

Exploring the Riddle of Curious George: A Thematic Study

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ABSTRACT

Children's literature has created versatile and popular characters since its inception. These characters produced a nostalgic and overwhelming presence through their actions, behaviors and unique identities on readers' minds. This paper probes into a complex notion of the identity of a popular character in children's literature, Curious George. Various authors and critics have tried to focus on different aspects of George's personality. The scope of this paper is to explore the versatile and multifaceted features of George's character, and to make an association between the character and its creators, H. A. Rey and Margaret Rey. The eventful life of the childless authors, who lived in a war-inflicted world, moving from one place to another, and seeking a final refuge in United States, is carefully analyzed and investigated in detail. The hilarious role played by George as a savior, to redeem them physically and psychologically, is adequately traced. Through the various *Curious George* series, the character of George is deeply examined and his relation to the 'Man with the Yellow Hat' has been interpreted from an oriental and postcolonial perspective. The enigma or riddle behind the true nature of George continually makes him one of the most beloved characters in the field of children's literature. Observed and analyzed in the light of war-affected world, during which he was created, George provides the potential to survive in any conflict-riven situation internally or externally. His multiple personalities of an animal, child, prisoner, Orient and African provides various facets that keeps his identity in a flux.

INTRODUCTION

The identity of 'Curious George' still remains controversial, ambivalent and ambiguous. Is he really a monkey, so curious about anything and everything which he encounters? Or does he represent the fate of the oppressed/suppressed and marginalized, which are expected to make those who are in power to be cheerful. His curiosity and adventures seem to be too much pretentious so as to make a sensible onlooker (observer/reader) to be suspicious about his real nature and character. A monkey personified, George always acts curious, innocent, stupid yet cheerful. He is rarely hated by the observers and characters involved in the action of his adventures. This is what makes him a real hero or to a greater extent a loving monkey in the mind of all readers. However, through his actions, he always creates chaos in the private and public space, especially to the Man with the Yellow Hat, his custodian and mentor. As part of solving the riddle of George's identity or to fit the jigsaw puzzle, a close observation is required in relation to the creators of this mysterious character and their rationale behind the portrayal of this curious 'hero.' But the limitation of this study lies in that being a character in Children's fiction and an animal, the notions

regarding his identity can be analyzed in an abstract manner based on certain theoretical perceptions.

George's creators, H.A Rey (1898-1977) and Margaret Rey (1906-1996), were both German-born Jews. Rey was born into an educated family in Hamburg and lived near the Hagenbeck Zoo. This enabled him to imitate the sounds of animals surrounded by him. He used to draw and paint well. During World War I, he served in the German Army and later, painted posters for a living, studied at two German universities, and even sold bathtubs to make his living. Margaret had a fiery personality and left her hometown, Hamburg because of Hitler's torture and cruelty and, became a photographer in London. Rey and Margaret met in Rio and eventually got married. They founded an advertising agency and became Brazilian citizens. They sailed to Europe for honeymoon, with their two pet marmoset monkeys and Margaret knitted tiny sweaters to keep them warm. Unfortunately, the monkeys died en route. They lived in Paris from 1936 to 1940 and later fled from Paris by bicycle as they heard that Nazis were planning to invade the city.

The Reys lived an eventful life; while living and working in a friend's old castle in Southern France, French po-

lice came in search of them, thinking that the Reys were making bombs. However, they were acquitted finding Fifi on the drawing boards. Fifi is George's original name in the French version of the tale. Fleeing from Paris, they had to encounter several frustrating travel obstacles like embassies, exchange offices, banks etc. Finally, their life flourished in United States with the publication of *Curious George* series that became a huge success. Reys took the manuscripts of Fifi along with their meager possessions they carried while escaping from Paris. Throughout their journey and life, Fifi/George had been a savior for his creators during the searches, as the drawings proved that they were children's-book artists. Hence, this fictional monkey became a living presence all throughout their life. The childless Reys might have found a loving child in Fifi/George. The various experiences and influences in their life might be the sole reason behind the creation and depiction of a character like Curious George. George takes certain characteristic features of his creators, and their passion for monkeys, that is evident from their biographical details and paved way in creating characters like monkeys personified. George can be seen as the real child they missed in their actual life. Curious George and his masters crossed a seemingly non-crossable sea to a new promised land and it is almost like the biblical exodus story that they encountered in real life.

