

Research Article

Identity Issues that Orphans Face Part 2

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A B S T R A C T

Sants (1964), the Social Scientist, gave importance to the the confusion resulting from a lack of a Sense of Identity. He termed it, "Geneological bewilderment", stemming from the lack of the anchor that a family gives, which is foundational to a person's perspective of self.

Purkey (1988), a Cognitive Psychologist also recognised the importance of "ROOTS" in the formation of a healthy sense of self that is challenged in times of challenges thrown up by life. This paper seeks the veracity of this phenomenon through Literature, a mirror of life.

Keywords: Identity, Belonging, Cognitive Psychology, Roots, Resolution, Identity Crisis

Introduction

What orphans lack is a family, an anchor, a place in society, a family name and a history which creates a void in their lives in terms of the impetus a family gives to the rest of us, someone who believes in us, a support system when things get tough and a name that propels us in society in getting admission in school, college, hospital, a name on a certificate, an introduction and an ancestry. In orphans, this results in a defensive attitude which makes it difficult for them socially, resulting in non-acceptance which they seek all their lives. This angst is termed 'identity crisis' which is compounded when any unresolved crisis occurs in life. Through case histories and interviews, this aspect comes through loud and clear.

A Sense of Belonging and Relation to Identity Issues

The need to belong is a strong driving force in every human being even if we have families. In schools we search for peer groups, best friends, cliques and a circle of friends who bring in an element of belonging and approval so important in the growth of our emotional and social selves, how much more the orphans who lack a family, the giver of the basic sense of belonging, acceptance and approval.

Anyone who has ever questioned their past history, past decisions and past circumstances can relate to this study.

In the movie, 'Renaissance Man', a young trainee cadet joins the American army. His father had served in the army but had given his life for his mates and was an unsung hero, something that bothered this young cadet. He had been ribbed about it in school where his schoolmates made fun of his father saying that he was a no-good soldier, amounting to nothing. His instructor cared enough to find out about this young cadet's father and on graduation day, his father was posthumously granted a silver medal for his act of bravery for saving his fellow soldier's lives.

The reaction of the young cadet says it all. He is deeply moved at this unexpected act. He accepts the star but a little later as he stands through the rest of the ceremony, he smiles, puffs up his chest, squares his shoulders, puts his chin up and stands proud and tall. Knowledge about his father that was made in public, made him stand tall and proud. He knew whose he was and where he had come from.

One's roots in family and native land are important. A similar tale is told in 'A Single Square Picture' (2002) by Patricia A. Moore. In the Tyra Banks Show on the 30th of August '07, Byron met his father from whom he had been separated after of his parents' divorce. He had one overwhelming urge and that was to 'bond with his father', 'bridge the gap' and 'be accepted'. He wanted to prove to his father that he was now a man and not a rejected little boy. He invited his

father to watch him play a match. At the end of the game, he turned victorious to his father and crying said, 'I did it!'

Review of Literature

Research for literature to accurately represent the orphan angst in depth, could hardly come up with anything that matched real life as seen through the case histories and interviews. There are adventures like Huckleberry Finn, romance in the form of Jane Eyre and the like but it was observed that the pain of not belonging that gnaws away at the heart and normality of an orphan are not available for those who might become wiser by reading. In 'The Shadow Man' (1978) Gordon states: 'We have lost our dead. They are no longer ours. We will not have them back. Whatever I learn about my father, I will not see his face or hear his voice or feel his hand taking mine, as I often pretend to, stretching my hand out in the darkness.'

The Basis of the Research

Why are Roots and Belonging so important?

In 'Final Payments (1976) Gordon writes: 'My past was the most interesting thing about me. What I came from was more compelling than I was. Would it be cheating to use the past as a touchstone? It was because I felt the present to be so fragile that I thought I must present the past.'

The concept of 'Roots' is one's identity firmly entrenched in one's psyche is the archetype of who we are, where we come from and where we are going. This sense of direction is possible only if the inner sense of identity is tempered with the sure knowledge of one's belongings firmly entrenched no matter where one goes or what one undergoes; it creates vast reserves of balance that makes one functional in society. It is not just the superficial knowledge of the ancestry, land, culture or family of a person; it is not just the geographical location that one is bounded by. It is the sure inner knowledge, the niche that one is able to create within these parameters and instate for future times and decisions.

In 'Inheritance of Loss', by Kiran Desai, Biju, on arrival to Calcutta after his stint as an illegal immigrant in America feels: 'Biju stood there in that dusty tepid soft sari night. Sweet drabness of home- he felt everything shifting and clicking into place around him, felt himself slowly shrink back to size, the enormous anxiety of being a foreigner ebbing- that unbearable arrogance and shame of the immigrant his vision blurred and he found he could see clearly.'

