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FLOWERS AND FRAGRANCE
Some Considerations About Children's Literature in India

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Authors of children's literature are circumscribed only by the experiences of childhood, but these are vast and complex, for children think and feel; they wonder and they dream. Their lives may be filled with love or terror. Much is known but little is explained. The child is curious about life and adult activities. He lives in the midst of tensions, of balances of love and hate within the family and the neighbourhood. The author who can fill all these experiences with imagination and insight, and communicates them to children is writing children's literature.

P.A.K. Mathew

To see the world through the child's eye means to see it with clarity and directness. All childhood experiences are first experiences and, therefore, in the nature of miracles. And writing for children will be literature only if it reflects universal truths as seen through the clear unclouded eyes of a child.

Shanta Rameswara Rao

Children's literature is never a miniature form meant for elders. It is a peculiar type itself, it exists and it has got an identity of its own. It has got a rational form and scientific basis in most of the forms and individual cases. It has got a social purpose. To speak the truth, children's literature does more for the betterment of the society than does literature for the adults.

*At last Dodo said, "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes."
Lewis Carroll – Alice in Wonderland*

Each Child is a Unique Flower



All children are lovable and each child is a unique flower. The best gift for a child is a storybook. Child heroes and heroines leave lasting impressions on children and adults alike. Children's Literature is a literary genre in no way inferior or less worthy of the attention of scholars and critics. *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha*, etc were basically fable-cloaked for moral edification and unveiling the ways of the world. They are food for children's thought and entertainment. Down the ages, this literature has come down but never had the status of a discipline of study. It is time it received adequate scholarly and critical attention. Its methods, techniques and devices are unique creative stimuli. Every language in our country has a treasure of this genre. Eminent intellectuals have been exercising their minds on Children's Literature.

Here is K.S.Karant's seminal statement:

“We in India have seldom bothered to delve deep into the inexhaustible treasures of nature. How many of our poets and literary men are bird watchers, wild life enthusiasts and lovers of nature in all aspects? There is no dearth of material for writing for the young, but when we elders lack experience and appreciation of the above-said repository, very little will come through our pens. ... This basic drawback has come from our lack of proper education. We have made childhood a sort of vessel, which has to be filled up, by elders and teachers with material that they consider useful, or worthwhile....” (1)

The Role of Children's Literature



Children's literature plays a vital role in shaping the individual's personality in the formative years. With an impressionable, plastic mind, a child looks around the world and goes on slowly acquiring understanding and insight. Children grow anyway but aiding them to grow in a happy and enlightening way needs proper tending. While education has a big part to play, reading is one of the most important inputs for the mind to mature into ever-widening vistas of thought and action. The ability to respond positively depends on a child's exposure to rational and well-considered choice of action with right attitudes in pursuing and achieving goals worthwhile.

This form of literature is drawn from the native ethos, from the family, the nation and basic human nature. To begin with, the elders around, most importantly the parents and elders in the family and the incidents, make the child imbibe habits and values.

Children's Literature in Indian Languages

Each of our *bhashas* is a product of a constituent culture within the diverse yet unified grand, national culture. The role that literature the child reads or introduced to being vitally mind shaping, writing for children needs to be a carefully designed, purpose-oriented activity. This genre with many forms has not received significant attention from critics and literary historiographers.

Comparative studies of the writing for children rooted in national ethos and culture in our *bhashas* would be a valuable exercise what with the erosion of values that our intellectuals find all around. With so much of Children's Literature extant, no systematic or sustained effort has gone in to analyze it comparatively with a view to understand the

achievements in our various *bhashas*. A project designed for this could well be a beginning.

Story for a Child

Story for a child came into being from its mother, granny or grandpa right from the times of the cave man. Children's Literature is a unique component of a nation's cultural blossoming. A nation's uniqueness rests squarely on its culture and its nobility and pervasiveness. The children's literature produced in a country like ours has multiplicity not merely in its various languages but also in the way the forms of that branch of literature, which flourished down the ages. The languages and genres may vary but the cultural ethos remains the same with small regional variations. The variety and vibrancy of literature in a particular age in a particular age varies.

Writing for Children - A Unique Component of a Nation's Literature



Writing for the young minds is a unique component of a nation's literature since it is an index of the cultural development of a nation. Just as a country has a history, it also has a history of its children's literature.

In our country there are thousands of languages but as many as twenty-four have been identified as widely spoken, or 'major languages'. Our literature has been growing reflecting the widening of our horizons and sharpening our awareness of the contemporary reality besides universal values, particular after our Independence. Democratization has come to be total in the area of freedom of expression and writing.

