

THE FACETS OF LANGUAGE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ON GANDHIJI

Meenal Rathore*

ABSTRACT

Children's literature has bloomed over a period of few decades. The value of reading literature for children is very well understood by Educators, Parents and Community members. Donna Norton (2010) in her book: Through eyes of a Child, summarizes value of children literature by touching different aspects of development- Cognitive and Emotional intelligence, Personality and social skills. Exposure to Children literature enables a child to imagine, respond and have her or his own opinion on a piece of literary work. The most significant aspect of reading is keeping hold of cultural heritage and passing it on to the next generation. We are all brought up idolizing someone be it our Parents, Industry heroes, National or International icons. Such iconic figures have always been a topic of interest among children. Young minds imitate, it is an established truth. So, it is important to allow their insights to explore. The very basic tendency of a human mind is also comparing and contrasting. The texts even are time and again criticized that opens a new angle and window for new readers. The present study is based on comparative study method (key contributors -Danish scholar Rasmus Rask, Kal Werner and German scholar Jacob Grimm) to develop rationale and multi-dimensional reading of a text by any reader. The prime objective of the study is to analyze the portrayal of iconic National hero- Mahatma Gandhi in different language styles and elements by different authors in their select works like Mrinalini Sarabhai's: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, B.R Nanda's: GANDHI-a pictorial biography, Ravindra Varma's: Gandhi (a biography for children and beginners).

Keywords: Children Literature, Cognitive, Emotional Intelligence, Cultural Heritage, Idolizing, Comparative Study, Language Style.

Introduction

The famous American writer and literary critic Edmund Wilson once said- "No two persons ever read the same book."

The same holds true for writing a book too. The subject and story of a book may be common but the essence lies in the way an author treats it. The impact of the written word is embedded in the language, style, turn of phrase and the various devices used by the author. Thus arises the need for comparative study.

"Thinking without comparison is unthinkable. And in the absence of comparison, so is all scientific thought and scientific research." (Swanson, 1971) (1)

The pertinent question here is –Why compare?

"A comparative study is a kind of method that analyzes phenomena and then put them together to find the points of differentiation and similarity." (Mokhtarian Pour, 2016) (2)

* PhD Scholar, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India.

The in-depth knowledge of any topic is possible only after extensive reading and that involves different authors, their perspectives and interpretations. One is bound to compare the similarities and differences that exist in their narratives and portrayal for better understanding of the subject. Also, comparative study paves way to form, apply, critically evaluate and refine metalinguistic terminology. (3)

This paper aims to do the same with special emphasis on Children's Literature on Gandhiji.

The field of literature for children is quite rich the world over and India doesn't lag behind in it as well. Reading, as a habit and skill, is rewarding at any stage in life but introducing the younger generation to interesting and informative books is a task only select few can perform with gusto. An early exposure to good literature doesn't only develop in children the habit of reading but it also teaches them to think for themselves, analyze facts, gain knowledge and come to conclusions. The relevance of good books can, therefore, never be under estimated. Reading is an undeniable source for cognitive and emotional development of an individual. It promotes imagination, creativity and thinking skills to a whole new level. The most significant advantage of reading is getting to know more about our own culture and that of others. It is a traditional means for transfer of knowledge from one generation to another.

It becomes all the more substantial and paramount when we talk about biographies. The lives of great men have always remained open for discussion and elucidation. No other historical or political figure has had more written on him than Gandhiji. His life, his ideals, his methods, his movements- there is just no aspect of his life that has been left out by researchers and authors.

The present study aims at concentrating on three biographies written on Gandhiji catering to young readers.

The books chosen for the purpose of this study are:

- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi by Mrinalini Sarabhai, Illustrated by – Goutam Sen
- Gandhi [A biography for Children and Beginners] by Ravindra Varma
- Gandhi a pictorial biography by B.R. Nanda

Comparative Analyses

The vital parallel that can be drawn in the three books selected is that all of them deal with the life and times of Mahatma Gandhi and cater to a young readership. There is bound to be a marked similarity in the plot when the subject is common to all. None of the three authors claim to have written an exhaustive account of Gandhi's life. They have touched upon various incidents of his life that molded him into the man he was. As is desirable in any comparative study, the approach, of all three authors, differ on more grounds than one.

For the express purpose of comparing them, I have opted to review them under the facets of language used by them.

