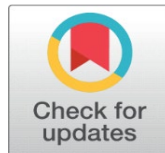


EXPLORING DIDACTICISM IN ANITA NAIR'S "LIVING NEXT DOOR TO ALISE"

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ABSTRACT

Children's literature is a crucial tool for imparting values, ethics, and life lessons, providing young readers with both entertainment and instruction. In her work, *Living Next Door to Alise*, Anita Nair illustrates this paradox, intricately intertwining a captivating narrative with didactic elements. This study examines the complex interplay between narrative and moral education in the book, concentrating on Nair's treatment of empathy, community, individuality, and acceptance. From a didactic perspective, the paper analyses how the author constructs realistic events and complex characters to impart ethical teachings to her young audience in a subtle manner. Nair's work is distinguished by its capacity to convey intricate concepts in an approachable and captivating way, steering clear of explicit moralization. *Living Next Door to Alise* showcases her ability to address universal issues, such as inclusion and appreciation of differences, while preserving regional nuances that resonate with Indian audiences. This research highlights the alignment of the narrative framework with children's developmental needs and moral maturation, underscoring the importance of relatable circumstances in imparting values. This analysis, informed by theories of children's literature and didacticism, demonstrates how Anita Nair establishes a dynamic interaction among plot, character, and moral instruction. It also examines how her work contributes to broader discourses about the purpose of children's literature, especially within contemporary Indian contexts. This study underscores the importance of didacticism in fostering the emotional and ethical development of young readers, offering valuable insights into the evolving role of storytelling in children's education.

Keywords: Didacticism, Acceptance, Kindness, Social Learning, Companionship, Indian English Literature, Empathy, Friendship, Storytelling



1. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature in Indian English reveals a dynamic yet evolving discipline that bridges India's rich cultural heritage with contemporary aspirations. Based on oral traditions and familial storytelling, this literature has evolved into various written formats to entertain and nurture young minds by addressing their mental and emotional needs. Despite its importance, Indian children's literature faces challenges in adapting to technological changes and addressing contemporary concerns. Childhood in India is a complex concept shaped by a combination of historical, cultural, and social factors, particularly during the postcolonial period, when a more multicultural and hybrid vision of childhood emerged (Thomas, 2017). Nonetheless, critics argue that English-language children's literature in India often overlooks the importance of speaking from a child's perspective, thereby reducing its impact. Furthermore, poor translation between languages limits the range and accessibility of these stories, preventing youngsters from exploring a broader literary environment. This genre, therefore, has significant potential for expansion, particularly in terms of increasing accessibility and satisfying the changing demands of its young readers (Chandra, 2023). The growth of children's literature in India has been remarkable, combining the subcontinent's diverse narrative traditions with the introduction

of the novel form through colonial influence. While Indigenous storytelling forms have consistently recognized the didactic function of stories, the introduction of the novel genre has presented both obstacles and opportunities for conveying moral and ecological lessons to young readers.

1.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyse the didactic elements in Anita Nair's *Living Next Door to Alise*.
- To explore themes of empathy, inclusivity, and individuality in the text.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) The first research Question focuses on Anita Nair's narrative elements in 'Living Next Door to Alise' and how they convey moral and ethical lessons to young readers. The second question explores the manifestation of the themes of empathy, inclusivity, and individuality in the book and their impact on the story's didactic purpose.
- 2) How do the themes of empathy, inclusivity, and individuality manifest in *Living Next Door to Alise*, and what is their impact on the story's didactic purpose?

2. METHODOLOGY

The proposed research on *Living Next Door to Alise* by Anita Nair will employ a qualitative approach grounded in literary analysis, focusing on exploring didacticism in children's literature. The study aims to analyse the author's narrative strategies and thematic elements to convey moral and ethical lessons, emphasizing the interconnected themes of empathy, inclusivity, and individuality. The methodology involves the following steps:

- 1) Textual Analysis
 - A close reading of *Living Next Door to Alise* will be conducted to identify and interpret instances of didacticism, with a focus on narrative structure, character development, and thematic exploration.
 - Specific emphasis will be placed on narrative techniques, such as dialogue, characterization, and plot progression, to explore how these elements convey moral and ethical lessons.
 - Key passages highlighting empathy, inclusivity, and individuality will be analysed to demonstrate how they contribute to the book's overarching didactic purpose.
- 2) Theoretical Framework
 - The analysis will be framed within the context of didacticism in children's literature. The study will draw on established theories of didacticism to understand how *Living Next Door to Alise* imparts lessons to its young readers.