The Role of Comparative Literature

Apart from this, our efforts to promote inter-language and inter-regional understanding, Comparative Literature has come to be an important aspect of literary studies. There has been widespread encouragement for studies in comparative literature.

But among these, Children's Literature does not seem to have engaged the attention of scholars and researchers. With the availability of translations, thanks to the encouragement literary translation has been receiving, comparative studies have come to be less formidable now. Though it is true that the heart of Indian Literature is the same whichever language it was it has been produced in. The regional varieties and qualities of their respective uniqueness deserve to be investigated and analyzed. This kind of studies help us to draw conclusions about the state of affairs in the field helpful to the present practitioners in the field. A systematic effort has to go into collection, classification and comparison would be of immense use to practitioners all over the country to widen their horizons.

In this context, a comparative study of excellence of literature, meant for children in various forms, must be recognized to be of great practical utility.

Unique Creations in Indigenous Languages

In the *bhashas* unique artifacts are being produced. Not all are along the same lines. Though we can readily agree that all are meant for children, nowadays we see that children of specified age groups have come to the target readers.

Identifying unique and insightful literary creations and honoring high flyers with awards has become a tradition now, after independence. Earlier, Zamindars and Maharajas of yore discharged this function.

Panchatantra and Hitopadesha

For quite long, children's literature, though written centuries ago exclusively for children, *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha*, still are read avidly since they teach all developing expedience tempered with moral sense. Down the centuries moral stories have been the staple reading/listening for the young. With the advent of the printing press and periodicals illustrators became as important as children's writers.

Comparative Study of Indigenous Literature Meant for Children

Children's literature that has been produced in *Bhashas* has great potential for comparative study, which would provide impetus to writers to give their best to our children today. Every *Bhasha* is coming up with periodicals especially for children. We have realized the importance and the potential of this form. Children's stories may be classified and analyzed according to a set of formulated norms.

In Telugu, a *bhasha* widely spoken in the South, there have been story-clusters like *Vetal Stories*, *Bhatti Vikramaraka kathalu*, *Marydaramanna Stories*, *Paramanandashishyulu stories*.. To cite a brilliant example in Telugu periodicals, there has been *CHANDAMAMA* for six decades, which has constantly been growing both in demand and supply, being published in as many as twelve languages and go to many countries.

Writing for Children in the Last Century

Writing for Children came in a big way during the last century with the emergence of children's corners in periodicals and whole monthlies devoted exclusively to children's stories, songs, and so on, more importantly in the 1950s.

In Telugu besides *CHANDAMAMA* mentioned earlier there were *BALA*, *BALAMNITRA*, *BALA JYOTHI*, to name only a few. Organizations of writers in that field began to come up. Telugu Balala Rachayithala Sangham came up in 1952. Even earlier there were smaller groups in various Telugu-speaking regions.

In the Telugu speaking area even in towns association for children's writing came up, though no systematic study of that aspect has been made.

Distinctive Features of Writing for Children

The objectives of writing for children, mainly are: aiding recognition; helping them understand the ways of the world; making them familiar with life styles and cultures; exposing them to various new/unknown ways of children; stimulating thought processes; motivating further reading/thinking/absorption of values and beliefs. These are only provisional and may need to be further expanded or fine-tuned to make the list exhaustive.

An Outline for a Comparative Study and Evaluation

Principles of comparative study and evaluation should inevitably start with setting up of points of comparison. The following list may be useful as points of comparison between the products in two different languages:

- Entertainment value, the capacity to engage and enlighten the young plastic minds Sustenance and gentility of exposure to various things around
- Stimulation of reader interest it (what next - the suspense motif is basic)
- Simplicity and ease of putting across concepts and ideals
- Building a pleasant passageway between the known and the unknown

- Reducing slowly and securely the divide between the young world of wonder inquisitiveness, imagination, intriguing actuality and the adult world
- Provoking a healthy, rational sense of enquiry

The study should also include the institutions, and organizations in various *bhashas* as for example A.P. Balala Mahasabha, Balananda Sangham, Baalala Academy, Bala Sahitya Parishat in the case of Telugu.

Notable events (Gidugu Sitapati Childrens' Writers' Training 1960, Baala Academy Children's Literature Training Camp)with 100 children and many writers) in 1979 in International Children's Year Celebrations etc.

