
THE STATE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN INDIA: A CRITICAL STUDY**Dr. Rakesh Chandra**<https://doi.org/10.59009/ijllc.2023.0028>

ABSTRACT

Every child in India grows up hearing interesting stories from the mother and the grandparents. These stories help in shaping up a child's future. But after a few years, this job is taken up by the literary persons who produce children's literature in different languages. Writing children's literature is often not an easy task. It requires special skills as a writer. At present, there is no dearth of children's literature in India but is it properly responding to the children's mental needs or is it incorporating the various technological advancements? This paper attempts to have a look at the qualitative and qualitative aspects of the currently available children's literature in the Indian languages. It also explores the shortcomings and grey areas in the writing style of the writers involved in creating children's literature.

Keywords: Children's Literature, Qualitative Aspects, Availability of Literature, Children's Magazines, Use of Technological Subjects.

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern-day children's literature stemmed from the stories which the mothers and grandparents in particular used to narrate to their children in the night before they went to sleep. By listening to these stories, the children's curiosity was aroused and imagining about that particular scenario, they would slowly fall into the realm of deep slumber. Thus, the purpose of storytelling was twofold: first, it was meant to be a source of entertainment for the children, and secondly, it helped to inculcate good samskaras into the psyche of the children. Since the first human interaction with the outer world was with the wildlife living in the forests, many of such stories were related to the wild animals, birds, amphibians, and domestic animals etc. With the growth of civilization, the oral stories were recorded in different scripts. However, their output was not huge and these stories in sporadic form could not adopt the separate form of literature. The growth of children's literature worldwide has been a slow and gradual phenomenon. The literature for children in English and European languages mostly come from the 19th and 20th century. Before that only a few books had seen the light of the day in the realm of children's literature. The most famous amongst them is known as Aesop's Fables which is a collection of fables credited to Aesop, a slave and storyteller who resided in ancient Greece between 620 and 564 BCE. The stories are laced with the moral teachings most relevant to modern times. Another landmark book is Grimms' Fairy Tales, originally known as the Children's and Household Tales. This is a German collection of fairy tales by the Grimm Brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm, first published on 20 December 1812. As is evident from the name, this book is also known as fairy tales of Grimm Brothers. In this connection, Hans Christian Andersen was a Danish writer who wrote fairy tales for the children in nine volumes consisting of 156 stories. His stories have been translated into 125 languages. It was published in 1812. In the Indian context, arguably the oldest book of children's literature is Panchtantra, authored by the great scholar Vishnu Sharma which was written between 1200 CE-300 CE, although some historians ascribe it to around 200 B.C. It is said to be a collection of 365 stories

for children. According to historians, Vishnu Sharma was appointed by King Amarshakti to teach his three sons how to rule the kingdom. These stories were originally written in Sanskrit language. The scholar broke down his teachings into five principles and it resulted in the short stories in the present form. These stories often feature animals and birds that make the subject matter and morals that are easy for the children to understand. Likewise, Hitopdesha was written by one Narayan Pandit in Sanskrit language in probably the ninth or tenth century CE. It consists of an epigrammatic text in mixed prose and verse that carries good advice. It was promoted by a medieval Indian ruler called Dhavalchandra. Hitopadesha consists of fables with both animal and human characters which contain worldly wisdom and advice on political affairs in simple and elegant language. Besides that, many portions of the epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata have been converted into plain and simple language for the consumption of children also, thereby extending their utility manifold. Similarly, the tales and anecdotes related to myriad gods and goddesses in various parts of the country have also formed part of children's literature though many of them are not available in written form. On the same footing, the stories of brave kings and queens and their exploits on the war fields have served as fodder to children's imagination. Such stories are still narrated by the elders to their growing children in both the prosaic and poetic forms in many parts of the country. Though these stories are inextricably linked to children's literature like folklore, their reproduction in print form or audio-visual form has still not been fully accomplished. Thus, in an Indian context like the global scenario, the centuries-old trait of storytelling in both the prosaic and the poetic form has been in existence and the tradition has flourished without any let and hindrances over the marching times. Still a lot of such literature is not available in written form for reading for the present generation of children. Notwithstanding the fact, India is a veritable treasure house of children's literature.

2. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN INDIA: A STATUS REPORT

2.1 Children's Magazines

In almost every major language in India, children's magazines are published on a monthly or quarterly basis. This can be verified by casting a glance at every book stall of any railway station. Children invariably search for such magazines and often buy them. Some of these magazines need to be mentioned here due to their immense popularity and their publication in more than one language. Chandamama was one of the earliest and long-running monthly magazines which was published in several Indian languages including Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, Malayalam, Gujarati, English and Hindi. It was finally published in twelve Indian languages till it stopped publication in 2013. It was first published as Ambulimama in 1947 in Telugu and Tamil. The magazine contained stories which were meant to deliver messages. These stories usually featured character types, rather than individuals. Betal Pachisi was one of the longest running stories based on the ancient Sanskrit text featuring the righteous King Vikramaditya and his ongoing battle of wits with betal, or demon. In 1968 Delhi Press published the first issue of Champak, a children's magazine in Hindi. It was published in two other Indian languages before the English version was launched in 1975. The magazine features stories for small children which are published in the backdrop of attractive coloured pictures to convey the point. Mostly, animal characters are depicted in these stories. Again, Target magazine was first published in 1979 by Living Media India Ltd. as a monthly magazine. It was in English language and carried an interesting combination of information, jokes, puzzles, and stories articulated in easily accessible style. The magazine was an instant success. Amar Chitra Katha's first title appeared in 1969. The aim behind its publication was to help Indian children connect with the culture and history of our country. Amar Chitra Katha was the

brainchild of Anant Pai who further launched Partha and Tinkle, two magazines. Despite some reservations regarding the picturisation of some characters in Amar Chitra Katha, the magazine still enjoys popularity among its readers. Apart from this, certain Hindi magazines also made an impact on the children's reading habits. Lotpot was such a magazine which carried a comic strip featuring Chacha Chaudhary and his constant companion Sabu, an alien from Jupiter. These characters became very popular among the children and the former attained the status of an uncanny hero. Further, magazines like Parag of Times of India group and Nandan of Hindustan Times group were extremely popular till their stoppage of publication a few decades ago. It is indeed tragic that the number of children's magazines have rapidly declined in the last two decades due to the coming of the computer and internet age in India. It has a definite impact on the reading habits of the children.

3. THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS FOR PROMOTION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

(a) The year 1957 witnessed the emergence of two publishing houses, Children's Book Trust, and National Book Trust. The former was established by cartoonist Keshav Shankar Pillai, popularly known as Shankar. He himself authored several books for children that were published by Children's Book Trust (CBT). In 1978, he instituted a competition for writers of children's books with a mandate that the CBT would publish the winning entries. The competition was organized in several categories that still continues. The books published by CBT are moderately priced and often translated into Hindi and other Indian languages. They target children living in smaller cities and towns all over India in order to extend the reach of children's literature.

(b) The National Book Trust

The National Book Trust was established by the government of India in the same year as the CBT. In addition to producing good literature in English, the NBT also concentrated on translating literature from various Indian languages. It is also aimed at arranging exhibitions and fairs in different parts of the country in order to make these books available to the readers. Its children's imprint, the Nehru Bal Pustakalay publishes books in English and various Indian languages.

Both these institutions have published several books for children in English and their translations in different Indian languages. They are still actively participating in their cherished endeavour and they have really enriched the children's literature in India.

