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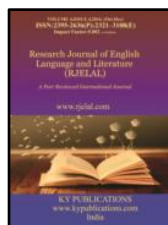
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ANIMALS AS HUMANS: PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS OF USING ANIMAL CHARACTERS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

Animals play an important role in children's literature because adult writers feel that children are associated more closely with animals and are able to communicate with them. They are unable to distinguish themselves from animals and writers find it easier to teach moral values to young readers in order to attain the preset ideal model of childhood. The characteristics that these animals possess are always influenced by the culture and can be studied only in context of society and culture. In adult literature, animals are used as an instrument of satire and whereas in children's literature, they serve the purpose of educating, entertaining and instructing young children. Most of the children's book writers use animals in their stories as a tool to encourage humor. Animals when dressed in clothes and talk to each other as humans do appear so funny and humorous to adults and children alike. Animal characters when used in children's stories help children to understand the behavior and characteristics of those animals. This promotes exploration among children. The technique of attributing human traits, characteristics and feelings to animals and other non human agents is called anthropomorphism. In the present paper the attempt is to show psychological reasons of using anthropomorphised animals by adult writers in children's books.

Key Terms: Anthropomorphism; humanize; Motivation; Self-centered knowledge, Egocentrically; Animism; Artificialism; Anthropocentrically

1. Introduction

There is a universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious. We find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds; and by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection, ascribe malice or good-will to everything, that hurts or pleases us. Hence...trees, mountains and streams are personified, and the inanimate parts of nature acquire sentiment and emotion.

The attribution of human forms, characteristics, emotions, intentions, motivations, thoughts, feelings, etc. to non-human objects, animals, forces of nature, animate and inanimate natural objects and phenomenon in order to explain and understand the behavior of those non-human agents of the world is called Anthropomorphism.

2. Discussion

Anthropomorphism is so widely described in various spheres of day to day life that it is easy to understand and exaggerate its potency, as Hume did by regarding it as world-wide. Hume was neither the first nor the alone who had overstated the strength

of anthropomorphism; rather it has been historically discussed by various psychologists as something which is an instinctive psychological process of human thought. The major part of research on the subject of anthropomorphism has, therefore, scrutinized either the extent to which humans humanize agents and events of the natural world or the degree to which this process accurately describes the real abilities of these agents to take humanized form and to understand unfamiliar behavior of these agents. However, it is investigated by psychologists like Asquith, Morewedge, Preston, & Wegner who claim that some cultures and some agents are more prone to the process of attributing human characteristics and forms than others. Carey holds that children, as compared to adults, are generally more open to anthropomorphized animals and other natural objects. Some circumstances and human experiences according to psychologists like Waytz and et al increase the ability to humanize the world as compared to others. Like any intricate or convoluted phenomena, it is recommended that anthropomorphism is diversely determined, consisting of both cognitive and motivational determining factors. A psychological discussion of anthropomorphism by psychologists like Adam Waytz, Nicholas Epley and John T. Cacioppo in an article entitled "On Seeing Human: A Three Factor Theory of Anthropomorphism" explores when and why people are more generally inclined to anthropomorphize the non-human objects of the natural world and for which they have given three main psychological determining factors of anthropomorphism. These are: Elicited Agent Knowledge, Sociality Motivation and Effectance motivation.

In anthropomorphism, in order to understand the behavior and characteristics of the unknown agents it is necessary to apply the knowledge about humans in general, and more specifically knowledge about the self. Self-knowledge serves as a base for understanding the other, therefore, the prime agent to figure out the process of anthropomorphism is, according to Waytz and et al, the elicitation of agent knowledge itself. This is because humans have acquired the knowledge about their own self in the early stages

of their development and it is so well discussed in detail that they are confident about it. They egocentrically, under the influence of self centred knowledge, always judge and reason the other lesser known agents and give them human characteristics according to their own beliefs and desires. So they generally anthropomorphize or use their own mental states and characteristics while reasoning about other non-human entities. However, children below the age of 4 years are unable to distinguish between self and the other, their internal self and the external world or the psychic world from the physical world. They always confuse the self with the other. As Piaget says: "at the starting point in the life of thought, we find a protoplasmic consciousness unable to make any distinction between the self and things" (235). While illustrating it with children it is seen that children consider their toys as like themselves and always feed and dress them in the similar way as they themselves do. This is because of their inability to distinguish between the self and the other. Piaget further uses two terms to describe this inability among younger children and these two terms are: "animism" and "artificialism." In animism children give life to non-living things, as it is often seen that children while playing with their toys always treat them as living object, and in artificialism they consider that the natural objects and phenomena are created by humans, like the baby brother or sister is manufactured by doctors in the hospital and so on. This is the reason that writers incorporate anthropomorphism in their writings for children because they appear natural to them and a part of their play world.

