



Arthur And George :A Combination Of History And Imagination

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ABSTRACT:

The present novel 'Arthur And George' is Julian Barnes latest novel. It has a complex structure. The novel is divided into four parts. The novel is narrated in third person, by an omniscient narrator, it begins mysteriously and combines history with reality, partly history, partly biography. The use of technique of irony dramatizes the events. The novel deals with true life stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and George Edalji. The novel fuses with fiction. Arthur's life from childhood to the handling of trial of George and George's life from the beginning (Origin) to the trial and their various experiences depicted.

The minor characters are also colorful and life-like. The themes of the novel are love, politics of hatred, deception and revenge, powerfully handled by the author. In this novel, Arthur demonstrates his quest for new topics, it is original ones – an experimental creation, humanitarian approach.

Arthur & George is the tenth novel written by Julian Barnes and it was published in 2005. Until the publication of this novel, Julian Barnes has long been recognized as one of Britain's most remarkable writers. Arthur & George is the latest work of a novelist who has been experimenting in the technique of this genre.

Arthur & George has a complex structure. It has been divided into four parts – Beginnings, Beginning with an Ending, Ending with a Beginning and Endings. The part I Beginnings relates to the childhood lives of two separate boys who are brought up in different environments. The part Beginnings also covers the early adulthood of the boys at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Arthur Conan Doyle moves from Edinburgh to England to Austria and then he returns back to Edinburgh before qualifying as a doctor, sailing in the Arctic and near the West Coast of Africa. He, later on, settles in London. Arthur lives a static and peripatetic way of life. George, on the other hand, spends his childhood in Wyrley in England and completes his education in Birmingham. The alternate narration of Arthur's and George's early lives emphasizes the dichotomy between truth and fiction. George, who is a son of a Parsee Vicar and a Scottish mother, is expected to tell the truth. The fiction appeals to Arthur and his imagination; he prefers the different, parallel version he is taught at home. George and his family become the innocent victims of a series of vicious anonymous letters and hoaxes. Arthur can see the beginning of the story as well as its end.

Please cite this Article as : Gajanan N. Katkar ,Arthur And George :A Combination Of History And Imagination : Golden Research Thoughts (Sept ; 2012)



The second part, 'Beginning with an Ending', describes the persecutions against George. George has become a solicitor and has written a book titled 'Railway Law for the Man in the Train'. This part also focuses on Arthur's ideology that you can not know which path to travel unless you first know. Though Arthur and George have never met, the two Christian names are brought together for the first time. They meet just before the first horse mutilation that is related by the narrator, without any reference to the two protagonists. There is a ninety page narration of the sentencing of innocent George in 1903 to seven years penal servitude for horse mutilation. He serves three years of this sentence before being freed in 1906.

Arthur's previous life with Jean Leckie, despite his marriage to Lousia has been narrated covering forty five pages. The second part ends in 1906 with the death of Arthur's wife and his receiving a letter from George Edalji. Thus, the two stories coincide to each other.

The third part, 'Ending with a Beginning' starts with the replication of the title of the novel. This part deals with Doyle's own investigation of Edalji's case during 1906-1907. It is also about how George is given a free pardon and declared innocent of the horse mutilation. George is also charged of writing anonymous letters back in 1903. The fourth part, Endings, moves forward to Arthur's death in 1930. A memorial meeting takes place at the Albert Hall, where George is present to attend the meeting.

Arthur & George has been narrated in third person and the omniscient narrator narrates the two lives of the two protagonists. The name of each of the protagonists is given at the beginning of the events of the stories of their life. The stories of Arthur and George are narrated in alternate fashion. Vanessa Guignery remarks :

As in Talking It Over and Love, etc, where each monologue is preceded by the first name of the protagonist who intervenes, so, in Arthur & George, each narration thus moves from one point of view of a secondary character. (Guignery, 2006 : 127)

The novel begins mysteriously as a boy is confronted with a white waxen thing. It is obviously an effort to lift the curiosity of the reader, as one of the protagonists of the novel is none other than Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, the world famous fictitious detective. In the second part, Beginning with an Ending, the chronology of the events is disrupted by narrating the events in the lives of the two protagonists using flashback and flash on technique.

