

The Little Prince: The Big Lesson

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The Little Prince, a theoretical parable in itself, is capable of evoking emotions related to oneself and the societal fabric of existence in an eloquent manner. This research paper talks about The Little Prince in terms of childhood, identity, and society in the Indian context. How being busy in modern times is confounded with being productive is questioned in this paper. The notion of how development is usually understood is problematic. It is important to understand that a child is not something to be raised. Only learning from experience, freedom, and responsibility is to be fostered. The Little Prince takes us from formality to authenticity. The way of the little prince is not philosophy. His way of life is philosia, where philo means “love” and ousia means “truth.” The Little Prince reminds us that truth is not an escape, but rather the awareness of escape. It is to be noted that childhood as a cultural construction comes out to be a human choice, and the consciousness of childhood comes out to be cultural. Much of childhood remains understood in terms of playing and balancing the cathartic threads of psychoanalysis, culture, and society. Through a psychosocial lens, this paper sheds light on how something hidden is always hyper-present, presenting itself by showing what it shows.

Keywords: The Little Prince, Childhood, Culture, Identity, Society, Development

Through our memories, which are creative laboratories on their own, The Little Prince gives us a retro perspective on understanding the world and ourselves in small doses. The Little Prince is a book that takes thirty minutes to read and thirty lifetimes to understand. The story of ‘The Little Prince’ has been told in such a way that if it were read by the ignorant, they would take it as entertainment. If read by a knowledgeable person, it would become the ultimate secret of life. It can be read at various levels—two, three, four, and five meanings run through it simultaneously. In other words, many paths run together in it without any contradiction. It has offered free will to the reader. A small child will also be happy reading The Little Prince, and the most knowledgeable will also resonate with it. The seeker will find the way, and the

one who has found something will have a new way of looking at things.

“All grown-ups were once children, but only a few of them remember it” (Exupéry, 2011). In other words, the things we have forgotten are not necessarily the things we remember. The Little Prince reminds us that metaphors can be understood by those who understand nostalgia. Quantum theory will work, as one will find oneself a little different after reading the book. One will become overwhelmed, light on occasion, and enchanted on other occasions. Freud’s fort-da, “only little is known,” resembles in its echo a tale. Psychoanalytic and literary truths have common ground in identifying important subjective nuances. The validity of those subjective nuances is such that they quench the thirst of the reader. It quenches one’s soul. The Little Prince de-stabilizes all stable discourses. The Little Prince introduces de-realization by questioning everything. He engages with a question wholeheartedly, unlike adults who have “never mind” in their scripts of

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curiosity, though they are equally vulnerable. The Little Prince would ask one's surface knowledge, "You think you know... tell me what you know."

On Childhood and Development

The Little Prince (Exupéry, 2011) comes as an apologue through which one can see development as a non-neutral term. One must render silence communicable. The modern oppressor is empty from within, like the king whom The Little Prince meets. One yawns and consumes the air of the normative The Little Prince questions the supposed knowledge of the adult. The distinction between child and adult is not one of temporality. It is not circular either. It's orbital. It asks us about the relationship between thinking and imagination. The script of individuality is prefigured—development with a capital D. The apparent lack of development is denoted by -d (minus d). It shows the sociological emptiness of categories in the language of convention. In this way, cultures are rendered deviant.

In our understanding of home, cultures have been displaced, i.e., not taken into consideration. A home is not limited to the nuclear family; it is also a joint family; it includes children living on the streets, in hunger, and in poverty. The question arises about the necessity of having a cultural life and community. Why is it not considered a development? This is how a child's world is destroyed before it is born. Instead of deconstructing or reconstructing childhood, we need to be mindful of how we think of it. A child's early environment is constituted by the unreality of conventional reality and the abnormality of conventional normality.

The Little Prince is a reminder of who we all used to be. This paper is not a commentary on what was written in The Little Prince. For that, reading the book is enough. This paper is about what was left unsaid and the silence that was shared in words. One may track a conceptual category called "childhood" through this pre-figuring of the world of the child, which begins at home—consumers vs. creators (Barthes, 1957). The relationship between vanguard and victim appears to be development. Barthes and the Little Prince ask one to think about the subject one is, and the subject one ends up becoming. How one came to be. It is about coercing desire: I want you to be this. The adult relates to the child via mobility; pursue that (Nandy, 1984; Nieuwenhuys, 1998). Adulthood seeks knowing eyes (relating via mobility) instead of naughty eyes, and it

results in the coercion of desire. Economic independence is gained at the cost of one's innocence.

