

Analyzing “Sense” behind Nonsense- Sukumar Ray and Lewis Carroll

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ABSTRACT : The nonsense literature is always placed under the lens of children literature, we can find several stories, poems which deal with nonsense literature, and this genre of literature is never taken seriously. The nonsense literature can be seen in the works of some of the renowned poets or writers of 19th century. The nonsense literature is nothing but a goblet which allows the writers to look into the social- political problems of the society, it allows them criticize the faults and shortcomings of the contemporary society. Through my paper I would like to analyze some of the texts of Sukumar Ray and Lewis Carroll, and through their writings I would like to focus on the “sense” behind their nonsense literature.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Nonsense poems and stories of India were used to written during the colonial period; we can find nonsensical elements in the works of Sukumar Ray, a renowned poet of 19th century, his works contains full of nonsensical elements, his works gives a humorous effect upon the readers, in my paper I will be taking some of the poems and one short story of Sukumar Ray to make my perspective more clear- in my paper I will be including the poems and the short story are- “Kimbhut”, “Kumro Potash”, “HukoMukoHangla” and “ Ha Ja Ba Ra La”

Lewis Carroll who is considered to be one of the important writer of the Victorian Period, he is also considered to be an important writer of the Nonsense writings, his works also contains nonsensical elements, like Sukumar Ray his works also used to mock the Contemporary society, I will be taking two books of Lewis Carroll to make my perspective more clear- “Alice in Wonderland” and “Through the Looking Glass”, from this 2 books I will be taking some of the poems to show the nonsensical elements in Lewis Carroll works.

Difference between Fantasy and Nonsense Literature-

As we know that Children’s Literature is a separate genre, which always plays an important role in the field of Literature. Under the mirror of Children’s Literature, there are many subjects under this particular field of Literature, like something related to Fairy or any Wonder Tale, this form the subgenre of Fantasy or Illusion, or Rhymes or Tales, the rhymes and tales contains some essence of Literary Nonsense. I will be presenting the actual “sense” which lies behind the nonsensical works.

Before going into a deep inside discussion about Nonsense Literature, it is important to know the fundamental differences between Fantasy and Nonsense Literature. Although there are many similarities between these two subjects, as both of these are very much away from the Capitalistic Truth or from the reality of the life, both these are considered to be not normal or impossible in everyday’s lives. So now talking about the differences, it lies in the perfect unity and rationality within fantasy, in fantasy there is sense of logic and rationality, as fantasy land contains certain rules, and whatever is happening there it makes a perfect logic as rule is being followed there. Like the Harry Potter might be taken as an a Nonsensical to a rational mind because of the flying books, magical elements, moving photographs etc, but however if it is shown through a different perspective, from the perspective of the fact that it all happen in Hogwarts which is illusionary school, which is full of imagination and magic, the land is full of magical power, it is somewhere in the Scotland and it covered from common people through magical powers, common people cannot see it, it appears to be world that might have alternative or even contrasting realities but similar structure. And on the other hand, in Nonsense there we cannot find any logic and rationality, within its territory. In Nonsense there are no magic or wonder to justify the improbabilities and impossibilities that occur. In Nonsense there is nothing in the territory or cosmos

which intends to make any conventional sense rather than it only tries to show towards the problems related to different traditions and conventions. There is no easy system that gives any kind of confirmation for the existence of nonsensical elements. However, the sense and logic beneath the nonsense literature lies within the nonsensical works, it only revealed when close study of the texts are made with reference to socio-political and cultural contexts.

Nonsense literature tries to portray certain socio-political concerns by obstructing and giving a new form of the existing conventions and rules. Nonsense literature is used in all form of writing like rhymes, verse or prose, it is a medium which was used by the authors and writers to mock the contemporary society of the colonial system, and they represented the stereotypical modes of the colonial system through a comic mode. The works of Sukumar Ray and Lewis Carroll are within the model of children literature is thereby political intent.