The name Fifi was seen as odd for a male monkey; hence upon the publisher's remark, Fifi was renamed as 'Curious George' and his first appearance was in a children's book published by H.A.Rey entitled *Cecily G. and the Nine Monkeys* (1939). It tells the tale of a giraffe who befriends Curious George and his eight monkey companions. The Reys wrote a total of eight *Curious George* books published between 1939 and 1966. The books entitled *Curious George* (1941), *Curious George Takes a Job* (1947), *Curious George Takes a Bike* (1952), *Curious George Gets a Medal* (1957), *Curious George Flies a Kite* (1958), *Curious George Learns the Alphabet* (1963) and *Curious George Goes to the Hospital* (1966) are considered to be the original adventures of Curious George. Over thirty million *Curious George* books have been sold, and that is available in 14 languages, showing its wide popularity.

ANALYSIS

In his initial entry to the literary world through *Cecily G. and the Nine Monkeys*, George is the victim of deforestation and man's invasion of their habitat, along with the protagonist Cecily Giraffe. Cecily's fellow animals and family are captured and kept in a zoo and she is upset with this great loss. A female monkey named Mother Pamplemoose, along with her eight offspring, became homeless due to deforestation. They lost all the trees and George declares that the family should pack their belongings and move on. There starts the journey and adventures in Curious George's life and hereafter, he is always 'on the move'. Cicely helps the monkey family to cross a deep ravine using her body as a bridge. George is the first one to cross and introduces his family to Cicely. They realize the situation of each other and decide to stay together. Later, when a fire breaks out in Cicely's

house, the monkeys work as a team with Cicely to help her. This incident makes the bond of their friendship stronger and unbeaten.

Curious George (1941) depicts George living in Africa and tells how he is captured by the Man with the Yellow Hat, who takes him on a ship to 'the big city', where he is kept in the zoo. This symbolizes 'slavery' signifying Trans-Atlantic slave trade. George is shown as an orphaned brown little monkey, living in the African jungle where an 'unnamed man' with a large yellow hat notices him. He observes George through his binoculars and wishes to take him home. George's curiosity makes him go and look for the hat kept on the ground by the man, who hides behind a tree. He puts the hat and is unable to see anything, as it is too big for his head. This makes it easy for the man to capture George and put him in a bag. George is moved to the ship and the man tells George that he will be taken to a zoo in a big city. The man tells that he will like the place and allows George to move around in the ship although with a warning not to get into any kind of trouble. Seeing some seagulls, George imitates their flying and falls overboard. Missing George is spotted in the Atlantic Ocean, given a lifesaver and pulled aboard.

The incidents happening in Africa and ship could be seen clearly in a colonial perspective. The man's invasion to African jungle and capturing of George symbolize the domineering act of the colonizer to the colonized. The unnamed man is an iconic representation of white invasion to control the brown-skinned, innocent, curious George who represents the marginalized Africans who were brought to America as part of slave trade. The slaves were treated like animals under slave trade. The hat is kept as a 'bait' to raise George's curiosity and the man succeeded in using it to capture George. He observed George hiding behind the tree, observing his nature and mannerisms to decide upon how to catch him in a perfect manner. George wearing the hat is blinded, couldn't understand what happens around, caught easily, put inside the bag and taken to the ship. The man gives George a promising vision of a new home that he is going to be in. The 'new land' and 'zoo' are presented as 'Promised Land' for George to feel how happy and lucky he is going to be, away from his own homeland. All these obviously depict the clever tactic used by the invaders to convince the colonized that their life is going to flourish with colonization. George's falling into the Atlantic Ocean could be seen as an unsuccessful attempt made by some slaves to escape from being taken away into slavery.