In Arthur & George, history and reality have been mixed together to convert the novel as partly history, partly biography and partly fiction. The letter of confirmation by Julian Barnes to the end of the novel dated January 2005 gives a few indications as to the later lives of the main protagonists apart from Doyle, one sentence from it draws attention to the historical basis of the novel. The letter is quoted as : Apart from Jean's letter to Arthur, all letters quoted, whether signed or anonymous are authentic; as are quotations from newspapers, government reports, proceedings in Parliament, and the writings of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. (360)

The combination of history and reality can also be seen in the earlier novels of Julian Barnes such as Flaubert's Parrot, A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters, The Porcupine and Cross Channel, a Duffy novel. Details of Conan Doyle's involvement in the Edalji case can indeed be found in Doyle's Memories and Adventures (1924). Mr. Barnes had been to the Newspaper Library in London, Birmingham for the research work of the novel. Not only the biographical details of Arthur's life but Edalji's life also testify to research on the part of the author. The biographical information has been used partially. The specific periods and aspects of Sir Arthur Doyle and George Edalji have been considered for this fictionalized conflict. As a result of this, the novel has been converted into a hybrid of fiction and biography which is now regarded as a popular sub-genre.

The irony is also used as a technique to dramatise the events in the novel. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has been admired for his creation of detective thrillers and in a detective novel the irony is used as a means to intensify the mysteries and suspenses in the story. Sherlock Holmes, a creation of Sir Arthur, is admired and known for his sharp intelligence and line of thinking. In this novel, Sir Arthur, a doctor by profession, plays a real life Sherlock Holmes. On the other hand, George Edalji, a religious person, who has also graduated in Law, has been convicted on the charges of horse mutilation and writing anonymous letters. He has been given the seven years' imprisonment out of which he has already served three years in jail. Coincidentally Sir Arthur is convinced that Edalji is innocent and he makes all efforts to acquit him from the jail.

Arthur & George describes the stories of the life of the two real life persons, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and George Edalji. The stories move according to the real life stories of the two protagonists in the novel. The narration alternates between two periods as George was born 18 years after Arthur, and between

comparatively static and a peripatetic way of life as George remained in Wyrley in England throughout his childhood and studied in Birmingham, while Arthur moved from Edinburgh to England to Austria and back to Edinburgh. Before qualifying as a doctor, Arthur sails, in the Arctic, near the west coast of Africa and settles in London.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is multi-dimensional person and the story of his life sets on a multi-national and multi-coloured background. The childhood, the adolescence and youthful romance have been canvassed to relate it to the story.

That August, Arthur was invited to lecture in Switzerland : Touie was still a little weak from the birth of Kingsley, but naturally accompanied him. They visited the Reichenback falls, splendid yet terrifying, and a worthy tomb for Holmes. The fellow was rapidly turning into an old man of the sea, clinging round his neck. Now, with the help of an arch-villain, he would shrug his burden off. (61)

Arthur & George is a novel in which stories of two different persons' have been narrated and very skillfully moulded in one pattern. The story of George has a limited canvass and it sets in Wyrley and Birmingham. Then the trial comes and major part of the novel describes the trial episode in a court and the matters related to the prosecution of George. The family of George is made a target by sending vicious letters.

The letters and hoaxes continue; Shapurji's plea to the malefactor to examine his conscience seems to have acted as further provocation. Newspapers announce that the vicarage is now a boarding house offering rock-bottom terms; that it has become a slaughter house; that it will dispatch free samples of ladies corsetry on request. George has apparently set up as an oculist, he also offers free legal advice and is qualified to arrange tickets and accommodation for traveler to India and the Far East. (44)

The tone of the novel is humourous when there is the narration of Arthur's life. For George's story, the tone is serious as this part of the novel is about the trial of an innocent and helpless person in a racially prejudiced provice. Both stories have the tones relevant to the setting

Arthur & George has been written combining the history, reality and fiction. There are two significant protagonists in the novel – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and George Edalji. These two characters have been supported by the other minor characters like Jean Leckie, Louisa, Wood, Shapurji, Compbell etc.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is one of the two protagonists of the novel. He plays a real life role of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a chivalrous detective story writer and creator of the world famous fictitious character Sherlock Holmes.

Since his childhood Arthur appears to be a curious child with sharp memory and mind. His home is close to the church and he is brought up in the environment of stories and instructions. He has been told about the existence of God and Jesus Christ. He is also convinced to follow the Ten Commandments and to keep away from the Seven Deadly Sins. Their family use to migrate from place to place during the first ten years of Arthur's life. It is a large family including his elder sister Annette, younger sisters Lottie and Connie, little brothers Innes, other two sisters Ida and Julia. Arthur has a good family background that is narrated as :

His father –Dukes of Brittany aside – came from an artistic family. He had talent and fine religious instincts; but was highly stung, and his constitution was not robust. He had come to Edinburgh from London at the age of nineteen; an assistant surveyor in Scotland's Board of works. (8)

Arthur completes his school education at Preston and step by step he develops into a large, boisterous youth who finds consolation in the school library and happiness on the cricket field. He moves to Edinburgh to study medicine.

