Research Article

Identity Issues that Orphans Face Part 1

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A B S T R A C T

Belonging impacts identity which is derived from one's ancestry and the society one lives in which is denied to orphans culminating in an Identity Crisis.

Resolving this crisis involves a Quest that orphans get involved in.

The aim of this research has been to:

To highlight the plight of this invisible micro-minority, to give them a focus, a voice and recognition is the aim of this research. To observe, establish, determine, verify, apply and present the findings to the world of literature and society.

This has been done through Research, Review of Literature, the use of Psychoanalysis in the works of Erikson, Franken, June Dwyer, Jules Chametzky, Daniel Fischer, Ostendorf etc. through records, Interviews, Case Histories and Surveys.

Keywords: Orphan Angst, Orphan Identity, Identity Crisis, Acceptance, Displacement, Rootlessness, Individual Identity, Positive and Negative Identities, Social Identity, Loci of Control, Unresolved Conflicts, Resolution

Introduction

Literature has been a mirror of life through the ages assimilating the concerns and changes of society. Classical writings changed, compromising on language, style, characterisation, story-line, plot etc. Women's Emancipation, Black Literature, Terrorist themes, Immigrant Angst, War; became important themes.

When Orphan Angst was researched it became an established fact that not much had been researched and written about to express their Angst. Therefore, research on this topic became all the more needful and meaningful.

The Angst of another group of a displaced category, the Immigrant, was used as a parallel.

The Oxford Dictionary defines Identity as follows:

Identity is the quality or condition of being a specified person, having a distinct and established individuality and a personality which does not require any change or transformation to it. The state at which the individual has arrived at and is comfortable ethically, morally, socially, intellectually, emotionally, financially and has etched a recognition of self within self and at the social level and has realized his dreams. This quality and state is essential to being a complete person.

This is the parameter that has been used in this research to pit identity crisis against. A person with a healthy identity is one who is established in his own individual identity which has not been disturbed by any internal or external forces and thus his identity does not need to realign itself in order to change or transform itself back to where it was before or even to a new self.

Man is a social being and therefore needs people around him to be able to interact with them in a healthy way, to

be able to solve and resolve the problems. This can happen only if the individual has established a recognizable identity. 'Tarzan of the Apes', by Edgar Rice Burroughs, is a prime example of a person living alone in a jungle and is brought up by animals as is Mowgli in Kipling's 'Jungle Book'. When Tarzan meets the first human being, Jane, he goes through an identity crisis. Was he an ape or a human being? Jane tries to teach him the use of language and the sense of his racial and individual identity. She teaches him the meaning of 'Me' and 'You'; two separate identities. Then she teaches him the meaning of their names; 'Me-Jane.' 'You–Tarzan', In this way giving him a sense of his own identity; of who he was. Identity is linked to one's person and name at the grass root level. The name then extends to the family name which identifies a person by giving him a place. Why we introduce ourselves with our names, designation and place of birth when we meet anyone new is to establish our identity. If we are amongst people who could possibly know our ancestors we state that we belong to that particular family to further establish our identity. It is this aspect that the orphans and immigrants lack. Factors that attribute to the building up of Identity, Family-wise, Socially, Culturally, Racially and other parameters as far as this research goes are:

Individual Identity

- To establish, recognise or associate one-self inseparably or very closely with another person, geography or society.
- To regard oneself as sharing the characteristics of another person/society.

Orphan Identity

An Identity that is imposed upon a person based on the parameters of having or not having parents is the identity of an orphan that he has to carry all his life. Therefore the orphan establishes or selects by consideration of an analysis of the circumstances due to the change in geography that the orphan arrives at. Thus the orphan analyses the situations, in his new surroundings and aligns himself to the new parameters of social behaviour, norms and expectations in order to be successful. Identity is therefore relational though individual. One derives his sense of being healthy or unhealthy when pitted against the prevailing parameters of society. There are many parameters against which one needs to align oneself to have an established identity in one's own eyes and in the eyes of society.

Perceptions

Family, society and culture are what one holds to be true parameters essential to one's personal existence which are the very ingredients lacking in an orphan's life. But the importance of these to an orphan who is trying to establish relationships through these parameters within self and

outside is immeasurable. His whole concept of identity is based in the way others perceive him and the way he feels others perceive him. These are two different perceptions. Orphans generally pattern their lives on perceptions that they think others have of them, even if there is no factual foundation for such beliefs. They live with these 'chips on their shoulders' and carry that burden like Christian in 'The Pilgrim's Progress', till they resolve the issues. In 'Adoptions in India', (2005) Vinita Bhargav states that 'Individuals experience themselves indirectly from the perspectives of other members of the same social group or from the stand point of the social group as a whole. As early as 1902 Charles Cooley developed the theory that one's ideas of self are significantly affected by what one imagines others think of one.

