

**CHILD PSYCHOLOGY – “IMAGINATIONS AND FEARS” IN VED MEHTA’S VEDI**

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The present paper focuses on Ved Mehta’s journey down the lane of childhood into the soul of the child he was and his experiences in totality. He narrates his childhood experiences with electrifying clarity and intensity-no matter whether the incidents are trivial or traumatic. Every word carries us into the world of the child who is trying to find out, struggling to fit in to the alien world far away from his secured world called “home”, wanting to be loved, playing and dreaming.

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The book opens up an unimaginable world – the Bombay slum school for the blind. VEDI’s father, a well- to- do England return doctor, was determined to give his blind son, the best education. Ved Mehta’s extraordinary power of word picture makes us experience the trauma the child faces and how he adjusts to his situation. We realize how VEDI in time, learns to get along without his family, without familiar sounds, scents and tastes, and also learns to read and write English Braille, to add and subtract, to play like all boys and to get along with school mates. It also reveals the intelligent and strong character of VEDI who adjusts and learns long before any ordinary child learns self- reliance.

Keywords: *Traumatic, Braille, Scents, Obstacles, Alien World*

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INTRODUCTION

Vedi, its title taken from Mehta's childhood nickname, is a rare, powerful book with a description of a very unusual childhood in the era of the past from the innocent fantastic eyes of a child. It opens a window to the working of the mind of a child-his fears, his traumas, his thinking, and his way of coping with the situation. The reader travels with Vedi to Dadar School for blind in Bombay and realizes (faces) the experiences of child from when he was almost five to the age of nine. He is a normal child despite his blindness. Though his prospects as a normal child were bleak, he had the fatalistic Indian attitude towards blindness. Unlike George Orwell's bitter memoir of his boarding school days, Vedi, the innocent, ignorant child, accepts the terrible, monstrous events in his life with composure and surprisingly with a kind of gaiety. He is a high-spirited, strong willed, eager little boy. He is so intent on exercising his child's prerogative of enjoyment that he seems almost unaware of the cruelty and difficult predicament. The situation is much worse than the child is able to comprehend.

Blinded by meningitis before he was four, he faces a sudden change in his life. He is shifted from a comfortable middle class home in Punjab to a school for destitute blind children thousand miles away. Actually it is an orphanage in Mumbai headed by a Christian minister with western ideas about education. The school is situated in a mosquito-ridden industrial slum. He has lived there for four years under the harshest of physical conditions and receives the most pitifully rudiments of education. He contracts typhoid within three months (and suffers repeated bouts of it) due to the unhygienic conditions prevalent there.

Ved Mehta belonged to a comfortable upper middle class family. His father faced a dilemma, how to educate a blind child in India. His father made a difficult but brave decision to send him to a school for blind where he will intermingle with children from different backgrounds and religions. This act required-great courage- a father sending a child to a foster home (though later on when he realized the conditions of that school, he regretted for not inquiring in detail about the school or visiting it before sending his child). He was far-sighted and

never wanted his son to become dependant on others. When his wife objected to sending such a small child to a blind school, he asked "Do you want him always to be holding on to your saree? or do you want him to make something of himself?" His father, standing on the platform of a railway station hoisted Vedi through the compartment window in the train and announced "Now you are a man". This sentence of his father's decided his destiny. His father literally dumps him on a train and says "Namaste" and walks away. The reaction of Vedi is so like a small child. His bewilderment can be felt when he realizes that he is going away. We are moved to read how that child reacts "I cried, I banged my fists, I slept." But later on Vedi learns to be self reliant and independent spirit. From that day onwards Vedi is on his own.

The novel reminds us of Dickensian setting. Though Vedi's childhood is touching and painful, the innocence of the child shines through and enriches the mind and soul of a reader. Though he was a child, he ceased to be a child before he was five. "Thus in the narratives, two voices emerge: the child and the adult. When the child speaks, grim events seem innocent and funny. But when the adult speaks, even the ordinary moments seem sad, reflected and a memory that brings together past and present with bitter sweet eloquence. The book contains minute details, the feeling, sound flavours and smells of his daily life while portraying his growth and increasing self-reliance.

