

**ADOLESCENT REPERCUSSION OF SPECIFICATION CRISIS IN MELINA
MARCHETTA'S *ON THE JELLCOE ROAD***

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Abstract

*Melina Marchetta, an Italian descent Australian writer, directs her attention mainly towards her native country Italy and the life of the people living in her adopted country Australia. She is an eminent writer who is capable of bringing out the psychological trauma of the people belonging to different age groups and finding out a solution for the problems. This paper attempts to study how Melina's character Taylor Markham from *On the Jellicoe Road* empowers herself and attains maturity from her frustrated and depressed mind set. Abandoned both by her mother and her caretaker, the protagonist comes across hard circumstances due to varied reasons such as familial breakdown, illegitimacy, abandoned life, identity crisis and finally she attains emancipation by family reunion. An attempt is made here to pinpoint the role of familial relationships in the development of young minds. Moreover, the involvement of matured adults in family and society will help to mould the immature adolescents.*

Key Words: Abandoned life, Familial breakdown, Illegitimacy, Identity Crisis, Struggle for Survival, Overcoming, Empowerment, Emancipation

Australian literature is often considered as young literature, for it began shortly after the European settlement in Australia in 1788. Common themes utilized in Australian literature include indigenous and settler identity, alienation, exile and relationship with nature. On the other hand, the immigrant Australian writers write on a variety of themes such as family

legacy, tragedy, grief, depression, isolation, reconciliation, nostalgia and repentance. Melina Marchetta, the selected author for discussion, an immigrant Australian writer, directs mainly towards her attachment with her native country Italy and her reaction to the life of the people living in her adopted country Australia. In this paper, an attempt is made to study how Melina's adolescent character Taylor Markham develops maturity in her by putting together the broken pieces of her mind, and also how correspondingly she changes her attitude and sensibilities.

Australian aborigines who lived in the Australian environment undisturbed, are forced to migrate to the outskirts of their native land in order to protect them from the invasion of the white settlers. However, their encounter with the related colonial violence brings in the conditions of poverty, identity crisis, cultural loss, exile and racism. On the other hand, the European settlers have witnessed almost the same issues in their immigrant settlement in Australia. Their experience is a painful one as they are treated as refugees depriving of self-esteem, confidence and emotional insecurity which continues to the next generation also. Linda Burnett is of the opinion that immigration certainly affects the life and education of adolescents. She says, "Adolescence is a particularly different age at which to migrate because of the significance of the question of personal identity, to which migration can add the problem of cultural conflict. Children and adolescents who have immigrated as refugees have the added major problem of a disrupted education" (24).

As an award-winning writer, Melina is endowed with the consciousness of problems faced by the young in their domestic domain and in society. Australia is a country which has become almost a melting pot into which many of the cultural streams conglomerate. Melina has lucidly portrayed such issues in her novel *On the Jellicoe Road* which is of immense help to understand the various stages through which her characters have passed through in their struggle for psychological liberation and to know whether emancipation for them is possible in their cultural and political situations. The central character Taylor Markham's memories of her mother and her caretaker Hannah who have abandoned her suddenly, and also the mystery of who her father is, have made her to undertake a journey to find her parents and the caretaker in order to solve the questions of her own identity. Prof. Akbar Husain and Tabassum Rashid rightly point out that,

Children from broken homes do feel distress and the reasons can be attributed to various factors such as parental conflict, mental state of the parents after divorce and their reactions towards them. In many cases custodial and economic reasons add up to the problems which can be manifested in symptoms such as sleep disturbances, depression and many somatic symptoms. (215)

In order to bring out the importance of familial relationship Melina highlights the psychological sufferings of Taylor who is ruthlessly separated from her parents and relatives and that hurts her mind so deeply. Taylor's pain becomes worse when she is deserted by her caretaker Hannah. Unable to tolerate the pain of separation and betrayal, she cries hysterically, "My mother deserted me at the 7-Eleven, hundreds of kilometres away from home. . . .She deserted me in our own backyard. As I walk back to the school on my own, I realise I'm crying"(145).Unfortunately, Taylor's frustration due to her loneliness changes her to be covetous over motherly love and affection. Therefore, her heart breaks and eyes fill with tears when she finds Raffy's mother cajoling and feeling proud of her daughter. After a careful reading of this novel Emma Carbone has reviewed, "Now seventeen, Taylor is in many ways still a young girl afraid of being abandoned by those she loves. Which is why, at the start of the story, Taylor balks at the authority thrust upon her and the relationships it will necessitate" (web).In the end, Taylor successfully returns to Jellicoe Road with her mother and Hannah and begins to move forward with a new knowledge of her identity.