4. THE PROMINENT AUTHORS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE INDIAN LANGUAGES ARE AS SUCH

a. English

There is a galaxy of authors writing in English for the children. The first and foremost name that comes to our mind is that of Ruskin Bond whose books namely, The Blue Umbrella, Rusty: The Boy from the Hills, The Whistling Schoolboy etc. are worth mentioning here. Subhadra Sen Gupta is best known for her historical fiction. She has authored A Clown for Tenali Rama, Jodhpur Bai: The Diary of a Rajput Princess etc. R.K. Narayan is best known for Malgudi Days. His other works include Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories, and The Grandmother's Tales etc. Paro Anand is credited with books like No Guns at My Son's Funeral, Wild Child and Other Stories and The Tree with a Travelling Heart etc. Sudha Murthy is a prolific writer for children who has penned How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other

Stories, Grandma's Bag of Stories and The Magic Drum And Other Stories etc. Ranjit Lal has authored The Tigers of Taboo Valley, Summer at Kalagarh, and Our Nana was a Nutcase etc. Some other writers writing for the children are Natasha Sharma (Rooster Saga, Ananya's Thumb etc.), Asha Nehemiah (Zigzag and Other Stories, Granny's Sari etc.), Arup Kumar Dutta (The Kaziranga Trail, The Lure of Zangrila etc.), Anu Kumar (How Did The Harappans Say Hello? and 16 Other Mysteries of History, Across the Seven Seas etc.)

b. Hindi

Pandit Sohan Lal Dwivedi was a pioneer literary figure in the field of Hindi children's literature. His works include (Ramu ki Billi, Dudh Batasha, 'Hua savera utho-utho', Bacchon ke babu etc.), Dwarika Prasad Maheshwari also belonged to that category who wrote (Hathi ghora palki, Sone ki kulhari, Makhan misri, Satranga phool etc.), Hari Krishna Devsare was also a giant in the children's literature arena who authored books like (Dusre grihon ke guptachar, Tota maina ka naya samvad, Bahadur Bhalu, Jali note etc.), Dr. Rashtra Bandhu was an influential writer for the children who wrote (Bal bhushan, Chuhon ka bal diwas, Raju ke geet etc.), Prakash Manu has to his credit (Char Bal Upanyas, Hathi ka joota, Ajab anokhi vigyan kathayen etc.), Devendra Kumar has penned (Ek chhoti bansuri, Khilone, Nilkaan. Heeron ke Vyapari etc.), Dr. Shriprasad (Mera saathi ghora, Meethe meethe geet, Bachpan ke geet etc.), Divik Ramesh (Chhatri se gupshup, Hanse janwar ho-ho etc.), Jai Prakash Bharti (Chalo chand par, Ped lagao sukhi raho, Agni etc.), Neelam Rakesh (Anjana dweep, Yeh kaisa chakkar, Chulbuli kahaniyan etc.). Dr. Sher Jang Garg (Gulabon ki basti, Geeton ke indradhanush Shararat ka mausam etc.) Besides that, Sukirti Bhatnagar (Dharohar), Bhagwati Prasad Dwivedi (Aakhar Aakhar Pyar), Ashwani Kumar Pathak (Phool aur Patte), Dr. Nagesh Pandey 'Sanjay'(Tehra Pul), Dr. Kamna Singh (Pinushi), Dr. Usha Yadav (Phir Se Hansi Dharti Ma), Renu Mandal (Badal Ki Sawari), Govind Sharma (Yeh Kalibanga Hai), Laxmi Khanna 'Suman' (Chidiyon Ki Duniya Rangin), Zakir Ali Rajneesh (Chocolate chor).

c. Bengali

The notable writers of children's literature in Bengali include Upendrakishore Roychoudhury (Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne and Other Stories, translated by Swagata Deb), Sukumar Ray (Rhymes of Whimsy-The complete Abol Tabol, The Crazy Tales of Pagla Dashu and Co.), Lila Majumdar (The Yellow Bird, The Burmese Box), Muhammad Zafar Iqbal (Rasha: Little Girl, Big Heart), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (Grandma and the Great Gourd), Premendra Mitra (Adventures of Ghanada), Sunil Gangopadhyay (The Adventures of Kakababu), Narayan Gangopadhyay (The Best of Tenida), Satyajit Ray (On the Run With Fotikchand, The Complete Adventures of Feluda: Vol. 1, The Unicorn Expedition: The Exploits of Professor Shonku), Inshra Sakhawat Russel (Tiny Jumps In).

