

The Role of the Image of the Child in the Development of Literary Studies

Begmatova Sokhiba Mustafoyevna

*Senior Teacher, Department of English Applied Sciences, Faculty Of The English Language №2,
Uzbekistan State World Languages University, Tashkent, 100015, Uzbekistan,*

E-mail: sokhibabegmatova@gmail.com

Abstract: *the article analyzes the historical stages and development of the creation of an image, in particular the image of a child, which is an important element of fiction. Our study considers the creation of the image of a child and their artistic functions in the masterpieces of ancient literature - ancient Greek, Egyptian and Indian literature. In ancient civilizations, the image of a child was viewed not as a simple everyday reality, but as a symbol enriched with symbolic, divine, and cosmological meanings.*

Keywords: *a child, identity, Greek mythology, Egyptian mythology, Oriental literature, Indian epics, fate, humanity, moral development.*

In world literature, the image of a child was created in different historical, social and genre contexts, through which writers of different periods revealed themes such as humanity, goodness, oppression, racial and social discrimination, freedom and physical suffering. In particular, in realistic literature, the child is portrayed as a character who reflects the social injustices of society, while in fantasy or dystopian works, he is portrayed as a victim of the system or a symbol of hope. In autobiographical literature, a person reanalyzes his identity through the child, reconsidering memory and reality.

Apparently, the image of the child is studied not only from a literary and aesthetic point of view, but also in connection with psychology, philosophy, social theories, and educational concepts. Therefore, research on this topic is relevant not only for literary studies, but also in a broader spiritual and educational context. In mythological views, the child is often depicted as a symbol of renewal, hope, future and goodness, through which ancient peoples expressed complex metaphysical issues such as the fate of mankind, life and death, the balance of good and evil. For example, the image of Perseus in Greek mythology is seen as a connecting link between human and divine forces. He is depicted as a hero who, from birth, is bound by a special destiny, fleeing from oppression and later overcoming it. Here, the image of childhood is presented in direct connection with his future mission. Perseus' childhood is interpreted as a symbol of danger, need and struggle against invincible forces.

Perseus is one of the famous heroes of ancient Greek mythology, who is known as a hero who overcame many trials and was supported by Athena, Hermes and other gods. Through the stories of his birth, childhood, and his experiences, the myths cover the gradual development of a child's character, entrepreneurship, and the struggle against fate¹. Perseus' mother, Danae, was the daughter of Acroasis, king of Argos. Interestingly, Acroasis heard a prophecy that he would be killed by the child born to his daughter, and therefore imprisoned Danae in an iron tower. However, the Olympian god Zeus, at his request, descended into the tower in the form of a golden shower, and Perseus was born from Danae.

Here, the birth of Perseus is presented as a child who breaks through fate, that is, a person with a great destiny. He comes into the world completely defenseless, but by divine will. Perseus' childhood is spent

¹ James. M. Curtis. (2023). Childhood and Innocence in American Culture.-P. 14.

in hardship, orphaned, and excluded from society - which emphasizes the idea of overcoming worldly trials through him. These elements are symbols of the skills and protection given to the young hero by elders or gods. Looking directly at Medusa's face can be fatal, so Perseus beheads her by looking at her reflection with the help of a shield. Perseus is not an ordinary child, but a person standing at the crossroads of human will and divine will. He is also a symbol of purity and courage. A hero who artistically and symbolically represents the path from childhood to maturity.

In Egyptian mythology, the image of a child is seen as the embodiment of divinity. For example, Horus is a child god born to avenge his father Osiris. His childhood struggle, his courageous resistance to cruelty, is interpreted as the triumph of goodness. In this case, the child is not a symbol of defenselessness, but, on the contrary, a symbol of future justice.

In Sumerian-Akkadian literature, the child is often seen as part of the divine will. In the epic poem "The Myth of Etana", the desire to have children, the value of the child, and the provision of the continuity of the generation through it are interpreted as the spiritual basis of existence. In such myths, the child is not a person, but a symbolic center of divine kindness, happiness, and humanity.

The child also has a special role in ancient Indian epics. In works such as the "Mahabharata" and the "Ramayana", the child plays an important role not only as a sacred birth, but also as the fulfillment of the principle of karma and justice². In particular, through children, the divine will is implemented, and their purity of heart is depicted as an example for adults. A detailed account of the image of children in the epic "Mahabharata" is provided. This epic work contains not only the struggle between adults, but also the ideas of karma, fate, humanity, and moral development expressed through children³.

One of the largest and most philosophically charged epics in Indian epic literature, it encompasses themes not only of martial struggle but also of human personality, responsibility, justice, and spiritual growth. Children are an important symbolic vehicle in this epic for personal upbringing, the inheritance of values, and the fulfillment of divine will. In Indian In the epic "Mahabharata" the image of a child is not simply a hero, but an important symbol representing moral, spiritual, and philosophical ideas. Through the pure and righteous childhood of the Pandava's, the jealousy and violence of the Kauravas, and the bravery and selflessness of Abhimanyu, the author has profoundly expressed the themes of child rearing, karma, dharma, and personal development⁴.

This epic symbolically illuminates the moral foundations of society, man's attitude towards his duty, and his struggle with fate through children. In this sense, the images of children in the "Mahabharata" are not only epic heroes, but also an artistic reflection of spiritual perfection for all humanity.

Also in ancient Oriental literature, the image of the child is closely connected with the spiritual life of society. For example, in the "Avesta", the child is depicted as the highest expression of purity and goodness, one of the constant representatives of light against the forces of darkness. Thus, in ancient literature and mythologies, the image of a child is not interpreted as a random character, but as one of the most important symbols of all human thought and beliefs. Through it, the ideological, philosophical, and religious aspects of human life are expressed through wishes and imaginations.

In conclusion, the image of the child has played a vital role in the evolution of literary studies, serving as both a reflection of societal values and a lens through which complex human experiences are

² Brockington, J.L. (1981). *The Sacred Thread: Hinduism in Its Continuity and Diversity*. Edinburgh University Press. -P. 25.

³ Vyasa, Krishna Dwaipayana. (1996). *The Mahabharata (Complete Translation by Kisari Mohan Ganguli)*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. -P. 63.

⁴ Mittal, Sushil. & Thursby, Gene R. (2006). *Religions of South Asia: An Introduction*. London: Routledge. -P. 131.

explored. From innocence and vulnerability to rebellion and growth, child characters often embody cultural ideals or challenge dominant ideologies. Their presence in literature has prompted critical engagement with themes such as identity, trauma, morality, and the passage of time. As literary theory expanded to include psychoanalysis, post colonialism, and gender studies, the child figure gained new interpretative dimensions. Scholars began to examine how childhood is constructed, remembered, and represented across genres and historical periods. Ultimately, the child in literature not only enriches narrative depth but also fosters a deeper understanding of the human condition and the shifting boundaries of literary inquiry.

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