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## “...the world to tie upon a string”: An Eclectic Approach to Nursery Rhymes

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Nursery rhymes play a great role not only in the life of a child, but in that of the whole of mankind and it is an integral part of the teaching- learning process. In the realm of literature, these songs play a major role in introducing new trends and theories such as the theory of archetypes, eco-criticism, eco-feminism, post colonialism, as well as areas like linguistics, history, sociology and psychology. Plato considered art as an imitation of real events, and for Freud, a literary work represents real events- especially those unacceptable to the society- in an indirect form. Conjoining these ideas, one reaches Aristotle's idea of *Katharsis*. Thus, some rhymes may have been written for the purpose of purification. When the rhyme is repeatedly sung, just as a traumatized subject repeatedly sees a dream, the artist and the hearer undergo a cleansing. Individuals tend to get attached to particular people from childhood, and they serve to mold his/her self. Whatever s/he teaches, sometimes in the form of rhymes, stay in the child's mind for ever. By listening to and learning the rhymes related to various festivals and occasions, the child learns to take part in social events, gradually turning into a 'social animal'. Thus the child gets attached to the society in which he lives, through songs sung by caregivers. Similarly s/he gets attached to the natural environment and thus finds out that it is his/her duty to protect environment from destruction just as it is his/her duty to never let the attachment figure leave him/her. This is the first step towards eco-criticism, and if the attachment figure is a female, the idea of eco-feminism takes form. Later when the rhymes related to the patriarchal society is sung, s/he, when grown up, asks for the equal rights of men and women, the basic idea of feminism. Similarly, nursery rhymes also reflect the process and end-result of colonialism in its manifold forms. Thus in almost all facets of human life the rhymes have a special position, as they serve the purpose of teaching by delighting and thus moving the whole mankind from the path of vice to that of virtue which is the sole purpose of any form of literature. This in turn makes what Sir Philip Sidney said, "therein of all sciences is our (literary artist) the monarch."

A nursery rhyme is a song meant for small children throughout the world. Even though children were sung songs in the past as well, the nursery rhymes came into usage in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the coming of printed books for children. Before this these songs passed from generation to generation orally, the tradition which is the earliest form of passing knowledge to the future. But the first collection of children's rhymes have been published before 1744- *Tommy Thumb's Song Book* and *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book*. The early nursery rhymes were based mainly on the culture, tradition, proverbs and other songs prevalent during the respective periods. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the culture of nursery rhymes started spreading all over the world and the most important collection include James Orchard Halliwell's *The Nursery Rhymes of England* which came out in 1842 and *Popular Rhymes and Tales* which appeared in 1849. In these two collections the author divides the rhymes as game- rhymes, proverbs, alphabet- rhymes, superstitions and so on.

Many researchers have come to the conclusion that the nursery rhymes which seem innocent to the people have hidden meanings in them, and that they are precious reserves of historical records. The themes of the various rhymes stand as proof for this argument, for they sometimes include the stories of war, heroic deeds and so on, which may have strong bonds with reality. The attempts to remove the objectional elements from the rhymes were stopped by the psychologists arguing that, that will not help in the healthy development of a child's psychological status, for nursery rhymes help children to understand the historical events and basic tradition.

The subject matters in the various rhymes show that the children's songs connect the various disciplines of study which include history, anthropology, sociology, and even the various fields of literary studies. It can be said that the basic education that a person gets is through the nursery rhymes that he is taught in his childhood which always remains in his mind consciously or otherwise. This category of songs moulds him into a perfect being, aware of the most significant things, and creating a sort of curiosity in knowing and learning new things, which is one aspect that makes human beings different from other creatures. A children's rhyme tells a story, presents a picture, an emotional experience, and reflections on life. When a rhyme is studied based on these four elements one searches for the reasons for the writer telling a story, presenting a picture or an emotion and also tries to find out the aim of the writer in writing these rhymes. Such studies help to conclude that there are various twisted stories and aims behind every rhyme, which may be historical, psychological, sociological or even anthropological.

