

An Expedition into The World of Imagination: An In-Depth Study of Suniti Namjoshi's Child Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Suniti Namjoshi is an Indian-Canadian revolutionary poet, myth-maker and a fabulist English writer. She has written various poems, fables, fairy tales, novels, short stories and children's books but she finds fable as an appropriate way of writing to put her ideas. She explores into the cultural milieu of numerous nations in her literature as she has passed through from various countries. Namjoshi's writings for the children endow with a world of fantasies which give them a chance to go on a different excursion into the world of fancy and live with fairy tales. She has written her first book "Aditi and The One-Eyed Monkey" as a gift for her niece Aditi which was well received by the children. So just because of the demands of the children she has written more stories for them along with the sequel "Aditi and The Thames Dragon". All these books in the series became very popular among the children as the stories are autobiographical and somehow interrelated with Suniti's childhood in rural areas of Maharashtra. The atmosphere, situations, thoughts and feelings are so natural that the children can correlate with it.

The present paper is an attempt to show the bright colours of various aspects in the life of a child. It will also offer a new approach and imaginative power of Suniti Namjoshi's child fiction.

Key Words: revolutionary, myth-maker, fabulist, cultural milieu, excursion.

Date of Submission: 08-12-2023

Date of Acceptance: 23-12-2023

Suniti Namjoshi is aware about the interest and curiosity of the child reader, so by her artistic genius she creates a large canvas with full of bright colours which is endeared by the children. Suniti Namjoshi presents her childhood days and birth into a noble family in the rural India through the character of little Aditi. With her innovative and imaginative power Suniti Namjoshi perfectly presents original essence of fairy tales along with the combination of modern technology and this quality makes her narrative unique. She has acquired the fame as a child artist, yet she asserts herself to be a feminist writer.

Through her children's literature, Suniti simply wants to entertain the children, gives them moral message and transcends them into the world of fantasy. Her delightful fairy tales introduce her philosophy by which she not only enlightens the child reader but also investigates the perspective of female in her depiction of feminist characters. The main quality of her child fiction is that it is endowed with a lot of love and affection for to the children and it does not point up any condemnation on the patriarchal world in a straight forward manner.

In Suniti Namjoshi's Aditi series the first series of books was *Unlikely Friends* in which the stories are packed with thrill, action, adventure and good number of fights. She doesn't show any discrimination here as she presents the female characters that are proficient enough to do all the things similarly the boys can perform. Through the activities of her characters Namjoshi frankly gives a strong message about her females that they are not selfish and introvert like their male counterparts. Her female characters never feel shame as they fearlessly accept their shortcomings. In place of showing any pretence they make an effort to rectify them which motivates the readers.

Namjoshi's writings indicate a remarkable dismal image of womanhood from time to time. She criticizes "the disappointments, deprivation and anguish faced by women who deeply aspire for more space within the existing social structures" (Goel 180). But another series of books *Adventures of Aditi and Friends* doesn't have brutality, murder and fight as it portrayed the friendship between human and animal in a delightful manner. Instead of presenting the fight Suniti's stories show unusual adventures and try to solve problems of various questions and challenges concerning different parts of the world which generally affects the mentality of the children. Besides, the presentation of her stories is so much fascinating that the child reader used to read it with interest and feels connected with these stories.

In Namjoshi's book series each and every adventure of the stories is linked with each-other yet each book can be read separately. The stories of Suniti Namjoshi's first book *Aditi and the One-Eyed Monkey* (2001) are realistic, imaginative, fantastic and autobiographical along with the modern technology which provides originality and uniqueness to her stories. In this she wants to reveal strong will power and determination through the three animal characters of different size, as- one-eyed monkey, Siril the ant and Ele, the elephant. It is the main aspect of her literature that when a person is engaged in it whole-heartedly, he doesn't feel the difference between the size of elephant and the ant. In Namjoshi's stories the unusual creatures like ant, monkey, elephant along with the human being come which makes her work charming and admirable. Besides, she also suggests that it should be a basic quality of every person that he must have the power and proficiency otherwise people can take advantage considering him as weaker ones. Here, the main protagonist Aditi is presented as a fearless and kind-hearted girl who is ready to face the dragon because of her friends after leaving the luxuries of a princess. Her grandparents have full faith on her talent which is rarely visible in patriarchal society of India.

