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### **Constructing the Unconscious : The Reality of Childhood dreams in Lila Majumdar's Holde Pakhir Palok**

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#### **Abstract**

Dreams have a quintessential association with childhood and bulk of children's literature seems to correlate this in an intrinsic manner with imagination. The images and aspirations associated with early years of life have been synonymous with thoughts which take shelter in our dreams. The inherent associations of childhood reading and encounters with Mermaid, Fairies and Ghosts to Hogwarts Castles repetitively tell us that successful characters and ideas created for the young minds impinge on the scope of dreams or 'dream- scope'. It depends on the landscape of the story and the author's design entirely as to how the journey between reality and fantasy appear to seem as one common narrative. In her novel Holde Pakhir Palok Lila Majumdar weaves a tale of distant lands and after life stories built in the reality of childhood belief that takes a new leap in the realm of poetic justice. Here an ordinary tale of two siblings Rumu and Bogi living in a humble village turn extra ordinary when they live the intangible experiences in chronicles and happenings around them. The coincidental narratives in the novel are catapulted to the sphere of disbelief wherein the search extends to a devout domain.

**Keywords:** Childhood, reality, dreams, imagination, belief.

#### **Article**

When we seal our eyes while reading most of Lila Majumdar's text what we see is absolute beauty. What remains embedded in our thoughts as a consequence is a Ray of empathy, we see words etched in light filled with intensity and that she has endlessly at ease penned flowers of sunshine. These flowers are like the gunomoni flower which blooms only if rooted in pile of ashes and dust. She gifts the reader an eye to dream which reaps magic and makes despair disappear from human mind and life. The magical fruit if possessed keeps away all pain from its owner.

It is not a collection of fantasia but a feast of vivid beauty of the larger world that sequentially unfolds which unless experienced life remains a gloom. Her writings liberate us from the mundane reality of everyday life and moves towards an eternal beauty. In the novel Holde pakhir palok<sup>1</sup> (The Yellow bird) two little siblings Rumu and Bogi learn from Jhogru that, love is not only about possessions but its beauty can be seen through dispossession and sadness, which lies in longing for 'Dumka', Jhogru's homeland. The entire narrative transverses between truth and mystery reaching to the road of chaste daylight between a lost young dog, two little kids and Jhogru their servant who has severed his roots from Dumka his homeland. All of them bond with sheer selfless love.

The sole endeavor of the writer and creator is to tell a story which creates a land of splendor. To cleanse the gathering moss of a banal daily existence and seeing it in new light with endless possibilities which form to create a projection of the world that does not exist anymore - is the enduring universe of the author in this story.

In a mystic morning the gunomoni tree planted by Rumu and Bogi bears the first flower, in the same evening Bhulo their lost pet dog returns home and the little child in Jhogru's house disappears. It was said that he left for Dumka with his parents. Is it that the child has returned to them as Bhulo? When Rumu asks his brother Bogi such a question Bogi in his

puzzled self recurred on something Jhogru had earlier stated to him. Where truth ends and dream begins is difficult to fathom.

And from here opens the fetters. The wondrous tale of the novel *Holde pakhir palok* becomes a bounteous experience of stories embedded inside a story, traversing between the mesh of fact and fiction, real and unreal opening up a counterpoint of every event that takes place in the narrative. The story figuratively unravels itself into an unseen hallway where staircases and tunnels lead into time.

‘We’ the readers who have forgotten most of their childhood dreams and stories will experience a sensation of reliving the past with a deep breadth and eyes wide shut. With a little touch of delight one can feel the unusual sense of dreamy bright spirit rally from the inside. We realize that the writer Lila Majumdar who is sharing her childhood tales understands the ‘me’ within myself to the core, the ‘me’ that the reader is unaware of. As a child when we sprint to the end of the story and take a breadth of relief that all is well, it is then we are faced with a new inscrutability that our boy Bogi is also perturbed with. The hanging thread between belief and disbelief makes us clueless in a deep sea of the unknown looking for an answer to the strange coincidences. Later with age the same lonesome self, tired reaches home after the day’s grill and see a ray of yellow beam falling from the streetlights through the broken window panes call us with a whisper into the dark shower room perhaps we momentarily familiarize it with the flight of light as the yellow feather which extends to a healing touch and here the logical self in us is put to trial which is epitomized in the character Bogi in the novel. This is where the writer continually presents her free flowing existence in our lives.

We the readers then get set for our journey to *khoai* under the guardianship of Jhogru with Rumu and Bogi in the search of diamonds and flowers on the snakes head, seeking which is the journey as the splendor of existence lies in the search (*Pelei toh moja phuriye gelo*).

