

# A VIGNETTE REPORT ON INDIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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**ABSTRACT:** Children's Literature occupies a vital place in World literature. Its uniqueness lies in its functions. It deals with something very precious - 'the mind of the child'. It makes a deep mark upon young minds which time never rubs out; the children are moulded by it. Children's Literature holds the future of the world in its palm. Children bring joy to any risky life amidst all worries, irritations and frustrations. But what brings joy to children has to be sorted. Undoubtedly, we can say that Children's Literature plays a unique role in entertaining children. Texts that are written for children and by children comprise Children's Literature. Children's Literature can also be called as 'didactic literature'. India, one of the most ancient countries is known for its rich heritage and culture not to leave out its rich oral traditions. India is referred to as 'the cradle of Children's Literature'. To trace the history of Indian Children's Literature, we should begin with the country's ancient civilization. Our oral tradition begins from the Vedic period with the encryptive narrated form. It is not easy to give a comprehensive typology for a rich and dense children's literature of our country. The oral and unwritten narratives have disappeared because of many historical invasions and its influences. From the Vedic stories, *puranas*, *ithihasas*, *kathasaritsagaras*, *panchatantras*, *mahakavyas*, *jatakas to cilapathikara* and folklores, India carries Children's Literature. This paper briefs out the vignette on Indian Children's Literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Children's Literature, History, Indian Children's Literature

## I. INTRODUCTION:

Children's Literature occupies a vital place in World literature. Its uniqueness lies in its functions. It deals with something very precious - 'the mind of the child'. It makes a deep mark upon young minds which time never rubs out; the children are moulded by it. Children's Literature holds the future of the world in its palm. Children bring joy to any risky life amidst all worries, irritations and frustrations. But what brings joy to children has to be sorted. Undoubtedly, we can say that Children's Literature plays a unique role in entertaining children.

## II. INDIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:

Texts that are written for children and by children comprise Children's Literature. Children's Literature can also be called as 'didactic literature'. India, one of the most ancient countries is known for its rich heritage and culture not to leave out its rich oral traditions. India is referred to as 'the cradle of Children's Literature'. To trace the history of Indian Children's Literature, we should begin with the country's ancient civilization. Our oral tradition begins from the Vedic period with the encryptive narrated form. It is not easy to give a comprehensive typology for a rich and dense children's literature of our country. The oral and unwritten narratives have disappeared because of many historical invasions and its influences.

From the Vedic stories, *puranas*, *ithihasas*, *kathasaritsagaras*, *panchatantras*, *mahakavyas*, *jatakas to cilapathikara* and folklores, India carries Children's Literature. We can mark the origin from the first century itself. More than these, we also have lots of Arabic and Christian versions. All of this has its didactic compositions. Indian stories flooded the western world. For example, the story of three young men entering a cave to kill a demon in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is a story from the *jataka* tales. The stories of *panchatantra* had also influenced the western stories. Hertel points out:

The *panchatantra* is a work which has made an unparalleled triumphal progress from its native land over all the civilized parts of the globe and which for more than fifteen hundred years has delighted young and old, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, high and low, and still delights them. Even the greatest obstacles whether of Language or customs or religion have not been able to check that triumphal progress. It is only the oldest extent

work of Hindu artistic fiction, but it is also the one which has exerted a greater influence than any other work of India upon the Literature of the world. (2)

Writing for Children is a challenging task which involves the choice of subject keeping in mind the age-groups of children. The manner of presentation makes all the difference. Presenting the world to the children from different perspectives depending upon the child's age group is a task of a genius.

### **KINDS OF CHILDREN'S BOOK:**

Many kinds of children books are available - picture books, word bird books, rhymes, storybooks, lullabies, Bilingual picture books, cartoon books, classic translations, fiction, non-fiction, magazines, historical books, retold versions, graphic novels and so on. Picture books are meant for age-group from the toddler to eight-year-old children. The Picturebooks are printed colourfully with big fonts and with colourful pictures. Looking at the pictures is the first step for a child to learn the words of particular things. The books on vegetables, colours, and fruits come under this category.

Word bird books are a kind of book that has cross-cultural and cross-lingual stories with its source from oral traditions and folklores of India and across the world. For example, the word bird books like Gulla, and the Hangul, Eecha pochha, All About Nothing, Kali, and The Rat Snake help the contemporary children who are learning multi languages. Bilingual Picture Books are books with two languages probably English and a regional language that helps the children to learn two languages at the same time. Baby Beboo Bear, Dosa, Rangoli, The Rooster and the Sun are a few examples of Bilingual Picture Books.