Works of Sukumar Ray

The sphere in which Sukumar used to live and write was witnessing a strong oppression from colonial power, and raising voice against the Raj. Sukumar Ray was very innovative writer, he had to some extent had accepted the European Enlightenment, this due the vision that Sukumar Ray was himself was very much well verse with western society, literature and philosophy, though he had criticise heavily the British Empire through his writings for its extreme greed and violence. The dialectic of enlightenment has been problematized in the European context too and the apprehensions that Ray had within the default 'Renaissance' of Bengal or the crisis of modernity had common resonance worldwide. They can be summarised as follows-

- Critique of industrialization
- Mechanical culture
- Destruction of agrarian societies
- Creation of 'Babu' culture
- Totalitarian impulses
- Destruction of individualities

According to Adorno and Holkheimer, enlightenment means establishing superiority of 'man' over 'nature', through rigid reason and inflexible logic which made it totalitarian and despotic. Thus, when Adorno and Holkheimer in their essay, "The Concept of Enlightenment" critique if for being "Totalitarian", they criticise those aspects, that made Enlightenment dictatorial and it is their experience of Fascism in Germany that made them critical of modernity too. It is this aspect of Enlightenment and colonization that

several pre-independence native authors critiqued. Sukumar Ray too was a creative artist of the time who was concerned with foregrounding anti-colonial and pedagogical methodologies. Thus probably he wrote Children's literature with the objective of rousing critical consciousness, primarily by problematizing the role of reason.

The poem through which I would like to start my paper is "Kimbhut" or "Super Beast". In this poem Sukumar Ray has tried to deal with the growing babu culture, which was at that time was doing nothing, but only making the educated Bengalis a subject for the colonial empire to exploit the common people. The education and employment by the European, also their culture was spread through the British Pedagogical Apparatus, all this was done for their own sake and satisfaction, and it was hold up very tightly by the aboriginal people because it gave employment them and also gave erroneous perception of position and gratification. This thing led to a circumstance that those people who were very much get influence by the western culture, started to avoiding their own native culture and customs, and in the due course they began to experience identity crisis. Sukumar Ray through this poem had tried to criticise the educated Bengalis who are losing their self and their unique native identity to the English culture, tradition.

The creature in the poem, which is poet's own illustration, is too much into gloomy as his wants for many things are absent in his own self but it is present in others. Strikingly when he gets all the things he wanted he become more downcast than ever before as now it is devoid of any of its own identity. Sukumar Ray through his poem had criticised the, then colonial rulers and those aboriginals who are like Kimbhut are not happy and satisfied with their own customs, traditions and culture. He aroused a different current of thinking using humour as a strong tool to criticised the colonial rule, he uses a comic tone to do this. The fact of without thinking and mindlessly accepting the colonial rule and manners will not bring anything good, but only bring miseries to the identity, just like Kimbhut who is only good for being laughed by everyone and made fun of. The poet also tried to portray the predicament of the modern man in a capitalistic world, which is fully mechanised, this world causes dehumanization. Kimbhut who is caught in a trap of colonial rule, he does not have his own identity or individuality, and he is in the sense of nothingness, he alone and isolated not from his work, but also from his own true self and therefore he is no longer a human.

Now coming to the other poem, “HukoMukoHangla” or “The Lung Headed Loon”, Ray criticises the very receiving idea of intelligence and conduct which during his time was used to set by the Raj. The creature in the poem is very much fed up by the rules and regulations of the raj, he cannot sued up the files which were sitting on the centre of his back, and his two tails are worked only in the two directions, but not in the centre. While reading the poem the readers may laugh upon the creature’s lunacy of not using his sense and blindly following the rules which is being laid down by the mechanical rationality, but the laughter lessen out when one gets to know that they are not less that the creature, they are also like the creature, as in their everyday life they also followed rules and regulations, and behave according to the conventions which are made up by the head of the power. Therefore through the poem, Sukumar Ray show the awareness of the fact that there is a want to commence the analytical thinking and thought which will take up to reconceived every receiving notions of conventions and mechanical reason, the poem also can be interpreted as a parody to the rich society, the aristocrat people have all the luxurious and have everything in excess but they are never happy or satisfied. Their overflowed lifestyle often leaves them with generous share of free time, which they gave away, thinking about unimportant things just like the creature in the poem.