The Little Prince soothed tumultuous hearts with its pure inquisitiveness and its soft simplicity. The Little Prince delighted his audience and captured their imagination with his perceptive questions and delicate truths. In his childish sincerity, The Little Prince told us that a friend is always unique. Things remain the same, but the outlook changes. It is not about the content; it is about the context. The Fox will remind us that "what is essential is invisible to the eye" (Exupéry, 2011). In an unthought-of manner (Bollas, 1987), The Little Prince talks to us, not at us. Children are living unrelenting critique at the heart of this stable normative discourse (Nandy, 1984; Nieuwenhuys, 1998).

The Little Prince reminds us that truth is not an escape, but rather the awareness of escape. The truth is like a river; it is not a conclusion and never comes to a full stop. It is like what Heraclitus discovered—ever flowing, like a Buddha-field. It also gives one the deepest theory of the kernel of truth, even in psychosis. Marcuse made a philosophical inquiry into Freudian ideas in *Eros and Civilization* (Marcuse, 1962). He asks one to think whether a non-repressed civilization is possible. Marcuse problematizes the reality principle as it has come to be. One can add further that pleasure is also a principle (the pleasure principle). The Little Prince reminds us that one cannot know too quickly. One has traditionally thought of well-being as a psychological phenomenon, even if one knows deep down that political, social, and cultural influences play a role in it. Now replace the word "well-being" with "childhood." One often places the responsibility for well-being on the individual and childhood. It is, however, equally constituted by political forces, as Olga Nieuwenhuys points out, that even childhood is "given" to children (Nieuwenhuys, 1998, p. 278). Familiarity breeds both contentment and contempt. It is that we are interpellated subjects, interpellated by the desire of others from the inside out (Dhar & Chakrabarti, 2014).

The global is the local

The universal does not hold because it is rigid and unmovable. The very reason for which universality asserts itself is its capacity to incorporate the difference as a specific variation. The word "global" is a play; a localized site comes to function as global. The child

and childhood are rendered fixed entities by the dominant image, which becomes the norm. That motif, that image, is being pursued. What one wants to want. Technologically, television, the internet, and social media show what one wants. What intimacy appears to be, rather than what intimacy is, is a “mirage.” The Little Prince reminds us of the existential question “what is” through his inquisitiveness. One begins as an explorer, like in *The Little Prince*, but one is asked to consume that which is available. In the act of observing children, the children are rendered absent. To make sense of *The Little Prince*, one must work through the fact that one will not know what one is about to find.

There is no linear hue—we too are vulnerable to baobabs, as *The Little Prince* is. A child who sells balloons in the streets and a child who purchases the balloons while sitting in a car—both are marginalised in their ways, like a desired “That” in adulthood. The streets show another picture of what childhood is. Its presence quietly and profoundly questions the norms one has subtly imposed and internalised as to what childhood is. A child is rendered, perhaps created in a certain way. The idea of a child is more positively cathectic than the real-life world. Creation is generous enough to allow what is not real. Is it possible to experience true childhood? One will have to tap subliminally at work. An anecdote can be both general and specific. One must not hasten to wither it. It is a place where life stories are supposed to intersect with symbols and rituals of a specific type of modernity (Nieuwenhuys, 1998). Childhood’s dominant thought is a global cultural good (Nieuwenhuys, 1998). Unpacking this script and its foreclosures is a necessity. The central task is not to loot a symbol of its excess; rather, it is an attempt to gain access to the excess. In that attempt, one will find that the global is indeed local (Nieuwenhuys, 1998).

As a child, one’s consciousness is immersed in creating something. Even if one finds something like an object, such as a toy, one would give it one’s originality, and that object would facilitate creative mourning of the loss of the other (Winnicott, 1953). The normative upbringing transforms a child from a creator into a consumer. A lifestyle gets created, and one willingly buys into that lifestyle. The Little Prince reminds one of this: an adult came out of a child. As a reader, you follow an idiosyncratic journey. Criticism is about locating fault lines rather than faults. It is the

difference between knowing and understanding. When people say it is all good, one must ask at what cost?