Arthur is influenced by the qualities of Englishness. Interestingly, he is Irish by ancestry, Scottish by birth, instructed in the faith of Rome by Dutch Jesuits, but he becomes English. It is because Arthur is fascinated by the long-gone, long remembered and long invented world of chivalry. He thinks the knights like Sir Kaye, Sir Lancelot and Sir Galahad as the most faithful and virtuous persons.

As a qualified doctor, Arthur serves in Sheffield, Shropshire and Birmingham. For some period, he works as a surgeon on the stem-whaler Hope. The ship sails from Peterhead to the Arctic Ice field. On this voyage, they use to hunt whatever they find in the ocean. Arthur uses to jump into the sea to be nicknamed as Great Northern Driver.

Arthur meets Louisa during the funeral to the Highland Road cemetery. His chivalrous feelings are aroused by her appearances as she is with her mother and without any male companion. After few meetings and exchanges, Arthur thinks Louisa is a perfect match for him:

Now, as they strolled this concentric resort, as she learned to take his arm, as her name changed in his mouth from Louisa to Touie, as he surreptitiously looked at her hips when she turned away, he knew he wanted more than flirtation. He also thought she would improve him as a man : which was, after all, one of the principles of marriage. (29)

The experience, until now, serves as a raw material for Arthur to make his career as a writer. He writes a short novel titled 'The Doings of Raffles Haw' and then there is no looking back. He succeeds in creating a fictitious detective Sherlock Holmes by using his imagination and sharp memory.

Arthur's love affair with Jean Leckie is a patient love story of the novel. When Arthur meets Jean, he is thirty-eight while she is a young lady in her twenties. Arthur being a successful novelist of detective stories, has been famous all over the world. He has been admired and flirted by many women of different age group. Arthur thinks Jean is a similar type of young lady. But when he has an interaction with her, he unknowingly falls in love with her. Jean is an attractive young lady from a reputed family; so their love affair is kept a secret. For more than thirteen years, they are attached to each other like the platonic lovers. They share many things with each other including the responsibilities of Arthur as a father and writer, and later on as an investigator. After the death of Louisa, Arthur and Jean marry.

Arthur plays very crucial role in disclosing the mystery in George Edalji's case. George Edalji has been convicted for seven years laborious imprisonment on the charge of horse mutilation. George writes to Sherlock Holmes about the injustice. In this way, the letters written to Sherlock Holmes reach Arthur. When Arthur meets George, he is convinced that George is innocent. Then, he plays a real life Sherlock Holmes to give justice to an innocent person. Arthur's glamour as a world famous writer helps him to get everything needed to solve the case. It is the love for chivalry that forces Arthur to get involved in Edalji's case. At last, George is released and the real culprits are put behind the bars.

The character of Arthur is a very colourful character; he is an obedient child, dreamy young man, a doctor, a sailor, a lover, a responsible father, a novelist and an investigator.

George Edalji is also another real life character of the novel. It is true that he is not as famous as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who is the creator of the fictitious character ,Sherlock Holmes. George is born of a Parsee father and a Scottish mother. His father migrates from Bombay to Scotland and settles there. Ultimately, Shapurji, George's father converts himself as a Christian and starts working as a vicar of the church in Great Wryly. George is a dutious son, who is described as :
He is shy, earnest boy, acute at sensing the expectations of other. At times he feels he is letting his parents down : a dutiful child should remember being cared for from the first. Yet his parents never rebuke him for this inadequacy. (4)

George is sent to village school for education. His mother used to teach him his letters while the father, simple sums. After the village school, George is admitted to Rugeley school when he is twelve. After four years, he joins Mason College in Birmingham to study law to become solicitor. His father thinks that George also can become a Member of Parliament like Mr. Dadabhoy Navaraji. George also takes this seriously and studies law by heart.

The politics of hatred and prejudice brings a storm in the lives of the family. There are anonymous letters using abusive language against his father Shapurji. Young George tries to complain against it but his complaints go in vain and unnoticed. But the intention of the letter writer is fulfilled as the family starts living under pressure and tension. They try to keep George away from this matter. After some time suddenly, George who becomes a solicitor is charged of horse mutilation. He tries to defend himself but all the evidences are intentionally planned and go against him. He is convicted seven years of labourous imprisonment.