Reaching America, George is taken to the Man's house, given food and smokes a pipe. He enjoys the comforts of the 'new world' and 'humanly pursuit.' However, the next day, the Man makes a call to the zoo and George plays with the telephone before leaving. Surprisingly, he calls the fire station and the firefighters rush in to the house and finds George instead of fire. George is arrested and sent to jail for the false alarm. Mischievous George tries to jump out, but the bars prevent his strenuous efforts. A guard arrives and George manages to run out from the open door and escapes. George climbs over a guard in front of the jail and then on the telephone wire. Soon he spots a balloon vendor, tries to grab a

balloon but gets the entire bunch and flies in the air. Later he sits on top of a traffic signal, making the traffic mixed up. The Man finds him there and buys all the balloons from the street vendor. Finally, he takes George to his new home at the zoo, where each animal gets its own balloon.

George's initial feelings reaching the Man's house is one of complacency. But soon he finds that he will be taken and kept in confinement of the zoo. He played over the Man by calling the fire station. This might be his protest against the Man's decision to take him to the zoo. His imprisonment makes it clear to him that the life he dreamt before coming to America can never happen. His escape and the luck factor made him enjoy, experience an air flight with balloons, but soon to be found out by the man and to hand over him to the zoo. George's situation symbolizes the confined and chained life of slaves in America.

Curious George Takes a Job (1947) shows George living in the zoo, from where he escapes, and undergoes various adventures. Later, the Man with the Yellow Hat finds him and takes him to live in his house. The remaining stories portray his adventures during his stay with the Man with the Yellow Hat. Escape from zoo initiates his 'humanly life' and the rest of his actions show him more of a human than a monkey. George can be seen switching the roles of a monkey to be a child and at times as an adult while engaging in different types of jobs. This evolution of his character signifies the endless possibilities of the chores that he is able to carry on his in his journey.

George is portrayed as escaping from the zoo in the story *Curious George Takes a Job* (1947) and then enters a restaurant being caught for eating a pot of spaghetti. He is forced by the cook to wash the dishes and does the job perfectly. The cook takes him to his friend and is given the job as a window washer at a tall apartment building. He does his job, and then finds a room being painted; inquisitively he enters the place and gives it a jungle theme by painting furniture covers as animals. He did all these while the painters went for lunch break. Upon their return, the painters along with the custodian of elevator, who is the cook's friend and apartment owner, chase George down. George breaks his leg while jumping to the concrete sidewalk, mistaking it for being soft as grass in the jungle. He is taken to the hospital in an ambulance and the woman of the apartment tells everyone that George got the punishment he really deserved as he had made her apartment into a jungle. The cook's friend also says that he was sure that George will create some troubles as he was so mysterious. As George is in the hospital, local newspapers report the news and the Man with the Yellow hat comes to know about it and, claims for George. In the meantime, George having healed gets out of bed and tampers with an ether bottle, which knocks him out. The Man and the nurse find him and put him in a cold shower in order to wake him up. George is taken to a movie studio, to record a movie about his life. At the end of the book, George is shown as watching it in a theatre with his friends, whom he met during this story. In this story, we find George's attempt to escape confinement, reminiscent of slaves' life and their attempts to escape their predicament. His skill in work is appreciated, and makes him move from one master to the other. His

missing of home is appropriated temporarily, by painting the apartment with jungle theme. He is in fact 'creating home' in this process. His innocence and lack of experience of the city life makes him to mistake concrete for soft grass that makes his leg to break. Hence, he is punished for his trial to escape. Various reactions by the lady of the apartment and the elevator man show different responses of people about George and his actions. The recording of George's life in the form of movie creates the mood of a 'metafiction' or story inside a story.

In the story of *Curious George Takes a Bike* (1952), the Man with The Yellow Hat buys a bicycle for George. In the story, George is helping a newspaper boy with his route, makes boats of the newspapers and sets them float in a stream. The bike's front wheel gets ruined when George runs into a rock. Some workers in an animal show help George to fix the wheel and he joins the show. He was given a bugle to play and told not to feed ostrich. However, he feeds the ostrich and the bugle lodges in his throat. The workers punish George by firing him and put him on a bench until they send him home. George saves a baby bear who climbed a tree, by lowering him to the ground in a newspaper bag. The workers felt happy for this incident and rehires George to participate in the show with his bike and bugle. The Man with the Yellow Hat, the newspaper boy and all other friends of George come to see the show. He becomes a great success. At the end of the show, the workers give him the bugle as a gift. Later, he goes home to bed. In this story also, we see George doing whatever he wants, that he was warned not to do. After the initial confusion, mess and turmoil, George is a success and joins back with the Man with the Yellow Hat and safely reaches his home, confined to domesticity.