### **Nursery Rhymes and Poetry**

Rhymes are basically poetic. The genre of poetry is assumed to be the oldest form of self expression, having its presence since the time of human civilization. It can be seen that most of the ancient civilizations stored their knowledge, history, and traditions in the form of songs, passed on to the posterity, orally. "Poetry is emotionalized experience. It is universal truth in thought or feeling, transmuted by the imagination into fitting images, and expressed in beautiful, and usually patterned language. It is the perfect expression of a worthy idea in measured language" (Varghese 20).

Various aspects differentiate poetry from other forms of writings, the basic elements being the style of writing, and the use of language, along with the features like rhymes, feet, metre, and so on. When a study is made it can be seen that the first and foremost field with which

nursery rhymes share their frontiers is the field of poetry. The various features of poetry- its target on human emotions, reflecting the poet's loss in such a way that it is felt by the readers as their loss, the emphasis on man's relation to the nature and fellow beings-are seen in nursery rhymes and with its help the child comes to know about the difference between prose and poetry.

The basic and most important element of poetry is the diction. The language is used in such a way that there will come the elements of surprise and irony, as, the language of poetry is the language of paradox as opined by Cleanth Brooks. The comparison of poetic language to lawn balls as suggested by William Shakespeare is important; like the lawn ball which is not a perfect sphere, the poetic language too is not fixed and perfectly shaped. When the ball gets to the right player's hands, that imperfect sphere is enough to make him reach victory. Similarly, the imperfect language, when used in the right manner, results in a perfect poem, which has the dual function of pleasing and teaching as suggested by the early literary critics from Plato onwards. Certain nursery rhymes, like the poems of the above kind, are double- edged swords, doing more than one thing at a time. The rhyme

“A wise old owl lived in an oak  
The more he saw the less he spoke  
The less he spoke the more he heard  
Why can't we all be like that wise old bird?”

is poetic, at the same time gives out a moral lesson that, to speak less is the first step towards wisdom.

Nursery rhymes help a child to learn certain elements of poetry the most important one being the kinds of rhymes. When a child hears

“Rain rain go away,  
Come again another day,  
Little Tommy wants to play,  
Rain rain go away”

he/she pays attention to its tune as well as to the words 'away' and 'day', and 'play' and 'away.' Such words which are similar in pronunciation are rhyming words. In the above rhyme we can see that these words come at the end of the different lines and so come under the category of end rhymes. This is the same with

Cock a doodle do!  
My dame has lost her shoe,  
My master's lost his fiddlestick,  
And knows not what to do.

Cock a doodle do!  
What is my dame to do?

Till master's found his fiddlingstick,  
She'll dance without her shoe.

Cock a doodle do!  
My dame has found her shoe,  
And master's found his fiddlingstick,  
Sing cock a doodle do!

Cock a doodle do!  
My dame will dance with you,  
While master fiddles his fiddlingstick,  
And knows not what to do

It can be seen that with the help of such rhymes even the rhyme scheme can be formed like **aaba**, **abba** as in *Cock a doodle do*. Also this same rhyme follows the iambic meter which has the feature of the unstressed syllable followed by the stressed syllable and has the feminine rhyme. Thus children's rhyme puts the base for poetry in a child's mind.

### Nursery rhymes and Linguistics

The study of language is a basic science which helps to know the evolution of language. The great classical philosopher Plato said about art as an imitation of reality. But if the imitation is perfectly shaped it will help an individual, from childhood to adulthood, learn many things to be made practical in life. The ability of language acquisition is there in every individual from the time of birth itself, and the development of this talent, to a certain extent, is done by those nursery rhymes teaching alphabets and number systems. The alphabet and number system thus acquired are already in the deep psyche of a child from the time of infancy itself and the rhymes help these elements to come out from the deep psyche to the conscious mind, and thus help in the further development of child's learning ability. Rhymes like *One Two, Buckle My Shoe* and *Hickory Dickory Dock* while help the child learn the number system and the measurement of time, some others like *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* and *A for Apple, B for Ball* help a child learn the names and order of the days in a week, and the chain of letters in the English alphabet respectively. Thus a child's first step for language acquisition is through the various rhymes.