The foreground of sacralization is propaganda, which feeds and perpetuates (Nieuwenhuys, 1998). The politics of contempt forecloses the politics of content. What is sacred? Childhood is emotionally priceless and economically useless (Zelizer, 1994), with mandatory innocence being the ideal. Otherness is marked in multiple ways. It’s a multiplicity at work in a single. Sacralization is where the ideal idea of childhood eclipses real-life realities. The ideal idea of childhood becomes a projective image, which can also happen via calendar art (Nandy, 1984; Nieuwenhuys, 1998; Uberoi, 2009). The images turn into ideals, and the real child is marginalized. We seek that script too, for it has tamed us.

The Little Prince possessed the Rose—not a rose—as well as three volcanoes, one of which was dormant. The script of adulthood might neglect this wealth. One enters a moral economy before labor. Intrapsychic repression and outside structures of oppression go hand in hand (Marcuse, 1962). An adult turns out to be economically functional, emotionally reminiscent, and a mourner. Will one be able to see the sheep inside the box? While de-centering the world child via a perceptible rendering, the word “child” melts, and one unpacks animality, technology, divinity, and solidarity. Both mutually constitute each other. It is orbital, not temporal. One here unpacks the mundane.

Childhood as it was

Negation is a hidden component of affirmation, and affirmation is a component of negation. While understanding childhood, rendering labyrinths is a constant process. What kind of world is Little Prince preparing for but we are not? We think of a planet, which is the planet, and the Little Prince is capable of thinking on many planets. I, here, am aware of the dangers of romanticization. Here, one must let the difference be different. Work and gender define this and that childhood and adulthood. Every discipline evokes a fantasy of what one will become. The machine keeps running itself. Despair and creative demand go hand in hand. A symptom can return as a difference, which is to say that a symptom cannot be located too quickly (Lacan & Miller, 1993). The presence of the child manifests itself in unprecedented ways. The Little Prince, while talking to Rose, Fox, Snake, etc., explains

matters of consequence or the real meaning of matters of consequence. It takes one to write a creator's script—from routes to roots.

Desire and lack are intertwined. Childhood is divided into two categories: childlike and childish. Abuse of the term "child," use of childhood as dystopia (growing up), and not being childish (Nandy, 1984). C.S. Lewis similarly held that the most grown-up among us are the individuals who have lost the dread of appearing to be childish: "When I became a man, I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up" (Lewis, 1966, p. 25).

The moral economy sanctions, legitimizes, and naturalises what it means to be a child, what you can do, and what you will do with the child. For the sake of growing up, what one does to a child is institutionalised brainwashing (Nandy, 1984). Through Winnicott's lens, one can see that a child is not passive but active. His infant understands what he likes and dislikes. If they dislike something, they will turn their faces away. If they want something, they will cry because they know what they want and they can get it from you (Winnicott, 1989). Similarly, *The Little Prince* is aware of important matters that the King, the Conceited Man, the Tippler, the Businessman, and the Old Gentleman are not. They count, collect, track, and order, missing the beauty of now. We, too, are like that. We lost our this (present) in the pursuit of that. The body gives birth to and posts discourses. *The Little Prince* shows truth, which is different from knowledge. Being authentic and spontaneous is closer to the truth than memorising the Ptolemaic knowledge of the earth being at the centre of the universe.

AshisNandy problematizes the parent-child relationship (Nandy, 1984). "You will do what we were unable to do." As a result, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry did geography and arithmetic. He consumed the knowledge first. He was not allowed to create art or be a creator. His fort-da is a boa constrictor from the inside and a boa constrictor from the outside. The child's ability to be "other than" is rendered "rather than this." In that sense, Other Than becomes another form of "no childhood" (Nieuwenhuys, 1998). From "what does the sound of the voice of your new friend sound like?" to knowledge of figures, things changed (Exupéry, 1943). From qualitative essence to quantifiable facts, the politics of interest get realigned. d.

As a margin, home as the child's centre is called into question (Nieuwenhuys, 1998). Happy homes turn

out to be the fantasy of the streets. The threatening Other blended into the vulnerable's imagination becomes perfect protection for the weak. Through the corner of one's eyes, one can see the adult's terror of childhood. AshisNandy said one needed to be savage to be a child, but one feared being savage to be a child (Nandy, 1984). Childhood, as a cultural construct, reveals itself to be a human choice. It is about the political psychology of a shared concept: "childhood." The consciousness of childhood turns out to be cultural. Childhood is seen as an imperfect transitional state (Nandy, 1984). The dual is at work here: absence and presence. The exploitation of children ensures the persistence of a tortured childhood within each adult as a flawed consciousness (Nandy, 1984). It comes as a reminder that growing up is not a problem; forgetting is (Exupéry, 2011).