George is presented as making a mess with ink and a fountain pen in the story *Curious George Gets a Medal* (1957). When he tries to wash it with a garden hose, the room gets filled with water. He goes to a nearby farm to get a portable pump. The farmer chases him and George escapes by hiding in a shirt on a clothes line. Then he gets into a truck going to the museum and makes another mess there with a dinosaur display. The museum authorities decide to send him to the zoo. However, the Man with the Yellow Hat comes with a letter from mailman and stops them from sending George to the zoo. The letter says that Professor Wiseman wants George to go up in a space ship and then bail out. George agrees to this and is given a small space suit. The experiment becomes a success, though prior to that it was not sure whether George will jump or not. George comes back to Earth in a parachute and awarded with a medal. In this story, George makes a narrow escape from being taken back to the zoo with the timely intervention of the Man with the Yellow Hat. Also, George gets a more respectable position to travel out to the space compared to his previous occupations.

In *Curious George Flies a Kite* (1958), once again George, who is left alone in the house and being curious, looks out of the window, sees a small house and wants to explore it. He jumps out of the window and crawls over a fence and walks towards the house. He sees many bunny rabbits in the house and accidentally lets one out. He makes real effort in finding the bunny and finally manages to get it back in the

house. On way back, George sees a man fishing and joins him. George falls into the water, while trying to fish. A boy in the neighborhood named Bill comes and helps him. Bill and George become friends and Billy shows George his new kite. George likes the kite and Bill goes to get his bicycle leaving the kite with George. George who is always curious begins to fly the kite. However, the kite takes off, along with George. He flies up in the sky and the Man with the Yellow Hat comes to rescue him in a helicopter. George returns the kite to Bill and Bill rewards George with his pet bunny from the bunny house he had visited in the beginning of the story. George's attempt to play and accidentally letting out the bunny could be seen as his own subconscious and insatiable wish for freedom. However, he himself managed to get the bunny back, like the Man with the Yellow Hat, who always gets hold of George after his adventures. Once again, George is rewarded for his good nature and behavior.

The Man with the Yellow Hat imparts literacy practices to George in *Curious George Learns the Alphabet* (1963) as he is always curious to learn. Readers also participate in the action of learning the alphabets along with George. The story shows the aspect of literacy that could be connected to the idea of the 'white man's burden' envisioned by Rudyard Kipling, in educating and enculturating the entire world, which was shouldered on the white man. George is shown as living with his friend the Man with the Yellow Hat and happened to see his books. He was curious about the black marks, dots and lines that he found in the books. George, being a monkey started tearing the pages and the Man told him to read it as it's full of stories. He also says that stories are made of words, which are in turn made of letters. There he starts teaching George alphabets like a parent/teacher, teaching a preschooler or nursery kid. With different alphabets, the Man teaches him words and this is his initial step towards education, moving him upwards in the ladder of enculturating. First he was taught to read and, then write. As usual, George being curious plays with the note that the Man send with George to the baker. He tried the alphabets that he recently learned from the Man.

The narrative *Curious George Goes to the Hospital* (1966) presents George who wakes up one day and finds a box on the desk. He opens the box and finds a colorful jigsaw puzzle which he mistakes to be a piece of candy and swallows it. When the Man with the Yellow Hat comes home, he finds out that the box is already open and both of them work on the jigsaw puzzle. They notice that the last piece is missing, tries to find it out and fails, and finally goes to bed. The next day, George is too sick and cannot eat breakfast. So the Man with the Yellow Hat calls the doctor and he recommends that George should be taken to hospital. After reaching the hospital, a nurse called Carol takes care of George, gives him a barium drink and puts him on the x-ray table. The x-ray result shows the puzzle piece in George's stomach as undigested. He meets a mother and her young daughter Betsy who is frowning as she is scared being the first time in a hospital. George is admitted in the hospital, taken to children's ward by the nurse Carol, given a pill and a shot to put him to sleep and wheeled into surgery. When he wakes up, he is dizzy and ignores the idea that the jigsaw