In the wonderful book, 'The Poisonwood Bible' (1998) Leah Price, one of the four daughters of Nathan Price, a missionary to the Belgian Congo, laments over her angst of not being a native of the place: 'But we've ended up giving up body and soul to Africa, one way or another. Each of us got our heart buried in six feet of African dirt. I rode

back and forth on my chair like a baby, craving so many impossible things, justice, forgiveness, redemption. I want to belong somewhere to scrub the hundred year's war off this white skin till there's nothing left and I can walk among my neighbours wearing raw sinew and bone, like they do.'

The longing to belong is so strong that Leah, a white wants to scrub her skin till all the white comes off and she looks the way the blacks do. Her yearning to belong goes deeper than the colour of the skin. She wants to be able to walk with her neighbours without distinguishing marks and live like they do. No matter what the colour of the skin is, the dominant culture is what the minority culture wants to ape. Hay Winner has said in 'Hay Winner's Search for Identity': "and I think the visit to these countries (quest) to my heritage, were very important in understanding where I'm up to, where I belong and where I'll be going." The three phases are important; where I'm up to- where I belong and where I'll be going.

The Aim of the Research

Identity and The Importance of Roots

The book is about the author's search for her identity between her Welsh African and Latin American roots which she tries to unravel. She is confused about who she really is and she sets out to research her sense of belonging. This saga is the crisis of identity pertaining to roots, "as a child growing up in Llandudno, North Wales that somehow to be half Welsh and half Afro Caribbean was to be half of something but never quite anything whole at all" In, 'Hay Winner's Search for Identity: 'I felt like I was back. After all these years, I was home again, standing on the soil of my ancestors.'

In 'The Kite Runner' (2003) Khaled Hosseini has written about the protagonist Amir going back to his homeland Afghanistan after he gets a letter that the little son of his childhood friend is alive but his whereabouts are not known. Amir feels responsible for the little fellow and decides to go on a quest to search for Sohrab and to provide a home for him in America. In the Pulitzer Prize winning novel 'The Colour Purple' (1989) by Alice Walker, Nettie, the protagonist's sister who has gone to New York, Harlem, writes about the Black people and their children and how they give money for the people in Africa even though they have never seen the land themselves. They have been away for centuries and generations, yet the call of their land lies upon their hearts:

'They live in such beauty and dignity, Celie. They give and give and then give some more, when the name Africa is mentioned. They love Africa. They defend it at the drop of a hat ...please give these to the children of Africa.' What sense of belonging makes these children defend Africa which they have never seen? Why is there such a keen

sense of roots? In what mysterious ways has their long lost identity been engraved into their psyche in such indelible ways and what is its importance?

The Case with what Orphans lack

Identity and 'roots' are inexplicably linked to each other. One belongs to a geographical place and those are one's roots. The identification with the place, culture, food, colour of skin, hair etc. means that such people have common roots and identity. On the other hand when this crisis strikes orphans they cannot find any source of strength, because of the non-availability of ancestors, roots and belonging. They falter and go to pieces because when they turn around for help they find that they do not have a person or an agency which would care to help in an ongoing way. Their identity is a complete void to them. 'Adoption in India' by Vinita Bhargav (2005) 'Living with a biological family provides one with a much needed mirror, which reflects bits of one's own personality in that of one's parents, siblings and members of the extended family...When the individual is disconnected from her biological family, important aspects of her past and future are obscured. An adopted child has no biological examples to which to turn.

'Inside the Haveli' by Rama Mehta portrays what the meaning of having ancestors is for those of us who have them: 'Its people who have no memory of what Udaipur was like, they don't know what they did, who they worshipped and what joy or sorrow they felt. They don't belong to the soil of Mewar; they have come to the town because of work; they love the lakes and the low-lying hills that keep them cool in the hot summer months.' They don't belong because they do not have an ancestry there like the protagonist in the novel. This creates a void in their belief systems, traditions and even their faith which is passed on through the keepers of family tradition. It is for this reason that they feel lost and need specialised help in building up their sense of identity.

Radius of the Research

Awareness of the other sections of Society

There is no awareness that there are people like orphans in society who will need specialised help. Counselling or committed help is definitely needed in the absence of ancestry or support systems like 'family'. Using the information from immigrant study of which there is no dearth, the knowledge obtained will be applied to orphan research to discover some truths that could be of help to them and to writers. More than any other group orphans are beset with this drive to find out their roots and belonging as was observed during the survey and research. There is enough evidence in oral records but not enough that can be quoted from literature that is an accurate representation.

