

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Dharmanshu Vaidya*

*Assistant Professor,
Children's University, Gandhinagar, India
Email: dharmanshuvaidya88@gmail.com*

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The term Children's Literature is loaded with multiple nuances and to begin the unpeeling of these many layers calls for the deliberation on its range, types and availability in different literary traditions. As far as the literary history of Indian subcontinent (that necessarily includes the present day India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal) is concerned, the term has modern relevance to its antique status. To begin with its historical implications and its vividness in terms of scope demands the discussion of its region specific dimension and hence when one looks at it in the specific context of the Indian subcontinent, it is certainly improbable to undermine and overlook its rich traditions of folklore, myths, legends, and tall tales as the sacred fountain of traditional literature. The oral tradition of Children's Literature goes back more than five thousand years, and the world's oldest collection of stories for children, India's *Panchatantra*, derives from this. In the case of India, though children are treated as the nucleus of family, literary scenario contradicts this pattern. The concept of Children's Literature as a distinct literary category has its origin in the Occidental tradition and by the time it arrives in its Eastern counterpart, the functionality of its purpose and the modalities of its frame attain a maverick flavor.

As far as the development of Children's Literature in the sub-continent is concerned, it has witnessed, as Meena Khorana observes in her seminal work, three distinct phases till the date. (Khorana: 29) Initially, the stories from the oral tradition, mythology, religion, folk-tales, legends and classics were adapted and rewritten. Then there were translations and adaptations of material already published in England and other European countries and also in different native languages. Writings specifically meant for children centering joy alone is a recent phenomenon. With increasing literacy level and implementation of international standards of education, problems like the multiplicity of languages, lack of demand, poor purchasing power and high production costs, lack of library facilitation have been dedicatedly controlled. The increased interest in the development of indigenous literature for children has led to the organization of seminars, conferences and training programmes in the subcontinent. Institutions and organizations to promote literature for children have been established.

With the benefits of the linguistic diversity in India, the production and expansion of Children's Literature requires a strong historical observation. For example, *Panchatantra*, assigned to Vishnu Sharma to teach *niti* (the wisdom of governance) of which 'The Monkey

and the Crocodile’, ‘A Blue Jackal’, and ‘The flight of Pigeons’ are widely known and widely translated stories. With religious diversity and religion-oriented stories *Kathasarit Sagar*, *Jatak*, *Katha Puran*, epics of *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana* and other classics have also been a perennial source of children’s stories. However, in this article, an attempt to overview four major linguistic or regional contributions to the oeuvre of Children’s Literature is at its centre and the first among them is the case with the English literary tradition.

A Case with English Tradition :

Behind the excellent success and reach of English children’s stories the following factors are responsible i.e., the quality of writing, illustration, book design and overall production in English language, and owing much to the foundation of Children’s Book Trust (CBT) in 1957 by K.Shankar Pillai. (Kimberley: 13) CBT brought out its first set of two illustrated books in 1961: *Kings Choice* (English) written by K.Shiv Kumar and illustrated by Reboti Bhushan, and *Varsha Ki Boond*(Hindi) by Kusmawati Deshpande and illustrated by K.K. Hebbar. India’s first picture book *Home* (English) written by Kamla Nair and illustrated by K.S. Kulkarni was published by CBT in 1965. The same year CBT also published *Life with Grandfather* and *Sujata and the Wild Elephant*, both written and illustrated by Shankar. The first picture book for pre-school children *Three Fish* written by Dolat Doongaji and A.K. Lavangia, and illustrated by Pulak Biswas was published by CBT in 1966. The first adventure story in an Indian setting in English for teenagers was *Kaziranga Trail* by Arup Kumar Dutta, published by CBT in 1979. Among other publishers in the English language

is the National Book Trust (NBT), a government-owned institution, publishing common reading material in Indian languages including English and Hindi since 1969 under the Nehru Bal Pustakalaya Scheme. (Hanh: 138) There are several magazines for children in English and the prominent ones are Children’s World, Champak, Junior Quest, Tamasha, Tinkle and Target, etc. Among the well-known writers in English are Ruskin Bond, Mulk Raj Anand, Shankar, Manorama Jafa, Arup Kumar Dutta, Nilima Sinha, Kavery Bhatt, Pratibha Nath, Vernon Thomas, Dilip Salwi, Ira Saxena, Deepa Agarwal and Manoj Das.