The next poem which I have is the “Kumro Potash” or “The Pumpkin Puff”, it is portrayed as a pot- bellied and slow Bengali men. The Kumro Potash is seen to be the representative of the Bengali Babus, who build up the town people scared and awestruck by show off about their power and special accord with colonial rulers, they used to boast about themselves because of their western education and lifestyle which they used led. According to his behaviour the town has to tune its own conduct, might appear to be true copy of the nonsense literature, but if someone does a minute reading to the poem than one can gets to know that Kumro Potash is nothing but the caricature of British Raj. Through the poem, Sukumar Ray had made fun of the colonized rulers and their empire, as they does not understand the illogical and in futile of abiding their rules and regulations and their methods of building up their empire, just like those who did absurd things, just because Kumro Potash danced or moaned or ran.

Now coming to the short story “Ha Ja Ba Ra La” or “TopsyTurvy Land”, it’s a story about a cat which takes absurd direction to go to Tibet. Here’s Calcutta and here’s Diamond Harbour

which is little to the South and here’s Ranaghat which is small to the North, and suddenly you are in Tibet, a single road and it took an hour to drive just to say a word. The simple illustration gives a detailed idea about the world and mind of children, for whom there is nothing hard or impossible. And on the other hand, the illustration, which keep on reminding about one of the peasant like description of distance, it also shows up the free bounded and amusing nature of the astray farming world. Sukumar Ray had also dares the traditional grounds; also very nicely he had turned it on its head. The nonsensical description of uncomplicated handkerchief straight away becomes a cat that only communicates but also even, sniggers and winks, all these things start making sense, when one gets to know that all of the these things Ray wanted to do here or show here, is nothing but to disturb the existing veracity and certainties and dares the notion of scientific rationality and thus try to make up a opportunity for thinking which is far beyond the existing rules and regulations. Sukumar Ray takes us to a certain place where our strapping conditioned mind comes upon to a dare, it is a court scene where a bat is the judge, crocodile is the lawyer, which is shedding its tears, here witnesses are valued as they are being purchased, as they are purchased they valuable, as money is valuable, it brought out the sum up total of corruption of the entire system which is come out as good humour or mockery.

Works of Lewis Carroll-

“Alice in Wonderland” and “Through the Looking Glass”, these two works of Lewis Carroll are considered to be the triumph of nonsense literature. Both of the novels are well praised by both children and as well as adults, it is being appreciate by the children and was very much symbolic to the adult and in many times it was allegorical also. “Alice in Wonderland” and “Through the Looking Glass” are cannot be separated from many analytical contrary within them.

So from both of the novels I have taken 4 poems each of the, starting from “Alice in Wonderland”, the first poem through which I will starting my discussion is “How Doth the Little Crocodile”, it was recited by Alice in chapter 2, she tried to recite the poem as “How Doth the Little busy bee”, but is all come out as a mistake and it become, “How Doth the Little Crocodile”. The poem is a parody to Isaac Watt’s poem, “Against Idleness and Mischief”, the poem starts with the line “How doth the little busy bee”, here the bee is reflected as a hardworking creature, it symbolises the diligent and earnest of a work. And on the other

hand Lewis Carroll poem, “How Doth the Little Crocodile”, here the crocodile is seen to be lazy, Lewis Carroll has made all the possible way to come out the crocodile’s morality, cleverness, fraud and rapacity are the important themes of the poem. Like the bee which is very much hard working and earnest towards it work, but the crocodile is basking sun and welcoming fish to his arms. Carroll made the poem more attractive through its mocking nature; he had used different poetic devices like- anaphora, alliteration, enjambment and personification, to make the poem more realistic.