George doesn't give up hope; he writes letters to Sherlock Holmes that ultimately goes to the address of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. When they meet, George successfully convinces him that he is innocent. Arthur takes charge of the case and ensures release of George.

There are the other characters which may be considered as minor characters. They are also colourful and life likes to support the major characters of the novel.

Jean Leckie is an attractive young beloved of Arthur whom he meets at a party in the honors of a prominent London Scotsman. She is aware of Arthur's family life and does not interfere in it. She waits patiently for the time to come and at last she marries Arthur.

Louisa Hawkins is Arthur's first love and wife whom he meets when he is a surgeon on a ship. Louisa is a shy, round-faced young woman with blue eyes shading to sea green. She proves to be a good wife. She dies in 1906 of an incurable disease.

Shapurji is George Edalji's father. He migrates to Scotland and marries a Scottish girl. He converts himself as a Christian and practices Christianity in his real life too. The charges of horse mutilation and anonymous letter bring storms in his family; but he fights for justice throughout his life.

George's Mother is a caring mother who likes to take care of her family in the absence of her husband. She used to teach in a school.

Campbell is an inspector to investigate the horse mutilation case. He has had a biased investigation and he convicts George.

Arthur & George is a novel based on a real life coincidence in the lives of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and George Edalji. The search for the truth is the issue that brings the two protagonists closer, though in different roles. The search for truth is the central theme of the novel that is supported by the other themes like hatred, deception, revenge and love.

George Edalji is a converted Christian, born of parents of different origin. His father a Parsee from India and mother a Scott give birth to three children – two sons and a daughter. George and his family become the victims of a series of vicious letters and hoaxes. It is only due to his father being Parsee, they are threatened and warned. The hatred of the writer can be seen in his words as:

Everyday, every hour, my hatred is growing against George Edalji. And your damned wife. And your horrid little girl. Do you think, you Pharisee, that because you are a parson God will absolve you from your iniquities? (34)

George's father is a vicar. Probably a hardliner might have stung to accept him as a vicar. The letters are written on cheap lined paper torn from a notebook and posted from Cannock, Walsall, Rugeley, Wolverhampton and even Great Wyrley itself. The family has to keep patience and silence for George's career and future. The family is also tortured by the unknown person by throwing a dead rabbit to the lawn, throwing eggs and dead birds across the lawn. The hatred reaches to an extent that they give an advertisement in a newspaper about Edalji family. When the God forbidden Shapurji approaches the police, he is threatened by them. One threatens penal servitude and the other threatens death. But suddenly the letter of threat stops coming to Shapurji.

The threats cease to come and George is relieved to seek his education. He becomes a solicitor by passing Final Examinations in second class. While returning home, he reads a news about his village. It is about mutilations of the animals. George Edalji has been trapped by the conspirators as the *Prima Facie* and the complaints he had made in the past regarding the anonymous letters and animal killings go against them. After the investigation by Campbell, an inspector, George Edalji is arrested. He tries to protect himself but the justice is denied and the truth is hidden. George Edalji has been convicted for seven years of imprisonment.

George writes letters to Sherlock Holmes to solve the mystery in his case and here comes the contact of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and George Edalji. During their meeting, Arthur is convinced that George is innocent. Then he plays a real life Sherlock Holmes with Mr. Woods as Dr. Watson. Vanessa Guignery, a renowned critic on Mr. Barnes, has rightly pointed out:

When Arthur starts investigation in the case, he himself impersonates Holmes, while his secretary, Wood, plays the role of Dr. Watson. The frontier between Sir Arthur as investigator and defender of an innocent victim, and Conan Doyle as writer, becomes blurred, and a series of metafictional remarks are inserted, comparing Arthur's investigation of a real case to the composition of the novel. (Guignery, 2006 : 130)

Arthur handles the case playing the roles of an investigator and a solicitor. By giving proofs and classifications in the court to the investigating officers and agencies, Arthur successfully proves George Edalji innocent. Besides this, he also brings out the truth that all those anonymous letters were sent by Royden Sharp and the animals were also being mutilated by the same person.

The theme of the search for the truth coincides with the theme of hatred. Shapurji is a Parsee who is born in Bombay in India. Like the other educated Parsees including Dadabhoy Novaroji, he migrates to Britain and settles in Scotland. He marries a Scottish girl. He devotes his life to the old and the sick by converting himself as a Christian.