d. Gujarati

Among the Gujarati writers of children's literature the notable ones include Harish Nayak (Megh Manushya Granthmala, Tingu-Pingu ki Vigyan Kathayen, Vriksha Kathayen, Banduk ki Beti, Thandie ka Ped etc.), Yashwant Mehta (Bade Jab Chhote The, Palkhi ke Pahiyee, Bal Anand Kathamala, Ras Vinod Kathamala, Vigyan Kathayen etc.), Ishwar Parmar (Panjari, Tabur Tauka, Bahubin, Palak Pari, Chakporiya etc.), Dr. Shraddha Trivedi (Viral ka Ek Din, Sunahara Pakshi, Chhammak Chhallo, Aao Khele etc.), Dr. Raksha Bahan Dave (Dhin Dhin, Tabdak Tabdak, Mujhe Pankhi Ke Pankh Mile, etc.), Dr. Hundraj Balwani (Chin Chin, Chhatis Number Ki Bus, Ikkiswi Sadi Ka Chuha, Akkad-Bakkad, Pintubhai Ko Chaska Laga etc.)

e. Marathi

The eminent writers of children's literature in Marathi are Madhuri Purandare (Radhache Ghar, Zade Laavnara Manus, Super Baba ani Etar Katha, Jadugar ani Etar Katha etc.), Shrinivas Pandit (Dr. Gende ani tyanchi mitramandali, Bahuliche Ghar etc.), G.A.Kulkarni (Bakhar Bimmachi, Mugdhachya Rangit Goshti etc.), Sun-Times Namjoshi (Aditichi Sahsi Safar etc.), Vinda Karandikar (Vindanchya Kavita-Bagulbuva, Atulokanchya Deshat, Pishi Mavshichi, Bhutawal, etc.), Rajiv Tambe (Gulabi Sai etc.), Ratnakar Matkari (Adbhut Goshti etc.), Snehlata Datar (Ka Ka Kumari etc.)

f. Malayalam

Malayalam children's literature was enriched by a strings of writers including Thobias Zachariah ((Sindbadinte Kappalottam), T.C.Kalyani (Amma's Aesopinte Kathakal), Muhamma Ramanan (Kombanayum Katturumbum), Meera Deepak (Appuvinte Aavalathikal), Vahid Azhikode (Daviathinte Padapusthka), KV Ramanathan (Thiranjedutha Balasahithya Kathakal), Sumangala (Vikramadithyante Simhasanam), Balkrishnan Koyyal (Kuttikalude Radio), Peroor Anilkumar (Kathalokam) etc.

g. Tamil

The notable Tamil authors are G. Meenakshi (Malligavin Veedu), Kriungal Sethuoathy (Siragu Mulaitha Yaanai), Sella Ganapathi (Thedal Vettai), Era Natarajan (Vigghana Vikramaathithan Kathaigal), Revathy (Pavalam Thantha Parisu), K.M.Kothandam(Kattukkulle Isalvi), M.L.Thangappa (Cholak Kollar Bommai), Ma. Kamalavelan (Antonian Attukkkutti) etc.

h. Telugu

There is no dearth of children's writers in Telugu also. They are Pattipaka Mohan (Baalala Taataa Baapuji), Devaraju Maharaju (Nenu Ante Evaru?), Kanneganti Anasuya (Snehitilu), Belagam Bheemeswar Rao (Thatha Maata Varaala Moota), Dasani Venkataramna (Anandam), D. Sumatra Devil's (Aatalo Aratippandhu), Reddy Raghavaiah (Chiru Divvelu) etc.

i. Kannada

In Kannada writers like Tammanna Beegara (Bavali Guhe), Basu Bevinagida (Odi Hoda Huduga), H.S.Byakod (Nanoo Ambedkar), Chandrakant Karadalli (Kadu Kanasina Beedige), N. D'Souza (Mulugade Oorige Bandavaru), Bolwar Mahamad Kunhi (Paapu Gandhi Gandhi Baapu Aada Kathe) etc. have made tremendous contribution in the field of children's literature.

j. Rajasthani

The children's writers in Rajasthan include Vishwamitra Dadhich (Machhlyan Ra Aanshu), Kirti Sharma (Paani Ra Rukhalaa), Mangat Badal (Kudrat Ro Nyav), C.L. Sankhla (Chada Chadi Ki Kheti), Pawan Pahadia (Number One Aoola), Neeraj Dahiya (Jadoo Ro Pen), Viola Bhandari (Anmol Bhent), Deendayal Sharma (Baalpane Ri Baatan), Harish B. Sharma (Satoliyo), Krishna Kumar 'Ashu' (Dharti Ro Mol) etc.

