



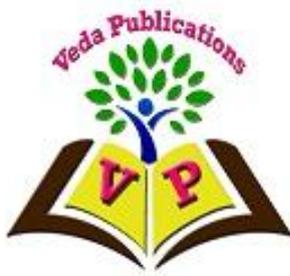
A CRITICAL STUDY OF CHARLES DICKENS AND MARK TWAIN'S ORPHAN HERO

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ABSTRACT



The study shall attempt to analyse and interpret the orphan hero in the select novels of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain. The orphan character which dominates a considerable space in literature makes a unique literary hero. The orphan character is not just one of the most preferred models but as illustrated by Terri Windling, *"The orphaned hero is not, however, a mere fantasy cliché; it's a mythic archetype, springing from some of the oldest stories of the world."*(Windling, P-1) The archetypal orphan hero occupies a substantial space in literature and the inevitable presence of an orphan as a protagonist which is a representation of reality has many dimensions to explore. The study therefore, shall attempt to analyse and interpret the orphan archetype as a marginalized and a colonized figure.

Keywords: *Orphan Hero, Orphan Archetype, Marginalization, Colonization.*

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INTRODUCTION

Being alone in the world to confront its challenges can either be terrifying or inspiring. And the orphans in fiction are inspiring as the orphans often possess the spirit and endurance to overcome any situation. The orphan hero in fiction emerges from grim situations, from being an outcast or outsider and homeless questing for a home. The orphan hero is deprived, insecure, and disempowered and they thrive to grow and assert themselves. Pertaining to structural analysis of the select orphan narratives what emerges as a common theme are the motifs of colonial ethos. The orphan protagonist is a perfect embodiment of a colonized subaltern figure; he is at the margin, the other, and lives in the periphery in most squalid conditions. According to Melanie Kimball the orphan is "*the eternal other*" (Kimball, p-559), this state of being the other is suggestive of his status as an outsider. The idea of 'otherness' remains central in a postcolonial discourse, in order to understand the notion of the 'other', postcolonial critics first seek to position a critical spotlight on the ways in which social identities are constructed. Identities are often thought of as being natural or innate, something that we are born with. Edward Said demonstrates the often paradoxical nature of identity in an increasingly migratory and globalised world. Intellectual thinkers from Mary Wollstonecraft to Frantz Fanon are of the view that the notion of identity has become indispensable to contemporary political discourse. Marginalization is the social process of becoming or being made marginal and excluded within a society; it also signifies the exclusion of the individual from meaningful socio-political as well as economic participation in a society. The orphan is symbolic of an outcast as he is marginalized by society and is often treated as an outsider. Elleke Boehme maintains in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*,

"...postcolonial literature is generally defined as that which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship... Postcolonial literature forms part of that process of overhaul. To give expression to colonized experience..." (P-3).

In the discourse of postcolonialism, where the margin and the centre maintains a dichotomous

relation the margins offers potential space for a discursive narrative of colonization. A margin is one who faces exclusion from any active participation in the society. The marginal identity renders the image of the 'other.' Every hierarchical society thrives on the victimization of the subordinate groups and the 'othering' of weaker people. *Orientalism* discloses the means by which the colonized is constructed by and in relation with the colonizer, Said very minutely analyses the distorted ways in which the colonizer depicts the colonized. While the quest for identity is crucial for the orphans, just to assert identity is never enough. The famous orphans namely Pip, Oliver Twist and David Copperfield in Charles Dickens's novels, and Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn all characteristically unique yet permeate elements that binds them together. All these orphan images available in classic fiction are closely related to being alone, marginalised, oppressed and being other in a society. This paper therefore is an attempt to study and explore these aspects available in fiction in the symbol of the orphan character. The study would attempt to analyse the symbolic significance of the orphan as a hero in the select works of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectation*, and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* and enquiring it through the postcolonial perspective.

ARCHETYPICAL ORPHAN HERO AS A MARGINALIZED POST COLONIAL FIGURE

Orphan characters symbolize our isolation from society and one another. They are the eternal other. The marginal is suppressed and dominated upon and is said to be a voiceless entity. The orphan hero is a potent symbol of a colonised figure and therefore, from it, issues concerning identity and otherness emerge. The orphans in fiction are muted subaltern. As being the subaltern, the orphans are marginalized in society on several counts. Postcolonial writers like Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak have maintained that those who are situated at an extreme point of marginalization cannot raise their voice. So, the question regarding the subaltern's potentiality for agency and resistance to the existing order becomes more crucial. The colonized orphans speak back and yet the struggle for identity and voice goes beyond merely polarizing the orphans'



assertions of power and independence. The orphan figure is a metaphor for an individual's search for identity, and for a new home or place for security. The orphan motif is a literary device by which writers explored and questioned issues related to identity, class division, racism and other social problems. The literary orphan in fact became a model to critique all that is wrong in the society. Writers down the age widely employed the motif of orphan-hood, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be considered as the first orphan prototype in nineteenth century novels. Most Victorian writers were preoccupied with the subject of orphan-hood in their novels and it can be quoted from Laura Peter's *Orphan Texts*,