3. DIDACTICISM IN INDIAN ENGLISH

Didacticism in Indian English literature is crucial in crafting storylines as entertainment and educational instruments, conveying moral, social, and cultural lessons. Grounded in India's rich storytelling traditions, numerous works in Indian English literature deliberately incorporate lessons designed to guide readers, particularly younger demographics, toward ethical and socially responsible principles. This practice aligns with the nation's tradition of utilizing narratives, folklore, and parables to convey wisdom and life lessons, a tradition that persists in modern writing. In Indian English writing, didacticism often addresses subjects such as social justice, reverence for nature, familial values, and cultural heritage, intricately weaving these motifs into narratives to foster introspection and empathy. Although this style is widespread, didacticism is criticized for occasionally prioritizing moral instruction at the expense of narrative inventiveness and complexity, which can restrict reader engagement. Nonetheless, the educational impetus remains a significant influence in Indian English writing, prompting readers to contemplate the moral aspects of existence within an evolving cultural and technological environment. The growth of children's literature in India has been remarkable, combining the subcontinent's diverse narrative traditions with the introduction of the novel form through colonial influence. While Indigenous storytelling forms have consistently recognized the didactic function of stories, the

introduction of the novel genre has presented both obstacles and opportunities for conveying moral and ecological lessons to young readers. (Pulimeno et al., 2020)

As the English literary tradition progressed, authors began to explore more subtle and sophisticated approaches to didacticism. Rather than overtly moralizing, these narratives sought to impart valuable lessons and insights through the immersive experience of storytelling. As Anita Nair's work demonstrates, modern narratives can enhance readers' humanity by inviting them to develop empathy and a more nuanced perspective on social realities. (Pereira & Campos, 2014). This shift towards a more nuanced didacticism is reflected in how contemporary authors incorporate local wisdom and cultural elements into their stories. By weaving these elements into the narrative, writers can convey important messages and values without overt moralizing.

4. DIDACTICISM IN ANITA NAIR'S LIVING NEXT DOOR TO ALICE

Anita Nair, a distinguished Indian author, is renowned for her contributions to adult and children's literature. Her venture into children's literature is distinguished by its didacticism, as she intricately incorporates moral and educational lessons into captivating narratives. Nair adeptly employs her narratives to convey ideals such as compassion, self-discovery, and environmental awareness, rendering her books engaging and informative for young readers. One prime example of this evolution in didactic approaches can be found in Anita Nair's novel "Living Next Door to Alice." The story, which explores the experience of emigration, presents opposing social ideologies in a subtle dialogue that encourages readers to develop a liberating empathy towards the characters and their circumstances. Rather than explicitly stating a moral or ethical lesson, Nair's work invites the reader to engage with the narrative on a deeper level, cultivating a more nuanced understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by the characters. Didactic literacy pedagogy has served as the primary method for reading and writing since the advent of mass compulsory education in the nineteenth century, and it remains extensively promoted and implemented in contemporary classrooms, focusing on the acquisition of formal norms and esteemed cultural materials. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012). Ethical literary criticism examines the pedagogical role of literature through an ethical lens, highlighting the use of moral exemplars, paradigms, and guidelines to attain a didactic impact. (Zhenzhao & Kaminskaya, 2022)

"Hey, Siddharth, listen to me. It is going to be better," Alise said suddenly.

'Why will it be better this year?' 'It is going to be. Trust me!'" (Nair 27)

This dialogue illustrates the didactic topic of empathy and encouragement throughout the conversation. Promoting empathy helps cultivate a sense of community and understanding among young people, which is crucial in addressing societal violence and indifference. Integrating empathy-building exercises in educational environments enables children to appreciate others, enhancing interpersonal interactions and a more compassionate society. This methodology has been successfully implemented in numerous countries. (Murad et al., 2022). To demonstrate how the support of a friend can help ease concerns and build resilience, Alise reassures Siddharth. Under challenging circumstances, the key lesson to be learned is that showing compassion and having faith in others can help lift one's spirits.