The terrain of *khoai* signals to the enduring call for a specific locale that is Shantiniketan. This is where the novel *The Yellow Bird* was written. In the words of the writer – ‘It was spinning in my soul, it felt like claustrophobia and I was unable to concentrate on anything else. So I took a week’s leave from Shantiniketan and wrote the entire novel in 6 days. I think I did it not write the story it came to me as a captive.’<sup>2</sup>

So the space of Shantiniketan, its air and sunshine flow ceaselessly into the novel. Not *khoai* alone the novel also hints on several other aspects like the cloud of dust at the fairground, the jungle of Sal which seems uncanny after sundown. As if the weird trees, blood red skyline are like the strange mystic trees as was once painted by Rabindranath Tagore is relived and this blends with Jhogru’s *dumka* and makes it immortal. Moreover *Dumka* expands its horizon to Shillong where the the *khasi aya Illban*, *Kakmi Doren* or *Kakmi Ubin* come as shadows in the character of Jhogru. These intrinsic childhood memories of the writer<sup>3</sup> merge into the story of the novel. There is nothing impossible in Jhogru’s *Dumka*. The place as seen by Lila Majumdar is a collage between dream and truth, real and not so real, our rationale earth and distant heaven. Jhogru’s nostalgic homeland *Dumka* is perhaps the lost Eldorado of childhood - a land where strange incidents happen time and again. It is a land where feetless, voiceless yellow birds fall to the ground when they are suddenly struck on their wings. Then if a dog eats the bird it gets transformed to a human being with brown eyes and sharp pointed ears.

The crisis is that it is difficult to belief such stories like Rumu believes. Several questions – why does Bhulo the dog vanishes after bringing home the yellow feather, and how does the fat dark child appear in Jhogru’s house with curly hair, brown eyes and sharp pointed ears. It smiles when called Bhulo and starts sobbing aloud when asked why did he eat the yellow feathered bird. Here the growing search for rationale in Bogi counters with disbelief of the logical self. However the questioning leads him to finally submit himself to the world of belief. A child does not need a talisman to dream. The saga of dreams

(Khoabnama) is quintessential with childhood. So also an infirmity is experienced as a state of dreams. When the children fall sick the stories of Nathu seem a reality devoid of logical questioning.

In Dumka Jhogru has seen trees which walk by, he talks of wood-fairies and horses who have feathers and wings, all of which are elements of fantasia which is justified as reality with coincidences where Jhogru the servant questions Bogi the boy in the novel at counterpoint – ‘Why do you not believe in things that are not written in books? After all how much of truth can be contained in books? That is the difference between you and me. We believe what we see never question how it all happened.’ So here Jhogru the believer and Bogi the rationalist try to argue each incident of fantasia surrounded with an obscure reality. Holde pakhir palok or the bird with the yellow feather is such an instance of a written piece where disbelievers would be denied an entry.

Not only the magical childhood but it is also evidential the ethos novelist Lila Majumdar wished to pass on to the growing kids Rumu and Bogi - it is the essence of what she believes encompasses life in entirety. In the story Nathu had commented –there is no root in the heart of money but the heart of compassion has its roots for sure. The writer sows the seeds of love and compassion in young hearts and waters it. Like the gunomoni tree if life does not experience pain and sadness it does not grow. She pushes the young mind to make an earthy journey through the stories and interaction of Jhogru and his friends Nathu, Nandu and Lakhania who represent the rustic loyal world of believers.

When the dreamy wrap of the story is untangled we discover a story of crisis, exploitation, denial and poverty that is fuelling the underprivileged mankind’s desire to churn life replenishing the thin line between dream and reality-a life that is surrounded by myth and mystery. They fight for basic living and sustenance and yet their dreams have not ceased which is perhaps unfathomable for people who are born privileged. The sudden splatter of a yellow feathered bird can generate immense happiness which a calculative bookworm will fail to realize. Those who are happy run away from it as they move out in search of sorrow because they have never experienced what it takes to be sad. Similar to these reflective words of Jhogru the story constantly flows and meanders around insights which can be achieved only with a profound understanding of ones existence, and making it flow through paragraphs and chapters in a novel for children is a demanding feat.

Imagination however bizarre maybe has a root in reality believed Lila Majumdar. <sup>4</sup> So the Dumka of Jhogru’s dream often unveils when we see the village in reality and the writer does not hide it from her little readers. Is there anything which we can call entirely real? In a foggy forest when a log of wood is mistaken as the bust of a tiger-then what is untrue? If the log of wood is true then the seeming tiger is also true, both are truth of two different moments. Truth therefore has to be weighed in both directions. The design of imagination or dreams never impinge on the validity or existence of such tales in reality however much unkempt or story less a reality it might be. The writer does not ignore the reality or surpass the object but transforms it and this is the mastery of Lila Majumdar. What she builds as a story is never a substitute of the disheveled reality but its unkempt compliment. She seamlessly opens the rainbow of life –a life which takes us to a new horizon-a story of wonderland close to nature.

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