A Case with Hindi Tradition :

The history of Children’s Literature in Hindi can be traced back to the riddles in verse written by Amir Khusro in the fourteenth century. In the nineteenth century, Raja Shivprasad wrote many books: the better-known ones are *Bachchon Ki Kahani* (1867) *Raja Bhoj Ka Sapna* (1876) and *Larkon Ki Kahani* (1876). The Hindi writers took full advantage of the source material like the *Panchatantra*, *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat* and the legends. In the early twentieth century, a number of well-known writers began to write for children. Premchand wrote “Kutte Ki Kahanian” and “Jungle Ki Kahanian”, Sohan Lal Dwivedi’s collection of poems, *Balbharti*, and *Bigul* and other patriotic poems earned instant popularity. During this period, several magazines also came out; the foremost of these were *Vidyarthi* (1914), *Shishu* (1915) and *Balsakha* (1917). The first full-length fiction for children was *Khar Khar Mahadev* by Narain Dixit, which was serialised in *Balsakhain* (1957). At present, well known children’s magazines are *Nandan*, *Champak*, *Balbharti*, *Balhors* and *Chakmak*. Some of the best-known

Hindi writers are Shyam Narayan Pande, Ram Naresh Tripathi, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Nirankar Dev Sewak, Vishnu Prabhakar, Vyathit Hridaya, Harikrishna Devsare, Swarna Sahodar, Manohar Verma, Sri Prasad, Shakuntala Sirothia, Jai Prakash Bharti, Nilima Sinha, Ira Saxena and Manorama Jafa.

A Case with Bengali Tradition :

The first magazine for children in India, *Digdarshan* was published in Bengali under the editorship of John Clerk Marshman, by Serampore Press in 1818. (Grenby: 47) An important tradition in Bengali is that a large number of those writing for adults have also written for children, unlike writers in any other Indian language. Nineteenth century Children's Literature was based largely on traditional and oral literature. In 1847, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, a teacher by profession, translated *Betal Pancabinsati* [Hindi: Betal Pachchisi]. Tagore has a famous poem for children *Bisti Pade Tapur Tupur, Nadey Eloban*, which was published in *Balak*, and *Birpurush*, a long poem with an illustration by Nandalal Bose. In 1919, Abanindranath wrote *Barngtarbratn*, Sukumar Ray wrote and illustrated a collection of nonsense rhymes, *Abol Tabol*. His father had launched a children's magazine *Sandesh*, which was discontinued after Sukumar Ray's death. His son Satyajit Ray, the well-known film maker, restarted and edited *Sandesh*, and encouraged almost all the modern writers for children. It is one of the most reputed magazines in Bengali. He edited *Sandesh* together with Lila Majumdar and Nalini Das. Satyajit Ray wrote and illustrated a number of books and liked to illustrate his own stories. His notable books are *Gupi Gayen Bagha Bayen* and *Sonar Kella and Prof Sanku*.

A Case with Gujarati Tradition :

Gujarat has an abundance of literature for children based on folklore. There are also plenty of translated books from other languages. In 1860, *Batris Putlini Virta* was written by Baji Bhai Amichand. During the third decade of the twentieth century, Gijubhai Badheka started two periodicals, *Sikshan Patrika* and *Dakshinamurthi*. He himself published 150 books for children of which eighty books were published in the series *Bal Sahitya Mala*, of which Badheka's stories are most popular. Hariprasad Vyas wrote *Bakore Patel* (1938). Jivram Joshi created humorous stories around new characters and published *Miyan Fuski* and *Chhako Ane Mako*. Among other well-known writers are Uma Shankar Joshi, Pannalal Patel, Labhuben Mehta, Nagardas Patel, Mulshankar Bhatt and Hansaben Mehta.

A Case with Marathi Tradition :

Panchopakhyana, a translation of *Panchatantra* was published in Marathi in 1825 by Mumbai Hind Shikshan Mandali. Children's Literature in Marathi was influenced mainly by works in English; H.K. Damle translated several books from English. V.K.Oke wrote many original books— *Hindusthan*, *Katharaja* and *Mahamanimala*. N.D. Tamhankar's *Gotya* (1940), a novelette, was published in the magazine *Khelgadi*. Tarabai Modak wrote original nursery rhymes and stories, Sane Guruji's *Shamachi Aai* is considered an outstanding book. B.R. Bhagwat's best-known titles are *Chandravara Swari*, and *Jaichinaval Kahani*, D.S. Desai wrote *Saha Sahase* and Jayant Narlikar wrote several books of science fiction. *Antaril Visphotis* Narlikar's most recent book. R.K. Atre wrote a play, *Guru Dakshina*. Ratnakar Matkari, Sai Paranjpe and Sudha

Karmarkar have also written plays. Among popular writers are Sane Guruji, Tara Bai Modak, Jayant Narlikar, N.D. Tamhankar, V.G. Apte, B.R. Bhagwat and his wife Durga Bhagwat.

Thus, the range and scope of Children's Literature has a variety of themes and forms as far as Indian subcontinent is concerned. The form is received well and also provides the novelty in terms its techniques of narration and illustration. To sum up, it is imperative to note that the methodology of writing for Children consists of impressive literary history and it calls

for the further deliberation on its theoretical frame.

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