There is mother, who is constantly present in his life, teaching him his letters, kissing him goodnight; and father, who is often absent because he is visiting the old and the sick, or writing his sermons, or preaching them. (6)

The family of Shapurji is God forbidden and they want to serve the people of Great Wyrley. Suddenly, strange consequences take place in their life. A series of anonymous letters using threatening and abusive language shatters the emotional world of Shapurji. The letters strongly object to Shapurji's taking

over the church as he is a Parsee. The family is targeted by doing some unreligious acts like throwing a parched rabbit & the dead birds. The orthodox letter writers hate the family. Shapurji tries to register a police complaint but he is threatened and neglected by the police.

When George Edalji becomes a solicitor, he is charged of the animal mutilation, especially horses. The law of the province is against the animal mutilation and the politics of hatred is played in such a way to trap innocent George Edalji. He is given a sentence of seven years of laborious imprisonment.

The theme of hatred includes the other two themes – deception and revenge. The honest and straightforward family of Shapurji is deceived by the conspirators Royden sharp and his associates. They do not want a Parsee to take charge of a Christian church. They even can not accept a Parsee marrying a Christian girl. When the family does not respond to the anonymous stinging letters, they try to deceive Shapurji family by involving George Edalji on the charges of horse mutilation.

This attempt to trap an innocent family is an act of obsessive revenge of some insane social elements. They successfully arrange the arrest of George Edalji, a solicitor, who has been given seven years laborious imprisonment. The real conspirator Royden Sharp might have escaped successfully but for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, s sharp investigation George Edalji is released after serving for three years in jail.

Arthur & George also highlights the personal story of life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It is a love story of Arthur and Jean Leckie. Arthur is married to Louisa Touie Hawkins. When he is a man of late thirties, he meets Jean Leckie at an afternoon tea party in the house of a prominent London Scotsman. Arthur is a world-known creator of the detective Sherlock Holmes. The flirtations of women are not unfamiliar to him. Jean asks him if he has seen the exhibition of photographs of Dr. Nonsen's voyage to the far North. She even dares to teach him the skiing lesson. Hence, they start dating each other. The March 15th becomes a symbolic day in their lives. It is the day when they first meet each other. George tells her, 'I know. I know because it is engraved upon my heart. If they cut me open they will be able to read that date'. (166)

They keep their meetings and relations secret, as both of them have commendable respect and reputation in the society. When Arthur is involved in solving the case of George, Jean is ready to accompany him. She does it sometimes. Though they are not married, Jean is a source of inspiration and a caring woman in Arthur's life. Jean thinks that she will wait for him for billions of years. On the other hand, Arthur is a father of two children and he has to think about his ailing wife.

After the love affair of fifteen years, Arthur and Jean get married.

Arthur & George is a remarkable achievement which confirms that the author is constantly looking for new topics and original ways of dealing with narrative. The diversity of his literary production to date clearly demonstrates that the author never stops experimenting with form, style and subject matter. He has the knack of surprising his readers with each new book. He has been consistent in publishing a conventional novel after a dazzling experimental one, offering a political fable and then a satirical force, translating a Nineteenth century book from the French.

Arthur & George is an experimental creation. It is based on a common episode in the lives of two real life people. Most of the times certain events in everybody's life have dramatic value, but one needs a writer's vision to intensify it. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, has been portrayed as a real life Sherlock Holmes, a chivalrous hero. He invests his time, energy and intellect to fight injustice. On the other hand, George Edalji, a solicitor of Indian origin, has been victimized by some of the prejudiced minds in the society. George and his family are targeted not because they are converted Christians but because of the colour of their skin. Arthur is convinced that George is innocent; he uses his reputation to give justice to a person who has already spent three precious years of his youth in a cell for no reason. Arthur is an angel for George.

The novel highlights the humanitarian approach of Arthur to solve the mysteries of the case. At the same time, the love story of Jean and Arthur becomes the symbol of patience, sacrifice, passion and love.

CONCLUSION :

Unlike the historical novel ,Julian Barnes has produced a completely different novel .He has employing an experimental technique of combining history with reality with fiction .The characters and the events chosen are historically real .The personal stories in their lives have been authentically treated .The other details are the product of authors imagination which is interwoven so skillfully that it too appears real

.The force of the narration carries away from the readers ,That they are spell-bound entirely ,as it happens when the read the detective stories of Sherlock Holmes .

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