The studies on the evolution of languages have put forth various theories explaining how a language came into being, the most important among them being the Bow-Wow theory. As per this theory, language evolved as a result of imitating the sounds made by the animals, when man was just a savage. Many words stand proof for this, and such sounds can be seen in abundance in nursery rhymes and other children songs. In *Little Robin Redbreast* the child learns about the natural enemies as well as gets an introduction to onomatopoeic words like "meow", the cry of the cat in the rhyme. Similar to this is the description of Old MacDonald's farm where

“...he had some chickens  
E-I-E-I-O  
With a *cluck cluck* here...

With a *baa baa* here  
 ...  
 With a *neigh neigh* here  
 ...  
 With a *quack quack* here  
 ...  
 With a *oink oink* here  
 ...  
 With a *moo moo* here  
 ...  
 Old MacDonald had a farm  
 E-I-E-I-OOOOOOO.....

At the end of the rhyme only the onomatopoeic sounds are given in order that the child identifies the beings and when s/he imitates the cries of the respective animal or bird s/he gets the notion that they too can speak like human beings, the thought which creates a friendly relation between the child and the animals and birds. These beings, in the child's mind become his/her immediate kin thus getting attached to them. Later, when the child becomes aware of the mother language, s/he comes to relate these sounds to many other words in the language and finds out that some of those words are derivations of these natural sounds, which puts the base for the 'Bow-wow Theory' of the origin of language, according to which many words in a language have derived from the imitation of the natural sounds by human beings. Such words are called onomatopoeic words. Related to this are two more theories of the origin of language: the Pooh- Pooh theory which says that languages have originated from the imitation of the emotional cries produced by human beings when they felt pain, pleasure and other emotions, and the Yo- heave-ho Theory which puts forward the argument that the origin of language is through the imitation of the sounds produced by men when they do works involving high degree of physical effort. These provide enough proof for the argument that "imitation is implanted in man from childhood... through imitation (he) learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated..."(Varghese 25).

### **Purgation via Nursery Rhymes**

Through his various studies Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis divided the human mind into three:

the id which is the unconscious mind that has in it the sum total of an individual's thoughts and wishes;

the super-ego which is the censor that prevents the conscious mind from satisfying the socially unacceptable ideas of the id; and

the ego which is the unconscious mind.

Freud pointed out that literary products and other forms of art, including dreams and neurotic symptoms, "consist of the imagined, or fantasized, fulfillment of wishes that are denied by reality or prohibited by the social standards of morality and propriety" (Abrams 319). The traumatic events in the life of a person too sometimes come out in the form of art. "...psychic

trauma is a condition which arises “when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming, intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind” (as quoted in Bloom 2)” (Koshy 13). The person’s inability to react against such an incident leaves a great wound in his/her mind, and this repeatedly comes to the conscious mind through dreams. Dreams thus have a purgatory effect. Since literary works are there as elements of wish- fulfillment, as suggested by Freud, they too help in the process of purgation.

An artist’s thirst for wish- fulfillment is seen in the following lines from *If Wishes Were Horses*:

“Come with me you can wish upon a star  
You can do all the things that you’ve longed to  
And you won’t have to wonder who you are  
You can be anybody you want to  
In a land full of promises and kings  
All your best laid dreams are for catchin’  
You can have the world to tie up on a string  
Just close your eyes and imagine...”

