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Storytelling for Young Hearts: Exploring Children's Literature

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Abstract: The present study deals with books written exclusively for children i.e. children's literature. Many writers and critics have put forth their views each adding to the meaning of children's literature. Children's literature is any literature which is appropriate for children. The problem arises when the selection of right books for children has to be made. Considering their minor status, adults play a vital role in selecting books for them. Obviously children's literature is not the concern of children alone. Parents, teachers and librarians on one hand, and authors, illustrators and publishers on the other are the potential judges of books for children. There are questions of suitability and vocabulary; of themes and genres with personal likes and dislikes.

Here the potential readers are children and hence writers and publishers mainly focus on how a book is liked by the child and what attracts him to select and read it. They should be guided by the adults but certainly have their own freedom of choice from within the children's literature. Since the emergence of children's literature adults played a major role in selecting books for children. The basic requirement for children's literature should be fulfillment of child's specific needs of pleasure, freedom, and fascination, just simple lovable literature without any restriction or imposing.

Key words: *children, literature, women writers, transcend*

Introduction: In ancient children's literature the focus was on religious, didactic and moralistic thoughts. There is gradual change in the thought process over a period of time. The true works of art however emerged in the 19th century. Here too the choice varies from didactic to moralistic to pure pleasure reading depending upon thoughts and beliefs of the adults. The main purpose of the books on children's literature should be pleasure giving, not primarily to teach them, not solely to make them good not to keep them profitably quite. These changes have seen 19th century as the dawn in new understanding of children's literature. New perspectives and trends in child psychology, liberal ideas of the adults on children are inevitable in bringing about the change.



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Now children's literature is progressing an ever better and more accurate inclusion of child in the book. Finally the participation of the child and identification with the child characters derives a source of satisfaction within him. The child derives much pleasure from reading and the fascination for books increase. Children's literature has come a long way from strict moralistic and didactic to liberal ideas of child's own emotions, likes and interests. The enhanced quality of children's books may be the outcome of the recognition of the child and its needs in evolutionary terms which may consciously or unconsciously seen as progressing towards better and accurate literature for children. The ultimate aim of children's literature should be development and production of fine children's literature that enthralls children.

But children do not always like to read about themselves. They would also like to transcend into the world of wonder, fantasy and fairy tale. Advanced studies in child psychology and awareness of child on par with adults as having their own emotions ,responses,interests,likes and dislikes has seen a change in the outlook of critics,parents,teachers and educationists who have acknowledged this fact. Though many critics have tried to define children's literature through various perceptions, the one aspect that echoes in them is that children's literature should be pure pleasure reading.

The characteristic features of children's literature are stated as, "children's books are shorter, favouring action and dialogue rather than passive introspection. Among the distinct characteristics of children's stories are recurring plot elements (as in early folk and fairy tales), greater flexibility of narrative events and the presence of child protagonists. Characters in children's books tend to be slightly larger than life, more colorful and romantic than one may find in the everyday world."

Over a period of time there is a lot of change in the outlook of children's literature. This is due to change in every society attributed to science and technological advancement. Mass media has reduced the gap between different cultures. There is more awareness about various aspects due to internet. These aspects have attributed to social and economic changes.

Children are not innocent anymore. They are knowledgeable and modern. They cannot be taken for granted. They have started expressing their likes and dislikes. Having said that, I would like to tell that children are still vulnerable for their age. Though they gain knowledge through various sources, they can't differentiate between what is good and what is bad for them. Because of vulnerability of age it is very important to censor children's literature. Controversial books are banned at many stages from publication, banning in libraries, book stores educational institutions



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and homes. Due to religious beliefs and conflicts between religious perspectives writing of certain literature is strictly prohibited. Authors on their part take care when writing for children.

In 1967, the French writer Charles Perrault wrote Little Red Riding Hood that was considered too harsh depicting cruelty to the exceeding limits for children. Hence, the revived versions of the original story were mellowed down by many authors later on. Books and comics with horror or crime themes are censored. In Britain and America writers gradually started to identify 'new realism' in children's literature. Authors started exploring bold subjects like crime, sex, drug abuse and other controversial social issues.

Children should not be taken for granted since they have their own sensibilities and possess the ability to think like adults. Due to lack of adequate resources, we find books of second rate writing and illustration in plenty for which there is a misleading idea that children's books are of second rate. Even the simplicity of plot has been looked down upon by some.

Language and style are the art of presentation in literature. The writer presents his inner thoughts and feelings through language adapting a particular style. Some norms are to be followed in use of language and style keeping in line with the mental wavelength of the minor audience. Since different vocabulary is used for different age groups.