"For once, I hoped Mahout Unni would wake up in time and take Alise away to the river or on one of his jaunts to raise money."

Suddenly, the thought of Alise in school no longer seemed like such a great idea. 'I am not so sure,' I said slowly. (Nair 30)

These lines reflect Siddharth's maturing maturity and rising capacity for critical thinking. There is a noticeable shift in his perspective, from one centered on himself to one more reflective, as he begins to consider the repercussions of Alise's actions. The lesson emphasizes the importance of carefully considering decisions and the potential impacts those actions may have on others. Critical thinking skills in children can be developed through inquiry-based learning, which encompasses problem identification, exploration, creativity, and reflection. Maturity influences this process as children's cognitive capacities develop, enabling them to utilize higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). As children develop, they enhance their abilities in analysis, reasoning, and communication, which are fundamental elements of critical thinking. Consequently, cultivating critical thinking from a young age is essential for their whole cognitive development. (Priyanti & Warman Syah, 2021).

"Now tie this ribbon around it.' She handed me a pink satin ribbon. 'Make a nice big bow. I am rather particular about bows."

"Sometimes Alise sounded like a character out of Wind in the Willows."

-(Nair 29)

Through Alise's hilarious behavior, the book indirectly teaches youngsters to address the obstacles they face with a sense of humour and a positive attitude. The light-hearted conversation about bows and ribbons demonstrates the importance of finding joy even in the most challenging circumstances, which helps cultivate a balanced perspective. Participating in hilarious storytelling improves children's language and cognitive abilities, including narrative construction and divergent thinking. Humor arises from social contact, rendering it a significant social skill that facilitates cognitive growth (Loizou & Michaelides, 2019).

Ever since I decided to attend school with you, I have been waiting for a chance. Three days ago, when Unni took me to the river for my bath, I saw that the dhobis had laid out many clothes to dry . . ."-(Nair 29)

The scenario subtly introduces children to rural and natural life in India. It depicts elephants taking baths in rivers and dhobis drying clothing. In addition to fostering respect for such activities, it offers a glimpse into ancient lifestyles that are environmentally friendly. Friendships can profoundly influence self-regulatory mechanisms, enhancing individuals' ability to set and achieve goals. This is achieved through enhanced behavioral self-regulation and adaptability in assessing outcomes, as observed in students with supportive connections (Ryabikina & Vasilchenko, 2023).

"For the first time in my life, I had a friend: Alise."

"I slipped out of the house and ran into the garden... If I could see Alise for ten minutes, I would have the courage to go through the rest of the day."

-(Nair 28)

The connection between Siddharth and Alise is a powerful example of the significance of friendship as a source of comfort and courage. It highlights the importance of maintaining meaningful relationships with others by demonstrating how a genuine friend can offer emotional support and encouragement in the face of adversity. Subjective experiences are essential for forecasting the behaviour of others. Individuals frequently depend on the simplicity or complexity of recalling previous behavioural instances to formulate predictions. For example, in assessing assertiveness, individuals forecast future assertive conduct based on the accessibility of recalling prior assertive behaviors, underscoring the impact of subjective retrieval experiences on behavioral predictions (Orita & Yagi, 2010).

Didacticism in literature refers to the intention of teaching or conveying a moral lesson or imparting information through the narrative. Though predominantly humorous and entertaining in the above excerpt, there are moments when the text imparts subtle lessons or encourages reflection on behavior and values.

I have heard of people being scared of tigers, elephants, even dogs and cats. But ants? Heee heee . . ."-(Nair 33)

This exemplifies that fear is a subjective experience that differs from person to person. Some fears, such as those of tigers or dogs, may appear "reasonable," while others may seem irrational; yet, they are just as genuine to those experiencing them. Siddharth is subjected to ridicule, which illustrates how inconsiderate it can be to make fun of others for their worries. This, in turn, fosters empathy and compassion.

