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***The Bees* by Laline Paull**

Author: Laline Paull

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“Nobody has ever heard an animal truly speak human language, yet in every literature in the world they speak human language. It is so universal a convention that we hardly notice it” (Le Guinn 2003). When reality gives way to imagination, it seems that even that imagination has certain truths to unfold. Since the dawn of civilization, man started to attribute himself to the world around. He made spiritual deities similar to his own appearance, found himself in constellations; later literature offered him boundless space to explore his imagination. There came talking cats, ruling lions, cunning fox, smiling machines...From Genesis to *Panchatantra* and *Aesop's Fables* down to Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny and in this twenty first century it has reached up to Laline Paull's *The Bees*.

Laline Paull is a British novelist, playwright and screenwriter. *The Bees* published in 2014 is Paull's debut novel. Her theatre works include *Eskimo Sisters* (2003), *Boat Memory* (2004), *Radiance* (2006), *Show And Tell* (2007), *Los Cuentos De Canterbury* (2009) and workshops at the Roundhouse Studios, London. Her second novel, *The Ice* got published in May 2017 with the Fourth Estate. *The Bees* was shortlisted for Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction, 2015 and was the winner of Orion Book Award 2015. She was honoured by Brookleaze Grant, 2014 by the Royal Society of Literature.

Literary world is buzzing around *The Bees* (2014) which narrates the story of Flora 717, a worker bee born into the lowest caste of her totalitarian hive. The story enters the mysterious realm of the beehive; the architecture, hierarchy, rituals, scents and signals. The book takes its readers for an unusual journey to the core of the hexagonal chamber and unveils the eventful life-story of Flora 717, a sanitation worker bee, the protagonist from the moment her cell squeezes her out till her soul rest in the forest floor. She is born into the lowest caste of her ancient ferocious society built around the devout worship of a queen. The society rejects individualism and exists as a totalitarian state where each individual born has a predestined life and destiny. *Accept, Obey, and Serve* are the codes each must live by. But Flora 717 is born different-bigger, uglier, and stronger. Her physical deformities, efficiency to produce royal jelly, courageous and victorious fight against the wasp, restless dedication as a forager, and ultimately breaking the 'first law of life: that the queen only has the right to give birth' and the heroic raising of the next queen of the hive all makes her remarkable and powerful spokesperson who makes ripples of changes in her stagnant society.

The book reveals strong traces of class-struggle, feminism, matriarchal society, Orwellian mantra, environmental issues and above all stands itself as a perfect example for anthropomorphism. Shami Chakrabati's chair of judges for Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction 2015, rightly commented on this books that, "*The Bees* are so real. This could be like an *Animal Farm* of twenty first century. What a great way to critique society, power and hierarchy"

Anthropomorphism describes the tendency to imbue the real or imagined behavior of nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intention or emotions. Three-Factor Theory of Anthropomorphism proposed by psychologists of University of Chicago, Nicholas Epley, Adam Waytz, and John.T. Cacioppo through their article titled, 'On Seeing Human: A Three Factor Theory of Anthropomorphism' published in *Psychological Review* 2007, Vol 114, No. 4, 864-886 provides the psychological and theoretical approach of anthropomorphism. One can find that Laline Paull has made a legitimate employment of this theory in the novel where the first factor is Elicited agent knowledge(it tells that anthropomorphic attribution is due to the likelihood of activating, either chronologically or situationally, knowledge about humans when making inferences about nonhuman agents), second, Effectance (it includes understanding, predicting and reducing uncertainty about one's own environment through anthropomorphism) and third, Sociality(anthropomorphism as a tool to get rid of social pain and to fulfill social needs and desires). Thus a plot which purely deals with bees and their affairs and biological facts inside and outside the hexagonal chambers are well anthropomorphized in every nooks and corners. It starts from the very naming of the thousands of inmates in the hive like Flora 717, Lily 500 to vivid descriptions of their humanlike actions, intense emotions, thought and so on intermingled with complex biological and entomological facts using a language colored with imagination.

Apart from this there are several portions in the book that shows brutal caste discriminations that even reminds us of the ruthless discriminations based on castes once practiced in India. The remark towards the lower caste protagonist by an upper caste bee is significant “because you lack botanical heritage, yours forms the base of our society. Or you draw it from the impure and promiscuous flowers, shunned by this hive”(Paull 30). This kind of marginalization which even extends like, the attitude towards Flora 717 like” the knowledge only causes pain to your kin”(Paull 10), “she will lose its(knowledge)use when it is time for her to rejoin her kin. And should it linger, I will personally wipe any knowledge from her mind”(Paull 16). This reminds us of the *Manu Smriti* which prescribes heavy sentences like cutting tongue, pouring molten lead in the ears of shudra who recites Vedas. Thus the book serves as an outcry against unjust criticism.

The character Lily 500, the old forager in the book serves the role of a social reformer. She is the one who prompts Flora 717 to make her first flight in the sky who believed that it was impossible for those who belonged to the lower kin. Her words to Flora is remarkable, “I read flowers, not scriptures. But I know our hive is in grievous need of food and that you have wings and courage and brain”(Paull 90). Thus author’s repressed thoughts based on logic and practicality apart from scriptures and traditions are voiced through Lily 500.

The references of the poisoned pollens and the consequent diseases in the hive all indirectly show the adverse effects of human intervention in the environment. Also the depiction of the unconditioned love of Flora 717 as a mother withstanding all odds of life points towards the real and sincere love in the present competitive human world.

The Bees is an extraordinary illustration where author breathed anthropomorphic techniques into the lives of bees living in a totalitarian bee society. The subtle expressions, imageries and the artistic embellishment of Paull’s language take her reader’s into a life amidst flowers, honey and hexagonal walls. The novel portrays the social issues and controversies cloaked in the anthropomorphic techniques that require critical contemplation and immediate reformations. The setting is different and plot curious. *The Bees* is actually an attempt for a deeper hexagonal reflection of the unnoticed realms of human world.