



A CRITICAL SUMMARY OF ENID BLYTON'S 'THE MYSTERY OF THE BURNT COTTAGE'

MARUF QUADARI

Assistant Professor
Kalsekar Technical Campus,
Navi Mumbai.
(MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Born on 11 August 1897, Enid Mary Blyton was an English children's writer, whose books have been worldwide bestsellers since 1930s, selling more than 600 million copies. Her books are still enormously popular and have been translated into 90 languages. As of June, 2019, Blyton held fourth place for the most translated author. She still features in the 10 of the most borrowed children's authors from public libraries. The Mystery of The Burnt Cottage was first published in 1943. It is a classic read and is enjoyed immensely by the children. In the book, we are introduced to the 5 'Find Outers' – Lawrence Daykin (Larry), Margaret Daykin (Daisy), Phillip Hilton (Pip), Elizabeth Hilton (Bets) and Frederick Algernon Trotteville (Fatty). Together they find out who burnt Mr. Hick's cottage.

Key Words:- Enid Blyton, Children's Novelist, Child Psychologist, Popular Female Novelist, Find Outers, Emotional Intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

The story starts with the village of Peterswood suddenly witnessing a great fire. The four children (Larry, Daisy, Pip, Bets) go there. It turns out the cottage which burnt was Mr. Hick's. They meet Fatty. At the start, their opinion of him isn't good. According to them, he is a 'conceited fat creature'. Then, the 'Find Outers' were formed. Fatty wants to be the head,

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but he is outvoted for to one and Larry becomes the head. Blyton here depicts the nature of kids---their sureness that they will do it, their eagerness to be like elders, to find things even elders can't find. Just so that they would be allowed to look around Mr. Hick's Garden, Larry drops a shilling so that his story about dropping a shilling won't be a lie. Blyton depicts their innocence here. They make a list of suspects, clues and so on. They also question the valet and cook of Mr. Hick. Blyton shows here that kids, their asking questions was a lot less suspicious than elders. She also shows their efficiency.

They also note that Mr. Hick claims to have been in London Train when his cottage caught fire, but when talking to the children he admits to have seen aeroplanes flying above the village. Here Blyton depicts their keenness. At a certain point in the story, Fatty decides to leave the Find Outers as the others get tired of his boasting and go for a bike ride. This way Enid Blyton makes sure that the story does not become all elderly and make it boring for children to read. She also makes it interesting by adding stern, strict parents, a stupid policeman, picnics, etc. in which they find clues, and so on. When Bets went on the walk with Buster (Fatty's dog), she saw a foot print which matched the one which they saw in Mr. Hick's Garden. She became excited and asked Buster to sniff it and follow the scent. She went along the muddy path, over the stile and astonishingly reached right in front of Mr. Hick's house...! She gets so excited on knowing this, that when Mr. Hick comes out, she tells him everything the Find Outers had been doing here, Blyton shows the eagerness of the youngsters. But Mr. Hick telephones police and Mr. Goon (the policeman) complains to Mrs. Hilton and makes them all apologise to Mr. Hick. They get very angry at Bets and call her 'idiot' and 'baby' and Larry says, "This is the end of Find Outers. That's what come off having a baby in it like Bets. Everything is spoilt." Here Blyton uses emotional intelligence in the story very aptly. Bets starts sobbing and everybody is disgusted and angry with her. Even though Fatty is impatient with the break up of all their plans, he feels sorry for Bets and speaks to her kindly. Then they go apologise to Mr. Hick. They become very sulky and mutinous as they think it was mean of him to complain to the police when he promised not to tell anyone. Mr. Hick becomes much more friendly when they apologise. They see the tempests flying and Mr. Hick says," They were here two or three days ago. I saw them. There were seven, Are there seven today?" That's when Blyton shows the keenness of children. Fatty immediately realizes that Mr. Hick was not the London trip because the last time the tempest had flown, there were seven of them and if Mr. Hick saw them, then it meant that he did not come from the London train. If a grown up has listened to this he could not have noticed Mr. Hick's lie as elders don't usually look at

aeroplanes. From then on, the Find Outers begin to consider Mr. Hick a suspect. Now, there is twist, the children know that it was Mr. Hick who did everything for insurance money, but they cannot do anything as they are kids and elders won't take them seriously, they also could



not tell the policeman Mr. Goon as they knew he hated kids and they did not like him too. The helplessness of children is shown here. They won't tell Mr. Goon as he will listen to them, shoo them away, and pretend that he solved the whole mystery himself. They become very depressed. They sit by the river and discuss things a bit loudly. Buster growls a bit and then becomes quiet. Suddenly when they are almost finished talking, he growls very loudly and for a long time. They all get startled upon seeing a big fellow, burly and strong, dressed in a tweed suit and enormous shoes.

They think he is trust worthy and anyway since they can't do anything about it. They decide to tell him everything. He says he is a bit of a Find Outer himself and tells them that he will find the witness and tells them to be present at the Police Station at 10 the next morning. Here Blyton induces the feeling of relief- as finally something was going to be done about Mr. Hick suspense-as to who is the mysterious fisherman and how will he solve their problems?

They all arrive punctually and to their astonishment the witness (the Tramp) arrives in a Police Car...! After him, friend, the policeman who turns out to an inspector of police, turns up. The Tramp confesses to everything he has seen. The inspector praises the children and they are very pleased. They ask their inspector whether he would speak to their parents. Pip says, "I suppose you couldn't possibly put in a word for us with our parents, would you? You see, Mr. Goon complains so bitterly of us. If you spoke well of us, it could be a great help." The inspector says 'yes' and keeps his words. He even offers to drop the children off to their home. The children are pleased and hope that all the people of that village see them with great friend, 'the inspector'. In this Blyton shows the typical childish feelings. This is what makes interesting for children to read. Here, the mystery is wrapped up. Blyton writes: - "There was only one clue that wasn't any good," said Larry, pulling out his match-box with the bit of grey flannel in. "We never found any Suspect with a grey flannel coat, and a tiny bit torn out of it."

"Well, if you don't mind my saying so, I have an idea that I can explain that clue," said the big Inspector, looking wise.

"Oh, do tell us!" said Bets.

The Inspector pulled Larry to him, swung him round, and showed the others a tiny tear in his grey flannel jacket, just by the arm-pit at the back.

"That's where your bit of grey cloth came from!" he said, with a deep chuckle. "You all got through that gap in the hedge when you went to find footprints, didn't you? And Larry must have caught himself a bit on a prickle, and the boy behind him spotted the bit of grey rag on



the twig and thought it was a clue! Good thing you didn't see that Larry's coat was torn, or you might have written him down as a Suspect too!"

The children laughed. "However, was it that nobody noticed Larry's coat was a bit torn?" said Bets, astonished. "Well—to think of all the things we found out—and we didn't find that out!"

Hence this book starts with thrilling moments, continues with suspense and adventure, and ends with a humorous twist. All the types are loved by the children, making it an ideal book for them to read. It is no surprise that her books are loved by children. Where she shows the down sides like a policeman who doesn't get along well with them. She also shows the god side by adding a character which is immensely helpful to them and is liked by them, is easy going and friendly everything children would like their hero to be. It is written in simple language which encourages the children to read it and throw it saying, "the words and sentences are too complicated, I can't read it." If you are thinking of encouraging your child to start reading, this book is better get him started...!

REFERENCE

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