues that Tagore's work often focuses on the darker side of childhood. To flesh out her point, Neogi examines some of the child characters in Rabindranath's texts — characters whose emotions the adult world often refuses to grasp.

In his essay, Samit Kumar Maiti argues that Rabindranath Tagore's *Jibansmriti* (1912), (the English version called *My Reminiscences*), becomes an impressionistic portrait of the development of Tagore as both a creative writer and a man. Maiti examines how the inner world of the imagination that Tagore delved into as a child, protected him from the agonies he faced during his early years. Eventually, Maiti's article explores

whether the political discordance against which Tagore calls for an egalitarian harmony, stems from a lack defining his childhood.

Surajit Senapati's article questions Sri Lankan society's founding of Sinhalese racial and ethnic purity on heteronormativity, and its concomitant outlawing of homosexuality. Senapati examines this setting through a reading of Shyam Selvadurai's 1994 novel *Funny Boy*, and interrogates how a democratic society could, paradoxically, enforce homophobia as its deciding parameter.

Avijit Pramanik claims in his article that most children's literature is written by figures observing and commenting upon their childhoods. As a result, critical interventions in the field of children's literature often hinge on the relationship between adults and children. In this setting, Pramanik examines Desai's short story, "Games at Twilight" in which, claims Pramanik, adult and child alike possess dynamics of power which are, however, generally enjoyed only by one of the two parties. From this point of view, "Games at Twilight" questions the controlling behaviour of adults toward children, and gestures toward the strategies by which children resist that control.

Soumyadeep Chakraborty's article suggests that a subversive streak runs through children's literature — a streak that questions the political and cultural codes founded on binaries. Needless to say, adults wield the sceptre of power within these binaries. Reading Ruskin Bond's 1956 novel *The Room on the Roof* as a piece of children's literature, Chakraborty questions such binaries through the novel's portrayal of the boy-protagonist's psycho-social journey and development.

Discussing the *ninots indultats* — an artistic figurine in the festival of Fallas in Valencia, Spain — Catalina Millán-Scheiding shows how this figurine depicts children as links between the past and modernity. Arguing that the *ninots indultats* has made for the increase of Valencian and *fallero* community self-representation, Millán-Scheiding demonstrates how the recent inclusion of the *ninots* in the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage is representative of an increase in the portrayal of children in aural and visual events. Such performative inclusions, Millán-Scheiding's article claims, have helped show how contemporary spaces shared between adults and children forge communal identity and selfhood.

Focusing on two Iranian films — Abbas Kiarostami's film, *Where is the Friend's Home* (1987) and Jafar Panahi's *The White Balloon* (1995) — Jean-Baptiste de Vaulx shows how they use their child characters, who are

multiple Othered, to construct a new cinematic aesthetic. This aesthetic strikes a balance between the exotic and the universal to reach out to cosmopolitan international audiences. However, looking at the films through paradigmatic child protagonists, such aesthetics are not without their shortcomings, as de Vaulx painstakingly demonstrates, by drawing connections with the international reaction to Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955).

Susri Bhattacharya's article examines matters of failed assimilations and consequent alienation among the child protagonists of two short films — Satyajit Ray's Bangla *Two* (1964) and Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989). Both films show how the effects of colonialism are connected with matters of self-estrangement among children across cultures.

In their article, Bera & Bhaumik have examined how the collection of Bengali fairytales, *Thakurmar Jhuli*, compiled and edited by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, contributes to the process of language acquisition by the young Bengali children during their formative years. A discussion on the select fairytales in both the original Bengali, and in English translation, makes a comparative study to show how they help children improve their linguistic and communication skills to differing extents in processes of language learning.

Applying both the extensive and intensive analytical tools and critical approaches, the articles included in this volume present a diversified representation (rather a serious exploration) of childhood and its complexities. These critical essays will surely be helpful to make our readers re-visit, imagine and understand childhood anew. Touching upon a number of social-cultural, psychological, philosophical or even linguistic issues relating to childhood, the volume aims at offering a wholesome critical assessment of as many important aspects of childhood as possible, when it constitutes the centre of critical attention of the artists. In this present volume, the articles have addressed, analysed, and offered insights into, a number of relevant issues relating to childhood, discussed above. Vehemently rejecting the idea of childhood as an unambiguous monolith, as a psycho-medical or biological concept, this collection is expected to appeal especially to those minds that are interested in childhood scholarship, and are looking for some newer avenues to re-direct their critical interests.