"Raman Sir knew Mary Ma'am would not have the same effect. All of us liked Mary Ma'am. She taught us science, and she made it fun."-(Nair 36)

This highlights the differences between two approaches to education: one based on fear (Raman Sir) and the other based on respect and engagement (Mary Ma'am). The implication is that leaders and instructors can increase the cooperation and praise they receive by cultivating positive relationships rather than inciting fear in their followers. Subjective experiences are essential for forecasting the behaviour of others. Individuals frequently depend on the simplicity or complexity of recalling previous behavioural instances to formulate predictions. For example, in assessing assertiveness, individuals forecasted future assertive conduct based on the accessibility of recollecting prior assertive behaviours, underscoring the impact of subjective retrieval experiences on behavioral predictions (Orita & Yagi, 2010).

"I want your parents' signature on it so they know how well-behaved their darlings are."-(Nair 35)

By doing so, children are taught that their actions have consequences, not just for themselves but also for others. This emphasizes the importance of accountability. When parents are involved in shaping their children's behavior, the concept of collective responsibility is strengthened even further.

"It is wearing what looks like our school uniform and a pink bow on its head," Rahul added. -(Nair 39)

Because she is dressed in a uniform and bows, Alise, the elephant, represents uniqueness within the context of uniformity. Her humorous and bold acts highlight the importance of expressing oneself, especially in environments characterized by rigid structures, such as schools.

Alise decided that school was a waste of time; she was better off teaching herself from the books. (Nair 39)

This is a subtle hint at the concept of self-directed learning, which emphasizes that education is not limited to the confines of official institutions. It also critiques rigid institutions that are incapable of adapting to the specific needs of individual students, implying that curiosity and independent discovery may be equally valuable. This study employs a didactic approach to explore significant themes in education and human behavior, offering practical lessons through its narrative. The portrayal of Siddharth's dread and Raman Sir's dictatorial attitude highlights the significance of empathy and understanding in classroom dynamics. The contrasting leadership styles—Raman Sir's fear-driven approaches and Mary Ma'am's measured approach—showcase the need for constructive and courteous teaching procedures. Alise's rejection of traditional schooling in favor of self-directed learning highlights the importance of tailoring educational frameworks to the individual needs of students. The narrative's didactic undertone calls for creating an open and supportive school atmosphere that values individuality, stimulates innovation, and balances discipline and empathy.

5. CONCLUSION

Anita Nair's *Living Next Door to Alise* is a rich exploration of didacticism, embedding valuable lessons within an engaging and humorous narrative. Through the misadventures of Siddharth and his talking elephant friend, Alise, the story deftly examines themes of authority, fear, empathy, and individuality in the context of education and childhood. The contrasting teaching styles of Raman Sir and Mary Ma'am serve as didactic tools to reflect on the impact of different approaches to discipline and engagement in the classroom. Raman Sir's ridicule and authoritarianism highlight the detrimental effects of using fear as a motivator. At the same time, Mary Ma'am's more balanced and empathetic methods demonstrate the importance of fostering respect and understanding between teachers and students. The story also uses Siddharth's fear of ants and his struggle to navigate peer and teacher dynamics to underline the importance of addressing individual vulnerabilities with sensitivity rather than mockery. Alise's rejection of traditional schooling in favour of self-learning further enriches the narrative, posing critical questions about the rigidity of conventional education systems and advocating for adaptive frameworks that cater to diverse learning needs. These elements collectively illustrate the power of literature as a medium for conveying moral and practical lessons, aligning with the tradition of didactic literature. (Keen, 2007)

Ultimately, Nair's work does more than entertain—it educates readers about the importance of empathy, the flaws of rigid authority, and the need for inclusive, student-centered education. The narrative invites readers to reflect on their own experiences with learning and authority, offering a thoughtful critique of societal norms while maintaining its charm and relatability. Through its clever integration of humour and didacticism, *Living Next Door to Alise* becomes a story and a meaningful commentary on how we can nurture growth and creativity in young minds.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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