The world of promises where one can be anybody and can do anything is the world of art and imagination. Plato considered art as an imitation of the real events, and as per the opinion of Freud a literary work represents real events- those unacceptable to the society- in an indirect form. When these two arguments are connected together the result is Aristotle’s idea of *Katharsis*. So some rhymes may have been written for the purpose of purification. When the rhyme is repeatedly sung, just as a traumatized subject repeatedly seeing a dream, the artist passes through a cleansing sensation. By passing on this rhyme to the public, and when they sing it the writer assumes the singers to be the protagonist in the song and he, as part of an audience gets relieved from the excess tensions in his mind. Thus by giving an artistic form to the experience, the artist “may attempt to transfer the recollection of the incident from (the) emotional memory to (the) verbal memory, thereby making it easier for (him) to overcome or even forget the impact of the” (Koshy 18) event that resulted in the production of the rhyme.

From the point of view of a child the process of catharsis takes place when s/he hears the rhyme sung by someone. In the process of catharsis the basic emotions involved are sympathy and pity. These emotions are there in the deep psyche of the child, and when the right time comes they will naturally gets to the conscious mind. When hearing the *Little Poll Parrot* the child feels sympathy for the parrot, whose toast and tea were stolen by the brown mouse. When the major character of the rhyme is present before him/her as in a situation demanding pity, the child gets rid of the large amount of emotions in his/her mind. This can be seen in *Ding Dong Bell* as well, where the pussycat who loyally served her master, is pushed into a well by a naughty boy. The condition of the cat cleanses the child’s mind at the same time gets the feeling

that it is his/her duty to protect anything to which s/he is attached, from danger, just as Little Tommy saved the cat.

### **The Theory of Attachment in Nursery Rhymes**

Attachment theory propounded by John Bowlby is linked with the relationships between human beings. This branch of knowledge studies how human beings behave and respond within relationships and what they feel when separated from their intimate ones. In short, it studies the degree of attachment between human beings. This study is mainly conducted in children greatly attached to the caregivers and the major characteristic feature of this relationship between the child and the caregiver is that when the child is alarmed s/he will depend on the caregiver with the hope that, that particular person protects and supports him/her from the current dangerous situation. Most usually when this caregiver leaves the child alone s/he will start feeling separation anxiety. The influence of the attachment figure on the life of a child is very much that the latter acquires the basic ideas regarding life from the caregiver. For the development of the child's mental capabilities the caregiver puts into use the various objectives which are accessible to him/her. Studies prove that in the life of an individual. In childhood, s/he will have more than one caregiver to whom the child is attached, and these caregivers are arranged in his/her mind hierarchically. The effort of all the caregivers make a child into a mature human being.

As opined by Lacan there are different stages in the life of an individual which are, the imaginary and the symbolic stages respectively. In between these two stages is the mirror stage. During the imaginary stage the child finds no difference between his/her self and the caregiver's self. So during this stage s/he accepts, without questioning, whatever the caregiver imparts with him/her. At that time what the caregiver is doing is molding the child in such a way that s/he will be acceptable in the society when grown up. Whatever the attachment figure teaches- sometimes in the form of songs- stay in the child's mind and by the time s/he reaches the mirror stage where the child identifies him/herself as different from others, those ideas, given to him/her by the caregiver, seen in the unconscious mind, along with the various other archetypes, engage in a conflict between the ideas in the conscious mind, and this conflict helps a child think all by him/herself. By the time the child reaches the symbolic stage there will be the application of these ideas at the right place and time.

In the rhyme *Manners* the singer teaches the right manners to be followed while living in a society. When the child hears the song from the caregiver during the symbolic stage s/he understands that:

“Manners make you feel good

Manners, nice manners

...they make you feel so good,”

and their application transforms a child into a socially acceptable person.

### **Sociological Elements in Rhymes**

Each and every element of the living environment is acquired by the child with the attachment to the caregiver. Related to the sociological life of a man is the awareness of the



various cultures and traditions related to the life in the community and among this is the knowledge and stories behind the various festivals celebrated by the people. When the child learns

“Dashing through the snow

In a one-horse open sleigh

O'er the fields we go

Laughing all the way

...