Anand, the orphaned boy in Manju Kapur's 'The Immigrant (2008), became what his uncle perceived of him since his own parents were no longer there to guide him as to the choice of vocation or an even a longer length of study to qualify as a dentist in Canada. 'During the 23 mile drive from the airport the uncle expanded at great length on Anand's goals. The orphaned boy needed to get ahead, brooding was not going to help. He had made a smart move in coming, even though it meant more years of study. The orphaned immigrant, who leaves his native identity behind, has to leave all familiar moorings and start life anew, has a double portion of the angst. He finds that the parameters he has lived by have to be left behind in the land of his birth and that a new life and new parameters have to be espoused. This doubly risky endeavour has to be somehow made successful by the dint of their perception changes, which need to start from day one of arriving.

In the much acclaimed work of Amy Tan, 'The Hundred Thousand Senses' (1995) Yiban said, 'Look at me. I was born to a dead mother, so I was born to no one. I have been both Chinese and foreign, this makes me neither. I belonged to no one…Tell me, whom do I belong to? What country? What people? What family? As I think more about my name, I realize I've never had any sort of identity that suited me, not since I was five at least,' We looked at his face. In all my life, I had never seen a person…so deserving to belong. The pathetic hopelessness of the situation is being brought out. Where do such people belong? Why is belonging so important? Why is this haunting primeval need to belong, so unforgettable, so universal, going beyond all boundaries of race, country, faith, status and most important, time?

That identity was wiped off and another one written in place of her own name which linked her to her father, his family his extended family and her ancestry. That is the reason why she feels that she no longer has an identity. Her new identity was now linked to a new man incapable of providing her with a genuine ancestry. Ancestors are like

clans and cliques that look after each other's interests. This lack is very much in evidence in orphans. A very important quote for a sense of belonging related to ancestry is taken from 'Maps for Lost Lovers' (2004), Nadeem Aslam states, 'The move to England had deprived her of the glowing warmth that people who are born of each other give out, the heat and light of an extended family. She prepared for him all the food he had been missing during his years away. As Aslam writes: 'people who are born out of each other'; in other words, people who belong to each other due to family ties provide that unshakable platform to move within society protected and cared for. Family gives one the identity that takes one through life and everything that life brings before one.

Other Identity Parameters

At birth one has a gender identity. Birth also decides ones racial, cultural, economic, the physical attributes and at times the mental attributes too. A dysfunctional family can result in emotional identity issues. Decisions taken at birth also grant identity. If the child is born in circumstances where the mother cannot keep the child then the Orphan or destitute identity tag is there for a lifetime. 'Illegitimate' is another tag. Defects at birth can grant the identity of 'special needs people'. If it is an unwanted girl child the identity could be 'dead' too, just a handful of ashes or a tombstone if fortune smiles on them or they end up being trashed in dust bins or become dog feed, these are established facts. According to our talents, educational achievements and profession we possess the identity of being a good student, good child, sportsperson, musician, actor, painter, teacher, doctor, engineer, lawyer, marine biologist, pastor, clown and many more. In medical terms one can have the identity of the 'person with AIDS' or the 'leprosy patient', or the patient with 'Tuberculosis.'

Religion grants one the identity of being a Christian, Hindu, Muslim and many other identities. One can be identified as being a happy or depressed or depressing person, a hardworking or a lazy person, a meticulous person or a scatterbrain; a dreamer, a philosopher, a genius, an ordinary person or a talented person. One can have multiple abilities. For one can be a doctor and an artist and sports person too. The same doctor could be a happy or a depressed person. The sum total of these is what gives every person an established identity when his equilibrium is not disturbed by any internal or external factors.

Positive and Negative Identities

An important aspect here is the fact that an individual affects the society positively or negatively and the society affects the individual in the same two ways. No matter what other Identity one possesses, these two are common to all mankind.

Therefore there are two ways in which one can react to a crisis.

1. A healthy positive way in which the individual takes up the challenge of changing to become a stronger person.
2. A negative way in which the individual regresses into depression and refuses to come out, the extent of which could be serious or long term. Very few belong to this category. Most people are able to resolve their problems or build up mechanisms to cope with them anyhow. Most people are able to resolve the crisis in their lives.