In her stories Namjoshi doesn't want to create any concept or negative thought in the psyche of youngsters about the restrictions of girl child, so she significantly commences the dream episode as children have a special attraction to dream and fancy. Suniti Namjoshi also displays about the importance of trees, water and nature along with the harsh results of global warming only for making conscious to the children. At the same time, in *Aditi and the Thames dragon*, Namjoshi tries to give them message and also keeps them alert about water pollution in the rivers and its consequences because of some insensitive and decadent people who do not use their common sense and dump waste into the river. She carries out this in her fables by using the sufferings of animal characters whose lives are affected by these people. By providing the fantastic events in her stories Namjoshi enlightens the young mind of the child readers and makes them educative. The setting and atmosphere of her stories touches various parts of the earth. So, the children acquire the information about different countries, means of transport, the distance, maps and geographical areas etc. and at times their process of learning is wiser and thoughtful than the matured persons. Through the background of this fairy tale Namjoshi plans the children in such a way so that everyone could know about the brutality and selfishness of people. This could be seen as a device of Namjoshi by which she not only gives training but at the same time entertains the child reader.

Namjoshi's contemporary stories *Adventures of Aditi and Friends* and *Aditi and the Thames Dragon* presented the fairy mothers as in the form of sages who have immense power with incredible capacity yet they are accepted as real-life human characters. On the contrary, there is no fight or malice in her next adventurous story *Aditi and the Marine sage*. The light mood, tone and atmosphere of the story construct the artistic impact and inventiveness of the work. She carefully establishes innovative glossary, the specifics of geography, modern technology into the story in a light-hearted manner through the animal characters which makes it visual and effective. Namjoshi portrays various incidents related to the elephant and the friends according to the sensibilities of the children. In this story the writer depicts the entire journey of finding out the name just to highlight its importance as it provides identity to a person. Moreover, the writer weaves all these elements in an excellent manner that it looks like an integral part of the story at a standstill.

In Aditi series Namjoshi makes the plot and language very simple, suitable and comprehensive instead of making it difficult. Each adventure of the story is correlated in such style that it leads to new adventure and carries the story forward. She invents new and lengthy words with such mastery that the readers become skilful about it without any effort interestingly. The way of presentation, the application of words, the lucidity of the subject, the formation of plot and above all the grip on the story all these are displayed by the writer is so real that it looks genuine to the readers and they go through the story with no trouble. Moreover, they easily believe on the abilities of the female sage which was presented by Suniti Namjoshi in *Aditi and the Techno Sage* with a different perspective. She reveals her feelings and insights of a female writer in her works. In most of the stories men are normally presented as the sage but with the help of her imagination Namjoshi realistically presents her female characters against all the established norms of a sage as well as the society. Her each character is unique and no one can deny their existence. They not only show affection, compassion, generosity, gentleness but at the same time they also show incredible bravery, intelligence and thoughtfulness.

It is significant to note that instead of being a feminist writer Namjoshi doesn't describe dark side of her male characters in her children's literature, while she does it in her mainstream writing. There is no trace of comparison or divergence among the characters in her works of children because she keeps away her young readers far from gender differences in an existing social context. Therefore, her child narrative is contemplative and there is no inconsistency in it. Her stories influence the young reader's consciousness and give them knowledge about different spheres of the world. Namjoshi cautiously exhibits the emotions, opinions and skilfulness of women characters without degrading the men. Through the adventures of her books, she explores beautiful images of the nature in place of talking about the community in the wide-ranging domains apart from the story in *Aditi and the Thames Dragon*. Namjoshi imparts a message through this story, and to further the story she depicts the people, their way of living, schools, museums, transportation and their mind-set about the

atmosphere etc. Through her characters she focuses on pure adventures, values and friendship but without any violence, conspiracy, infidelity and other negativities. Just because of all these qualities her literature is very much relevant for the children.

Another work *Unexpected Monsters* is a set of four books and all are based on the thrilling incidents of various monsters in different parts of the world. But Namjoshi's presentation of monsters is different and unique from others as mostly the monsters are shown as dangerous, violent and gigantic. In her book *Aditi and her Friends take on the Vesuvius Giant* (2007) Namjoshi also talks about the divergent perception of the monsters. Another book *Aditi and her Friends meet Grendel* (2007) depicts about the author's the place of living Devon. The setting of the story is about the natural surroundings as-caves, rocks, beaches, water, winds, waves etc. and far from the busyness of the town. Through the character of Grendel Suniti Namjoshi presents the mindset of the young readers which was affected by an emotional dilemma in their course of action. She not only talks about the reason of psychological growth disorder but at the same time also the healing power where the family and friends can treat such children with their love and care along with the proper counselling. Here the writer demonstrates the significance of the common growth of children as it is an essential part of their life otherwise, they want to escape from the responsibilities in their adolescent age.