Jingle bells jingle bells

Jingle all the way

Oh! what fun it is ride

In a one-horse open sleigh”

as well as the *Twelve Days of Christmas*, s/he comes to know that when it is Christmas time the ground is white with snow (even though it is a constructed archetype for some), and also that it is the season of gifts and merry-making. The image of Santa Claus coming with jingling bells in the sledge drawn by seven reindeer, and placing the gifts in the socks of the child who is not naughty but nice, comes to the child's mind when the caregiver sings *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. S/he comes to know that since Santa knows if s/he had been good or bad, s/he should be cautious so that Santa's precious gifts will be presented to him/her as well.

A child, for the first time turns out to be a social animal when s/he starts schooling. There, apart from the primary caregivers the child may get new caregivers. With the influence of these caregivers have upon the child s/he becomes aware of the various behaviors to be displayed before the society. The grand festival of New Year allows the caregiver(s) to introduce to the child the expected behavior that s/he adopts as resolutions for the coming year. In New Year Resolution the child learns to develop the various qualities and actions that make him/her a good social being. Here the child learns to be sincere, to talk less in class, to progress in studies, to confess the lies, and to go out and play which increases his/her social interaction. The child learns that, to be kind and helpful to the fellow beings are some of the best things to be done in a lifetime. The caregiver sings

“These are my resolutions

For New Year

To bring in me an evolution

To follow them I'll try my best

Until then I'll not rest”

to teach the child to strictly stick on to the resolutions, which in turn gives the lesson that one should be strong and wise in taking decisions in the crucial moments of life, which makes him/her a good individual capable of becoming the norm in a society. The rhyme also gives the instruction to achieve the goals through hard work.

By listening and learning these rhymes related to the various festivals the child learns to take part in every social event so as to make him/her and others around, happy. Thus the child gets attached to the society in which he lives, by listening to the songs sung by the caregivers.

### **Nursery Rhymes as Ecology Conservatives**

For being a complete social being a person, from childhood onwards should be aware of his/her duties towards the natural environment and the living beings in it. When rhymes related to the various elements in nature are sung to them by the attachment figures, children get attached to those in such a way that they see a reflection of their attachment figures in those elements and get the feeling that they should protect those elements from destruction, just as it becomes their duty not to get separated from their attachment figures. This point of view lays the basis for eco-criticism in the literary arena which may pave the way for eco-feminism if a child is attached more to a female figure.

Eco criticism emerged as a result of the awareness that human beings are destroying the natural environment through their various actions. The basis of this inconsiderate behavior of man is anthropocentrism, as per which, men think of themselves as the axis of earth and that they are free to rule over the natural elements and exploit them for their advantage. This notion became much more powerful with the emergence of modern science in the Renaissance and the humanism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Against this came the idea of deep ecology which advocated for eco-centrism which considers all living things as possessing values and moral and political rights just as human beings. Deep ecology, as in the words of Fritjof Capra, views the world as “a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent” (Keralavarma 140).

The ideal of eco-centrism is to make human beings aware of the fact that their relationship to the other living things in the world is one of stewardship and that, human beings are expected to give to the future generations a world which is livable and enjoyable. Also the future generation should be taught that they should protect the environment from further destruction. This lesson can be taught to children via many rhymes which the caregivers are expected to sing.

When a child hears *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* s/he finds that this element of nature is as precious as a diamond as it brings happiness to the mind and the eyes. Along with this idea, the stories related to the stars, told by the caregiver, help in bringing out many of the human beliefs regarding stars, from the child's unconscious to the conscious mind. Similar is the case with *Snow Flake, Snow Flake*. This rhyme, through words, shows the falling down of snowflakes during winter. The repetition of “falling” creates in the child's mind the picture of snowflakes falling down from the sky as said in the rhyme, “falling in my hand,” “falling on my nose,” and “falling on my head.” With the appealing tune the child shows a liking to the snowflake and this in turn makes nature precious to him/her, and the destruction of this will hurt the child, and when s/he becomes an adult, tries to follow what the eco-critics did.