- The other would be to develop an identity of a prickly person who finds it difficult throughout life to react in a healthy manner to the crises of life or to other individuals. Many people belong to this category and they go through life not having resolved their crisis or revised their identity. It is this category to which many of the target group belong which is the focus of this research.

- The next category of people is like Phoolan Devi who turned her crisis into a story of vendetta. This category also does not have many takers. Ed Husain in 'The Islamist' (2003) is another such case. One cannot establish a healthy Identity by looking for escape routes. Resolution depends upon facing the issue and conquering it.

Connection between Self and Social Identity

For the orphan this is the most important common factor. There is a strong connection between identity cognizance of self and social identities. One derives one's identity from the society one lives in, which has been detailed in ethnicity. Therefore, if one is an Indian one sees one's society as an Indian society in the native land, which perception changes in the adopted land. One is an Indian in a white land. Pecola, in 'The Bluest Eye' (1970) longs to be a white in the white society where she lives because being black is the factor which makes her the 'outsider'. The perception of self affects society and the society affects the perception of self. They are both interdependent. The social is inter-individual. How does one affect the bonding with the culture of the new place and the neighbourhoods one lives in, when we create Brick Lanes, South-Halls and Harlem's?

Personal and political aspects are visible in the world today where the Indian identity is one to be contended with. The top jobs, the top slots in education, in business; many of which belong to outsiders is not creating a healthy atmosphere for the whites to live in, in their own land. The whites losing a sense of right and identity in a land which is their own must be a peculiar problem that immigrant needs to be sensitive to. How do the whites view themselves in a society which has welcomed others in, only to take a back

seat themselves? In the midst of all this confusion, how does an Orphan find their place?

Mary Gordon has tried to write about the angst of the immigrant in her novels starting from, 'The Shadow Man' (1978), 'The Other Side', (1989) 'Temporary Shelter', (1987) 'Pearl' (2005) and 'Seeing Through Places' (2000); novels in which the immigrant story and the angst is beautifully and authentically highlighted. She explores the effect of 'place' in the identity of man and the problems faced by him in the adopted land and his responses to the problems in order to set roots. How the experiences of the immigrant translate into knowledge that he can use to firmly embed himself in the land of his choice are the topics that she has touched upon.

The Crisis

It is a phase in which an individual feels a need to establish an identity in relation to society after a crisis occurs in his life. When this system of identity is disturbed one can lose one's moorings, balance, footing, hold, control and equilibrium upon the self. This brings about a change in the perception of self with the result that dual or multiple identities could be formed within a person which can be an uncomfortable state to be in at the mild level but a malady one can cope with. It can be traumatic at the higher level and can be handled with love and care and professional help at times. If the disturbance is very high on the 'Richter scale' of interference then it can create dual identities or dual/split personalities which in medical terms can result in Schizophrenia.

Crisis Studies

There is a very clear and explicit movement. To deal with the crisis at hand, Gordon decided to go through the fine tuned search which alone could provide the answers so as to resolve the crisis. What is identity crisis? What are the reasons for this phenomenon that seems to strike everyone at some point of time in life or the other? Why is there this need to 'place' our roots and ourselves in order to anchor ourselves in the realms of the known and the familiar, the own and the secure? How do we set about doing the needful and what are the various methods employed? Are the results worth the implications they may have for the ones who need direction? Can this be the muse for the writers?

Gordon does not search for her mother because there is no mystery about her, no hidden aspects that could spring upon her and disturb her inner calm. She is trying to find herself in her father; in the way he looked in his written works in his women acquaintances and in herself, his daughter To dig up not only the glorious but also the corrupt so that she can through the knowing, make her peace. Who was her father? Who, consequently was she? She had to have the answers to be able to go with her life. Peace came after sorting out her father's life and the acceptance of the facts that presented themselves. Her crisis can be best expressed through the various phases that she went through.

Reasons for Crisis

As detailed earlier, crisis is triggered by a catastrophic and significant change in a person's life. This results in a state of reflection or withdrawal from the environment that the person is immediately in, by the person in crisis through which he can arrive at the answers to the dilemma. The typical examples are 'Surfacing', by Margaret Atwood and Sarita in 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' (1980), by Shashi Deshpande and Isabel in 'Final Payments' (1976), by Mary Gordon. The protagonists remove themselves from the vicinity of the problems to better avail of the opportunities of healing. Crisis can occur due to many reasons; death of a loved one, mid-life crisis, life threatening experience, children moving away from home, prolonged or fatal sickness, failure at studies, love, finances and any other circumstance like a shift in geography, can disturb the equilibrium of the person. This person is not able to accept the situation which renders him unable to take the effort of embarking on a quest to find answers.