Suniti Namjoshi talks about the most important feature in her book *Aditi and Friends help changeling the Budapest* (2007) which is the development of identity and sensitivity in the life of a child. The role of family, home and society is very important in giving the social aspects to a child; on the contrary a child feels alienated and bewildered if he is born as an orphan or belongs to a broken family. Namjoshi reflects the trauma and condition of seclusion and identity crisis in this book through the character of Changeling and the old woman. Her previous book about Grandel also informs about the problem but along with the clear solutions. But in the case of Changeling the adventures are primarily obscure devoid of any solution; even then at last Changeling finds a name and home by her friends. Namjoshi successfully presents the character of Changeling to create the narration simple and modest so that it could express the cruel face of society without hurting the sensibility of children.

The perception of Namjoshi's stories has newness and different outlook for the readers. Its mode of expression fascinates the children and they never feel bored with it. The characters are well defined in her stories as amusing, powerful, wise and energetic. They show the chastity of friendship and sort out all the problems sensibly. Namjoshi makes an effort to form a new enthralling story every time by using the legendary stories in her works. Her fiction represents fresh insights in the combination of modernism with traditional method. But the setting and background of her last story *Aditi and Friends in search of Shemeek* (2007) acquaints with historical forts of the ancient times.

In Namjoshi's works she favours the punishment as it is significant in wonderful growth of the person but should be mild, not at all heartless because it creates a bad impact on the psyche of the children. So, in her child narrative Suniti employs the punishment as an essential device which gives an opportunity to the people to come across their mistakes and to identify new meaning of life. In her stories Suniti Namjoshi formed new ideas and concepts to create an impression that punishment should be productive and tender so that it would originate right conduct in children. Namjoshi was mainly a typical feminist writer who criticizes on the male supremacy in the society. Satire was her favourite form to comment on the gender discrimination in her fables. She also renders male chauvinism and dual ideology in the traditional society through her legendary stories. Namjoshi strongly represents her feminist ideas in her writings, so it was a challenge for her to be tender and entertaining to the children. However, in her child fiction she provides a particular place and consideration to the female characters without being informative or serious. The stories are purely adventurous and imaginative which were written according to the interest of the child readers.

Earlier the women writers had to write within the limitations or conventions set by the society. But in present time women have got equal position or independence to convey their thoughts and feelings without any pressure or stress of the society. Namjoshi's works for children are also based on reason but there is no mark of restraint and her views do not show any prejudice regarding both genders. She makes them equally proficient in doing anything but her chief concern is especially on the female issues through her strong depiction of female characters. She naturally expresses the abilities, thoughts and feelings of female characters with no compromise. Likewise, her male characters don't govern others and show immense courage with strong activities without any superiority complex in them. In this way Namjoshi's fables for children are appealing and keep her work apart from paradoxical point of view. Namjoshi artistically communicates about equal opportunities of females in her stories and at the same time makes an effort to shape the child's mind about moral values. Through the character of Aditi Suniti notably focuses on the abilities and rights of girl child. But even in doing all this she maintains the pleasure and gratification for children.

Not only the writings of Indian English writers but other Indian languages writers are also concerned with the morals and problems of the society. Suniti Namjoshi's place in English literature is remarkable from this point of view as her narrative deals with the social issues and principles. Besides her literature is also

influential for all age group child readers as it affects their mentality appropriately. Instead in the writings of Indian English writers women are deemed as commodities whose only work is to be a slave of men and perform their duties according to men's needs and desires. They are known as weaker sex as compared to men so they adjust in any situation without probing into it. Being too humble, shy, delicate and obedient the women quietly follow the commands of males and satisfy the entire physical and practical wants of them. Women are unable to fight against their inequality and exploitation so instead of confrontation they give much preference to compromise.

Through her women characters Namjoshi reflects contemporary experiences and the mistreated facets of female condition and position. In almost all the fables Suniti's women characters are able to take decisions for their lives in the midst of tensions and problems for varying their stereotype images and way of life. For Suniti fable is a suitable means of writing to explore her ideas regarding the status and rights of women, their relationship with men and traditional dominant ideology of the society towards them and it could be seen in her children literature similarly. Her female characters create their own identity even though a lot of inconsistencies and gender inequality prevalent among the society.

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Dr. Kalpana Pandey. "An Expedition into The World of Imagination: An In-Depth Study of Suniti Namjoshi's Child Fiction." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 12, no. 12, 2023, pp. 23-26. Journal DOI- 10.35629/7722