In a situation where man destroys nature, the wish for the co-existence of man and nature is seen in *Mary had a Little Lamb* where the lamb follows Mary wherever she goes. When a small child hears this song s/he too aspires for such a dream world when a precious part of the nature is always with him/her. In the mental picture of the child the girl in the rhyme too becomes a part of nature, and in one way or the other she represents nature, which is the crux of eco-feminism, which argues that the destruction of nature by the various dominating systems like patriarchy, imperialism and so on, go hand in hand with the exploitation of women in the male-dominated or patriarchal society.

### **The Stereotype of Patriarchy**

A patriarchal society is described as one where the male members have the power to control or prevent the activities of women. Such a society assigns certain duties to women and prefers them to do nothing outside of those. This makes it clear that the major principle of a patriarchal society is that women are subordinate to men. By assigning the duties the society is imposing upon women the legacy of 'feminine' qualities. As Mary Wollstonecraft said, "Women are told from their infancy and taught by the examples of their mothers that little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience and a scrupulous attention to do a puerile kind of propriety will obtain for them the protection of men..." (Krishnan 73). Thus while sex is determined by anatomy it is society that fixes the gender of a person by classifying certain qualities as masculine and feminine. The words of Simone de Beauvoir stand as proof for this: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine" (Abrams 122). The view of Aristotle that women naturally lack intelligence and rationality and so, are not capable to take part in public affairs is, to a certain degree, accepted by women taught and bred in the male-dominated society. The society makes use of language as a weapon to oppress and subordinate women, and even the small children are given such an idea that women are always inferior to men, via the books they read and the songs they sing, especially the nursery rhymes.

Through the rhyme *Five Little Ducks* the singer puts an impression upon the mind of the child that men are stronger than women. In the rhyme when the ducklings disobey the 'mummy duck' one by one, the last stanza says

"No little ducks went swimming one day,

Over the hills and far away

Daddy duck said 'quack, quack, quack,"

And all the five little ducks came swimming back."

Thus in the child's mind men get a powerful position while women will be the living image all the qualities representing subordination. Such songs establish the ideals of a patriarchal society in the child in that, when s/he is "exposed repeatedly to stereotypes and distortions... will come to believe them and take them for granted" (Cameron 6).

## Rhymes and Colonialism

When women are controlled by the hegemony of patriarchy the tool which the powerful countries used to oppress the 'inferior' countries was colonialism. The former group of countries came to be called the colonizer and the latter group were the colonized. Just as gender is the creation of the society colonization too is a social construct. The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is that "of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Krishnan 57). Observations conclude that some countries were colonized not only because they had the features of the colonies but because they could be made into the colonized. In the history of colonialism the notable ones include Europe's ill-treatment of the Red Indians tribes in America and the blacks in Africa. When the colonizer got the upper hand in the countries they looted and destroyed everything of native origin, including the culture and tradition. Whatever they destroyed came to be considered inferior and superstitious.

*Ten Little Indians* tells us how the ten little Indians turned out into none at the end due to the various violent attacks that awaited each. In certain versions of the same rhyme the 'Indians' is replaced with 'Negroes.' The rhyme, while presenting the Indians and the blacks as inferior, also indicates the breaking down of the culture and tradition of these two groups of people as a result of colonization. Historical evidences show that the Red Indians and the Africans had a strong culture of their own, entirely different from that of the colonizer.

Chief Seattle's letter to the President yells out how the Indians were attached to nature and to what degree the whites are different from them. For the Indians nature is sacred and the land on which they live is not their property. Unlike the colonizer they do not dominate over it or exploit it. The Chief in his letter builds up kinship relations between the various elements of nature and the tribesmen, and goes to the extent of telling that everything in the world is interconnected and interdependent; the claim put forth by deep ecology in the later centuries. At the end of the letter the chief writes'

"Where is the thicket? Gone.