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CHAPTER ONE

IS THERE ANY SPACE FOR CHILDREN?
A STUDY OF CHILDHOOD NEGLECT IN SELECT
NOVELS OF KAZUO ISHIGURO

AMIT MONDAL

Biography: Amit Mondal is a PhD scholar at the Department of English & Culture Studies of The University of Burdwan. He has published articles on various emerging issues related to English and Indian literature in national and international journals. He was awarded Junior Research Fellowship by UGC in 2017. He qualified West Bengal State Eligibility Test in 2017 conducted by WBCSC.

Abstract: Kazuo Ishiguro is a contemporary British writer born in Japan. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017 for his remarkable work. In his novels he has portrayed an emotional world, and looked into the human relationship from a different perspective, about the practice of the same ideology among different individuals, and their shared connectedness with the world. Characters in Ishiguro's novels are connected to each other on the basis of their duties and responsibilities, irrespective of age and profession. In the domain of life, childhood plays a major role in interpreting the duties and responsibilities of the adults to their own children, and shows how adults disturb children's mental states with prescribed rules in the hope of fulfilling their own unfulfilled desires and expectations. I find that there are certain complexities in the representation of childhood in Ishiguro's novels, *A Pale View of Hills*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*. His novels talk about children who are not allowed to enjoy childhood. The identity of children is politically determined by the so-called 'guardians' in the act of compromise. Here, childhood itself is less a phase of human life, more an act of compromise. Childhood is not something that a child is supposed to 'get', rather, childhood is something that becomes useful for guardians. Children do not

have choices about their own lives. They are used just like machines by the adults whom they work for.

Keywords: choice, guardians, morality, negligence, projection.

"The child is father of the man". William Wordsworth's expression about human life is well suggested in his poem "My Heart Leaps Up" in which he explains that we should remain childish through our entire lives, to retain positivity of mind. Childhood is the best part of human life because it holds a mirror to experiencing innocence and purity. It teaches man the lesson of being original to his own self. The best thing to discuss about childhood is its connection to the adult world. When childhood is exposed to the adult world it creates memories and nostalgia. While celebrating and glorifying childhood, Wordsworth has rightly suggested that in every 'man' there should exist a child, because adults always learn from the experiences of childhood. In the global context, this representation of childhood takes many turns in the fields of criticism, especially in contemporary literature. Kazuo Ishiguro's novels are fertile with the idea of childhood which explores the selfish nature of the adult world. It tells the story of older people who are not satisfied with the life they live. They think that the only way of serving their own purpose is to play on the lives of children. Children are abandoned in a world of darkness, devoid of hope and fulfilment. Ishiguro's fiction is exposed to the politics of the adults about the idea of childhood. Childhood is not considered as the nostalgic phase of adulthood anymore, rather it anticipates bad experiences in adulthood. Boys and girls grow up under the guidance of adults who shape young minds in such a way that they continue to live the lives allowed by their guardians. Turning into adulthood, those boys and girls do not have good memories to be nostalgic for. There remains no choice for them. It is the anger and frustration they nurture in their minds to shower upon forthcoming generations. This relationship between childhood and adulthood becomes very complicated. Childhood cannot be understood without understanding the politics of adulthood. In this juncture of life, living within childhood is risky as well as dangerous for a child. It raises the issue of ethics and morality so far as the question of freedoms of childhood is concerned. It questions the love and care of adults towards their children. The protagonists of Ishiguro's novels, namely Kathy, Tommy, Ruth, Stevens, and Banks, are not happy with their lives. They are scared of their past and uncertain of the future.

Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* explores the history of a Japanese family. In this novel, the schildhood of two daughters of the family, Keiko and Niki, play a very crucial role in showing a mother's attempt to consider

her daughters as a mirror, to create her own identity, as well as exploring the imagination of a mother who creates a projection of bad memories associated with the childhoods of her daughters. The novel tells the story of Etsuko, a middle-aged Japanese woman living in England with her second husband and her daughter Niki. Etsuko's sad memories take the readers to her past in Japan, where she had a daughter named Keiko by her first husband. In her Japanese life, she had a friendly relationship with her neighbour, Sachiko, and her daughter, Mariko. Etsuko had a friendly relationship with the little Mariko, for whom she had some motherly affections. This motherly feeling of Etsuko points towards the fact that before becoming a mother, she projects the image of her unborn daughter into Mariko. This later leads Etsuko into becoming careless of her own daughter.