Sociality motivation, as another psychological determinant of anthropomorphism, means the desire to be connected socially with others. Those who are lonely or lack social connections are more prone to make connections with their pets and other non-living things by giving them human characteristics. As Demetrious Loukatos says

All personification imposed on any inanimate object is...due to man's need for a milieu of "human like" beings, and due to his fear of solitude. Always avoiding

isolation in nature, man everywhere creates imaginary beings in the form of men or animals in order to populate his surroundings. It is much the same need that led him in ancient times to the conception of the many divinities who filled his solitude...in deserted places and on the seas,[travellers and navigators] personified the mountains and rocks, the island and cliffs, putting themselves in relation to them. (467-74)

Aristotle in *Politics* states that "man is a social animal" and it is a basic need among humans to maintain and establish social connections with others. Lack of social connection or loneliness has negative impact on the mental health of an individual. People who are lonely due to the loss of their spouse or friend usually make connections to God. They give human attributes to God and talk to him as if he is able to hear and talk like they do. Moreover, those who have a sense of ignorance and are dissatisfied with their life also anthropomorphize God, their pets, and other non-human agents. To illustrate, children of the working parents always feel dejected and ignored. So, due to the lack of social connections they make connections with their toys, pets and other non-living things which are basically an attempt to recover themselves from the social pain and loneliness.

Effectance motivation, being the third key psychological factor for understanding when and why people anthropomorphize, means the basic and chronic motivation to become competent and effective agents of society with healthy social connections with others. This in turn develops among humans a sense of analogy, understanding and mastery over the surrounding natural world because people think egocentrically and anthropocentrically. They consider themselves as the center of the universe and all natural objects and phenomena have meaning only in relation to them. They with their knowledge about the self, analyze the natural world and phenomena. They analyze the world in the form of images that are familiar to them and of these their own self is the most familiar thing to them. They humanize the world and feel a sense of control over the world.

Moreover, unfamiliar things develop a sense of fear and terror among humans; so, when they humanize or anthropomorphize those things in human forms and characteristics they feel satisfied and powerful. As Mary Kay O'Neil and Salman Akhtar has quoted Freud in *On Freud's: The Future of an Illusion* that:

Impersonal forces and destinies cannot be approached; they remain eternally remote. But if the elements have passions that rage as they do in our own souls, if death itself is not something spontaneous but violent act of an evil will, if everywhere in nature there are Beings around us of a kind that we know in our own society, then we can breathe freely, can feel at home in the uncanny...perhaps, indeed, we are not even defenseless. We can apply the same methods against these violent supermen that we employ in our own society; we can try to abjure them, to appease them, to bribe them, and, by so influencing them, we may rob them of a part of their power. (22-23)

Effectance motivation is more clearly seen in the behavior of young children. Young children are egocentric and believe that everything and everyone on this earth thinks and works as they do. They think that everything on this world is created for them and they have full control over all the natural objects. Children while playing with toys or with other non-human objects always try to gain mastery over them and this activates effectance motivation in them. As Leslie White says young children are more likely to be "occupied with the agreeable task of developing an effective familiarity with the environment... build[ing] up an increased competence in dealing with the environment" (321) by a desire to understand and manipulate their surrounding environment and for this purpose they generally anthropomorphize the natural world. They, as discussed earlier, with the help of familiar things try to understand and to attain competence over the unfamiliar. Therefore, anthropomorphism in the early stages of life acts as a means to reduce uncertainty and complexity associated with unknown or non-human agents. For example, a child while playing often talks to non-living objects and

sometimes beats them with a rod when they do not follow him/her. Therefore, this in turn, develops in children a sense of belonging and control over the surrounding natural world. Children with the development of mind and experiences understand the distinction of the self from other humans and non-human entities. They acquire knowledge about the self and then apply this self-knowledge to understand unknown entities and this ability to recognize the other is well developed in fully grown experienced adults.

Our surrounding physical world is full of uncertainties and doubts which need explanations and humans in order to get full understanding of the world always shape it in the forms and images that are meaningful and known to them. They apply their own knowledge about the self in order to understand the other. This is because humans think egocentrically and under the influence of their self-centered excessive love and knowledge of oneself always imagine and consider external physical world not only as alive but also like them. They consider themselves as the center of the universe, as it is well explained by Hilary Putnam in the book *Reason, Truth and History*: "Our world is a human world, and what is conscious and not conscious, what has sensations and what doesn't, what is qualitatively similar to what and what is dissimilar, are all dependent ultimately on our human judgments of likeness and difference" (qtd. in Mitchell 37). Moreover, Datson and Mitman are of the opinion that when one ascribes human characteristics to animals one develops a sense of commonness of thoughts, feelings and emotions between oneself and those animals. One feels a sense of belongingness and "humans use animals to transcend the confines of self and species; they also enlist them to symbolize, dramatize and illuminate aspects of their own experiences and fantasies" (2).