Language plays an important role as it helps in narration and understanding of the story. The style complements language as it is the manner of writing that is elegant, systematic in certain process and it enhances the interests in child reader. It increases the attention span. Simplicity in language is considered as the standard for children's literature and it has to be used appropriately as it sometimes gives vague picture.

Unfamiliar words have their own importance. Different visions of the writers are the basis for the use of language in children's literature. Subject and theme are other features which make story gripping. The child itself forms the subject in most children's stories. The child reader has some connectivity with the child protagonists whose innocent point of view slowly reaches a point of maturity as the story reaches climax. Though most of the children's books have the same pattern, the child reader still enjoys going through the journey of innocence to maturity with enthusiasm.

It is so true that children's fiction delights even adults. One of the other reasons for this is the selection of theme. The thematic content of children's literature forms the basic structure of the book. Its main objective is to cater to the interests of the juvenile audience. The writers of children's literature must consider the suitability as the field consists of audience of different age



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groups who need to be addressed at different levels. Suitability is considered as one of the features of children's literature. It focuses on the cognitive aspect of development. Child in its world of innocence, imagination, and surroundings like home, school and neighborhood can also form the content of the theme which is aptly suitable in their fiction.

In this age of science and technology, the world is connected through internet, telecommunication, mass media and advanced transport facilities. This has bridged the gap between people of different cultures and languages. There has been an increase in translations in the field of literature. This activity is also seen in children's literature. Translations of many regional literatures in wide area of human accomplishments, knowledge and information are made to delight the child reader. Ancient literature like Panchtantra is translated and retold in many Indian languages. It has also been translated to other foreign languages. Similarly Aesop's Fables are also translated into many Indian languages. Apart from the old classics many contemporary works are also translated.

As age of the child reader is a vital aspect, it is also considered as a feature. Since childhood is a formative period, the various stages of growth from infancy to adolescents to youth has to be considered and classified in order to produce suitable fiction for different age groups. The understanding level of children at different ages varies and so are their interests. Hence children's literature should be written according to the age-group of the child.

The books which are the expressions of simplest joys of life are needed by children. They just transcend into the world of imagination and fantasy. Genres which set the mood for this kind of experience are fantasy and fairytales. Hans Christian Anderson's SnowWhite And The Seven Dwarfs, and Perault's Cindrella are a few examples of fairytales. The readers are transcended into a dreamland. The writer with his own imagination, conception and observation creates a world full of magical elements that are amusing and exciting. The children live in the world of fantasy which is like a dream.

The aim of children's writing should be delight not edification. The eternal child like qualities like wonder, simplicity, laughter and warmth should be there. Children literature should enthrall children.

Apart from identifying the quality of children's books, it is equally important to understand the concerned audience-the child. For a child, a book is a source of satisfaction that derives from identification and participation, and an expansion of his own experience. They provide him an



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opportunity for catharsis, self-knowledge, and broadening his psychic experiences. But children do not always like to read about themselves. They would also like to transcend into the world of wonder, fantasy and fairy tale.

There is a lot of change in the outlook of children's literature. This is due to change in science and technological advancement. Mass media has reduced the gap between different cultures. There is more awareness about various aspects due to internet. Children are not innocent anymore. They are knowledgeable and modern. They cannot be taken for granted. They have started expressing their likes and dislikes. Though children gain knowledge from various sources, they cannot differentiate between what is good and what is bad for them. The difference between adult literature and children's literature is seen at this point. Because of the vulnerability of age it is very important to censor children's literature.

In order to have clarity on the concept of children's literature, it is essential to study its features like language, style, theme, subject, age-group, suitability and genre.

As we read children's literature, each of us, young or old, can view the world as a child yet again. Children's fictions delight even adults. The thematic content of children's literature forms the basic structure of the book. Now the world is connected through internet, mass media and advanced transport facilities. This has bridged the gap between people of different cultures and languages. There has been an increase in translations in the field of literature. Thus, the translations in the literary world have gained momentum. This activity is also seen in children's literature. Translations help in reachability of foreign literature to the regional child audience. Ancient literature like Panchtantra is translated and retold in, any Indian languages. It has also been translated to other foreign languages.

Conclusion: To conclude, in order to have clarity on the concept of children's literature, it is essential to study its features like language, style, theme, subject, age-group, suitability and genre. Apart from the old classics many contemporary works are also translated. Translations have increased the reachability to the concerned audience. Thus, translations are to be encouraged but when it comes to subject content, it is quite a challenge for the people working in this field as it involves vulnerable age group. Since childhood is a formative period the various stages of growth from infancy to adolescents to youth has to be considered and classified in order to produce suitable fiction for different age groups.



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