Our country is best known for its lullabies. The rhymes and lullabies are Bed time stories and songs, which has come in print form too. Cartoon books are the books that have cartoons illustrated with stories. Today, we have the cartoon shows to which children are addicted. This fashionable trend of cartoons is also used by the publishers. They bring out books based on the cartoon characters in different genres - drawing books, picture puzzle books, and so on. Ben 10, Donald Duck, Dora, Power Rangers, Dragon Ballz, Spiderman, He-Man and Barbie series are a few examples of Cartoon Books.

Classic Translations like Parthiban's Dream by Nirupama Raghavan and Pippi Lambemoze by Sandhya Rao gives the classics a new age and have reached the people of other languages too. Children's Magazines are much adorable. It insists not only on reading but it also has furnishes a range like stories, information, poems, activities, games, and puzzles, which helps a child in its learning. Magazines like Chandamama, Children's world, The Magic Pot, Tinkles, and columns in Dailies like Young World are some examples for magazines.

Historical Fiction, fiction, and Non-Fictions have also been published. Epics like The Mahabaratha and The Ramayana have come out in versions meant for children. The Bible has also been published for children. Retold versions of legends and myths are still being published and are received very well. There are many writers of children's literature across the globe, who have written literature for children. They are Daisy Ashford, Elizabeth Shipper, Green, Thomas Maloy, Grimm Brothers, Hans Christian Anderson, Lewis carol, A. D. Milne, Dr. Seuss, Rudyard Kipling, Shashi Deshpande, Rabindranath Tagore, Ruskin Bond, Anita Desai, K. Shankara Pillai, Arup Kumar Dutta, Poile Sengupta, Paro Anand, Swapna Dutta, Sandhya Rao, Zai Whitaker, Kalpana Swaminathan and so on.

In India, we have many writers who explore the art of writing for children in their regional languages- Amir Khuso, Mirza Ghalib, Mohamed Iqbal, Dr. Zakir Hussain, and Qudsia Zaidi writes for children in Urdu; Prem Chand in Hindi; Rabindranath Tagore, Upendra Kishore Roychowdry, Sukumar Ray, Satyajit Ray, Asha Purna Debi and Mahasweta Devi in Bengali; K.P. Kesava Menon, M. T. Vasudevan Nair in Malayalam; T. P. Kailasam in Kannad; Bharathiyar, Anushka Ravishankar and S. Rama Krishnan in Thamizh and a host of others.

Among them, we have writers who were striving hard in retelling such as Poile Sengupta, Nandhini Nair, Rebati Bhushan, Shankara Pillai, Deepa Agarwal, Samina Misra, Sandhya Rao, Pradyumna Kumar and Many more.

### **III. A BRIEF HISTORY:**

Children's Literature has a different history in the world. When we Google out the history of children's literature, we find that the history has been charted out from the fifteenth century. The tales that were written generally fascinated the children for centuries. The Tales of Robin Hood are an example.

The history begins from the seventeenth century when the first picture book was published specifically for children. Then, we have Charles Derrault's work as the foundations of the fairy tale in France. Little Red Riding

Hood, Sleeping Beauty, and Puss in Boots are a few examples. In the Eighteenth century, John Newberry published *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* in England. Then we have Grimm brothers (Wilhelm Grimm and Jacob Grimm) who were important in preserving the oral traditions of Germany such as that of Snow White, Rapunzel and Hansel and Gretel.

In 1835 and 1848, Hans Christian Andersen published his fairy tales like *The Little Mermaid*, *The Ugly Duckling*, and *The Snow Queen*. In 1865, Lewis Carroll published *Alice in Wonderland* in England. Chandler Harris' folk stories featured the personification of animals speaking in the African-American dialect. *The Adventures of Pinnocchio* of Carlo Colloid, is a puppet story, and the first Italian fantasy fiction for children.

In 1900, one of the best known American stories emerged written by L. Frank Baum *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Other works include J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, and A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*. C.S. Lewis published several chronicles in 1950. Dr. Seuss with his rhymes attracted many children for generations. In 1997 J. K. Rowling came out with her first Harry Potter novel.

Children's Literature books were established in libraries of schools and especially in academic books in the Thirties. Several records will help one to trace the roots of Children's Literature. From the ancient times (50 BCE to 500 BCE) where children enjoyed stories from the elders' narration such as the Aesop fables, poems of Homer, the *Iliad*, The Trojan war, and the *Odyssey* forms the Children's Literatures of that era.

The Middle Ages (500-1500CE) consists of epics, romances, adventures, fables, biblical stories, and other tales. The European Renaissance (1500–1650 CE ) has many instructional books, books of martyrs, and value education. The invention of the Printing Press in the mid-fifteenth century played an important role. The Seventeenth-century has its unique role where Children's literature gained new attention with works like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Alphabetical Rhymes*.

The Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries consist of Moral Tales, John Newberry's *Little Pretty Pocketbook*, *Folk Tales*, and so on. The Victorian period or The Golden Age was the age when children's literature blossomed. The Fantasies occupied the stories of this age. *Alice's Adventures*, *Adventure stories of Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, domestic stories for girls, school stories, and illustrated books are few works of this age. In the Twentieth century, the widening world had a greater diversity in Children's books and awards, medals and scholarships were given.

The tabular column given below will give a brief account of the history of Children's Literature, according to the period and its attitude and the treatment of the literature.

Period:	Attitudes/Treatment:	Literature:
Anglo-Saxon: 525-1100 CE	Not greatly valued; abandonment, killing, slavery; promising sons were educated	Oral literature of adults; music, poetry, numbers, history; monks began to write books for educating children
Middle-English: 1100-1500 CE	Infanticide still practised despite strict laws; away at 3 days until 6 or 7; swaddling, opium, liquor; hardening	Upper-class French/educated Latin, lower-class English; reading Scriptures
Renaissance: 1500-1650 CE	Infanticide still practised; considered miniature but troublesome men and women; no concept of development	horn-books, reading-boards, primers for lessons
Restoration: 1650-1800	Swaddling died out by end of 18th C; America: mothers cared for own children; survival raised to 50%; life less severe	New England Primer published for children; chapbooks, nursery rhymes; fairy tales and fantasies discouraged
19th Century: 1800-1900	1860--changes in treatment of children; having enthusiasms and emotions; 1840--change to women schoolmarms:	Given fantasy, history, adventure, biography, poetry, romances, periodicals; books on child rearing
20th Century: 1900-	Childhood recognized as a stage of development; emphasis on adolescence; no	Materials based on child interests aid discipline in wake of new "softening;" no

2000	longer asset, family size decreased	longer learning by frightening
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**IV. THE PIONEERS:**

Our Indian Children’s Literature definitely has the richest oral tradition. This is evident when one looks at the history of our Children’s literature. As briefed in the previously, Our Children’s literature begins from the Vedas. Narration is an inborn instinct for all human beings and it is the beautiful element that should be noted while we trace out history. The smallest manifestation of narration can be found in the orally transmitted Vedas during ancient times. They were in the form of lyrics full of devotion and later elaborated into stories, episodes and even dramatized for stage presentation. This kind of narrative has been called as cryptic narrative.

With all these stories that have been either compressed or elaborated in the form of mini-tales by supplying details of childhood begin the Children’s Literature. The stories of varuna and vasistha, yama and yami, agathiya and lopamudra, pururavas and urvasi are a few examples. Thus, the Vedas represent the sowing period of the Indian Children’s Literature.

Next to the Vedas, we have the puranas or saga model in Children literature. ‘Puranas’ means ‘old’ in Sanskrit. We have eighteen puranas such as Padma, Vaishnava, Naradiya, Garuda, Varaka, Matsya, Kurma, Linga, Vaya, Skanda, Agneya, Brahmanda, Bhrahnavavasta, Markenya, Bhavisyad, Vamana, and Brahma. All of them follow the saga narration. They have a chain of narrators who are the linkers of little tales.

For examples, In The Bhagavata there is a sequence of narrations, in different occasions by different narrators to different audiences; From the Lord to Brahma, Brahma to Narada, Narada to Vyasa, Vyasa to Suka, Suka to Suta from Suta to Sounaka: this goes from narrator to narrator. The narrative features of the Puranas were given in a list in Ayyapa Paniker’s book on Indian Narratology such as “contextualization, orality, Question-answer pattern, use of dialogue, recursiveness, author as character, human-divine interaction, from creation onwards, supra-national, benefits of listening”(30).

Moral and Religious lessons were taught through these Puranas. Paniker says that the Bible can also be considered as Puranas because it also combines multiple functions of encyclopedic narrative. Novels of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy can also be compared to this kind of Puranic narrative. The Ithihasas comes next to the puranas. The puranas deal with legendary issues in the context of history, Ithihasas deals with historical issues in the context of a legend. Divinity can be strongly felt in the Ithihasas. The Ithihasas of our Indian literature are the Ramayana and the Mahabaratha - two epics mostly unknown to the modern-day children. The characters of the puranas are humanized in the ithihasas. They are bound within time and not much of realism can be seen here.

We have many versions for children of these ithihasas now. But the Indian epics differ from the western epics. Homer’s The Illiad and Valmiki’s Ramayana have many features in common such as the plot, incidents and abduction, but the war in The Ramayana is shorter than the Trojan War. We can see the narration of a nation as its central mechanism, sequence of plots, heroic element, love and war, realism and fantasy in both the epics of India.