The Little Prince is also for "the child from whom this grown-up grew" (Exupéry, 2011). It will lead us to the realisation of how much one depends on adults and how much one depends on others to be adults with me. The audience of the text is also the active retro-perspective of a childhood reduced to echoes of knowing in adulthood. This would give one the script of one's history too—a modern history. It enables access to liminal and subliminal states during adulthood and childhood (Nandy, 1984). A twenty-seven-year-old man entering the clinic could be a seven-year-old child. In other words, it is the timeless affect that manifests itself rather than the chronological affect..

Although written in a language, this phenomenal fable has transcended languages and cultures. Although it is written in words, it has gone beyond words. Like the rose in *The Little Prince*, the book is unique to all readers. As the *Little Prince* was fond of sunsets, the book too is a transitional space (Winnicott, 1953), where inside and outside become less precise and the reader gets a taste of the creator within. It is in the imagination of the reader that the book lives. Not only does the *Little Prince* exist as a parody of so much of what we are told to accept as we grow older, but it also begs many of us to use a tool we often forget we have—our imagination. *The Little Prince* awakens in us, if only for a few moments, our inner child, and one sees clearly again. It is when one allows oneself to imagine, to wonder, and to love that one can be a child even when one is a grown-up. That is the gift the book will pass on from generation to generation. One can do with being a little less grown-up.

It is not about thinking. It is not about agreeing or disagreeing. It is not a matter of believing or disbelieving. It is about understanding. From understanding, the possibility of living emanates. The work of *The Little Prince* happens when the reader has forgotten the words. The Little Prince has something to do with one's consciousness, not with one's character. If a person becomes more conscious, their character is naturally transformed. But that transformation is different. It is not managed by the mind—it is natural and spontaneous, and whenever one's character is natural and spontaneous, it has a beauty all its own.

The only purpose of life is life itself. We are very engaged in doing things, so much so that one thinks one is breathing life when it is the other way around—life is breathing us. If one allows it, forgotten treasures and wonders can return. Only if one allows one's love and imagination to take one where one truly needs to go. In doing so, one would always find a home. Often, one finds oneself in the barrens of imagination, where fellow travellers make quiet promises to themselves. The promises one makes in one's imagination are not imaginary promises. That is the ground for authenticity that *The Little Prince* asks one to be in touch with. The Little Prince is not asking one to render imaginary friends; it is asking one to reconnect with imagination as a friend. The book asks the reader to imagine, just as the pilot had to imagine that *The Little Prince* is fine after all. If one asks oneself deeply, one will find that the Little Prince is, indeed, back with his rose.

Loss evolves, much to our surprise, into gain. Playfulness is not ecstatic in the sense that it gives one just the knowledge of reality; it brings one closer to the reality that one is. It is a movement from noesis to being. From askesis to ekstasis *The Little Prince* touches the element, which is very much present but hitherto unknown. The Little Prince asks one to think about the subject. The subject one eventually became. How we came to be, how I came to be, how you came to be

On Helping and Interference

A child is not to be helped. A child needs love, autonomy, and a facilitating environment (Winnicott, 1989), not help. A child needs nourishment and support. The potential of a child is unknown, and help is of no

use when the goal is unknown. Help is indeed a beautiful word, but here it becomes the very reason for interference in the discovery of a child's potential. Power is disguised as help. Despite all the help from parents, family, relatives, neighbors, teachers, and priests, a child remains lost. Autonomy is different from help. To grant a child autonomy means to facilitate trust and freedom, whereas the modern consumer culture gives help, which implicitly means interference, dominance, control, and often also emotional manipulation. French paediatrician and psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto talks about non-interference (Dolto, 2013) as one of the most important elements of education. In other words, doing nothing is a great help. In modern society, children are in eternal fusion with their parents because the consumer paradigm requires it for its survival. *The Little Prince* tells us in such an honest way that children are explorers and creators, for whom one's assistance is required, not one's interference.

