

METAMORPHOSIS OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING ON FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT'S *THE SECRET GARDEN*

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ABSTRACT

The paper entitled *Metamorphosis of the Human Psyche: A Psychoanalytic Reading on Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden* ponders over the psychoanalytic concept of the novel by decoding the unconscious realm of the main character. The transformation of the main character through the formation of superego or the moral consciousness is depicted. The behavioural problem faced by the child due to the parental neglect is rectified by the unknown magic that prevails in the secret garden. Sigmund Freud's tripartite theory is used to decipher the psychic realms of the main character. The introductory part consists of a brief description about children's literature and its importance. It also provides the major themes of the novel and a short description about the theory and its formation. The core part deals with the behavioural problems faced by the main character Mary Lennox due to intentional neglect of her parents. The Freudian tripartite theory is discussed in detail. The three distinct realms of the human mind, the id, the ego and the superego and their features and various stages of development are discussed. The lack of parental guidance caused the degradation of personality development in Mary. The role of the parents in bringing up a child is an irreplaceable factor. Good behaviour and personality is developed in a child at a very early age and this behaviour is developed with the help of parental guidance. Various instances from the novel are taken to establish the fact that Mary was under the control of her

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unconscious mind. The influence of the nature helps in the transformation. The neglected mind of Mary is reflected in the secret garden. The conclusion part of the paper sums up all the major concepts discussed. Good behaviour and personality are developed in a child at a very young age and the influence of the parental guidance is inevitable. She finds the secret garden as a projection of her own self. She thus takes the step to rejuvenate the garden and thereby the garden soothes her mind and her transformation is complete.

Keywords: *Id, Ego, Superego, Parental neglect, traumatic experience.*

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature elevates us to the realm of fantasies. It has a tone of bliss and innocence. It's a body of written works and pictorial representations produced in order to fascinate and enlighten young minds. Children's literature is often optimistic and provides a ray of hope to the readers. The themes of Children's literature are mostly associated with nature. It's a journey through the vision of a child. Fantastical elements elevate the genre to a loftier level.

Children's literature usually provides a moral element that helps to perform positive acts in life. Being good is important and this fact is always highlighted. The good comes to destroy the evil and the good always wins.

The extreme contrast between the good and the bad, the conceptual and practical, the orphan life and ideal family life, home as the epitome of security and wilderness with all sorts of atrocities are the major characteristics of children's literature. The fantastical ideas are easily accepted without any concerns of reality. These fabricating ideas help children to be imaginative.

Frances Hodgson Burnett's most famous and most important work of all time was *The Secret Garden*. This novel was published in the year 1911. The novel

has undertones of the author's life. "Indeed, many of the details come directly from her own experience of loss, and of her walled garden with its robin at Maytham Hall" (Gerzina 30). The themes of rejuvenation and rehabilitation are highlighted in the work.

Mary being a child who is completely neglected by her parents suffers behavioural problems and mental trauma, later her encounter with the secret garden and other characters in the novel transforms her into a better child. With her parent's death due to the rapid spread of cholera, Mary was sent to England to be looked after by her uncle. Mary's life takes up a great change after reaching Yorkshire.

Mary gets attracted by the so-called secret garden and wishes to see it and make it her own. Her quest and findings provide her with many friends which help her come out of the childhood trauma she was facing. Her disagreeable character takes transformation. She finds something in common between her and the garden. This metamorphosis is depicted through the fantastic elements in the novel.

The neglect of the parents stays as the basis for Mary's behavioural problems. The secret garden of the manor is also under a neglected situation like Mary and it also requires care. The element of magic prevails in the garden as it is the place of revival. Taking all these factors under consideration the transformation of Mary's character can be read through the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud.

The term psychology comes from the two words, *psyche* meaning the soul and *logos* referring to the subject of study. The term acquired the literal meaning "the study of the mind". Sigmund Freud was an Austrian physician who treated people with psychological disorders such as irrational fears, anxiety, and obsession using an innovative procedure called psychoanalysis. His psychoanalytic theory attempts to explain personality, motivation, and mental

disorders by focusing on unconscious determinants of behaviour. Freud's technique studied the meanings of dreams, slips of the tongue, forgetfulness and other blunders in everyday human life. From this, he was lead to a new notion of the structure of personality.

