

For students of GE English Semester 4 (Children's Literature)

Hello Students,

Let me add a few notes on my part for the two texts assigned to me for the course.

1. *Tales from Thakurmar Jhuli: Twelve Stories from Bengal*

I have already provided extensive introductory lectures on the text in classes held. My focus had always been on the oral quality of the narratives in the text and how it has been preserved in the very manner of telling in the written form. You have already either obtained or photo copied the introductions in Sukhendu Roy's English translation (OUP). I particularly refer to the introduction by Bharati Ray where she enlists several features of the tales.

I guess I was in the middle of the story of Kolaboti Rajkanya. Although I could not finish the story, I think I have provided you with a pattern for the analysis of the narrative of the story. On the basis of such an analysis you are supposed to defend the oral and often unpredictable narrative pattern of the tale.

However, there is one part to which I wish to draw attention to, and it is the ending of the story of Kolaboti Rajkanya. Buddhu and Bhutum, the monkey and the owl princes, are married to two beautiful princesses. But the princesses not seem to be totally happy with this. So there comes the sudden discovery of the secret that Buddhu and Bhutum are actually fallen angels in the disguises of monkey and owl. The wives decide to burn the disguises without taking the consent of their husbands, so that they are in permanent possession of two handsome princes as husbands. Although Buddhu and Bhutum feebly regret the loss of their disguises/ special abilities, surely it is a big relief for everybody, even for the child who is listening to the story. There seem to be the assurance that accompanies the end of every fairy tale, that there will never be any further crisis in the state. So the 'disguises' have justifiably become redundant.

Reflect on this. You may use the analyses of other stories from the volume as illustrations. If you have any doubts feel free to talk to me.

## 2. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

Since we are in no position to do the text, all I expect is that you have read the novel and has also watched the film. Although the two are not exactly the same, the film retains almost all the major episodes and dialogues in the novel. As a novel Harry Potter stories are cast in the mode of fantasy fiction for young adults. Although the novel is deeply rooted in the culture and tradition of English school stories and boy's fiction, dating back to the nineteenth century, it is able to ensure a universality of appeal, and hence an immense popularity. The reason seems to be twofold.

### a) *The world of magic*

By celebrating magic, and thereby the universal imagination of the young readers that accompany it, Rowling creates an alternative discourse. Hogwarts, a school that mainly runs on a principal of egalitarianism, distinguishes people on the basis of their wealth in magic, which is the other word for their imaginative and sympathetic capacities. Strangely catholic by nature, the world inspires all the stakeholders to think beyond the rat race, beyond the horizon of individual material success and achievement. Harry's role as a hero does not resemble the smart go-getter of the modern world; rather the hesitant, fumbling,

orphan boy with a pair of old fashioned glasses, becomes the chosen one, the unwilling hero in the world of magic. It is this aspect that makes him not only akin to the figure of Jesus Christ, but also the very symbol of hope for young boys and girls across the world, to renew their faith in whatever goodness they possess, under all sorts of adversities of the modern world, a world characterized by its inequality and its celebration of material wealth. Harry's tale provide an imaginary escape route to children oppressed by the adult world in various forms, like the novels of Shirshendu Mukherjee in Bengali.

b) *Paucity of Descriptive passages*

Despite its rootedness in the English school story tradition, the factor that ensures Harry's universal popularity is the raciness the narrative, which is also deceptively silent about the description of various locations. For a general understanding a map of Hogwarts is provided in the beginning. It is actually in the film version Harry's story, as it has been fleshed up, becomes distinctively English. But the film also retains most of the dialogues in the novel as because the progress of the story is based on them. There is little of psychological detailing of any mind, including that of Harry. Eventually Harry's adventures progress not much with his own decisions to do something, it is rather the chances and coincidences that rule. Often these coincidences are later reveal to be a part of a greater design, beyond Harry's reach. But throughout, what remains inherent, sometimes manifested, is that Harry bears no ill will for anybody. He among all the students of magic has the least desire to do something great with magic.

Students, I expect you will go through these points and will have your own reflections and observations. I am appending three resources with this lecture note, one is a book about the facts regarding the Harry Potter and the wizarding world; the other two are chapter from a book, one deals with the possible origin of Harry Potter stories, in the existing tradition of English children's literature, the other is about the construction of the imaginary world of Hogwarts, the institution of magic. Since, this time, our thrust will

fall on the J K Rowling's **handling of the school story structure, in the creation of a universally appealing world of magic**, I request you to go through them.

I wish you all the best. Feel free to talk to me in case of any doubt.

Mobile: 7586902188