The above-mentioned list is just representative of children's literature in different Indian languages which is illustrative and not an exhaustive one. The fact is that children's literature exists in all Indian languages and even in popular dialects like Bhojpuri etc. Also, it is flourishing despite the growth of materialistic society affecting human relations to a great extent. Since the last decade of the 20th century, children's literature is also available online

which has expanded its reach to children who are tech-savvy. Further, the printing quality of the books has also increased manifold making them more attractive. The field of Children's literature is attracting more and more writers today as it holds ample opportunities. The range of subjects is varying from old to new ones such as science and technology, fantasy and folktales etc. The future of children's writing appears to be bright in India. However, there are also some challenges which need to be faced with courage and conviction in order to promote children's literature.

5. THESE CHALLENGES CAN BE ENUMERATED AS SUCH

1. First and foremost, there appears to be repetition of subjects in the stories and the poems. The preferred areas are nature, wildlife (on the lines of PanchTantra stories), fairy tales, old king and queen stories, and moral and educational tales. Their treatment is also not new. As far as introduction of modern technology is concerned, only mobile phones and computers form the part of such literature. This repetition often bores the young readers. At least their treatment in different styles is needed to make children's literature more interesting.

2. The purity of language is not taken care of. Like in Hindi children's literature, one can easily find the unnecessary insertion of so many English words and sentences which mars the beauty of any indigenous language. More often than not, children well-versed in any vernacular language find them not at ease with these words and they become disenchanted with the book they are reading. That is not healthy for the growth of children's literature in general.

3. The most essential ingredient of children's literature is that it should be written from a child's perspective even if an adult writer is writing it. But many writers don't do that. In that case, the possible impact on the child's psyche is lost and the writer's hard work goes in vain. It is said that to write a book for children, one has to mentally transform oneself into a child first. But this is scarcely being done.

4. Children's literature is not reaching its readers on a large scale. On the contrary, only a few urban children catch hold of these books. Sometimes, their prices are high and secondly, the rural or semi-urban children are not even aware of them. This is a tragic situation which can be slightly addressed if the writer himself makes a move and reaches the early educational institutions for a reading session of their books. Children's literature must expand its reach to all irrespective of rural-urban divide.

5. Translations of children's literature from one language to other languages are rarely done and their number is limited. This situation is definitely deplorable. That way the child readers are deprived of variety as well as some quality reading. Moreover, it restricts the reach of any writer to a particular region despite the quality-writing he is indulging in. There is an urgent need to expedite the translations of children's literature in different Indian languages.

6. Lack of children's libraries in the cities and the rural areas restrict the reach of children's literature to their readers in both rural and urban areas. If not separately, at least a section of any library should be earmarked for children with inclusion of as many books as possible. This will enable all the children to enjoy the reading of their favourite books.

6. CONCLUSION

Children's literature in India has deep roots and it is still flourishing in modern times. Though the children today are more tech- savvy and generally don't prefer to read printed books and children's magazines, the demand for such literature has not diminished. The trend to upload children's books and magazines online is steadily growing. In this age of the Internet and computers where everything is available on Google, it is creditable that children's literature in printed form is still thriving. But there are few challenges to deal with. The children's writer should bring new topics into their writings and they should also present their stuff in an interesting and easy-to-understand style. Besides that they must make endeavors to extend the reach of their literature into far-flung areas also by moving to schools, orphanages etc. for reading sessions. It should be always kept in mind that the scope of children's literature will never diminish but at the same time the writers have to accept new challenges. They will have to change their perception in accordance with changing times. Last but not the least, the quality of their work will have to be taken care of, always. That alone will ensure the success of their efforts. Overall, the status of children's literature in India is showing promise and holds good for the future.

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