"In Victorian literature, the orphan can be read as an unfamiliar and strange figure outside the dominant narrative of domesticity...the Victorian orphans have emerged as a metaphor for 'the dispossessed and detached self' which is characterised through his loneliness (having no home, family, or community support) and isolation (having no social connections)."(Peters, P-18).

They were often portrayed as poor children without a means of creating a successful life for themselves. The literary conventions of orphan novels owe much to the novels of Dickens, whose repertoire is full of endearing orphans. The literary orphan epitomises the onslaught of industrialisation, poverty, loneliness and class division amongst others. It can be illustrated from what Laura Peters has to say in her book *'Orphan Texts,'*

"...the orphan's task of creating self is inseparable from class issues. As these novels imply, class, like gender and race, is not only a social construct but a hereditary condition that determines identity."(Peters, P-22)

The orphan hero yearns for acceptance in a society but they also consciously choose transgression and alienation. They experience psychological torture; the contradictory nature of their social location makes them unsuitable for most type of traditional families. Domestic ideology continuously displaces orphans, refusing to legitimize their identity. The distorted images of the orphan as outsider results from such unsubstantiated repugnance they have experienced within

domesticity. And social isolation reproduces unnecessary violence within the orphans. The orphans exhibit inconsistent personalities pertaining to psychological inadequacy. Fanon argues that the sense of inferiority and inadequacy in the colonizer's psyche results in violence. Violence, Fanon maintains is a form of self assertion, the orphan characters in select fiction thrives to assert themselves. Bhabha's concepts such as Hybridity, Mimicry, Ambivalence, the Stereotypes, the Uncanny, the Nation, Otherness, etc reflect the colonized people's ways to resist the power of the colonizer. He states that we should not only observe colonialism as straight forward oppression, domination, violence but as a period of complex and varied cultural contact and interaction. Bhabha also maintains that the colonizer's cultural meanings are open to transformation by the colonized people, according to him there is an element of negotiation of cultural meaning when the colonizer and the colonized come together. Bhabha further states that the identities of both can be structured when both interact. Bhabha discusses a number of mechanisms which threaten colonial domination, he exposes that the subject of colonialism is always resistant. Bhabha claims that there is a space

"in-between the designations of identity" and "this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy," (Bhabha, P-4)

The alienated and ignored orphans can be considered as an emerging force for disruption within a society. Yet, the orphan understands the need of potential social flexibility and mobility to counter his circumstance. According to Pazicky,

"Images of orphanhood have pervaded the American imagination ever since the colonial period. The orphan appears in varying degrees of intensity-sometimes as palpable presence, other times as mere shadow-in every manner of text: fictional and non-fictional, religious and secular, poetical and polemical. But whatever shape the orphan assumes, the figure signals identity formation, not only individual but cultural." (Pazicky, P-11)



J.K. Rowling's fictional orphan hero Harry Potter in the *Harry Potter* series has been well received worldwide; the orphan hero has on his shoulder the heavy responsibility to save the world from the evil wizard Dark Lord Voldemort. Yet, what is more remarkable in *Harry Potter* is not in the extraordinary fight between Good and Evil but in the two Worlds that Harry Potter lives- one real and the other is the magical world of Hogwarts. Harry lives in both world and they do not collide allowing him to live as a contradiction. The magical world of Hogwarts stands next to the real world; Harry keeps returning to the real world and is brought to reality where he must accommodate himself. Although, Harry is portrayed in a magical and fantastical world of make believe. Rowling's portrayal of Harry although endowed with bravery is not a perfect human being; his transformation remains central not the transformation of the world. Melanie Kimball in *From Folktales to Fiction: Orphan Characters in Children's Literature* exhibited that orphans makes a perfect hero in literature. The writer discussed the inevitable presence of the orphans in various genres of literature as both orphan heroes and heroines becomes a crucial medium in critiquing the society. According to her, "Orphan characters in folktales and literature symbolize our isolation from one another and from society." The orphan hero symbolize the state of loneliness and thereby the loss of connectedness from society at large. The orphan character is symbolic of the eternal other, an outcast and a marginalized figure who thereby quest to make his identity. According to Nina Auerbach,

"The figure of the wandering orphan, searching through an alien world for his home, has fascinated generations of novelists...The orphan is born to himself and establishes his own social penumbra."(Auerbach, P-395)

Charles Dickens can be considered as the first English novelist to give orphans a frequent and central role in his stories. His most memorable orphan characters are Pip Pirrip in *Great Expectation*, Oliver Twist in *Oliver Twist* and David Copperfield in *David Copperfield*. Orphans are common characters in Dickens's novel; his representation of the orphans is a critique of the Victorian collective conscience.