piece is out of him and the book the Man with the Yellow Hat has. The next morning he feels better, takes ice-cream and goes to play room where many children including Betsy have gathered. He meets another kid in a wheelchair with a broken leg, trying to walk. George starts doing things that makes Betsy in good mood. He uses his four limbs, puts on a puppet show for the kids which makes Betsy to smile. Then he finds a record player and turns it on, standing on the turntable and spins around faster, flies off and finally lands on a large pillow. The kids laugh seeing it and Betsy too smiles. The nurse comes in and takes him to sleep. Upon waking up, he sees the wheelchair of the boy with the broken leg being empty and hops into it and wheels it out of the room. The nurse notices that it is gone, but George by then reached the corner heading down a steep ramp in the first floor, towards attendants and pushing food carts. George jumps off the wheelchair before it crashes into the carts. Food is spilled all over the place, and the dishes and wheelchair are damaged. All the children come out to see this accident and the entire scene makes Betsy and her friends to laugh. But George begins to cry and Betsy seeing him crying, consoles him. She tells him that what made her happy and smile was this incident. The adults agree to clean up the place and they are happy that George is the reason for Betsy to be happy. Finally, the Man with the Yellow Hat comes and takes George home. Before they leave, the nurse comes and gives a little present to George to take home. He opens it and finds that it was the piece of puzzle that he swallowed and they put it in the right place to complete the picture.

This story, like the previous ones, shows George's adventures and being loved by all around him. The actions related to matching of jigsaw puzzle can be envisioned as fun learning normally done by small children at the early literacy stage with the help of adults. Hence, we can see that George moves on with the literacy stage that he started with the previous story *Curious George Learns the Alphabet*. Also, it is worth commenting that George in the last part of *Curious George Goes to the Hospital* cries when all the kids laugh at the mess that he created. This makes George different from his earlier actions and reactions. In the earlier stories, he is never shown as being sorry and sad for his unintentional actions and mischief. This also takes him more towards the 'human' trait. This reaction can be correlated to his present condition of being literate. He is able to distinguish between what is desirable and not desirable in a society, which is a major objective aimed to be achieved with literacy. Thus, George shows the evolution of man from the early stage of being an ape towards manhood.

Curious George series offers its readers the cognizance of a soothing drama. The readers enter into a carefree world of small adventurers and greater rewards along with George. The mimicking nature of George eases the stress of its readers. It raises the question as why the Reys chose to comfort the world with a mischievous monkey instead of a more heroic animal. Why did they create a creature in constant need of saving instead of one that embodied deliverance? It is obvious that George represents the slave-like global situation of people irrespective of race, gender and class. Sam Chao (2015) in *Monkey See, Monkey Do: Orientalism in*

Curious George remarks that ‘*Curious George* is a canonical text in American children’s literature: the beloved monkey as protagonist of the story has become an icon of childhood’ (1). He refers to the background of culture that gave birth to the character of George and his adventures. It was written in France by two German-born Brazilian citizens, Margaret and H.A. Rey, in the midst of World War II. As Nazi forces were approaching Paris, they had to leave France, carrying only the manuscript of George with them. They travelled through Spain and Portugal to Rio and ended their journey in the United States where the book got published in 1941. According to Chao, ‘the culture that produced it cannot be located in a single country, *Curious George* can be situated as a text that has absorbed Western cultural values. When those Western values are examined, distinct parallels to Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism, the way in which the Western world interacts with the East, surface in *Curious George*’ (1). The relevance of George’s identity comes out in examination of this comment. Originally, George was named Fifi and the change of name shows how the identity is affected when moving from one culture to another, or to appropriate oneself within the expectations of an alien culture. George’s identity conflict can be connected to what has been experienced by his authors/creators, during their transcontinental journey.

The New York Times (2005) refers to the reason for popularity of *Curious George* in children’s literature on account of his mischievous nature. It makes the 4-6 year old children feel superior. Hence, George is seen as a ‘toddler’ who is innocent and likely to make mistakes by the superior, pre-schoolers or the very young. His irresistible qualities like ingenuity, determination and curiosity are the main features of his character. Acting stupid and innocent, he is always on the forgivable end, a quality imparted to the blacks by the whites.