Discussion

We are written on just as much as we are written on. In other words, we cannot discuss being in the world without also discussing the world in which we are being. In one's every effort to talk about childhood, there are possibilities to eclipse it. One is honest to the extent one's memory allows. *The Little Prince* questions our knowing and how, through the script of childhood and our internalised imago, we create the child. Adults need protection too. *The Little Prince* and Exupéry both need water to quench their thirst (Exupéry, 1943). *The Little Prince* shows the ticklish relationship between childhood and adulthood. d. Both come first in their respective domains—thinking and knowing, respectively. One oscillates between protection and discontent, where halting the instinct comes with a price (Marcuse, 1962). Sublimation and production create a soundproof glass door between something that speaks and something that we know cannot speak. k. Are you able to listen to a Rose?

The work of *The Little Prince* is subtle. *The Little Prince* is best understood when the reader is lost and only what is read is there. It is a site where the reader and the reading become one. When one calms one's voice and is influenced by western thought (a western that), one's secret self speaks. It is not that tame; it is attached and detached like dew on a leaf. What one

has tamed comes with what one has tamed, and from what one has tamed comes the responsibility of which one is afraid (Exupéry, 1943). The tale of Sita in India is a tale of silent suffering (Nandy, 1995). Silence has decibels in psychoanalytic terms. It is necessary to recognise the thingifying of childhood and adulthood experiences. The task of liberating the child cannot be done without liberating the adult. It is about the aesthetic of the prism, not just the passive aesthetic of reflective mirrors (Nandy, 1984; Nieuwenhuys, 1998). Crises are not always negative, for there comes the possibility.

We will have to transform the script of this word “oppression” as the child suffers on the battleground of traditional traditions and modern values (Nandy, 1984). The images in *The Little Prince* are significant. The watercolour illustrations take one into a state of reverie. It will come as a particular kind of imagery capable of evoking emotions. Baby icons (Uberoi, 2009) will fit the representation of a child through the lens of adulthood, which is consumed by us and creates afterimages of dominant perception around reality, which forecloses *The Little Prince*’s voice, one’s secret self. The lotus in Ganesha’s hand would become an object incapable of communicating its subjectivity. Suffering overlooked this eye. Music was the same; we fell in love with different effects. The script is delivered as a script, which is hidden behind cryptic effects.

People say that music is an escape. It is one of the ways to forget one’s miseries, sufferings, and disappointments in life. Simply put, one may say that music is one of the ways to forget oneself. We feel light when we forget ourselves. Moving away from oneself becomes synonymous with moving away from the deadening parts of oneself and from all that burdens us. However, that is not the case. Music is not an escape; it is the awareness of the escape. Why does *The Little Prince* stick with us even after we’ve forgotten about him? It is because it is not an escape. It reminds us of the escape that one has as an adult. a compliance zone rather than an exploration zone. It gives a taste of what Jiddu Krishnamurti, a pioneer mystic and philosopher, refers to as “choiceless awareness” (Krishnamurti, 2012).

Conclusion

The way of the little prince was not philosophy. His way of life was philoia, where philo means “love”

and ousia means “truth” (Hass, 1958), or real (of) matters of consequence, rather than love for wisdom or knowledge. It is love for the truth, be it palatable or unpalatable. Delayed gratification is learned, and dams are created in the river of curiosity for electricity purposes (productivity). Dams were missing in *The Little Prince*; he never let go of a question (Exupéry, 1943). “To speak of repression is to speak of the crime of joie de vivre.” Tuning in to the specific frequency and affective cognitive texture of the moment is required. *The Little Prince*’s scarf reflects his life experiences. Questions about *The Little Prince* appear like knocks on our door of knowing. He reminds us that it is beautiful to think about something other than oneself (Exupéry, 1943). One needs to learn to arrive by listening to his knock. *The Little Prince* teaches what acceptance is through its relationship with the Rose. The shade is not possible without the sun. Despite this, people adore the shade and say nothing but negative things about it. One divides the sun into good and bad breasts, taking the term from an object-relational psychoanalyst named Melanie Klein. *The Little Prince* reminds us to appreciate the beauty of sunsets; we must, after all, see the sunset. Only through complete acceptance can the narratives of childhood and adulthood be cathartically joined. Wholeness can be attained through the integration of the breast. Socrates will be where Plato was. Our hearts will be where the little prince was.

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