The orphans in Dickens's novel

demonstrates the outsider figure who remains alone and neglected. Dickens writing in the Victorian Era projected that the repercussion of the Industrial Revolution impacted everyone. A distinct, unique middle class was formed alongside the traditional working class and wealthy aristocracy. However, there were certain individuals that fell outside this model of Victorian society. The orphans became society's victim- a person without a past, without connections (identity or lineage or legitimacy), and without status. Charles Dickens portrayed the orphan's pessimistic view of the world, concerned with understanding how orphans manage to survive the suffering and psychological damage inflicted upon them by those who should care for them. In *Oliver Twist (1839)*, *David Copperfield (1850)* and *Great Expectations (1861)*, Dickens depicts the world as a place where normal family relationships are anomalous or non-existent. He seeks to give an instance of an individual's struggle to remedy his homeless condition by searching for love, friendship, and security. An excerpt from *David Copperfield*,

"I was crying all the time, but, except that I was conscious of being cold and dejected, I am sure I never thought why I cried. At last in my desolation I began to consider that I was dreadfully in love with little Em'ly, and had been torn away from her to come here where no one seemed to want me, or to care about me, half as much as she did. This made such a very miserable piece of business of it, that I rolled myself up in a corner of the counterpane, and cried myself to sleep,"(Dickens, P-48)

Young David in despair and loneliness weeps and is reminded of how Emily had taken care of him. These lines suggest the poor plight of David who is separated from the person he loves and weeps because he is left unwanted and unloved. In *David Copperfield*, it is Peggotty, the young servant who looks after young David, together with her family, provides David with support and a model for family strength, illustrating simplicity, honesty, deep humility, gratefulness and capacity for joy in the face of penury and tragedy. Dickens' *Oliver Twist (1839)*, *David Copperfield (1850)* and *Great Expectations (1861)* deals with the formation of the orphans



personalities. Most of his works are explorations of the orphans' conditions and situations; he strives to reveal orphans' problems that face them and hinder them from achieving success, unity of being and happiness. The Industrial Revolution greatly impacted Charles Dickens' novels as he attacked its nature and effects on humanity. The character Oliver Twist is a representative of child labour and Dickens' attitude towards him is synonymous to his approach to gruesome and traumatizing factory works. An excerpt from *Oliver Twist* will be apt to illustrate how an orphan boy endures hardships in such factories,

"But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none. Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of church-wardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder."(Dickens, P-6)

Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* expresses the outcome of such subjugation; he was fascinated by the psychological effects of colonialism on both the colonizer and the colonized. He maintains that for the marginalized and suffering native, colonialism destroyed the very soul. Here in the context of the orphans, the orphans face such alienation and trauma.

CONCLUSION

Literary orphan characters encourage purposeful separation from society and pursue self-reformation rejecting social and cultural interference. Reformation and finding of the true self becomes a part of the process while searching for his or her own identity. In an introduction to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by T. S. Eliot he maintains that

"Huck Finn is alone: there is no more solitary character in fiction. The fact that he has a father only emphasizes his loneliness; and he views his father with a terrifying detachment." (Eliot, P-349)

This orphan maintains the status of an outsider of the American society in the nineteenth century. Widow

Douglas gives Huck Finn the opportunity to make a new identity to become a valuable member of the American society. Mrs. Douglas endeavours to change and "civilize" (Twain, P-13) Huck Finn by giving decent clothes and education in school. Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* concentrates mainly on the growth and development of an orphan boy named Tom Sawyer. Both Huck Finn and Tom are synonymous, in the sense that both characters intrude in each other's life in various episodes. Both are significantly on a constant process to assert themselves in their respective society, in search of freedom and ultimately questing for their identity. The motif of orphan hero continues to appeal both writers and readers. To conclude it will be appropriate to quote from Diane Loercher Pazicky, "Orphanhood, the lost of parents who represents the moorings of a child's identity, is the ultimate metaphor for identity issues." (Pazicky, P-11)

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