Curious George has had the reputation of a buffoon for decades. This sets out to change our perceptions, solemnly presenting George as a hero. The absurdity in the creation of a monkey character like George, thriving in a world haunted by Hitler, raises further concerns. However, it could be argued that while it looks ridiculous to think about children’s books during the war-torn time, for Reys, foolishness would have been the only coping mechanism to sustain their life. It is observed that people needed a place to go that wasn’t fraught with nightmares, and George existed because the war existed. Hence, it is to an extent, a paradoxical existence and Reys found that merrymaking was the preferred means of tolerating the trials of the time. The vibrant colors added to the pictures and actions of George, were intended to present brightness to the dark circumstances in reality, because of war. Happiness was the target of Reys in coloring George than showing heroism in his portrayal.

The representation of George in this manner can be read along with ‘the grandfather’s riddle’ in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952). The narrator of the novel gives an account of his grandfather’s last words before his death. He called the narrator’s father and said:

“Son, after I’m gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy’s

country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion’s mouth. I want you to overcome ‘em with yeses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction, let ‘em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open” (16).

These words had a profound impact on narrator’s character and actions. While all others thought that the grandfather went crazy, the words continued to haunt the narrator for the rest of his life. The ambiguity lies in the fact that though the grandfather calls himself a traitor, he seems to be suggesting the narrator to keep on the fight and avoid treason. Though he appears to be meek and humble to the white folks, deep inside he never forgets who he is and where he comes from. Even after competing in the Battle Royal, he yeses the white community. Nevertheless, he is always critical on the fact that he stands as an African-American. This makes the narrator to think seriously on the stand he has to make in his life and to interpret his existence in the society as an ‘invisible man’. We can see a similar strategy in the actions of Curious George in his dealings with the people around him and especially with the Man with the Yellow Hat. This makes us doubt about the real nature of George, whether he is as innocent and stupid as he acts.

Another interesting image on Curious George is one of a ‘Saviour.’ Reys’ experiences in life have been painted in *Curious George* series. One can compare Reys and George in actual life and in fiction, and comments that it isn’t the American salvation of self-propelled heroic deeds and waving banners; it is a salvation that comes from seeing joy in hardship and waiting for the one who will rescue you. It is not heroism and revolutionary fights that has been displayed, but the actual patience in waiting for the coming of the ‘saviour’ that alludes to the Christian faith. For Reys, George was the saviour who eased their mental agonies; however, in the stories, the Man with the Yellow Hat has been presented as the rescuer of George. So, the Man with the Yellow Hat acts as a saviour of the second level, ‘a saviour’s saviour’, considering Reys – George – Man’s relationship. Hence, the narrative has been presented as a way of salvation for Reys. The Man with the Yellow Hat is represented not just as a paternalistic monkey-capturing hideous person, but as a genuine savior. He embodies the Rey’s determinedly optimistic spin on their situation. Like George, they were forced out of their home, but in the retelling of their own narrative, they had a rescuer. In reality, they saved themselves, but it’s easier to see their world view as a brave response to a scary world. In the fictional creation, ‘George’ played a vital role in their life of adventure and escape.

In the stories, it seems that George emerges as the real hero and not the Man with the Yellow Hat. Edward Said (2010) put ‘Orientalism’ as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient” (873). He calls orientalism “a Western style’ of asserting dominance, and the object being dominated– the Orient– can vary. We find a repetition of the pattern of the orientalist features in *Curious George*. George represents the concept of the ‘orient’ for the Man with the Yellow Hat. Their relationship is one of that of the East and the West. Said concretely examines the question of authority in his theory on

Orientalism. Western authority is built on a foundation of pre-supposed intellectual authority. The Western mentality claims intellectual superiority due to amount of knowledge conceived about the Orient. In that sense, the zoo in *Curious George* is symbolic of the physical accumulation of knowledge in the form of 'exotic' animals. They will be kept in cages under control, thus representing physical bondage. The first appearance of the Man with the Yellow Hat is in the attire of an explorer. He is in yellow attire, carrying a camera and a shotgun. The camera represents his sense to focus on the mysterious aspects of the 'other' land as part of picturing, which is a form of representation. He is cautious to carry a shotgun to terrorize the colonizer showing the power of weapon, an invention of their superior intellect. It also acts as a self-defensive mechanism to keep the colonizer at ward, as they belong to a cannibalistic culture with mysterious traits that must be appropriated by the intervention of the White man which turns out to be his 'burden' as mentioned by Rudyard Kipling in his famous poem.

