



Adopted Children and Foster Parents: A Study of Preeti Singh's *Flirting with Fate*

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ABSTRACT

Adoption and fostering are the customary or optional procedures for taking as one's own a child of other parents. The term 'adoption' usually refers to the legal transformation of a child's familial status, through which individuals permanently assume the major responsibilities of birth parents. The term 'fostering' usually indicates a temporary, mutually agreed upon delegation of the nurturance of the parental role.

*The present paper aims to bring into the notice Preeti Singh's debut novel, *Flirting with Fate* (2012). Touching the genre of crime fiction, the author has delved deep into the psyche of adopted children, simultaneously exposing how a well educated society receives these kids and what breathes into their frustrated intellect. The paper is an endeavour to present the grim glimpses of child psychology, to measure the effect of suppressed emotions onto a human's life and what kind of relationship is shared by adopted children and their foster parents.*

KEYWORDS : Parents, Child, Psychology, Crime, Fostering.

The euphoria which exhibits itself through the creative voices in regional literatures invites the reader to get a closer peep into the more rhythmic pattern of life lived by the people of a particular region. But unfortunately, the attention of majority of the readership is captured by mainstream literature only. Regional literature has usually been treated as only an offshoot of the mainstream writings and thus considered inferior lacking the grandeur cherished by the established literature. But a closer view discloses the latent reality: it is actually through regional experiences that a creative voice travels through the national or international literary horizon. In worshipping the merits of established authors of national or international repute, many a times the creative value of regional writers is left unacknowledged. Consequently, even the efficient writers can scarcely transcend the label of regional author and thus their creative output remains undervalued or does not valued at all.

The present paper aims to bring into the notice Preeti Singh's debut novel, *Flirting with Fate* (2012). Touching the genre of crime fiction, the author has delved deep into the psyche of adopted children, simultaneously exposing how a well educated society receives these kids and what breathes into their frustrated intellect. The paper is an endeavour to present the grim glimpses of child psychology, to measure the effect of suppressed emotions onto a human's life and what kind of relationship is shared by adopted children and their foster parents.

Adoption and fostering are the customary or optional procedures for taking as a child of other parents as one's own. The term 'adoption' usually refers to the legal transformation of a child's familial status, through which individuals permanently assume the major responsibilities of birth parents. The term 'fostering' usually indicates a temporary, mutually agreed upon delegation of the nurturance or educational elements of the parental role, or both. Fostering also more often concerns the process of child rearing and not necessarily the legal definition of the child's status or relationships. Adoption and fostering, however, are defined and performed differently depending on the time, location, and societies involved; as such, scholars also sometimes use 'fosterage' to describe substitute parenting arrangements. It draws primarily from disciplines in the social sciences and humanities that understand adoption and fostering as negotiated practices between children, adults, communities, institutions, and states, practices that are shaped by, among other things, social structures, law, economics, and history.

An experiment in the genre of crime fiction, *Flirting with Fate* by Preeti Singh is a notable manifestation of the dangers of adoption and problems faced during fostering a child. Through the protagonist, Anand, the novelist tends to show each and every curve of the life led by an orphan or adopted child in a society which usually treats such kids as unwanted and neglected. Primarily, such children are left at the threshold of orphanages after their birth to lick the dust of the streets. And secondly, the way this world receives and treats them makes it a matter of vulnerability which easily surge them towards the tide of crime.

Set in Shimla, the novel opens with the scene of a child lying at the gate of Palash, an orphanage run by Mr Gonsalves. He is named Anand and rest of the story is about his adventures and crimes. His heart filled with joy each time a couple came to visit Palash for adopting a child. And he was demanding even in the matter of foster parents:

Anand always wanted mothers to be young, smelling nice, with a fair and creamy skin, walking like a fairy on earth. He wanted his mother to have long beautiful hair, big eyes, a thin body and a lovely warm voice. He had pictured his mother to wear lots of bangles and payal on her feet – so when he would be naughty and hide from her, he would know she was about to catch him! (Singh 39)

But Sribehen who acted as his foster parent in the Palash and doted on him was an old lady; Anand did not like her much. When he found out that it was Sribehen who was a hindrance in his adoption, she was burnt down by him. Later he was adopted by a couple, who was in search of a son, and it gave a new direction to Anand's life and his criminal tendency was curbed a bit. "He was becoming a responsible boy and it reflected in his relationship with his new mother" (Singh 78). But after sometime, his mother miraculously conceived and it left him under the threat of going back to Palash again. This critical situation egged his sleeping criminal instinct to come alive. But during his stay with his new parents "he had grown to love his mother, father and little Ananya and didn't want to hurt them in anyway. As he sat in the garden, in a corner amongst the cactus plant, he felt life too was like this, full of thorns" (Singh 82).