- **Genre**

There is little occasion to differ on this account. All three books are historical biographies of Mahatma Gandhi but intrinsically they differ in the formatting. Whereas Gandhi [A biography for Children and Beginners] by Ravindra Varma is completely textual, both Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi by Mrinalini Sarabhai, Illustrated by – Goutam Sen and Gandhi a pictorial biography by B.R. Nanda are ably supported by well- drawn illustrations that support the narrative, contemporary photographs from Gandhi's life & the places associated with him, facsimiles of letters, newspaper reports and cartoons.

- **Theme**

As in life, these books on Gandhiji, all deal with the themes of coming-of-age of our central character. It is his journey from Mohandas to Mahatma that is central to these biographies. Another important theme that emerges is that of an individual versus an establishment. Gandhi's conflict with the British government is the perfect example of this theme.

- **Narrative**

On one hand there is the charming little book by Mrinalini Sarabhai which begins with Gandhi's childhood and move forward chronologically in small burst of episodes from his life, on the other hand both Ravindra Varma & B.R. Nanda start by calling him the Mahatma and gradually move back in reverse chronology to the child he was and the events that shaped him. All three books employ the device of '*In Media Res*', which is Latin for 'in the middle of things. None of them begin at the very beginning of Gandhi's life. They somehow drift back to his birth but the story begins from wherever the author's feel the impact would be most on young readers.

“One day in a small town called Porbandar in Gujarat, there was excitement and joy, for that night the drama “Harishchandra” was to be staged. All day the children talked of the play.”

[Opening lines of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi by Mrinalini Sarabhai]

“In January 1948, before three pistol shots put an end to his life, Gandhi had been on the political stage for more than fifty years. He had inspired two generations of India...”

[Opening lines of Gandhi a pictorial biography by B.R. Nanda]

“Einstein was not the only one to see that Gandhi was a unique and incredible kind of human being.”

[Opening lines of Gandhi – A biography for children and beginners by Ravindra Varma]

- **Literary Devices used in Prose**

Mostly when we talk of children’s literature the two frequently used literary devices are Repetition and Alliteration. Not only are they easy to understand but also simpler to identify. They also tend to keep the flow of the text lively. Fortunately for us, there has been a lot more work done in the field of children’s literature and we come across myriad instances of choicest devices used that keeps the readers engrossed while also adding weight to the content.

One such beautiful device used by these authors is *Parallelism*. This particular device has much to do with plot rather than line by line text. As they are all historical biographies, we come across events that were taking place simultaneously in a given time frame across continents.

Yet another device used with aplomb is *Foreshadowing*. It is a nuance of writing which hints towards later events in the story.

“He could hardly have imagined the new vistas of maturity and public service which the South African adventure was to open to him.”

[Gandhi, a pictorial biography, B.R. Nanda- Chapter 3, page 12] when Gandhi got an offer to work in South Africa, he had no idea what an important role that would play in his political life.

All three authors have been successful in using the literary device of *Epigraph* where a famous quote is used to provide credence to the author’s train of thoughts and words.

“Generations to come, it may be”, Einstein had said of Gandhi in July 1944, “will scarcely believe that such one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon earth.”

[Gandhi, a pictorial biography, B.R. Nanda – Page 2]

Ravindra Varma has successfully set the *tone* and *mood* for a somber, modest, soft -spoken protagonist who believed in frugal living. The words chosen create an atmosphere of warmth and belief in the quite confidence of the man who was our leader for decades.

“Gandhi never claimed uniqueness. In fact, he protested against being described as unique. He insisted that he was a common man; that there was nothing uncommon about him. He was not a prophet, not a Mahatma.”

[Gandhi- A Biography for children and beginners, Ravindra Varma, Page 9]

The *language* used in all three books range from being easy to difficult. Mrinalini Sarabhai’s work is the easiest to get in terms of vocabulary used, she certainly had a young readership in mind. The textual book by Ravindra Varma can be mentioned next in the use of language. Although the difficulty level has risen, it doesn’t hamper or meddle with the flow of language which succeeds in keeping the reader captivated. The most bewitching language amongst the three has been employed by B.R. Nanda, who not only manages to use impressive lexicon but also uses the literary device of *Allusion* with great nonchalance.

There are many instances of the use of *Symbolism* in his work. One great example that catches the eye is:

“Gandhi’s deepest strivings were spiritual, but he did not - as had been the custom in his country- retire to a cave in the Himalayas to seek his salvation. *He carried his cave within him.*” [page 3]

Conclusion

Tremendous progress has been achieved in the field of children's literature and my work here is just a smattering of applause to all those who have worked in this field and made it possible for our children to connect with good literature. Language in its entirety, brightens a plot and yields integrity to the narrative.

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