Now going to other poem “You are Old, Father William” from “Alice in Wonderland”, it was recited by Alice in Chapter 5, it was the advice from the Caterpillar to recite the poem, the poem is mockery to the poem “The Old Man’s Comforts and How He Gained Them”, which was well known to children at that time, the poem was written by Robert Southey. The poem mockingly shows the generation gap between an expert and experienced man and his boastful, blustering and proud son, the son keeps on prompting about his father’s age, about how old he is. However, the parody one is totally different from the original one, the old man is not only cheerful and god in health but he clowns around, he can stand on his head, he can stand a eel on his nose, he can eat as much as he wants, he can do backward flip and many more things. He tells his son that he is done with his questions and it will be better if he leaves now, here the old man uses his age as a defend to whatever he wants to do, he can play around, he can eat as much he wants. The old man also takes a convenience of the juvenile lad trepidation of age by vending some ointment, while selling it he says that it will keep his bones soft when he will get old. He even tires to embezzle his power, and with a bigger stick he tells the boy to go away as he is asking too much of questions. Like all the children of his age are very curious, just like that he also very curious and do not have much knowledge and experience like the old man, but the old man disperse the boy because of the boy’s less power, and does not give much observation.

Another poem is “Tis the Voice of the Lobster”, this poem is recited by Alice in Chapter 10, to the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon. The poem is a satire to Isaac Watt’s moralistic poem “The Sluggard”, the original one shows the unattractive state of an indolent person which is a gloomy instance, whereas the parody one shows the parallel immorality of the lobster’s that it is fragile and cannot backup his overstate and is thus uncomplicated prey.

The last poem through which I would end my discussion of “Alice in Wonderland” is “Twinkle

Twinkle Little Bat”, the poem was recited by Mad Hatter in Chapter 7, and it is satire to Jane Taylor’s “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star”. The poem appears to be inquiring the activities of the bat, as for him it seems to be a mysterious creature; it does not have any constructional affinity. The tone of the poem is very whammy at the antics of the bat but being informed of the actual claim of the book of Carroll one could not easily say that or come to a conclusion that the poem is a piece of nonsense, the style is very vibrant and hugely enjoyed by the children, but the uncomplicated can be more illusive and may be filled with concealed plans. The fact is that it is the parody of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” makes it more blameless, in fact the book is a parody of manners and have elements of Victorian England. The word “Twinkle” here is not an onomatopoeic word, since the word does not show the sound of the object, the sound of the star cannot be heard by the human ears, it is actually a visual onomatopoeia, where the tinkling of stars is shown as “Twinkle”. Carroll has been mocking the foolishness of linguistic over-creativity in both literature and everyday use.

Now I come to novel, “Through the Looking Glass” so the first poem from which I will start my discussion is “The Jabberwocky”, in this ballad Carroll had used nonsensical elements, throughout the entire ballad, forming a tale of good and bad, which lead up to in the killing of the dangerous Jabberwock, the poem is highly appreciated not only for its decorative words but also for sonic and memorable nature. In this poem, Lewis Carroll had tried to show an amalgamation of close form and narrative with very queer language. Most of the words which Carroll made up have meanings, though the starting effect inside the poem is one of uncertainty and nonsense. In most of the cases readers cannot bring out the true sense behind the words as they do not know the words and also their meanings. Therefore by arranging his language in a form of ballad as well as by making it as traditional heroic quest, Carroll had shown that it is not possible to inject nonsensical elements with meaning simply through context. Nonsense Language also can make bosom stories seem amusing unusual and also permits Carroll to gently prod fun at clichéd adventures stories. The poem seeking narrative is also usual enough to know the readers about its beneath all the nonsense, after reading the poem one can know that it about a hero who is all set to kill the monstrous creature, Jabberwock, even one does not

know or does not understand about the monster's identity or the overall general plot. The heroic quest is a tired and real plot, which allows readers to fill what they do not understand with their imagination.