It would be extremely difficult to understand and empathise

with, the loss of parents that the orphans have to accept and live with. They have lost their dead forever without any hope of seeing their face, hearing their voice, feeling their hand, something they can only imagine but have never had the opportunity of knowing. In 'The Shadow Man' (1978) Gordon writes about the desperate hope to belong: 'I called Ronald Gordon. Ron and I are both hoping for a connection. Two Gordons, coming from Vilna, to Lorain...hoping that Ron Gordon and I will look alike.' How does one cherish or relate to a blank memory? It is here that the writer can supply surrogate experiences with understanding and the orphaned children can identify with them when they build their imaginary world with exaggerated characters, traits and feelings. Here it is that they can exchange shadowy nothings with genuine information. Here it is that they can meet their reality, coloured with their dreams and longings; something they never let go of. Gordon goes on to say: 'I still feel uprooted, but at least I knew what I was about. I was looking for the place where my father and I could be one again. I peered through the fog for the glimpse of a man who could not be touched. I knew I wouldn't see my father's face again or feel his breath or hear his voice but if I was journeying back in memory to places we had been together, I was engaged in a quest that was not only admirable but, most important, meaningful.

If Gordon was peering through a fog to find her father whom she had seen, how much would the orphan yearn to tear the fog through to find any feeling of belonging in and through people they have not seen, families they do not have? Could the writer make this journey meaningful? Could literature offer solace and find a place for them to rest? 'At the same time, I want to be in contact with anything to do with his past, more than anything, I want to be with him and I think it is at least possible that I can be with him more completely if I have more information about his life.' For an orphan these are such pathetic sentiments; 'anything' is such a vast word, a word grasping at the wind in the hope of pulling out any tiny bit of information which would be enough to sustain her lifelong, enough to justify her quest.

Orphans can never have their parents back but they yearn for any information about them. In 'The Poisonwood Bible' (1993), Adah Price writes on the memory of her father, 'He was my father. I own half his genes and all of his history. Believe this: the mistakes are part of the story, I am born of a man who believed he could tell nothing but the truth.' Orphans lack all that - knowledge about ancestry, who they were, what they did, what was their place in society, therefore what was their own place in society, are issues they struggle with. Halima Bashir in 'The Tears of The Desert.' 'Sometimes though, I wondered why I didn't run a similar clinic in my home village. At least there I would have my family around me in case of trouble'. In times of a crisis, they do not have the solace of having their family

around them. 'If I did, they might be waiting for me and they might take me again. I had to go to my village. It was the only place where I might be safe from them.

Genealogical Bewilderment

When and if an orphan looks back for a safe haven where does she go? Whom can she bank on? After Halima goes to her village to serve her people as a doctor, she is accosted by the very people who had tortured her: 'So, you are the new doctor,' he sneered. 'We hear you'd come here to serve your people - the Zaghawa. Is that true? When an orphan belongs 'to your people' there is the other aspect of 'serving' them, of being a contributive member of the community. Lack of belonging creates other problems for them which another person like Halima does not even have to think about or strive for. Sants (1964) elaborated further on the consequence of lack of knowledge of one's genealogy. He introduced the term 'genealogical bewilderment'. This he described as a state of confusion and uncertainty in a child who has no knowledge or only uncertain knowledge of her parents. It could lead to the development of poor self-esteem and a confused sense of identity.

One such search in real life is the story of Izidor Ruckel being written here. Izidor Ruckel's story: He was ten when he came to America after having spent those ten years in orphanages, foster homes and institutions in Romania, his homeland. His was a story with a difference. He was old enough to remember much and old enough to want to keep in touch with the nurses who had looked after him. With the help of the T.V who helped finance his journey, he went back to Romania and managed to find his parents who had abandoned him when he was three. What made him want to search for his parents? What made him want to go back to his native land? The same driving force that made Gordon want to find out about her father and his background which she wrote about in 'The Shadow Man' (1978). He writes that his memories of those ten years were not ones to cherish: 'It was like being brain dead. You got smacked on the head with a broom stick. They didn't believe we deserved an education.' After he was adopted, his new parent's home-schooled him because he hardly knew any English. He picked up slowly and went to regular school later. He says: 'I think anyone can learn if you have the patience and the courage to work with them step by step.'