The ideas expressed by Kipling (1990) are evident in the representation of George. The Man with the Yellow Hat serves 'captives' need,' waits in 'heavy harness,' and finally seen as the colonized as 'fluttered folk and wild.' The 'new-caught' George is shown as 'half-devil and half-child.' This was the image of the colonizer about the colonized, assuming intellectual superiority over the Orient. The Man with the Yellow Hat desires to take George, home with him to the zoo as happened in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In comparison to the older tales of abduction and forced enslavement of Africans during the slave trade, it is seen in *Curious George*, the glorification of the man with the Yellow Hat who is celebrated as a friend and protector rather than condemned as a captor and oppressor.

Chao (2015) observes that even the camera that is carried by the Man with the Yellow Hat implies that 'the only souvenirs he will bring home with him are photographs' (2). But it turns out as he takes George home with him. Here, George metonymically acts as a representation of the monkeys in Africa, if not as a representation of Africa as a whole, when he is brought back to be displayed in the zoo. By implementing Western authority, autonomy of the Orient is denied. As seen in the story, from the very beginning, it is the Man with the Yellow Hat decides what George should do including the decision to take him home without the knowledge or consent of George. He constantly denies independence for George. The result comes out as George initiates certain actions in a desire to escape and turns out that it becomes the man's burden to rescue him. Thus, George implicitly punishes the Man with the Yellow Hat for his bondage.

The Man has a patronizing role with George and he serves more like a father figure for George. Chao (2015) observes that he assumes a position of superiority, dictating George's freedom and implementing punishment for George's misbehavior (4). This is clearly visible in the illustration where the Man sits George down to talk on the ship enforcing this position. The Man smokes a pipe and wags his finger. Also his words to George, "run along and play, but don't get into trouble" (14) further exemplifies this fact. The actual intentions of the slave traders is shown in the actions of the Man

with the Yellow Hat that involves robbing George of his freedom and placing him in captivity (Terhune, 2012). By depicting parent-child relationship between George and the Man, racial superiority symbolizing paternalistic aspects of white supremacy and the childhood innocence of the Orient are represented. This signifies the power politics in terms of race as well as adult-child relationship.

Analyzing the narrative in detail, Sam Chao (2015) in his article *Money See, Monkey Do: Orientalism in Curious George* has made some significant observations in this regard. The relationship between George and the Man can be seen as a gendered one in Orientalist view. It exhibits a patriarchal vision of the West being masculine in opposition to the feminine view on the Orient. George cannot be seen as completely feminized; however, he is obviously demasculinized in many ways (4). The identity or 'name' itself is a constant reminder of his masculinity. The yellow hat is also representing a similar function. Diana Crane (2000) in *Fashion and Its Social Agendas* mentions that hats were crucial indicators of social status for men up until the 1960s (82). Belonging to higher social class is representative of the masculine features and patriarchal norms. Phallic associations can be noted in the representation of hat and the adjectives referring to it as 'large' (6) and 'big' (12), again indicating masculinity. The man's shotgun and pipe have similar symbolic meanings associated with it. George's initial name as Fifi also refers to the fact of the gender identification.

It's worth noticing that in connection with the Man with the Yellow Hat, George is portrayed by phallic absence. His inability to attain the masculinity like the Man highlights the oriental features associated with George's representation. It could be interpreted that George is still in a pre-masculine stage which categorize him as a child, naïve and inexperienced. Even though he carries a masculine name 'George', in effect he is neutered. He is not shown with any of the features like a hat to show his masculinity. On several occasions, he tries to wear the man's hat and shoe, but it doesn't fit him. Thus, George tries to imitate the Man at many instances. However, he is not able to be the man he yearns for, the only thing he can do is to imitate which is typical of a monkey. This further complicates his oriental vision. Chao reads the story arc of George as an incomplete Bildungsroman (5). He is trapped in a state of unrealized masculinity and hence can never be a complete man. The only freedom given to George is to create his own downfall, as he is shown as responsible for all the misfortunes happening to him. The man has been described as George's 'friend' (50), though we do not find his actions as friendly, especially in the beginning. He is stuffed into burlap sack in the beginning, accompanied by forced immigration and patronizing.