The other poem from "Through the Looking Glass" is "Tweedledum Tweedledee" the poem is about two twin's brothers who stand side by side with arms around each other's shoulders. The poem shows the fighting between these two, they fight because of a fragile rattle, their fight continues until they are sacred way by the crows, which cause them to forget their quarrel, also they did not believe that they ever quarrel, they ignore Alice questions about how to get of the forest, but they did not say anything. They also give their hands to her for greetings, but she grabs each man's hands, and they three starts to dance in a ring shape. After a little dance they stopped, and Alice again starts to ask question about how to get out of the forest, but both of them ignore. After that one of the men started to recite a poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter" which I will be discussing after this. After finishing the poem, Alice gets diverted when she sees the Red King sleeping under the tree, and he was snoring like a train's engine. Tweedledee tells her that the Red King is watching her in his dreams and if he wakes him up she will get vanish, after hearing this Alice began to cry and she says that she is real, both Tweedledee and Tweedledum tells her that her tears are fake not real. But Alice thinks that both of them Tweedledee and Tweedledum are talking nonsense and nothing else, she knows that she real. Alice changes the subject and prepares to leave, and that moment Tweedledee grabs her hand and points to a fragile rattle which is fell into the ground. Tweedledum sees it as a new rattle and gets burst into anger whereas Tweedledee crouch in fear. After Tweedledum calms down, both of them agree to have a fight over the rattle as who is going to be the owner of the rattle, Alice helps them to start with the fight, but before the fight a crow comes and scared them off and Alice slips into the forest alone.

The next poem with which I would be starting my discussion is "The Walrus and the Carpenter", the poem is being recited in Chapter 4, by Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Lewis Carroll tried to show the shrewdness of human nature, how many human betray their close ones for their own benefit, this what Lewis Carroll had tried to portray in the poem, just like the Walrus and the Carpenter betrayed and tricked gullible oysters and eat them after taking a walk together in the seashore. Though the oldest among the oyster declined their

offer of walking with them, but the other oysters agree to join them in the walk, as they were innocent and does not know about the hidden motive of the Walrus and the Carpenter. Though the Walrus tried to not to eat them and tried to show them sympathy but the Carpenter wanted to eat them, so they brutally eat the oysters, from this the readers can get a idea from the oldest oyster who did not want to go for a walk with them as knew the evil intention behind the walk but the younger oyster falls into the prey of the Walrus and the Carpenter, and does not pay a heed towards the hearing of the oldest oyster, thus if they would not have gone for a walk their life would have been saved.

Now the last poem from the novel "Through the Looking Glass" is "Humpty Dumpty", Alice goes to the egg, which has enlarged and become Humpty Dumpty. Humpty Dumpty lazily sits on a wall, without paying heed to, he notices Alice when she tells him how much he looks like an egg. This remark irritates him and Humpty Dumpty insults Alice. Then she begins to humbly recite the nursery rhyme of Humpty Dumpty, and he asks her name and requests that she state her business. Alice tells Humpty Dumpty her name and he tells her that her name is full of nonsensical as it does not have any meaning of its own. As according to his point of view, names should have some meaning, it's nothing like keeping a name randomly without any definite meaning, thus he offers his own name as an instance since its resembles to the structure of his body. He goes on and tells that with a name like Alice, she could be any structure at all. Conscious for his well being, Alice asks Humpty Dumpty why he always sits at the top of the wall. To this he, replies that the King made him a promise, which stimulus Alice's recollection of the rhyme talking that the King's horses and the King's men put Humpty Dumpty back together again. Alice's thinking to the poem exasperation Humpty Dumpty, who holds on that he is well secured and moves to other subject.