He hopes his visit will be fruitful, by others becoming aware of the plight of Romanian orphans, just as Halima Bashir did in 'The Tears of the Desert' (2008). He hopes to write about it to make the need come to the forefront through his writings. He has met his several of his other siblings. His adoptive mother hopes that he will be a wiser and more responsible person by the time he gets back, that his life will have sorted out his questions and his unrest; that his quest in the hope of finding himself is successful if he can

resolve the issues troubling him, if he can find his identity in the finding of his parents. Therefore a broad scope of Identity could be termed as follows:

The Applicability of the Research

Definition of Social Sciences

Social Sciences: Described identity as a term that denotes an individual's comprehension of himself as a discrete, separate entity. It pertains to a person's view, self-image or the mental model of self. This concept of self is known as personal identity, which every person has developed over the growing years, coming to a place of self comfort. In her book Vinita Bhargav states, 'An important developmental goal for a school-age child is to establish herself beyond the domain of the immediate family. What teachers, friends and others say gains importance vis-a-vis what a parent may suggest. Thus the opinion of the peer group may challenge the assertion of a parent. This process sometimes brings the child into conflict with the parents. Therefore, it can be stated that personal identity is a reflection is the social identity granted to one.

Definition of Cognitive Psychology

Cognitive psychology defines identity as that which refers to the capacity for self reflection and self-awareness on the part of an individual. There are two terms that are widely used to describe 'self' or 'identity'. The thinking or the cognitive aspect of the self which is directly related to the image one has of self is described by Purkey in 1988, 'The totality of a complex organised and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence. The next is related to self-esteem. This is directly related to the emotional aspect of the self. It is connected to how an individual perceives his self worth or the value one attributes to oneself. In 1994, Franken stated that, Self-Concept is related to self esteem. People who have good self esteem have a clearly differentiated self concept. When people know themselves they can maximise outcomes because they know what they can and cannot do.'

Conclusion

Relation between Self concept and Self esteem

Self-concept and self-esteem are dynamic and can therefore be changed or modified due to situations, changes or shifts in the external or the internal environment of the person. Therefore the perception of self that one has in relation to the environment, the comfort zone that one has created over time and the recognition that one has as an equal in society leads to a particular niche one has been able to carve for oneself, in the sphere of one's identity. This is the concept of 'Identity' that one has. These are those invisible lines around each individual; that separate one person from the

other, they also serve as a permeable membrane that allow the movement of the person's interactions with the world and with other people around him. When this protective boundary that keeps the person intact is disturbed in some of the following ways:

- By intrusions by other people that violate that line and the trust of the person.
- By situations that leave the person exposed in such a way as to damage the security of the person.
- By the problems that are created by the simple act of living in the world. A crisis is created within that individual that needs more than the usual coping skills to deal with the problems. The affirmation of these boundaries by providing a conducive environment gives us a cosy and comfortable zone known as our healthy identity.

When these boundaries are respected by others, we have a strong sense of identity. We learn to move comfortably within these boundaries without impinging upon the boundaries of other people. People with healthy identities, respect the boundaries of other people. They do not walk in and out of these lines. Vinita Bhargav in her book, 'Adoption in India' (2005) states, 'The findings suggest that behavioural, emotional and attitudinal conflicts bring out a child's sense of loss. Most adopted children experience considerable ambivalence about being adopted during this phase. (Singer. et.al.1982) In addition to attitudinal change there is an increase in anger, aggression, oppositional behaviour, uncommunicativeness, depression and self-image problems that may emerge during this period among adopted children. (Brinich 1980; Brodzinsky 1990, Nickman; 1985). This emotional and behavioural pattern reflects a process of adaptive grieving response to the understanding that one has lost someone significant. (Brodzinsky 1987)

A Clear Concept of Identity is Imperative

This is why a clear concept of Identity is imperative. Should the standard not be established, it will not be possible to work within defined parameters and lay the foundations of the rest of the research. It is for this reason that Gordon has been chosen to represent the orphan angst. She has usually defined her female protagonists within the confines of the patriarchal social and religious submission. From there she takes her protagonist through a realistic journey, not of arriving at the resolution overnight, equipped with the right and permanent parameters of identity but through the realistic path of a girl left to her own resources, taking the right and the wrong turns in the path of life, paying for her wrong choices, but the final product of the experimentation and the search is a person the protagonist is comfortable with, for the rest of her life. Rosenberg and Horner (1991) stated that, in struggling with the identification with good and bad parents, good and bad self, the child works towards

an integration of her roots and experiences of upbringing. The birth parent romance can be overcome if this integrity is achieved. She would have trod the path of the crisis, the search and the arrival at the comfortable niche in a credible manner which can be of help to anyone who is going through a similar problem. The journey from the unformed, incomplete person to the turmoil's of life to the final settling down is the reasons why this author was chosen specifically.

Further Research

Every research is limited within the boundaries of the topic. Much research is needed on this topic and focussed research under the various aspects of different countries, different social strata, educational level, religious leaning, economic background and more importantly the acceptance levels of orphans in society: these will be worthy topics to explore.

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