

Hair Symbolism and Changing Perspective of Women's Role in Children's and Young Adult Literature

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Abstract : Social rules and guidelines specify how a body should be clothed and how it should look. The social rules have made the body a space for expression, oppression and sexual 'commodification'. Being a malleable aspect of the human body, hair has always been worn in a number of ways and this characteristic of hair has made it an essential vehicle for conveying symbolic meaning. Hair, particularly women's hair has always been considered to be associated with richness and beauty, apart from being associated with sexual power. Society has always had a preoccupation with hair bordering on obsession and has projected its moral and political supremacy by controlling and influencing how an individual wears their hair. Irrespective of the gender of the individual, society has tried to control an individual's hair to express its control. However, with time, there has been a marked change in the way hair has been used by the individual. Hair has always been the focus of scholarly studies; not just aesthetically, but also in the cultural and social context. The fascination with hair rises from the fact that it is the only part of the human body that is always on display. Fetishization of hair is common in literature and goes ahead to reveal the character's social and moral status. Modern authors for children and young adults have turned this concept on its head to point out how characters are breaking away from the mould and establishing their personal, moral and social boundaries. This paper will trace the change in hair symbolism in literature for children and young adults to understand how it has changed over the course of the time and what light it throws on the changing pattern of women's position in society.

Keywords : gender, hair, social symbols, society, women's role

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