The Mahabaratha is compared by Vyasa, where Vyasa sought the help of Lord Ganesha to write the epic. This has a tree-like narration with eighteen paragraphs, which have multiple voices in it. A series of narrations come into the text from time to time and they sustain the narration. The little stories in this epic were drawn out and were made for children.

The Srikhala or Chain narrative tales follows the ithihasas. Kathasaritsagara means ‘ocean of stories’ forms this kind. The tiny tales that were narrated by different narrators set the chain and flow in a single frame. Kathasaritsagara is a collection of stories like the panchatantra, dasakumarasarita, hitopadesa katha, Vikramaditya katha, and so on. They all have a framework that provides a connection between the different stories.

The narration has two narrators in it - the master or author narrator and the character narrator. Any contemporary readers who approach the text from their perspective are likely to miss the multiple layers of narration. Interestingly, Poile Sengupta brings these multiple layers in her retold versions. “The Story of Malayaran”, Saimhasana Dvatrmsika”, “Vetalapancavimsati” form this chain of tales.

We have many other stories that have been written as an experiment in these chain tales by our Indian writers such as the works of Pandarani, Prabandhakootu or Bhagavata mela, Sukrapati, or Harikatha. These chain narratives have influenced many western works such as *The Arabian Nights*, *Decameron*, and *The Canterbury Tales*. All these are aspects of Postmodern meta-fiction.

The Anyapadesha, an allegorical tale follows the Saga model. This is the most used narrative form for children in India, an effective means of communication that transforms the concepts and values to children. The Panchatantra tales are an example of this allegorical model in Indian Children's literature. Jesus Christ and Buddha often spoke in parables to communicate principles to the people. This model implants the principles in the minds of children.

Panchatantra has its framework and Vishnu Sarma had classified the entire wisdom of classical texts under five headings. Chandra Rajan who translated this into English has explained this as an 'emboxed' story. Panchatantra has influenced many western and Indian writers too.

The Mahakavyas are the classical literary works, which have their base in the Ithihasas. We can even consider this as a retold version. Raghuvamsa by Kalidasa comes within this Mahakavya. They are not didactic like others. This has been created for aesthetic pleasure and concerns itself with social and political conditions. As parables plays a vital role in the Bible, Jatakas plays in Buddhism. Jataka tales tell stories about the former births of Buddha and it consists of 550 birth stories arranged in twenty-two books. A kind of parallelism prevails in these Jataka tales.

#### **THE SOUTH INDIAN STYLE:**

The South Indian Literature follows the Dravidian style. This was established just before and after the beginning of the Christian era. The Sangam classic consists of many literary works. Five major classic such as Silapathikaram, Manimekalai, Seevagasinthamani, Kundalakesi, and Valayapathi have inspired many Indian and western writers. 'The Thirukural' is an ancient tamil classic, which has gained a universal acknowledgement and was taught to children in Tamil Nadu academically from the age of five.

Usually, the Tamil classics come under three features according to the subject matter and genre it deals with. They are Iyal, Isai, Nadagam. Silapathikaram as a model for the Dravidian style consists of all the three features in it. We have a dividend of Akam and Puram in Tamil classic. There are versions of Silapathikaram compressed with the realm of fantasy that is needed for the children. We have many miscellaneous narrative forms in Tamil Children's literature such as Pillai thamil, thuthu, and Anthathi. We have stories of vaandumama, stories of S. Ramakrishnan, and Mugilai Rasapandiyan who tell and retell stories for contemporary children blending humour and fantasy. At present, we have writers like Yuma Vasuki, Uthayasankar, Vizhiyan, Vishnupuram Saravanan who strives to bring up Children's Literature in Tamil.

Folk and Tribal narratives are the richest oral tradition in Indian Children's Literature. They were all not published and it was all anonymous and orally transmitted to generations. Proverbial stories can be classified here. A. K. Ramanujan's story "A Friend in Need" about a tortoise is a translated version of Tiripura's story; "Queen Kamal Khori" is a story from Assam. We have numerous stories from folks and tribals such as Babuji stories, Bhopo stories and kudyattam. Therefore, our Indian children's Literature is definitely a cradle for children's literature. We have different heads of stories and tales.

#### **V. CONCLUSION:**

In the present era where children are looked as a consumer, faces issues of globalisation, environmental crisis, and one can use this didactic form of literature to teach them to face the issues. Children Literature had taken a twist towards popular culture having accepting the changes in culture and lifestyle. The Science Fictions takes a major commercial success these days, however, it is all of fantasy and myths seeded remains the base. One can't deny the fact of transition or transformation of this form into various genres or types to cater the need of contemporary children.

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