According to Freud, the personality was divided into three parts or it can be called 'The Tripartite Theory of Personality. The id, the ego and the superego are the three distinctive realms of personality. These develop at different stages of life. These parts influence the behavioural changes in an individual.

"The unconscious is the true psychic reality; its inner nature is just as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and is just as imperfectly communicated to us by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the reports of our sense organs" (Freud *Interpretation of Dreams* 321). The formation of the human psyche starts from the very childhood itself. And the role of parenting starts here.

The behaviour of Mary in the starting is quite contrary for a child of that age. The Freudian theory states that the child's mind undergoes consistent changes during growth. Behaviour is the outcome of ongoing internal conflicts. The conflicts between id, ego and superego tend to create anxiety and it leads to the reliance on the defence mechanisms.

Mary learns about the contrast between the good and bad at the Yorkshire manor. This insight should have been learned at a very younger age under parental guidance. The rude character of Mary takes a lift to a much agreeable one after this. The superego develops when a child is taught the distinction between good and bad. This superego guides humans to behave properly.

The formation of a child under the guidance of the parents is an inevitable factor. Mary was deprived of this care and concern. The trauma she faced was washed away with the care and concern she received from Yorkshire. The

proper parental guidance is required for better mental and physical growth. The influence of the secret garden in Mary's life helps her heal her psyche and move to a happy life.

Freud states that "We never have so little protection against suffering as when we are in love; we are never so desolate as when we have lost the object of our love or its love for us" (*Civilization and its Discontent* 33). Mary Lennox was a child who was deliberately forbidden of love. She was defenceless against her sufferings. The love and care she received from the magical secret garden transforms her inner self and ameliorates her soul into a benevolent one.

In the analogy of the iceberg used by Sigmund Freud, he states that the mind is like an iceberg and only one-seventh of the whole is visible above the water surface. The portion beneath the water surface is massive and the human psyche shares a similar metaphorical structure. The theory of personality or its structure is that people have three levels of awareness. It includes the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. Freud compared the prodigious size of the unconscious to the part of the iceberg that lies beneath the water surface. Only a small portion of the human mind is seen above the water surface which is the consciousness.

The human mind is a complicated structure and its true sense cannot be found. Sigmund Freud tries to sort out the human psyche using his famous tripartite theory. "...Freud suggested a three-part, rather than a two-part model of the psyche, dividing it into the ego, the superego, and the id, these three 'levels' of personality roughly corresponding to, respectively, the consciousness, the conscience, and the unconscious" (Barry 98).

The id is the instinctive component of the human personality. It works based on the pleasure principle. The id or the unconscious is the reservoir of psychic energy. Freud stated so because the id houses the raw biological urges like

sleep, eat, defecate and mate. The pleasure principle means it demands instant gratification of the needs. The id does the primary process of thinking which is illogical, irrational, and fantasy-oriented action.

The ego is the decision-making component of personality that functions according to the reality principle. The ego acts as a mediator between the id with its forceful urge for immediate gratification and the social world with the norms of suitable behaviour. The ego is conscious about etiquette, rules and customs and proper behaviour. Freud states that "The ego represents what we call sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passion" (*The Ego and the Id* 20). The reality principle is based on delaying the instant gratification urges of the id until the appropriate vent and situation can be found.

The super ego is the moral component of the personality. The superego incorporates moral and social standards. It distinguishes between what is right and what is wrong. From childhood, they develop this ego ideal which gives the child a clear differentiation between the good and the bad. This training is given by the parents and other social authorities. "The superego emerges out of the ego at around three to five years of age" (494). The superego is a moral watchdog, the moral centre of personality. This moral watchdog contributes materially towards building up what is called "character". The parental guidance and pampering is an inevitable factor for the development of the superego.

The intra-psycho conflict between id, ego and superego leads to anxiety and this anxiety leads to the reliance on the defence mechanism, which temporarily relieves anxiety. Theories state that defence mechanisms are psycho procedures for avoiding painful admissions or recognitions.

The early childhood period of a person is to be pampered and cuddled. The child expects love and care from the parents. Both the mother and father have

equal roles in considering the child. The limpid view about the good and the bad is introduced to the child. But many children face traumas, wretched situations and behavioural problems in life due to parental neglect. Such a situation is limned through the life of a fictional character Mary Lennox.