Anthropomorphized animal characters are used in children's books as these books are didactic in nature and whenever to teach moral lessons it always points towards social evils, bad habits, sins etc. which sometimes creates tensions among class, castes or certain group of people. Thus, in order to avoid this tension these books use anthropomorphized animals and other inanimate

objects as one knows that they lack any class, caste etc. Simon Flynn in "Animal Stories" a chapter in a book by Peter Hunt *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* gives two theories that show how these animal stories affect and attract both the readers as well as writers alike and how they respond to such stories with animal characters. The first theory lays emphasis on the distance and second on identification between readers, especially children, and animals used as protagonist in the animal stories. Sometimes, a writer, according to Elliot Gose, chooses animal characters in his stories and through them he tries to show social, emotional and psychological concerns that are difficult for children to understand or that he does not wish his child readers to experience them directly in human forms.

On the other hand, identification theory encourages and helps readers to identify themselves with the animals which are used as protagonists in animal stories and experience the consciousness of these animals. John Stephens, while studying such concept, notes, "a product of our tendency to encourage children to situate themselves with in the book by identifying with the principal character" (4). This 'identification' between children and animals is believed to be the result of animism (as given by Piaget, a psychologist, in reference to the child's understanding of the world). Children, according to Baker, have inborn capacity in them to make connections and communications with animals. This association between child and animal, as observed by Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, is a part of the Romantic's construction of childhood who always linked children to nature and other objects presents in the natural world. They considered that children are irrational beings and thus find difficulty in understanding the difference between themselves and animals. Later Christine Kenyon-Jones argues that this inter-connection between children and animals, as proposed by romantics, is also deeply ingrained in other cultures and societies. This association is so old and dates back from the classical antiquity. For instance, Aristotle in the Fourth century BCE says children are different from animals and there is no innate connection and communication between them. It occurs only due to

the desire of humans who enjoy their top position and always consider themselves superior and ivilized from animals and other humans at the lower position. So, it is not only children who are related to animals but women, slaves, migrants, beggars, poor and those who are seen as 'other'. Therefore, Tess Cosslett observes:

These definitions of childhood carry along with them (or proceed from) complimentary implied definitions of the adult...so the adult becomes a person who is divorced from nature, rational, logical, and scientific. This is also an adult, who knows what the differences between animals and humans, how our species is defined. The child, by contrast, has still to learn these markers and rules, and exists in a space of play in which boundaries could potentially be transgressed. (476)

Various Psychologists consider children as imaginative and not rational as they lack ability to distinguish themselves from the external world and therefore attribute their own thoughts and feelings to the world around them. They give life and voice to the external world. Animism (as given by Piaget) and Anthropomorphism are innate in them. Therefore, children's book writers always use animals in stories written for children because they identify themselves more with an animal that has human attributes. Children are egocentric in thinking and consider themselves to be at the center and all other things have meaning and existence only in context to them. So, they anthropomorphize animals and other inanimate objects because they consider themselves to be at the center of the whole universe with unlimited power to control any phenomenon in this natural world. Therefore, they feel greater independence and full control over non-human objects while animating and anthropomorphizing inanimate objects. As Sullivan in *Historical Dictionary of Children's Literature* says:

The Romantic belief in the child's unity with nature is a major impetus behind the production of animal stories for a young audience: and the child's capacity to endow things with life to pretense play, blurring the boundaries between animate and

inanimate objects, is a further element that inspires writers to do likewise in children's book. (30)

3. Conclusion

It thus, becomes clear that the children connections and identifications with animals are constructed by adults and not by children themselves as adults always consider children as irrational and inferior to them. That is why adults incorporate animals in the children's stories. Therefore, animals play an important role in children's literature because adult writers feel that children associated more closely with animals and are able to communicate with them. They are unable to distinguish themselves from them and this notion is well stated by Freud as:

Children show no trace of the arrogance which urges modern adult civilized men to draw a hard-and-fast line between their own nature and that of all other animals. Children have no scruples over allowing animals to rank as their full equals. Uninhibited as they are in the avowal of their bodily needs, they no doubt feel themselves more akin to animals than to their elders, who may well be a puzzle to them. (126-27)

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