Acceptance is a very essential part of the dynamics of the process of healing. It is acceptance that gives a stable platform to the person to pause and think about the course of action to take. It enables the person to embark on the quest with a clear vision of what it would mean if the crisis is not resolved, with the result that he loses touch with the meaning of life and his part in it. He loses the belief system that eggs him on to take a course of action that helps them to manage the crisis. Acceptance therefore plays a pivotal role en route to the path of healing.

- Loci of Control: One such terminology is the locus of control dealt with earlier. The 'loci of control' could be either internal where the person is able to control and direct his actions and the external when the person is affected by the environmental or situational causes beyond his control. He is therefore unable to deal with the crisis since he cannot find strength within himself.
- Unresolved conflicts take their toll:

Therefore if one does not resolve the issues of one's roots, one is incapable of being a complete being, fulfilling all the parameters of a healthy contributive person. Such a person is incapacitated emotionally and incapable of functioning in a wholesome way. People questioning their roots like orphans, blacks, holocaust victims etc. are prime targets for identity crisis. A shift in geography is a major reason for a crisis. This will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter IV. The examples are Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Korean Americans and Afro / Americans and many others. People who live outside acceptable boundaries of the society like Eunuchs, Prostitutes, Pimps and people with Aids, people under exceptional circumstances like Soldiers, Spies (example Sarabjit), Smugglers and Criminals.

What is an unhealthy /unresolved identity?

Wherein one has not managed to resolve the conflicts of life with success and it comes out in anti-social ways. One such case is detailed in the novel by Sherman Alexie, 'Indian Killer'. In this novel he writes about the protagonist who is a Red Indian by birth but is brought up by loving white parents. He is not able to resolve the dilemma about his roots. Is he Indian because of his birth or is he white because of his adoption? Unable to resolve the crisis, he goes on a path of destruction by taking revenge on the whites because he rejects them. In his mind he holds them responsible for the dilemma he is in. This is also prevalent among orphans in the form of a paradox which has been detailed later. He goes on a rampage after he decides to execute one act of violence to make his point. "How does one separate from parents-birth mothers and soul-mothers alike- without disembowelling oneself? That is the question heart-rendingly put, but there is no answers states Judith Wynn of Boston Herald.

A very similar case happened with Phoolan Devi. The crisis in her life was introduced by the simple act of being raped by men of the rival group in her village. She embarked on a path of destruction because the path of justice was never open to her. Therefore, resolution never came to her. Her identity from a simple village belle to a fearsome dacoit bent upon the path of vendetta underwent a change. She was now a fallen woman. She changes her identity finally to that of a powerful politician.

A real life case is that of Jane (name changed) who could not accept her humble parentage, which, coupled with the fact that she was an orphan and therefore dependent upon others for her sustenance went into severe problems later on in life. These factors pushed her beyond the bounds of sanity and she gave in to schizophrenia with which she is still struggling. Such cases are few and far between. Reactions to crisis differ from person to person.

Why does a lack of roots/ belonging lead to an Identity Crisis?

A change in self-perception due to a change in any of the factors can result in a questioning of the self that can result in 'IDENTITY CRISIS'. They shake the very foundations of the belief system in self, resulting in a crisis which if not dealt with can result in an immobility of the person's ability to cope or assimilate in society, which is the value each society places on individual autonomy and placing. In this paradigm, the individual affects the group to which he belongs and the group affects the society of which it is a part. They not only affect each other in the reverse order but they also permeate and reflect upon each other too.