From the very onset of the story, it is translucent that Mary Lennox is a victim of dereliction from her own parents. It is depicted in the novel about Mary's mother's attitude that "She had not wanted a child at all, and when Mary was born she handed her over to the care of an *Ayah*, who was made to understand that if she wished to please the *Mem Sahib* she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible" (Burnett 7). Mary's mother gave importance to her physical life and other enjoyments rather than to pamper the child. The mental development of a child requires parental supervision and Mary is deprived of that in the very beginning itself.

"Attachment refers to the close, emotional bonds of affection that develop between infants and their caregivers" (Weiten 448). Researches show that the child has an attachment with the mother at the birth itself. Mary had been taken care of by servants. But she had no attachment towards the servants either, as they merely looked after her because it was their duty. No one showed love, care or compassion to the child.

Mary was under the control of the id that works on the pleasure principle. She wanted the instant gratification of needs so her id overrides the ego and makes the urges possible. If the urges are not fulfilled the psyche reacts with temper and aggressive behaviour. Mary is the most disagreeable looking child ever seen, she was "...as tyrannical and selfish a little pig ever lived" (Burnett 7).

The trauma is caused when a child undergoes an intense event that affects the emotional and physical wellbeing. It could be of various reasons including abuse, abandonment, separation from parents through death or divorce, or like

in Mary's case intentional or conscious neglect from parents. Mary's parent's suddendeath due to the outbreak of cholera in India intensified her situation.

She had begun to wonder why she had never seemed to belong to anyone even when her father and mother had been alive. Other children seemed to belong to their fathers and mothers, but she had never seemed to be anyone's little girl. She had had servants, and food and clothes, but no one had taken notice of her. She did not know that this was because she was a disagreeable child; but then, of course, she did not know she was disagreeable. She often thought that other people were, but she did not know that she was so herself. (Burnett 16)

Mary is taken to England to her uncle Archibald Craven as he is her only relative. Her life at Misselthwaite manor teaches her new things. Her behaviour takes up a gradual shift from what she was in the beginning. The servant

Martha who was there to help Mary taught her to do things on her own. Martha is different from the maids seen in India. She cares for Mary and teaches her many significant factors that help in the transformation of her character. Martha introduces Mary her little brother Dickon who does things on his own. Dickon's character can be equated with the superego or the moral consciousness that Mary lacks. From Martha, Mary learns about the locked-up garden. Mary's curiosity works and she sets forth to find the locked-up garden. This is the function of her id. No one was allowed to inquire about the garden, but Mary's curiosity makes her go in search of it.

Mary understands the cause of her distress; she also learns that being rude was something awful and being calm and kind makes people more satisfied. The super ego is starting to work. Her mind always wandered around her neglected situation. She wanted to be concerned by someone. Mary interprets that when a person smiles it makes the person much more virtuous.

Psychological studies state that positive subjective experiences such as happiness, love, gratitude, and hope help humans to live in the moment. Mary experiences happiness only after reaching England. She had no reason to be happy in India. Mary had setbacks and traumatic experiences in her early years. That caused her to have a sour expression. On reaching Yorkshire her mind finds reasons to be happy.

Towards the middle of the novel, we find Mary's character transforming. Mary says "thank you" for the first time. She was not used to thanking people and she never noticed what people did for her. This action can be seen as the function of her moral conscience or superego.

Mary's traumatic past experiences wanted her to shut herself out of the world. She wanted a place of her own where she could be by herself away from neglect and disregard. This trauma in her mind made Mary take a decision to follow her id than waiting for a better situation in considering with the ego.

This can be considered as a kind of defence mechanism used by the ego to avoid painful submissions and thoughts about traumatic past experiences.

The crying sounds heard in the mansion makes Mary curious to go in search of it. Mary finds a boy named Colin who was locked up in a room for the past ten years like the locked-up garden. Colin was her cousin the son of Craven. He has an unspecified spinal problem that hindered him from walking. Mary's influence makes the boy come back to life. Her superego functions in helping one in need. Colin is also neglected by everyone like Mary. Mary empathises with Colin and helps him get back to life.

Colin is considered as the symbolic representation of the id. Colin is very aggressive and angry and always has temper tantrums like Mary. He wishes for instant gratification of his needs. Both these children are victims of neglect.