Mariko's life is merely a reflection of Keiko's life. Mariko's childhood is marked by negligence and abandonment. As a little girl she is not taken enough care of by Sachiko. There are many instances in the novel which show this negligence. There is a scene in the novel in which Sachiko drowns Mariko's cats before they move to England. This act shows the intention of a mother to murder her own daughter. Sachiko seems to be less careful to treat Mariko as her daughter. Rather, Mariko is reared just like those "dirty little" creatures by Sachiko. Brian Shaffer has rightly pointed out that Sachiko's act of drowning Mariko's cats is "a figurative murder of her daughter" (qtd. in Beedham). Mariko's suicide later in the story explores a threat of the adult world to childhood in Japan. It is the psychological pressure on a little girl that leads to her committing suicide. This psychological pressure is created by Sachiko's negligence and abandonment. This story is repeated in the family of Etsuko because she knows that bad things would surely happen to her own daughter, Keiko. Keiko seems to appear as a rebirth of Mariko. It is forecasted that Keiko will bring fear and grief into Etsuko's life. To Etsuko, Japan is always a land of nightmares, and the Japanese are the dreamers of bad dreams. With fear and grief, they leave Japan for England. Keiko's childhood does not offer Etsuko a motherly space, rather it provides a constant threat to her. Because of this threatening intervention, she becomes negligent of her own little girl, because she knows the future of Keiko's childhood. It is the negligence of a mother that disturbs a child's psychology and thus spoils her entire childhood. Being members of the adult world, Etsuko and Sachiko represent a society which is devoid of love and care for children, especially in the context of Japan.

It is noteworthy to mention that the impact of atomic war is ever-present in Japanese life, as we see in the characterisation of Sachiko and Etsuko. The terrible influence of war sets the background of the novel. It also plays a major role in sudden changes in Japanese life, in comparison to the rest of the world. The horrible experiences of atomic devastation do not even spare these two mothers, Sachiko and Etsuko. They are damaged, both psychologically and socially. This distorted life victimises the younger generation, and thus spoils their childhood. The bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki is not only responsible for spoiling Japanese children, it also creates a psychological alienation between a mother and daughter which is metaphorically associated with Etsuko's growing tomatoes. The planting of the tomatoes points towards the fact that as a mother, Etsuko must have possessed the sense of love, compassion, kindness and care which creates an emotional bond between mother and child. However, the reality shows Etsuko's failure to show her motherly love towards Keiko which is explored with Etsuko's negligence of the tomatoes. If we try to understand Etsuko's psychological state, we find that she was conscious of Keiko's associations with the life and death of Mariko, whom she projected as her own child. The tomato plant is the symbolic representation of Keiko's childhood — neglected and projected. For Shaffer, Etsuko's negligence of the tomatoes is an indication of her treatment of Keiko; so Etsuko is "figuratively speaking, the murderer of Keiko" (qtd. in Beedham). This negligence is also notable in the scene in which, before leaving for England, Etsuko promises Keiko that they will come back to Japan if life does not go well there. Etsuko feels guilty that she did not keep the promise. Keiko is emotionally cheated, and it is the broken promise that creates an alienation between the two. To Etsuko, Keiko has always remained the projection of her own guilty feelings. This alienation offers a space for her childhood which is merely a total projection of fear, guilt, and negligence on the part of adults in the Japanese context. This makes the lives of Mariko and Keiko so insecure that they cannot cope with real situations. They fail even to compromise with real life challenges. Due to the lack of this ability, Keiko commits suicide.

Niki, the youngest daughter of Etsuko, creates a new space for Etsuko who wants to renew her life, so she can forget about the past and welcome a new life offered by England. Niki is a compromise between Etsuko's past and present. She is mixed-blood, of a Japanese wife and an English husband. The significance of the character of Niki lies in the fact that she creates a new identity of her mother. She is the external projection of Etsuko's internal feelings. This becomes realistic with the dat of Keiko's funeral, when Niki absents herself. It is not only about Niki's rational self, which prevents her from joining the funeral, but also about the guilty feeling of a

mother about the bringing up of a child. The space Niki is supposed to enjoy in her childhood is also neglected by Etsuko, because she has never treated Niki like a baby, rather Niki has always been a means for reconstructing her identity and forgetting past memories. Niki is the projection of her rational self, which accepts the new world and denies the horrors of past.