Once he leaves his home, the world of Vedi turns upside down. He has to face many drastic changes. He has to go through many hurdles. Blindness was not the only obstacle. Vedi spoke Punjabi while the other children spoke only Marathi and the Principal determined to teach him English. There were also "cultural" differences. Mehta wore shoes and proper clothes while his schoolmates had to make do with whatever was available. The building had a single electric light- in the Principal's bed room- and a single hurricane lamp in the boys dormitory.

Vedi is a good looking boy and moves around with confidence and a good smile. Mr. Ras Mohan remarks that "He'd never before seen such normal looking eyes and such an open, cheerful expression on the face of a child". Unlike many children who would not have been able to accept the



situation so easily, Vedi's happy disposition helps him to face the many changes in his life. Not only this, it also helps him overcome his plight and achieve something. He is no ordinary child, but rather highly intelligent and curious by nature. His child like curiosity is very endearing.

Initially he stays with Mr. Ras Mohan and is treated as a special child. Later on he faces another drastic change when he is shifted to the Dormitory with the other blind boys. Though he is provided with a special bed, he is baffled by the sudden change once again. There Mr. R.M calls over a boy & says, "Vedi, this is your loving big brother". The desperation of the child can be felt when he cried out "I want to go to Hea! I want to go to uncle and Auntie! He is home sick & desperate -"The bed was so big; the room was so large and so over crowded. I cried, I slept, I woke up, I pressed my face against the pillow to stop my howls". But every cloud has a silver lining. Vedi found a champion in Deoji. Deoji becomes his mentor and guide and helps Vedi to adjust to his new environment. He is the one who instills in Vedi the feeling that his parents have not deserted him but love him very much. When Vedi is feeling low because he is not allowed to do anything according to his own choice, He misses his parents and believes that his parents have forgotten him. It is Deo ji who consoles him and says "your Mummy &Daddy love you very much , or they would n't have spent so much money to send you here". Mr. & Mrs. Ras Mohan in their own way, try to inculcate in him good manners and discipline. They try to teach him how to eat, how to walk, and how to talk. They try to give him education in the best possible way. They also try to teach him to be creative and makes own toys and games etc.

Mr. Roy gives Vedi two cigarette tins to make his own toy. Vedi takes the tins and turns them into a telephone. Yet the child misses his home, his food, his life, and his toys. When Mr. Ras Mohan describes to him how he had sent a telegram ,Vedi gets an idea "I pretended I was sending a telegram home:

NEED MOUTH ORGAN HORSE

MECCANO SET PLEASE SEND.

He fights his insecurity, home sickness & creates a defense mechanism by living in an imaginary world. His adaptability to his surroundings is amazing. He accepts every situation with composure and amazingly, with a kind of gaiety. He imagined his sightless world was the same as everyone else's. He loathes any type of help. He ascribes his independence to "facial vision" sensing objects and terrain through shadows and feel of the air. He gains his independence at the cost of serious knocks and falls. But he is extraordinarily stoical about pain. He learns to ride a bicycle and roller skates. He runs perilously over roof tops flying kites, etc.