Anand's relationship with his new father was also humming with the emotion of love. Once when Ramesh, the father, was back at home from a tiring day, Anand slipped his hand in his father's. "Ramesh stopped on the stairs and with one look in Anand's eyes he gathered, that the boy was aware of the talks taking place. They both had begun to share a silent understanding, a rapport that was rare and beautiful" (Singh 83). After spending a long time in the orphanage, Anand received the love of his parents and the feel what it was to be part of a family. As Alva Myrdal observes, "small children need the permanent, stable devotion of one particular person with whom they can form a close attachment" (124). He was sure of his parents that they will not send him back to the life of drudgery after the birth of the child of their own blood. His mother, Madhu, loved him like his real mother considering no difference between him and little Ananya. But his heart received a terrible jolt when he overheard the conversation between his foster parents. The mother he had accepted fully as his own declared to his father after conceiving a child of her own:

Yes, I wanted a son, but now when we have our own child coming, why we should raise a boy whose birth and origin is a mystery, darling? Who knows whose dirty blood runs in his veins? Ramesh, it's best we get rid of him and send him back. Biji too, would be happy with that. (Singh 85)

Anand had heard the entire conversation that had taken place between his foster parents. Being shocked was an understatement; he was simply shivering with pain, as he did not realize tears were streaming down his eyes. Numbness snuggled in his heart, something he could not decipher himself. In this connection Alva Myrdal aptly says: "maternal deprivation is the result of some calamity and often accompanied by a sudden shock which itself would be sufficient to upset the emotional and mental balance of the child" (125). Such change of behaviour left a permanent scar on the psychology of Anand. Now he was uncertain about everything. He was too grief-stricken to learn the bitter truth that the mother he adored, was keen to get rid of him too. Biji's taunts and painful jolts seem to fade, on hearing his mother's words, which tore through his heart. Anand from a confident, loyal and happy child had turned a defeated and sad person.

This incident made Anand worried about his father's condition too. He felt that Madhu, the mother, plays with people's emotions using them to her benefit and he should put a stop to that, so she does not hurt poor little Ananya and his father too. He racked up his brain to surface those negative emotions of hatred and revenge that had been lying dormant, for some time now. It was time to wake up the devil in him, so little Ananya would not be treated in the same manner, one day. He planned to get the unborn child out of his mother's womb of which she was proud of. He quietly took the mustard oil from the cupboard and went into the bathroom. Anand sprinkled the oil in the bathroom, generously, till the last drop from the bottle was falling slowly. The novelist has aptly described the psyche of a frustrated and insecure child through the character of Anand:

He squeezed the last drop, which simply struggled to come, and while he did so, Anand imagined the bottleneck to be the unborn baby's feeble neck. He had better die, or else his cruel, emotionless mother will one day play with his life too, decided Anand. The devil had arisen again. (Singh 87).

Thus to rephrase Simone de Beauvoir's words, it can be said that one is not born a criminal, but is made. Children like Anand take to the path of crime just because of the inhuman behaviour they receive from the so called cultured and educated society. Time and again, they are made conscious of their adopted status which unconsciously becomes the reason of their anguish and frustration. And it is this element of frustration which leads them towards the path of crime.

Such kind of reception of adopted children determines the importance of intimate bond that these children share with their foster parents. In lack of respect, affection and love it does not take time to turn these children against their parents; sometimes, this act of negligence renders these children psychologically so baffled that they do not give a second thought even before murdering their foster parents. The parental relationship which is so glorified and considered as a touchstone of person's moral self is thus drowned into the pool of hatred. The present novel ends with a serious note that our posterity is at stake of emaciation if the generation gap keeps on widening.

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