Where is the eagle? Gone.

The end of living and the beginning of survival" (Keralavarma 190). This is the situation that arises when the natives are pushed out from their land and the colonizer loots it. Not only from nature but from the traditional culture too the native men get uprooted. So in the rhyme the disappearance of the ten Indians can stand for the disappearance of the values and ideals of the Indian tribe.

Literature is one weapon to remove or re-establish certain ideals in the society. Post-colonial writings came out expressing the experiences of the colonized under the colonizer. These writings also include the attempts to re-establish the earlier traditions of the colonized. When the *Ten Little 'Indians'* turns to 'negroes,' the downfall of the African culture due to white intervention gets revealed. This downfall is portrayed in *Things Fall Apart* by the post-colonial writer, Chinua Achebe, through various images and tribal stories, like the quarrel between earth and sky and so on. Achebe, in the work says about the dangerous spreading of the English culture with the help of the image showing the appearance of the locusts. In reality as well the people who started following the alien culture started uprooting from their minds the native

beliefs and this paved way for a schism in between the people of the same cultural background-one supporting the new culture and the other opposing its ideals. Since a work of art is the thought and wish of an artist the same is the case with post-colonial writings which are “deeply marked by the experiences of cultural exclusion and division under empire” (Boehmer 3).

### Archetypes as Part of Children’s Rhymes

The experiences of human beings are almost common among those who live in the same age and situation. But certain other experiences are common to the whole human community, the images of which are present in the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind can be divided as the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious, as popularized by Carl G. Jung. The experiences and images common to the whole human race are seen in the collective unconscious which, in simple terms, is that part of the mind shared by all people. The images and thoughts thus present are called ‘archetypes;’ and these get expressed through literary works as well as dreams and fantasies. Even in rhymes meant for children such images can be seen.

One of the historical events presented in *Ring a Ring a Roses* is the Black Death which hit England in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. In this rhyme it is shared the collective belief of the people of using poses to ward off diseases which was a technique used by the ancestors of the child who hears the rhyme. This idea is dormant in the unconscious mind of the child, and the rhyme helps in the awakening of this particular idea, which will have an impact upon the life of the child.

The personality of an individual is formed with the characteristics that s/he acquires within a culture. These characteristics include the archetypes along with many others, but since they have no direct influence upon the conscious mind they go unnoticed. When a person changes his/her culture, along with it changes the personality. A change in culture can occur even with the development in the field of technology. With the coming up of various new innovations the personality and mentality of a person undergo a change. But still in his/her mind the archetypes of the past beliefs are present, which makes the person superstitious to a certain degree. So even with the newly developed techniques within reach the unconscious mind searches for the elements of the past culture, which was once the culture of a whole society. By learning the rhymes related to these cultures the child is again reminded of the features of the past culture which is there in the deep psyche of the child, and when the right environment comes the elements come out automatically. The best example for such a rhyme is *London Bridge is Falling Down*. The rhyme mainly deals with the destruction of the London Bridge and the attempts to reconstruct it. The people in London held the belief that a bridge would collapse unless a human body, dead or alive, is buried in its foundation. During the time when this rhyme was written, even though there was scope for developed means of building a bridge with wood and clay, or bricks and mortar, or iron and steel and so on, the people still believed that the bridge would fall down. Finally the speaker tells

“Set a man to watch all night  
Watch all night, watch all night  
Set a man to watch all night,  
M y fair lady.”

The watchman sitting at the foundation can mean that if the body of a human being is there at least very near the foundation, the bridge will be safe. During this time England was taking successful and speedy steps towards technological advancement. Still the people lived in the dark ages of superstitions and this superstitious belief is the one present in the collective unconscious of the people. All these, when studied carefully help a lot in understanding the whole human race, thus contributing a lot to the field of Anthropology which is the study of human beings and their actions.