Childhood is not given a solid identity in Ishiguro's novel; what is important is the attitude of the adults on which the identities of children depends. Mariko, Keiko or Niki, all of these little girls are merely neglected children. They are treated more as imaginary children, less as human babies. In such lives they are not given space or choices of their own. Their existence is denied by society. They only exist when it is a case of satisfying adult society and forgetting the past.

Ishiguro's next novel, *The Remains of the Day* deals with memory, nostalgia, and disappointment in portrayal of childhood. This is a story of an English butler, Stevens, who has dedicated his entire life to the service of Lord Darlington, and is now is in the service of his new employer, Mr Farraday. Stevens makes a journey to meet Miss Kenton, the former housekeeper at Darlington Hall, with whom he spent lots of time. On his journey, he recollects memories of his past life at Darlington. Ishiguro has not given detailed descriptions about the Stevens' childhood, but readers are given the space to think of of it, and to reconstruct the character of Stevens through his memories. Childhood plays a prominent role in this novel in exploring the hidden reality in the relationship between children and older people. It is the past life of Stevens that reminds him of the days when his fate was predetermined; to be a butler like his father, a job of dignity and prestige in England. After dedicating his entire life to his job, he realises that he has not achieved any dignity or the honour that he once expected to earn, but intead, he has been used only for social benefit. In Stevens's realisation, it is nothing but an act of continued service over the years. As his father was a butler, he is also supposed to be a butler. Stevens' journey has some psychological aspects too; it can be seen as a journey from ignorance of social dignity to the light of knowledge. Stevens' realisation finds its source in his childhood, when he was not given any opportunity to find his own way. The orders and rules of his father affected his child psychology, so he could think only of his future as determined for him by his father. This looks like a dignified mission, continuing a job to which his father has dedicated his own life. Keeping this thought in mind, his father does not even know how he has spoiled his son's childhood. Stevens' father is not the only guardian who influences his life; the entire society takes part in it. The narration itself does not explore detail about Stevens's childhood

memories. It hints at the fact that he wasted his childhood days; he was not given any choice on his own terms. His childhood was used to construct his psychology according to the demands of society. It is the bad memories of Stevens' past lead him to think of his life as having been in vain. Memories are so prominent in the novel that they are turned into a character. Stevens' constant servitude and determination take his childhood away from him. It can be argued that has has never had a childhood. He is left with the remaining days of his life. If he wants to recreate his childhood, he will have to use his imagination to help him reconstruct it.

When We Were Orphans turns to loss, memory, and the search for identity. This novel deals with the journey of a detective, named Christopher Banks, to find out about his parents and solve the mysteries of his past.

Banks spent his childhood days in the Shanghai International Settlement in China during the early decade of the 20th century. The story goes down memory lane to let readers know about the sudden disappearance of Banks' parents when he was a child. After this shocking incident, he was sent to his aunt in England. His parents' sudden disappearance creates a kind of alienation, and turns him into an orphan. He feels a sense of loss and guilt which haunts him for ever, leading him to want to solve the mysteries of his personal life. 'We' in the title suggests that Banks is not the only orphan, and there is another character named Sarah, who was also orphaned at the age of ten. This alienation probably impels Banks to become a detective so that he can solve his personal problems. Ishiguro uses a unique narrative style to tell the story, in which readers see how Banks spent his childhood days and how he becomes a successful detective. Ishiguro has not gone into detail in the portrayal of Banks' childhood days, but the narrative tells us that his father eloped to Hong Kong with his new girlfriend, and a few days later, his mother was captured and turned into a concubine by a warlord named Wang Ku. This has been an unresolved mystery to Banks, who questions why his parents abandoned him, and thus spoiled his childhood. As a child, Banks deserved to enjoy a happy and normal life, but it is the acts of hiding truths and abandonment that make him feel guilty. He does not know the reasons behind what happened. This explores the reality that children have little importance in the society of adults, because they separate themselves from their children for their own causes. The Lacanian interpretation of 'real stage' has close associations with Banks' parents' sudden disappearance from his life. As representatives of adulthood, Banks' parents deny the mundane existence of their son, because, in their view, the identity of Banks as a child is not a 'real' one. Banks' childhood is considered as a projection of his parents' imagination. It is an undeniable