

LITERATURE AS A SAVIOUR IN LLYOD JONES *MISTER PIP*

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Abstract

Literature has the power to take a person into another world, a world where one's mind is freed. Literature unveils the whole world before the readers and makes them realize that they are not alone in feeling what they feel as they relates to the characters and situations of a work of literature. Mister pip is a novel written by Lloyd Jones, a famous New Zealand writer, that describes how a person can be rescued from the throes of war, through literature. Mister Pip is a story of a young girl Matilda who lives on an island surrounded by the terror and pain of war. And Mister Watts is the person who introduces her to the world of literature. Mister Watt is a single white person on that island which is blocked from the outer world because of the ongoing civil war. So there is also community and cultural difference that makes the islanders suspicious about Mister Watts. But Mister Watts attempts to educate the children and distracts their minds from the thorns of war. For this he uses Charles Dickens great literary work Great Expectations. This attempt not only helps the children escape from the real and terrifying world but also gains Mister Watts, the trust of the islanders. Matilda, the main character of the novel not only gains peace of mind through Great Expectations, but also gains the will to live by relating to the characters of it, and this saves her life during the climax of the novel.

Key words- War, Cultural Difference, Literature, Great Expectations,

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Lloyd Jones is a famous New Zealand writer, whose writings are generally more inclined to the idea of escapism. A lot of his writings like, *Here At the End of the World We Learn to Dance* and *Paint Your Wife*, displays the characters going into an imaginary world to find solace there. And often the settings of the novels are his homeland. Same is the case of *Mister Pip*. Mister Pip is set around on the island of Bougainville against the backdrop of Civil War of 1990s. Mister Pip tells a story of a black young girl. The novel is first person narrative. So through Matilda, the protagonist of the novel, the reader gets the knowledge of the environment which she lives in, the circumstances i.e. the ongoing civil war and its effects, and how in these state of affairs she got in touch with Mister Watt, the only white person left on the island, who have decided to teach the children of the island.

Matilda is a thirteen year old bright and curious native girl on the island of Bougainville. Due to the effect of the ongoing civil war, the island is blocked off from the rest of the world. In the prevailing chaos, a lot of people have left the island, as a result, now the native children have no teacher to teach them. Their studies are affecting as well as their minds are very much getting disturbed in these circumstances. Many a times the soldier comes to their village. It was very frequent for them to come and disturb their lives, by pervading terror. It is witnessed in the novel many a times. There is one time when soldiers came into the village and natives hide in the deep jungle. The Redskins could not find the natives there so they killed their animals.

An old dog had its belly ripped open.....to stare at that black dog was to see your sister or brother or mum or dad in that same state. You saw hoe disrespectful the sun could be, and how dumb the palms were to flutter back at the sea and up at the sky. The great shame of the trees is that they have no conscience. They just go on staring.

Here Lloyd Jones portrays a very distressful sight of the killing and the anarchy, imposed by the soldiers. Because of this ever present turmoil and the escalating terror of the War, all the non-natives decided to leave the island before the blocked was imposed. And now the islanders have no contact with the outside world. Surprisingly there is one white man, Mister Watt who has not left the island yet. Mister Watt is a dubious character of the novel. His behavior and his nature are a little odd to the natives.

Mister Watt was a single white man left on the island. So natives were a little suspicious about him in the beginning. His way to talk and dressing sense were a little different from the rest of them. Also his behavior was a little weird. Sometimes he could be seen wearing a big red clown nose, pushing a trolley with her wife in that trolley. He seldom talks with the natives. That's why when he decides to educate the children, their community difference becomes a barrier in this venture. But still he tries very hard to win the hearts of the islanders and to educate the children, though his main aim is to divert the minds of the kids from the throes of war, not, to educate them in conventional manner.

Mister Watt was not a conventional teacher. He himself once said

I want you to understand something. I am no teacher, but I will do my best. That's my promise to you children. I believe, with your parent's help, we can make a difference to our lives.

But he was very much familiar with the novel *Great Expectations*, and that was the main thing that he taught the children. Gradually the kids started to relate to the main characters of the novel. Through the voice of Matilda, the reader get to know that how she started thinking about Mister Pip, the protagonist of the novel *Great Expectations*, as a real person. Though she knew that he is just a fictional character but she started having sentiments about him. That can be traced in the following lines from the novel.

I never took to Estella. I can say now I was jealous of her. I didn't like that other teasing girl, Sarah Pocket, either. I was always glad when it came time to leave miss Havisham'

The setting of the novel *Great Expectations* is England in the year 1860. The children of the class have never heard about such a place. Fact is that they never even went outside of the

island. That's why they were very much fascinated by the place and setting of Great Expectations.

Mr Watts had given us kids another piece of the world. I found I could go back to it as often as I liked.

Here one can see how the children started to escape from the real terrifying world, to an imaginary world where they could find peace and a little consolation. In this way the novel became a very important part of their lives. Even when they lost the single copy of Great Expectations, they started to rewrite the novel, by remembering and discussing the incidents of the novel with Mister Watt. The terror of the soldiers started to grow even more, but the children were able to cop up with these worsening situations, as they knew that next day again they will go to the class to mister Watt and again will be able to read Great Expectations and go to Mister Pip's world once again. But eventually the worst came before the islanders. One day the Red Skin soldiers came to their village destroyed the whole village and spilled the blood of so many innocent people.

Due to some misunderstanding the soldiers became furious with the villagers and set fire to the houses. Few days later they came back and started to kill innocent people. Their first victim was Mister Watt. Matilda and other students adored Mister Watt and they had to see the brutal killing of their most beloved teacher. Moreover Matilda had to witness the Rape and killing of her own mother. This cruelty affected the innocent mind of the young girl so much that she lost her will to live. Just after this brutal massacre, a flood came and started to destroy everything and everyone. Matilda was also caught in the flood. She was scarred but did not have any will to fight for life. Just then suddenly she saw a log and clinged to that. Clinging to the log she was thinking that this log is like Mr. Jaggers of the novel Great Expectations, who once saved Mister Pip.

In this way she related her life to the life of Mister Pip and once again got the will to survive. Literature became the saviour of her life. It is often said that children's minds are like delicate buds. They need to bloom in a safe environment as they have major effect of their surroundings over them. Because of the war the native children were forced to live a life of distress. Mister Watts realized this and decided to take a step to educate the children. In this way

the kid's mind would divert from the chaos of war, and would bloom in its natural course. Great Expectations did benefit the kids just as was expected by Mister Watts. Not only it gave the children something to think about and something to learn, but also it gave Matilda a huge courage to survive during the climax of the novel.

Through the novel it is emphasized that reading a book isn't just about absorbing the story and then carrying on with your own life. But books are much more than that. People can relate to the story and, the power of the story will remain with them for the rest of their lives. This novel suggest that a book cannot stop a war or cannot put an end to the inhumanity prevailed in the world but it can release a person from the hardships of life, through imagination and it can inspire one's will power to face the difficulties and overcome the hurdles in life.

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