The school could have crushed anyone's spirit. But unlike many children Ved Mehta was evidently made of sterner stuff. He does not carry a trace of self pity. The fierce desire to be normal ran hand in hand with the knowledge that there were certain things he could not do unassisted. The school teaches him to read and write and to make his own. It also teaches him to come to terms with himself, including the unreal, imaginary world of lonely child miles away from his home. Many a times as a child does he comforts himself by living in a make believe world. The school also provides him the platform where he is introduced to his first lesson in independence, discipline and the possibility of doing "regular" things with other visually impaired boys: fighting, throwing tantrum, being petty and selfish. Children can be cruel to each other. He has to face many snide and sarcastic remarks from some of the other blind children. We see child psychology at play here when one of the boys named Abdul tries to put Vedi down by making snide remarks about him, he retaliates. Vedi has learned by and by how to counter attack. When Abdul makes sarcastic remarks about his soft hands, soft diet, soft bed etc., he does not take it lying down. Like a normal, healthy child he counters attacks. He is fed up with Abdul a dirty beggar and goes into the workshop and slashes some of the bands of the seat which Abdul was canning. But later on Vedi, being good- hearted gives some money which he received from his home to Abdul "to repay him for his extra work on the chair and to make up with him. He is a sensitive boy who realizes how hard the boys worked. The boys talked about snakes



and scorpions and ghosts, but they were a hard-working lot and worked long hours caning chairs in the expectation of a hours a piece of orange peppermint or a visit to a zoo. There are various situations which remind him of his home & his siblings. When he was learning Braille, the sound and clatter of wood, metal and paper, the tick-tick-tick of punching reminds him "fast, like the pitter-patter of my baby sister Usha's feet". "I remembered the soothing, almost unperceptible sound of sister Umi turning a page." while learning Braille, some of his letters are remembered by connecting them to the names of his family e.g. "P" for POM . As is very normal in a child, he also indulges in Hero-worship. He is a great follower of Deo ji. He wanted to join music classes like Deo ji. He is also highly imaginative as normally children are in this age. "I used to imagine that each of my fingers-read the fastest".

Being a high spirited boy and of jolly nature, Vedi adapted to his surrounding and accepted the situations- whether trivial or traumatic- with alacrity. He feels comfortable and secure in this home (i.e. orphanage) far away from his real home. He does not want anymore upheavels in his life. When Mr. Ras Mohan announced one morning that, "the war is coming in a big way. Dadar may be bombed,the school may have to be moved." They all felt frightened. When Mr. Ras Mohan told Vedi particularly that he had written to his father to take Vedi away, Vedi replied "I am not going, I want to stay with Deo ji, Abdul & Paran". The desolation of the child Vedi can be felt When Mr. & Mrs. Ras Mohan are about to leave Vedi's home, he cried out "I don't want to be left behind."

Ved Mehta writes in his book 'Vedi', from the perspective of total blindness. It is a very unusual story in which we are able to connect it with Dicken's novel But unlike Dicken's stories, the people in the school, whether they are the children or the superintendent, are all kind to him. The school teaches this high spirited child Vedi, to become self-dependant and to accept the reality of his life. We are carried along the journey of Vedi from four to nine till he leaves the school. The writer balances the sketchy but vivid memories with his mature reflections. Another remarkable feature is that the narrative is chronological, but most of the chapters

are given titles such as "holidays", "playmate" and "Among homes" etc. acc. to their themes. Thus we find that Vedi was a normal child who accepted his blindness with a fatalistic attitude though his prospects of a normal life were bleak.

CONCLUSION

We find that the book Vedi is written from the perspective of a child who is totally blind. It is a very unusual story in which the writer unravels the mind a child who has been uprooted from a secure, homely atmosphere to an alien place at a very tender age. The book is a continuous flow of dialogue as in a script. We easily accept this because it is a child who is speaking and like all children, Vedi also speaks in question and answer. The inquisitive brain of a child is transformed into the shape of Vedi. The emotions of a child- sudden joy and then suddenly low, accepting the situation in a matter of fact manner, child like hero-worship, his fears, his insecurity and doubts, getting attached to some particular persons and many more such behavior is well depicted in the child Vedi. The working of a child's brain i.e. what he feels and how he gives expressions to his inner thoughts— is all that we unravel when we journey with Vedi. The book holds one's attention from the first page to the last and one wants to finish the book in a sitting.

REFERENCE

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