Humpty Dumpty tries to make a riddle out of every part of their discussion. Alice accolades his scarf, which he describes he collect from the White King and Queen for his un-birthday. He then, tries to explain that a un-birthday is a day which is not his birthday. Humpty Dumpty says that un-birthdays are pretty much better than birthday than, he starts to use words that do not make any sense in the reference of his context of what he says. Alice inquire that what does he actually means, to which he respond that he can construct words and can, do anything that he wants,

nevertheless he reimburse words more if he wanted them to do abundant amount of work. Then suddenly, Alice recalls the poem “Jabberwocky,” and she put a question to Humpty Dumpty to make her understand the words to her. She tells the first stanza, which he takes in aside word by word. Humpty Dumpty then begins his own poem for her, which all of a sudden ends with a goodbye. In anger, Alice walks off, grumbling about his conduct when a sizeable slam reverberates through the wood. Humpty Dumpty renews the plan of naming and the role it plays in forming specification. Unlike the Fawn and the Gnat, Humpty Dumpty has a shading comprehension of naming. Nonetheless, Humpty Dumpty continues to keep a comprehension of language that countermands Alice’s comprehension along the way vernacular operates. Alice accepted that actual names do not have intense importance, while names for ubiquitous conception such as a “fame” or “thickness” have unbending sense that all people understand. Humpty Dumpty trust the antonyms, mentioning that he perceive the name Alice to be foolish and brainless as long as it breaks down to signify anything about who she is. Humpty Dumpty carry on this devious influence of language, taking autonomy with the definition of familiar words and set up definitions for them that complement his impetus. Words become characters under Humpty Dumpty’s implementation, a plan he encourage with the assert that he exactly reimburse the words more when he makes them do a lot of work.

Humpty Dumpty’s ideology of naming shows both the unpredictability of language and the volume of literature to move on the meaning. Humpty Dumpty renews the meanings of words at will, but he should use other words that have assumed firm meanings to spell out the new definitions. If too many words have liquefied meanings, their meanings will change eccentric, and language will come to an end to purpose as a apparatus efficient of liaise ideas. Humpty Dumpty’s plans about language will drop into pieces if many people modify the meanings of words to go with their solitary fancy. If we look it through the view point of literature, Humpty Dumpty’s plans are more suitable. Author control the different meanings of words they use when writing, giving their language a excellence that has the embryonic to engross and charm the readers. Carroll’s recurrent use of puns and word play shows how accommodate he was to these belongings of language. Even in this part, Carroll plays with the pun on the “richness” of language,

indicating that Humpty Dumpty pays words more when they work harder.

II. CONCLUSION

So I would like to conclude by saying that, both Sukumar Ray and Lewis Carroll has given their remarkable in the field of nonsense literature. Both of them have a respected and special position in the world of children’s literature, both of them has been portrayed as beloved children writers of all time. Their writing style had very much amused the children and also the adults. Writing nonsense in productive way to enlarge a person’s creative thinking skills and imagination by making humdrum things into scenes full of fantasy, magic, nonsense and silliness. This can be a very good method for making the children understand that language and reading are very playful and also very exciting. As discussed earlier, the traditional structure of communication has many faults and loopholes, problems of model communication can be seen in the works of both Sukumar Ray and Lewis Carroll, images and texts are always multivalent. As Derrida and Saussure has shown that one cannot get into a stable signified, a stable meaning that can provide a ground for entire system of connotation and denotation.

Sukumar Ray has made up a original and honestly nonsensical poetry, with the charmer and genuineness of the Bengali Culture at the heart of the poems, he also created casement into the culture, he had also very much encourage the readers into go through further into the ardent and indulgent Bengali culture and keep on experience nonsense literature from around the world and adore all the imaginative and expressive multiplicity they observe.

Lewis Carroll works contains of comedy of manners, and elements of Victorian Age, as he himself belonged from the Victorian Era. Lewis Carroll who open out the world by smashing the roles of pick out self since any species, can voluntarily swap their body and transfigure into other species. Unpredictability of body position is one of the core themes in Carroll’s world, a good instance can be the part when Alice met the egg a shaped creature. “Humpty Dumpty”, as he was half egg and half human, she was very much known to the fact as she had read it in the children’s book, which she had read in the real world.

Therefore in order to know more about nonsense literature, if we look into the visual perspective, we have got to know about changing of human body as a point of taking protection from the harsh society.

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