### Historical Events' Presentation Rhymes

Behind the various actions of human beings there are influences of certain historical events. These events pass from one generation to the next through the various works of art like stories and songs. People, who were unable to express their feelings based on these historical events, sought the help of various literary genres, including those songs meant for children, which appear to be innocent. A careful analysis of these rhymes reveals the real stories behind their composition. Many of such rhymes of British origin presents before the audience certain historical events in England.

Sometimes the 'Atishoo!' expression in *Ring a Ring a Roses* is replaced with 'Ashes' which gives hints regarding the great fire that stayed for five long days in England. Half of London turned into ash and the rage of fire is described by Samuel Pepys as, "...and thereupon the water again, and to the fire up and down, it still increasing, and the wind great. So near the fire as we could for smoke.; ...you were almost burnt with a shower of fire drops...up the hill of the city, in a most horrid, malicious, bloody flame, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire....The churches, houses, and all on fire, and flaming at once; and a horrid noise the flames made and the cracking of the houses at their ruin..." (Carter 541). Since the great fire broke out just after the Black Death hit the place, the 'ashes' in *Ring a Ring a Roses* shows the transformation of England from a country of wealth to ashes.

The seemingly innocent *Baa Baa Black Sheep* has a twisted history of the slave trade in England. Though many countries engaged in this trade the most important and to a certain extent, the pioneer was England, and this trade came to be called the 'triangular slave trade' in which large number of slaves were carried from Africa to the North American colonies in British ships and they were employed in the cotton plantations owned by the whites. This slave triangle which moved from North America to England then to Africa and to America continued until the nineteenth century.

In the plantations the slaves worked hard and the profits were shared among the masters and dames, as in the rhyme. In some versions of the same rhyme the last two lines are

"But none for the little boy

Who cries down the lane."

This was the condition of the African slaves who got no profit from the plantations where they worked. They were denied even the basic rights and freedom by the colonial masters. In the pathetic situation the slaves could do nothing but "cry down the lane."

One of the most important periods in the History of England was the Reformation of the late sixteenth century when Henry VIII held the crown. The Reformation aimed at limiting the corruption in the Catholic Church. Henry VIII supported the church but that was short-lived because of the matrimonial problems of the king. The king wished to divorce his wife and marry another woman, which the Pope disallowed. This resulted in the king's fierce hatred towards the Pope and the church. The king passed the Act of Supremacy as per which it was not the Pope but the king who was the supreme head of the state. With the king passing the Act of Treason, anyone who criticized the king, would be executed. Thus Henry VIII made use of the Reformation to assert his superiority over the Pope. It is believed that the rhyme *Goosey Goosey Gander* was written to show the impact of King Henry VIII destroying the monasteries and killing the churchmen who refused to read the new prayer book.

The king destroyed the monasteries due to three reasons; one was that the monasteries were loyal only to the Pope, and in the present situation when the Pope has nothing to do with the state these monasteries were of no use at all, secondly the king was attracted by the huge wealth that the monasteries possessed which could fill the Royal Treasury, and finally many of the monks were corrupt. In the rhyme the singer rhythmically sings,

“...There I met an old man  
Who wouldn't say his prayers  
So I took him by his left leg  
And threw him down the stairs.”

This was the condition of the people, especially the churchmen, who rebelled against the king's destruction of the monasteries and establishing his power over the Pope. They, like the old man thrown down the stairs in the rhyme, met with death. The fall of the man in the rhyme “nearly broke his back” and like this was the life of those who were not killed by royal court. They had no right to fight against the king, but obey him and accept his deeds without questioning.

From all these evidences it can be said that the seemingly innocent nursery rhymes are the story of human civilization and culture. They touch all aspects of human life from the beginning of the development of a child from early childhood to the old age. During childhood it puts the base and with the growth of the child passing through the various stages, it gets imbibed in his mind as well as his style of living, thus making him aware of all aspects of life, which results nursery rhymes in carrying out an interdisciplinary study.

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