This paper focuses on the adolescent Taylor Markham's repercussions due to identity crisis and her struggle for survival and the final overcoming of the difficulties inflicted on her. It is quite natural that the dilemma of life due to sudden changes of physical and psychological conditions produce ambiguous status among the young adolescents which they exhibit through eccentric behavioursuch as emotional storm and stress. Elizabeth B. Hurlock writes: "At this stage instability is extreme. From tears to laughter, from self-confidence to self-depreciation, from selfishness to altruism, and from enthusiasm to indifference are all common reactions of young adolescents" (393).

At the outset, young people often consider life without identity as meaningless and hence, they struggle a lot to retain their own identity. Moreover, confusions and conflicts caused by their search for identity certainly create unreasonable emotional outbursts such as

anger, tension, and sometimes even depression. Depression is accompanied by emotional tension which is intensified by feelings of insecurity and inadequacy and also by guilt feelings. In general, the more dogmatic the feelings of adolescence, the greater will be the emotional accompaniment of doubting. The protagonist Taylor misjudges the Brigadier who guards her when she goes astray to the serial killer. Likewise, Taylor misconceives Jonah Griggs, her classmate, as a traitor for giving information about their secret journey in search of her mother to the Brigadier which finally helps the Brigadier to bring them back to Hannah, her caretaker. She mistakenly proclaims, "Jonah Griggs is my second reminder to never ever trust another human being. My mother was the first and these days I feel like Hannah might have joined that small and intimate group of traitor" (54).

Consequently, instead of thanking the Brigadier for saving them from the serial killer, she hates him for preventing them from finding out the whereabouts of her mother. She utters, "I could easily put it down to the fact that I'm still angry at him for being the one who stopped me and Jonah Griggs that time" (108). Moreover, Taylor ignorantly suspects that the Brigadier might have murdered the missing Hannah. She innocently asks Jonah Griggs, "What if I told you that I think the Brigadier is the serial killer and Hannah knew and he's done something to her?" (271). Taylor exhibits her irrationality towards the Brigadier when he informs about the critical physical condition of her mother. Ignorant of the fact, she beats him thoroughly: "It stops me but I wriggle out of the Brigadier's grasp and smash him hard over and over again" (358-59).

Secondly, adolescents who struggle for survival, mostly face lots of issues such as lack of parental care, loneliness, and taking wrong decisions. Additionally, adolescents suffering from lack of parental support turn to be arrogant and jealous of others. Deprived of parental love and affection Taylor feels envious of Tily, Santangelo's sister who plays and enjoys with her father. Furthermore, her orphaned condition is worsened when Santangelo takes advantage of her situation and demands her to fulfil his claims. He teases her, "And I think it's pretty obvious that you're still an emotional mess looking for your mother and you know that if you find her, you'll find your father as well. . . I'll tell you what you've been desperate to find out for most of your life" (144).

Leading a lonely life under the custody of an unknown person without parental care and affection, affects the adolescents. Moreover attachment between young adolescents and caretakers is so strong that separation from the caretaker even results in hindered growth. Taylor, due to her separation from sick mother, is pushed into the hands of the caretaker Hannah. Here the reader finds that an adolescent should be given proper importance and guidance in the family and that will tend to mould his/her character. As a teen-aged girl, Taylor plans to escape instead of finding a solution for her problems. Deprived of the presence of her mother, the innocent girl undertakes a secret journey in search of her mother ignorant of its consequences. Taylor considers her life as a punishment. She explains her pathetic condition as, "It's the punishment for having nowhere else to go in the holidays or breaking curfew or running away with a cadet in year eight" (18). Her condition becomes more pathetic when she is betrayed even by her caretaker Hannah. Taylor grumbles, "I want to see Hannah. I'm not sure why but I find myself repeating the need over and over again. Because it's like a voice whispering in my head telling me that there is something so unnatural about her absence" (45). Bryan Kroll puts across "Attachment between child and caretaker has long been recognized as the cornerstone of healthy psychological and emotional development, both during childhood and in later life" (116).