Periodicals carrying writing for children before and after 1950, *Bala*, *Balamitra*, *Balajyoti*, *Chandamama*, *Bala Prapancham* etc. The following is list of the veterans of yesteryears (before 1950) Chinta Dikshitulu; Chalam, Tekumalla Kameswara Rao, Voleti Parvateesam, Kavi Rao, Narla Chiranjivi, (Nastik Kendra); Nyayapati Raghava Rao, Medicharla Anjaneya Sarma, Yedida Kameswara Rao. Veterans still writing and highfliers and distinguished among those writers after 1950 both living and departed B.V.Narasimha Rao, Balabandhu Madduluri Ramakrishna, Miriyala Ramakrishna, Vejendla Sambasiva Rao Vejendla Sambasiva Rao, Challa Radhakrishna Sarma, Velaga Venkatappiah; Ravoori Bharadwaja, Balantrapu Rajani Kanta Rao, Dr P.Tirumala Rao, Menda Prabhakara Rao, Menda Suryanarayana, Palanki Venkata Ramachandra Murty, Reddy Raghaviah, Gidugu Rajeswara Rao C.V. Sarveswara Sarma, D.Sujata Devi, among many others.

In **Hindi** the list may include:

Sukhram Chaube, (*Gunakar*) Harikrishna Devasare; Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Sumitra Kumari Sinha, Kamleswar, Saraswatikumar Deepak, Siva Murty; Yogendrakumar Lalla, Sri Krishna, among several others.

In **Bengali** it is reasonable to include: Narayan, Sibram Chakravorty, Bhibutibhooshan Mukhopadhyay, Mohanlal Gangopadhyay, Rebanta Goswami; Satyjit Ray; Hemendrakumar Ray; Mohonlal Gangopadhyay; Ajeya Roy, among several others.

In **Tamil** one needs to include:

R.Aiyasamy; Periasamy Thooran; Rajam Sethuraman; T. J. Ranganathan; 'Raji' 'Muthu' Puvanna, P.V.Giri, Ponrajan, among many others.

In **Malayalam**:

Akkitham, Evoor Parameswaran, Narayan Kurup, Shudhanshu Chaturvedi Sankara Kurup; 'Mali'; Karur Nilakantha Pillai; Narendranath; M.T. Vasudevan Nair; Katavanattu Kunnnikrishnan, among many others, are great names.

Coming to **Kannada**:

R. Narasimhachar, M.S. Puttanna, Ammembala Vasudeva Naidu, T MR Swami, N. Prahlada Rao, Shankara Bhat; B.S.Panduranga Rao; Kuvempu; G.P. Rajaraman, Subhodha M. Rama Rao are very important names, of course, among many others.

The Recent Shift in Focus

The shift of focus in the very recent years is from mere fancy to rationalistic, scientific, knowledge enriching themes and incidents. This aspect has to be carefully analyzed on the basis of dependable data.

Other Important Aspects to Consider

Different forms in Children's Literature in prose and verse, right from cradle songs.

Lyrics (*geyams* in Telugu) for tiny tots for recitation and listening in classrooms and elsewhere on other suitable occasions, story poems and songs, short plays (both on the Radio and Children's school functions etc) and most importantly, narratives short and long including serializations in periodicals.

Presentation-wise many categories could be set up. The following is a tentative list:

Traditional: Episodes in adaptation from our *puranas* and classical literary texts

Culture oriented proving exposure to the tales laid in other cultures and countries.

Message oriented pieces for moral edification, entertainment and exposure to the ways of the world and the behaviour patterns of the good, evil etc.,

Language specific creations and fantasies

Modes of illustrations in colour and line drawings can also be classified as shown below:
:

1. Period specific and culture specific pieces
2. Apparels of outlandish / imaginative characters and situations
3. Aids for the understanding of Life styles: Fabulous, Realistic, Humorous, Fantastic

Besides these categories, more can be set up based on the analysis of the themes, variety of subjects, narratological devices as in string stories, stories within stories, story clusters round personalities; imaginative variety and conceptualizations.

A Prayer for Children from a Great Indian Poet

Scholastic preoccupations need not blunt us the ground realities and our responsibility to the tender, affectionate, thinking minds. Here is the prayer of Madduluri Ramakrishna

(2), a Telugu writer, who has been veritably leading a crusade for the recognition of the child's claim to joy in a busy business-engrossed adult world.

Where there is nothing like a school,
Where play is learning,
Where kids never know force,
Where they live sweetly as birds
Where kids are understood by adults
Where adults themselves can become kids,
Father, in that world, let me be born.

Ramakrishna, born slightly after General Dyer's diabolic action in Jallianwala Bagh, a frontline fighter in our struggle for Independence, has been drawn to children and their joyous world. He became a schoolteacher. He has been veritably leading a crusade for the recognition of the child's claim to joy in a busy business engrossed adult world. Now an ailing, incapacitated writer soon to become a nonagenarian, he continues to be his cheerful self with kids, now mostly with his own grandchildren.

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