Is George really happy or not in the Man's company also need a careful analysis. At times the words and illustrations are contradictory to each other. Chao (2015) notes that the illustrations signify an idea or cultural value independent of the word they are associated with, whatever conclusions the child reader draws from the dissonance or congruence of the two signifiers will result in the meaning she interprets (6). An inexperienced child who has no full access to the world of the texts depends initially on illustrations or im-

ages to get the meaning of the text. Hence, what all images that are represented in the texts, for instance, the image of the Man, monkey, Africa etc are created in the mind of the child and will have a lasting influence on them. These images ingrained at an early stage of coherence will mould the thoughts and interpretations of the child even after becoming an adult. There are various examples in *Curious George*, where the texts and images speak on George's behalf. He is often drawn as smiling, representing his naiveté and optimism even in the midst of chaos. When the text speaks of him as 'sad' (12) or 'frightened' (48), George is presented in illustrations with a waving smile.

Terhune (2012) comments that the cover illustrations of *Curious George*, the first book of the series, has become one of the most recognizable images of the franchise and provides an emblematic representation of the power dynamics, cultural structures, and characterizations associated with racism in America (109). The cover image represents George carried by the policemen, where George looks happy. However, one can find the timid, powerless George in contrast with the authority of the white policemen. The connection between image and text could be seen in the light of reader-response theory. According to Peter Rabinowitz (1994), "reading is never an unmediated encounter between reader and text. Rather, it is always reading in a particular cultural context, which to a greater or lesser (but always significant) extent predetermines the nature of that reading experience" (141). Thus, the culture of the reader plays a major role in his reading and interpretation of the text. The child reader of the texts will note both the similarities and differences based on their own cultural experiences. Hence, the white child reader identifies himself with the Man with the Yellow Hat, whereas find 'otherness' in George; however, for a black reader the experience is vice versa. Hence, we can see that these tales are not a "neutral relay station in the circulation of cultural materials" as seen by Stephen Greenblatt (Lentricchia and McLaughlin, 1995). However, in the contemporary modern global world of multiculturalism, cultural hybridity made it possible to see uniqueness in diversities. Modern world accommodates cultural varieties more than the past.

Contemplating on the actual role of George, the question remains whether he is the hero or the anti-hero. The Man with the Yellow Hat is not the hero of the tales. The role is taken more by George, following his adventures. He is a monkey without a tail and a savior with selfish intent. He is also the greatest opponent that the Man has to appropriate. We don't find any antagonists in the stories. George turns out to be his own worst enemy as he is responsible in inviting the dangers that he initiates with his curiosity and spirit for adventure. He gets into trouble as he forgets, deliberately or not, to listen, disobeys and cannot resist his actions. He is in conflict with himself, flawed and more of a human. This brings him in close association with the definition of a 'tragic hero' by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (Heath, 1996). According to the definition, the hero of a tragedy must evoke a sense of pity or fear within the audience. This is partially applicable in the case of George, being represented more as a human and a hero in his adventures.

CONCLUSION

George's identity becomes more relevant in the context of his creation. He is the literary product of a war-torn world where people engenders a shattered and hopeless life. Reys convey the message that true liberation has no correspondence with human actions. People have no control over their life and fate, and the only way to carry on with it is to be hopeful. George's tales gives this sense of hopefulness in spite of mess, chaos and confusion. Far from being the 'Other', 'Oriental', 'African', 'animal', 'immigrant', 'monkey', 'child' or 'prisoner', George is a real hero whose identity always hangs in the air, evading an exact locus. *Curious George* tales creates critical literacy in the modern child reader to think and make judgements of the representation of cultures, often of fabricated histories created by the Western literary tradition. It enables them in re-reading the history and related myths, based on cultural and ethnic diversity, and be agents of a new way of thinking and living in the modern hybrid multicultural world, which gives equal importance to all cultures and nothing is superior to the other. *Curious George* invites a fair vision and identity in the post-racial modern society. As a masterpiece in children's literature, *Curious George* offers an adventurous world for a child anarchist who can easily identify himself with the character, which is otherwise restricted in the real world of the child.

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