When individual, group and social identity intermingle in such a way so as to grant a person a conducive environment to grow, heal and become complete, that environment can be stated to be a healthy one. They serve to grant either a positive self image or a negative one to the person. In the novel, 'The Mistress of Spices', Haroun the driver from Kashmir tells Tilo about his father's decision, 'One day the fighting started and tourists stopped coming. Rebels rode down from the mountain passes with machine guns and eyes like black holes in their faces...I am telling father Abbajan we must leave now but grandfather said, 'Toba, Toba, where will we go, this is the land of our ancestors!'
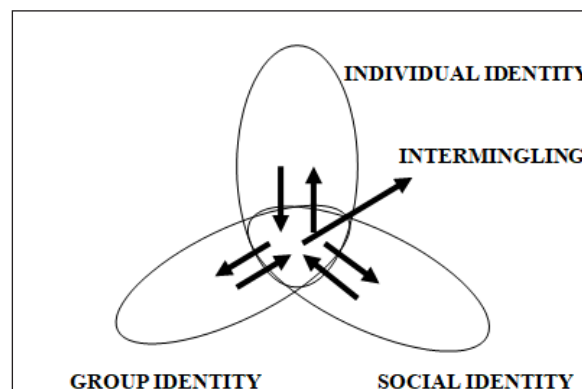

Figure 1.Intermingling with Clear Lines Drawn

When Haroun suffers pangs of homesickness and goes through the immigrant angst, he remembers a truth his grandfather had stated. One is rootless outside of one's land and there starts the crisis. The case of the Kashmir conflict raging between India and Pakistan is a crisis of a sense of belonging which Indians, Pakistanis and Kashmiris have all been involved in for years. The result of this crisis is there for the world to see, with innocent people paying with their lives. (Ex. Daniel Pearl) Rootlessness is the phenomenon that follows Identity Crisis or vice-versa, when a person feels he has no anchor, is suspended, is not able to stake roots in anything around him to give him stability, he develops an identity crisis. Orphans and Immigrants are prey to these feelings because their sense of belonging is vastly disturbed. On the other hand, finding roots helps the person to use that path to becoming healthy emotionally and moving on.

The awareness of self apart from terms of inter-individual processes and how appraisals or reprisals could reflect upon the definition of self affect the concepts of 'knowing oneself'. This in turn affects the general need to belong to or it causes a shift in the secure niche in groups or society affecting perception of self identity and social identity. Therefore, the importance of self identity cannot be ignored as it affects individual achievement also. Thus, the concern is with how one analyses oneself and that may at times result in inordinate emphasis on the parameters of self or societal evaluation. Socially acceptable behaviour grants boundaries to the psychological paradigms of judging oneself in the society one lives in.
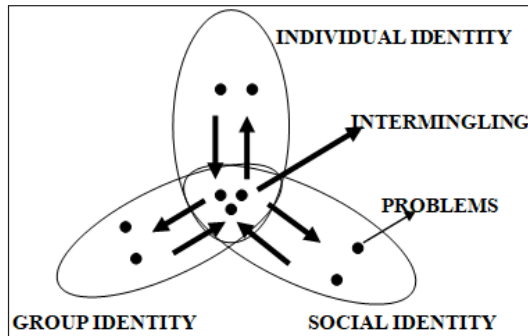
Problems in One Sphere Permeate to the Others

Identity crisis can be the result of a shift in the perception of self awareness or acceptance or in the way society views the individual. Crisis occurs because the perception of an integrated or unified self takes a battering. A person with a strong belief in self will evaluate the change and choose the new direction and values his life as he needs to take to cope with it. He will apply his methods and come out a conqueror. The other person may be defeated by his own weak coping systems and result in cocooning himself or taking backward steps which are regressive in his behaviour and growth. He is thus incapable of choosing a desirable path or taking action that would help him to a pathway of progress and being a contributing member of society. He constructs his identity from the pieces of himself that are scattered around him.

The positive aspect of the crisis

There is a positive aspect to identity crisis. It helps to highlight the patterns of belief and behaviour in an individual. These, if evaluated correctly can be attended to in an individual seeking help. Thus a crisis is a welcome opportunity for change in a person's life:

- Becoming aware of one's flaws so that one can find ways of overcoming them which gives them a knowledge bank of experience which not only strengthens them for the future but also comes in handy when others need help. In this way one becomes capable of becoming a contributive member of society. In all the selected texts, this aspect is very clearly visible.
- It provides an opportunity for change which if not undertaken renders the person open to repeated attacks of a similar crisis. For this one has to have a positive attitude where it is more important to learn from the experience rather than be downed by it into depression. The selected texts talk about change.

Gordon describes it succinctly in 'The Shadow Man' (1978) 'What one can willingly close the door on, leave behind and move on'. Judge Nicholas Murray spoke regarding the book, 'Hay Winner's Search for Identity', which has been quoted earlier, "The exploration of roots is also an exploration of what Welshness means and by giving a new and different perspective on that, I think it's very valuable.

