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## Exploring Young-ness and Uncle-ness of Younguncle in Vandana Singh's Literary Creation *Younguncle Comes to Town*

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“Ever since there were children, there has been children’s literature” (Lerer 1). Children’s literature has witnessed its own journey globally throughout the ages. For India, this genre was brought in from the remote country, England. Rimi Chatterjee examines its route to India in her edited book *Reading Children: Essays of Children’s Literature* as she writes,

“The category of ‘children’s literature’ was, like the novel, the newspaper and patent leather shoes, imported into India by the British where it was quickly and enthusiastically taken over by certain fractions of Indians” (8).

One of these Indians, Vandana Singh is an emerging name in the recent Indian Children’s Literature in English. *Younguncle in the Himalayas* and *Younguncle Comes to Town* are her two best seller books under the ‘children’s literature’ category. While writing for children, the writer has to describe what is acceptable from the children’s perspectives. She presents childhood in her books in a way as Phillippe Aries opines, “...childhood was not some essential or eternal quality in human life but was instead a category of existence shaped by social mores and historical experience” (Lerer 2).

Her literary creation *Younguncle Comes to Town* (2004) portrays a picture of its lead character Younguncle. A man who is in his 40 plus age is actually fond of childish behaviour. The lead character Younguncle is an uncle by his age and look; but a young man by his heart and actions. His name reflects exactly what he is. His name as ‘Younguncle’ can give amusement to all. He even prefers to be called by that name. Vandana Singh narrates,

“He has always been called Younguncle. He says he prefers it that way – although it is quite ridiculous to be called Younguncle even by one’s parents. But he has always been a little different from other people” (3).

Young-ness and Uncle-ness are two separate identities of one’s personality. They usually do not mix up with one another. They are generally associated with the age of a person – young-ness for the young age and uncle-ness for uncle-like age. Young-ness represents mirth, energy, adventures and enchantment. This very stage of life gives a new dimension to the meanings of life. Being a young person by heart and by age of course, one has the privilege to enjoy the full-ness of life. On the contrary, we relate uncle-ness with seriousness, suggestive approach and somewhat solemnity. Being an uncle, is obviously a matter of sincerity, seniority and maturity. Here, the text deals with topsy-turvy-dome of the existing concepts.

A person, like famous TV artist Mr Bean, can attract all. Mr Bean, in his uncle-like age, behaves like a child. He has a child-heart in his old-age-body. Even in our day to day life, we see such live characters around us.

Indian childhood is visible in Younguncle through his actions, thoughts, philosophy and his mental outlook. He is cheerful and childish. He has acquired the habit of imitating the sounds of cars with various afflictions. He can make noises like a monkey, saves his sister from an unwanted groom-to-be by using funny tricks and is fond of making and recalling funny anecdotes. His nature lures all to converse with him. His uncle-ness is seen as he is fond of adventures and wandering. In the text, Singh says,

“He likes to do things his own way. Why, he has just spent the last two years wandering all over the country, having all kinds of hair-raising adventures” (3).

As a sensible person, he is a good thinker too. “Younguncle had a few philosophical discussions with the baby”, (Singh 15) though the small baby did not understand anything.

Because of his real life experiences, he is able to laugh in any adverse situation and able to understand human psyche which helps him bring out the best solutions for any question. His childish way of life is reflected when visiting the village, he opened his largest suitcase which “was filled to the brim with the most unusual things: an enormous conch shell he had found on the shores of the Arabian Sea, a fragile piece of coral that had washed up on a beach in the Andaman islands, a sculpture of twisted vines that had been given to him by an artistically inclined monkey from the forest of Assam...” (6-7).

As an adult person, he has to settle down with a job or any profession. On the contrary, as a moving butterfly, he changes his job now and then. Vandana Singh says,

“The trouble with Younguncle, people said, was not that he couldn’t hold down a job, but that he took his jobs too seriously. Well, maybe serious is not the word, people would say. Enthusiastic.” (8)

Enthusiastically, he absorbs all the technicalities of his job. This child-like curiosity makes him expert of his profession very soon. “He got so good at his job that, simply by the sound the car made, he could tell precisely what was wrong with it” (Singh 9).

Later in his life, this art is converted as a tool to amuse people. “He could toot like the horn of a police car, and wail like an ambulance siren as well. When he saw somebody disobeying traffic rules, which was very often, he would make these sounds and startle the errant motorist. The driver and his passengers would look around guiltily.” (Singh 9-10) Through this way, he would teach the law-breaking people a lesson. This seriousness with funny ways is observant in him.

By heart, Younguncle was a cheerful man. In any situation, he is able to make others laugh. This is also the greatness of his character. When he was working as a sales attendant in a shop, he was given a name “Hemant” in a job and had to wear a shirt with that label. “People who knew him would say: “Why are you wearing Hemant’s shirt, Younguncle?”” He would respond quickly and amusingly, “Because Hemant doesn’t want to wear it.” (Singh 13-14)

His usual remark proves him a young man by heart. His humour is reflected in almost most of the incidents in which he is involved.

Even other characters in the text have very funny names like Ancient Uncle, Ancient Auntie, Bakvaasnath etc. “Ancient Uncle was Younguncle’s great-uncle, but most people called him Ancient Uncle because he was very old. Whenever they mentioned him they would say, “Oh, Ancient Uncle!” and shake their heads because he often didn’t behave like a dignified old man of eighty-eight.” (Singh 51) When the children of the house asked for the permission to go with Younguncle to meet his Ancient Uncle, their mother replies, “Younguncle Plus Ancient Uncle Means Even More Trouble!” (Singh 52)

In a nutshell, one can sum up that the text *Younguncle Comes to Town* by Vandana Singh celebrates the very plausible dilemmas and a delightful style. The adventures of Younguncle, like a cartoon character Mr Bean, entertain, delight and amuse readers of any age. By and large, the young-ness of an uncle and the uncle-ness of a young man at heart are simultaneously explored in the text. In this regard, narrating childhood from this Indian literary text has been proved as an emerging literary trend.

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