Moreover, lack of supervision by the parents may result in harmful deeds both inside and outside home. Studies prove that parents' lack of attention towards adolescents due to their alcoholic nature, cleavage in husband-wife relationship, illegal relationship, sickness will hinder the growth of them and that will make them to go towards a "better" so called perspective such as falling in love, having bad friends, trying for bad habits without probing onto whether it is suitable or good for them. Also many a time adolescents take wrong decisions which result in pathetic ends. Being young and hot, Taylor's lover Jonah Griggs on the brink of anger murders his own father and determines to commit suicide. Elizabeth B. Hurlock delineates the cause of committing suicide as,

Studies of attempted and actual suicides during adolescence have shown that there is a sharp rise at fourteen years and a peak at nineteen years. School failures, loss of a loved one, conflicts with parents, teachers, and friends, especially friends of opposite sex, are the most common causes of suicide or attempts of suicide. (448)

Finally, the paper focuses on transformation and maturity due to self-realization in the last phase of a man's life. It is true that family dimension helps to face transformation in life from bereavement, redundancy, illness or whatever it may be. Linkage between parent and adolescents will help to mould the character of adolescence, whereas separation hinders development in them. Contextual factors such as strong social support network, positive relationship, good experience at educational places may protect the young people to a great extent from the impact of bad company.

Melina's portrayal of adolescents and their struggle to accept transformation from childhood to adulthood are highly realistic. She also pinpoints how the role of familial relationship plays in the development of young minds. It is presented in a crystalline manner, how familial relationship and familial support and friendliness give the dejected and isolated people an identity. Friendship among school friends, their enjoyments and quarrels are well displayed. Moreover, the involvement of matured adults in family and society will help to mould the immature adolescents.

The life of Taylor is an example to prove the impact of good and bad friendships. In the novel, the students from the two teams namely Cadets and Townies fight among themselves at the Jellicoe School. Territory map has been made for teams and the students trespassing their boundary line are punished severely. Prayer Tree belonging to the Townies is lost to the Cadets as a punishment for Raffaella and Ben stealthily entering into their territory. Moreover, the Townies leader Taylor and Ben are arrested and kept under custody by the Cadets for crossing their border line and entering into the Cadets territory. This is reflected as, "Two of his Cadets have Ben by the arm and I can tell by the look on Ben's face and the angle of their strongholds that he's in pain" (81-82). However, gradually the two teams become friendly with each other and go together in search of Taylor's mother.

Finally Taylor's meeting with her mother Tate after a long separation gives immense pleasure, resulting in an emotional outburst. Taylor's mother also undergoes psychological disturbances when she meets her daughter whom she has left in the Jellicoe Road. At first, she displays a wondrous feeling: "then she starts to cry. Not dramatically but with such sadness, clutching at her throat, looking at me like she can't believe her eyes. She tries to speak but she isn't able to" (411). Pathetically, their union comes to an end suddenly with her

mother's death. Taylor's emotional outbreak over her mother's death excites pity and it becomes intense when she asks her dead mother to come alive at least for a day. She explicates the situation a "Just one more day please, Mummy, just one more day please.' And when it hurts too much, I go up to Hannah and Jude's room and tell them that she's dead, and I climb between them and I am raw inside"(416).

Self-realization is one of the major factor that brings about transformation in the adolescents. Taylor who undergoes mental pain due to the betrayal of her mother, however, feels convinced when she knows the reason for her mother's betrayal. In fact, she feels pity for her mother when she understands that she has deserted her in order to keep her away from her dangerous disease cancer. Moreover, Taylor feels emancipated from her depressed and frustrated feeling when her mother dies. She informs her friend Raffela that her mother has died peacefully in a house which she longed to have for a long time. Surprisingly, after her mother's death, Taylor finds Jellicoe Road which she hated earlier to be the prettiest place: "She died in a house on the Jellicoe Road. The prettiest road I'd ever seen, where trees made breezy canopies like a tunnel to Shangrila"(416). In the point of view of MeenaKelkar and DeeptiGangavane, "The question of freedom or empowerment can be significantly discussed in the anthropocentric world. . . . At the basis of this world lies the human ability to know, act, and enjoy. Unless human beings know, and act they cannot establish any relation or any contact with the world around" (24).

Hence, the paper comes to a conclusion that though Melina's young character Taylor Markham undergoes psychological trauma, she comes to an understanding to differentiate the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, when she realizes the true situation. The reader finds that the character finally attains self-empowerment, self-realization and emancipation. Therefore, one's attitude towards relationships and decision making abilities contribute to emancipation and confidence building capabilities. Consequently, maturation makes them understand the situations of the environment and act responsibly. In the present scenario, adolescents are confronted with challenges such as discrimination, deprivation, disparity, poor quality education, malnutrition, drug abuse, trafficking and health risks. However, these conflicts and confusions are solved when one prepares himself/herself to understand and to find a solution for such problems.

The researcher, thus, finds out that the writer through the portrayal of the psychological turmoil of the people can completely wipe out the psychological disturbances and their evil effects. Genuine love from the members of the family, friends, neighbours and others help to identify other. It is recommended to the elders and matured people, guiding the innocents and the mentally affected adolescents will lead them on the right path by finding out the truth of life to enjoy it in a better way.

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