Although Craven loved his son, he refused to pamper him because his wife

died. The locking up of the garden and the death of Mrs. Craven is connected to one another. Mary takes Colin to the secret garden, the garden of his own mother with the help of Dickon.

Mary has a combination of problems and this has affected both her body and mind. A similar situation is identified with Colin who too undergoes this trauma of being detested. They both are affected by psychic disorders caused by parental negligence and insecurity feelings. They both experience physical and mental weakness.

Mary had seen a projection of herself in Colin. She understands how rude it was to behave so. The motherly figure both Mary and Colin wishes for is fulfilled with the coming Susan Sowerby, the mother of Martha and Dickon. They experience motherly affection and consideration from her.

The human psyche continues to develop and transform throughout childhood and prime. "Freud stressed the importance of early childhood experiences, believing that personality was formed in the first six years of life; if there were significant problems, those problems must have begun in the early years" (Ciccarelli 48). The unconscious mind influences the conscious behaviour, development of the self and early childhood experiences. All the conflicts and experiences of human beings are stored in the unconscious from early childhood itself. The superego develops with the introduction of the division between right and wrong. Mary gets this distinction only after reaching England.

Nature has a magical power to console the human psyche. The garden acts as a key to the metamorphosis of Mary's character. Nature enhances humans in ways of its own. Mary receives care from nature, particularly in the secret garden.

The garden has a pompous role in healing the mental conflict of Mary. The author states that there is some kind of magic that prevails in the garden.

The "secret garden" is a projection of Mary's inner self. Like Mary's inner self the garden too was abandoned. The garden was a place of reflection for Mary as she used it to escape from society. The key to the garden was buried deep in the soil and the door to the garden was covered by ivies. This is symbolic of Mary's unconscious mind buried deep within Mary with multifarious problems and conflicts. The theme of negligence is the common factor that yokes the garden and Mary together. She finds herself or her state of loneliness being mirrored in the garden. Mary empathises with the garden.

Mary, Colin and the secret garden are connected by a term of ten years of intentional negligence and abandonment. Mary and Colin were ten years old, and all these ten years both of them suffered mental conflicts and behavioural problems due to parental neglect. The secret garden which was the garden of Colin's mother was abandoned for ten years after her death. Both the garden and Colin receive life with the help of Mary. Mary identified different realms of her inner self in the garden and in Colin. Her lonely and defenceless mind and her unconscious filled with traumas of the past were reflected in the garden.

Her rude and disapproving character, the id was mirrored in Colin's behaviour. Mary took the step to rejuvenate the garden and the garden healed her psychic troubles through its concealed magic.

Mary's behaviour takes the transformation and her psyche is healed. The intentional neglect of Mary's parents caused her personality to degrade and she was completely under the control of her ego and id. The super ego develops and her personality and behaviour have undergone the metamorphosis.

The parental neglect from the very start of her birth was the major cause of her disagreeable nature. She was never loved nor cared for by anyone. This caused her to be the most disagreeable child ever. Personality development is an inevitable factor in a child's life. This development is triggered by proper parental guidance. It is quite unacceptable for a girl of ten years to be completely abandoned by her parents. Mary never even got a chance to gaze upon her mother's face. The first ten years of childhood is the effective phase of a child who should be immersed in the care and love of their parents.

Freud stresses the importance of the parent-child relationship from the very onset of the baby's growth in the womb itself. Childhood experiences have a strong hold on the personality development of the child. Mary had experienced her fair share of miseries as a child.

England was the land of resurrection for Mary and the secret garden paved the way for her rejuvenation. The underdeveloped moral conscience or the ego-ideal started its function in Mary after she learns about good and bad. The so-called "superego" starts to function properly making the psyche of Mary to balance the mental conflicts and to gain the behavioural stability that she lacked.

The behaviour and good personality functions with the working of the superego. Mary's encounter with other characters in the novel eventually helps her to revive from her traumatic past. Martha, Ben, and Susan Sowerby are the characters who introduce her to morality and love.

Frances Hodgson Burnett has portrayed the traumatic past and the rejuvenation of the character Mary Lennox in a sentimental way making the readers experience the metamorphosis of the character. Furthermore, when psychoanalyzing the character of Mary, it is decoded that, all of Mary's mental conflicts were the sole effects of parental neglect. According to Burnett, such

psychological conflicts can be healed by the magic of nature and the power of love.

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