A sense of belonging is what all displaced people seek and its importance in being contributive members of society cannot be under-estimated as seen from the texts. Having completed the deconstruction of the texts regarding the topic, they now need to be pitted against psychoanalysis to substantiate the angst in terms of reality and applicability.

Traits Orphans Exhibit

The following traits were observed which the researcher felt if addressed, would be of immense help to them to enable to change their perspectives of self and others.

The common traits were:

- Their perception of a family is a fairy tale one. They think that families are very loving and that parents never leave the children even for a short while. This is due to the feeling of abandonment. They get very upset if their idea of a family is not adhered to.
- Parents are supposed to so unconditionally loving, that they never discipline their children no matter what they do. They only love, love and love. Most times they object strongly to any form of disciplining because of their internal reactions to it.
- They believe that to compensate for their state of being orphaned the whole world owes them, because God and their parents had forsaken them. From this stems the unacceptability and jealousies between siblings, the umpteen comparisons and even tattling to the parents, visitors and others to be the favourite child. At times they succeed in winning over one parent and some of the other relatives and friends who are anyway keeping the family under close scrutiny expecting step- child behaviour. Every opportunity becomes an established fact with them which the child takes advantage of in a bid to be first in anyone's life.
- They are thus very possessive of their parents and siblings (when others are around- to show off that they are as normal as they are), that they have parents, siblings, material possessions, opportunities etc. just the same as others have. This results in a lot of game play and hurt on the part of the biological child who is all the time being sidelined or told that he or she 'belongs really' and therefore should be more understanding. This is expected from one who is a child too.
- They are very sensitive, reading into words situations and actions what was probably never meant. Because they are orphans their insecurity tells them that everyone knows about them, acts accordingly with them and rejects them. A lot of it is real, a lot imagined. It is the imagined that has to be rooted out and the real has to be resolved.
- They go through life searching for that one person who will wholly and only be their own and have nothing to do with anyone else, a very unrealistic utopian picture because they cannot create an island for themselves.

When this person whom they feel close to forms even normal bonds with others, these people feel betrayed and they either lash out or crawl in. Neither helps in resolution or healing so they go through life searching for that crutch of living which, because it depends on the behaviour of another, will bring them heartache repeatedly. This turns them into bitter people. Inward, personal resolution is essential to bring beauty and completeness into their lives.

As a result of this they are people who feel they are different; so they feel differently about themselves and they perform differently in life based on their unrealistic expectations; the way people treat them and their inability to form bridges between the two. It is to research and explore the accuracy of the above findings from psychoanalysis and to find a way out from these dysfunctional attributes that this research is being conducted. To resolve these issues at times they need to embark on a quest to find answers to belonging which is the most critical question that faces every human being.

What makes them embark upon this quest? What are they hoping to find that will resolve this incompleteness within them? Will the findings heal the yearning within so much that they are able to pick up the threads of life and carry on, restored and healed, as contributing members of society?

These questions are dealt with in Mary Gordon's novels, 'The Company of Women', (1980) and 'Final Payments', (1976). Though the protagonists are not orphans the principles apply very aptly and it is for this reason that she was chosen. Felicitas grew up with an exacting priest who decided her course of action. He wanted her to be like the virgin Mary and that notion of purity was imputed upon the young girl. When the constraining ties became suffocating, Felicitas runs away and starts a life of her own. Later she comes back and tries to adjust to not only the place but the dreams she had shattered. In 'Final Payments' (1976), the protagonist Isabel grew up in a very confined space, surrounded by the male company around her father. The only female around her was Margaret who was highly dysfunctional herself. Isabel, therefore had no female role model to ape or confide in. She had no giggly friends with whom she could have been a growing child with the euphoria of childhood or its pains. Both the protagonists had smothered, damaged identities that they needed to explore before they could settle down to life. The whole reason behind the study of the orphan angst was to find out the void in the understanding of orphan angst through literature which could be filled by an informed understanding. The first generation goes through greater angst. The second generation of orphan offspring do not feel it as keenly except when it comes to certain relatives who question one's belonging to the family or when it comes to financial or heritage matters. Orphan acceptance depends upon the how much they differ from the family or society they are placed into, regarding their complexion, their eyes, their hair and their language from the dominant group, therefore Europeans do not have as much a tough time as browns and blacks do. Orphans, if adopted into their own race do not face this problem as much as they do if adoption is intra-cultural, inter-racial or inter-continental because then the child looks very different compared to the parents. On the other hand, children who never get adopted, which is a greater percentage, face the angst most acutely.

This is another realm of research.

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