



CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IS AN ARENA FOR SHARED AND DYNAMIC DISCOURSE AMIDST CHILDREN AND GROWN-UPS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Children's literature is the fictional creation of a cultural space in which writers find ways of exploring what they want to say to and about children. If we go back to the early history of children's literature we may see that this body of literature includes oral stories, songs and poems. These oral compositions were transmitted orally in order to educate, instruct and entertain children. When it started to appear in writing forms it came in form of educational books. Generally these books had pictures of animals, plants and anthropomorphic words. In distant past children were not seen and treated different from adults. The concept of childhood began to rise during seventeenth century. With this century adults began to see children as innocent and beings in need of care and protection. Training by adults around them was felt required. This paper is to examine the historical perspectives of development of children's literature. This paper reveals children's literature as an arena for shared and dynamic discourse that protects and cares of children's emotional world and trains them to lead a better life.

Key words: children's literature, discourse, grown-ups, historical perspective

INTRODUCTION

Historical perspective provides us a vision to see a subject in its budding phases and evolutionary phases. How did a particular field of study get shape in cultural, social and



intellectual settings of a time? How did under the influence of a particular subject lives and actions of people take place in past? Historical perspective provides wide range for research study by promoting the relative constancy of phenomena. This paper explores historical perspective of development of children's literature as an arena for shared and dynamic discourse between children and adults. This perspective differs from history because it is aimed at to sharpen one's vision of the present, to study the present using past. Here in this essay examining a wide range of works hypothesis, considering children's literature a two-way life and mind changing platform for adolescents; that might be proved as a clinical tool for the society, will be tested. This work will show that children must be incited to explore their interest expressing themselves in literature. This practice will give rise to ethics in their personality. Current society is in dire need of personalities of ethics.

On the basis of the rich and highly informative literature on the history of children's literature, it might be argued that historical model is common to all children's literature both in their inception and later on in their development. The same stages of development and the same historical patterns recur time and again in all children's literatures, transcending national boundaries and even temporal ones. Regardless of when and where a system of children's literature began to develop, whether its emergence took place a hundred or even two hundred years later, all systems of children's literature known to us, without exception, pass through the same stages of development. Moreover the same cultural factor and institutions are involved in their creation. With the times of prior to the emergence of human civilization on this earth adults had started to entertain and condition their children with tales and fables. From the net of these tales and fables children's literature began to take shape. Children's literature sprang from stories passed down orally generation to generation. There is a long journey of evolution of children's literature from oral tradition to written form. Today children's literature covers a wide range of diverse genres from fiction to verse, from tales to non-fiction. This form of literature appeals to readers from any of the age groups.

Children always love to listen stories before going to bed. Every corner of the world produced sleep-inducing literature for young ones in every epoch of human development. We also owed a treasure of such literature from ancient writers from all over the world. Panchatantra from India is one of the earliest written fables which was written around 2200 hundred years back. Around 1600 hundred years back appeared Aesop's fables. Imperial China witnessed peak of storytelling, even today stories from this age are used to teach moral and life lessons to students in china. It is not far back that concept of childhood was emerged. Before that children were not seen a separate entities with their own requirements and limitations. In 17th century philosophy regarding children and childhood started to come into being. John Locke, in his outstanding work "*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*" propounded the theory of empiricism. It means at the time of birth human mind is *tabula rasa* (a blank slate). According to this theory human mind learns through sensory experience in this world. His five senses eyes, ears, skin, nose and tongue. A child is

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in a very vulnerable state in respect of experience and physical growth. While going through children's literature a child may come to know the world primary through the eyes of others, doing this he may get second hand experience. This experience may enhance his range of thought process and may be helpful in development of child's perception.

With the development of such theories Europe became the centre of Cultural Revolution in the world. It was only in eighteenth century that children's literature began to rise with its own discourse. Didactic texts for children became increasingly common and popular. These books are aimed at instructing children. Prayer books, textbooks, alphabet books began to appear in Europe for middle class also. *Pentamerone* from Italy became the first major published collection of European folk tales. Charles Perrault began recording fairy tales in France. *Primers* was Russia's earliest children's book. Two centuries later illustration in children's books started to be introduced. With the introduction of illustration into children's books children's literature turned a more popular form of literature. In the first half of the eighteenth century children's books were also seen as pleasure reading. With enhanced availability of paper and printing children's literature flourished a lot. In the latter half of 18th century children's literature appeared as an independent form of literature. This literature found a luxuriant form during 20th century. John Newberry's *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* is widely taken as first published modern book for children. The book was aimed at giving entertainment to children. The book contains a mixture of rhymes, picture stories and games. Newberry believed that play was a better enticement to children's good behavior than physical discipline. According to the journal *The Lion and the Unicorn*, "Newberry's genius was in developing the fairly new product category, children's books, through his frequent advertisements... and his clever ploy of introducing additional titles and products into the body of children's books." Another philosopher who influenced the development of children's literature was Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau emphasized that children should be allowed to grow naturally and joyously. His idea of appealing to children's natural interests took hold among writers for children. Thoughts of Rousseau had a great impact on German Philanthropism. The shift to a modern genre of children's literature took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. There was a great change from didacticism to make way for humorous, child oriented books. *Tom Brown's school Days* by Thomas Hughes appeared in 1857. The book is considered to be the founding book in the school story tradition. Publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* indicates the changes in writing style of children's books. This is one of the beginning books in fantasy genre. The book is helpful in ignition of children's imagination. Carlo Collodi wrote first Italian fantasy novel, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. The book was translated many times. In the US children's publishing entered a period of growth after the American civil war in 1865.

In present scenario children's literature may be defined as a body of writings accompanied with illustrations in order to inculcate and amuse little ones. This form covers a considerable range of works from ancient to modern; this includes acknowledged classics of world

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literature. Going through the pool of these writings a link between young people and grown-ups has been established. There was a strong need of establishment of such discourse. Authors of juvenile fiction gave a voice to the needs of this vulnerable phase of human life. Children may recognize and explore their latent interest and potential. Reading a worthy literature makes children more valuable social beings. Writings make a considerable influence on growing children and these children also communicate their requirement and contentment. A child in formative years shows a transitional phase and study of this phase may give resolutions for problems in personal, professional and social life of people. If influential writers may incite them to compose their own fiction this fiction may reveal complications in human nature that take shape during coming-of-age years. Children's literature may become a two way medium of communication between adults and children. Such education may be part of public education and home education. We may study influence of various factors such as the age, gender, class and the religion on their expression. These studies might be helpful in identifying any kind of mental, moral, emotional, spiritual and behavioural deformity. On the basis of the literature produced by a child, a child might be conditioned. Therefore we need to present children's literature as a platform where every adolescent may get inspiration to compose his or her fiction that may contribute a lot in solving the adolescent problems in society. In case we recognize our adolescents we may give shape their life as an efficient citizen.

Through the influence of children's literature children should be incited to compose original work. Publication houses should be opened by governments to get their work published. Children are the future treasure of any country. We should study their imagination. Research work should be promoted on their writings. Psychological, sociological and literary research may be conducted on their writings. Academics may take out clue of many problems from the research on composition by children. There is a big problem since the beginning of social structure that many children get diverted and go directionless even turn as unsocial elements. They turn as criminal, murderer, robbers, rapist, smugglers, prostitutes and addict of drugs. These conditions of human being show some disorder in their emotional status. It means they may not care emotions and feelings of themselves and of others. Composing literature will help them in becoming emotionally healthy. Literature may be an effective and two way medium of curing mental and emotional ailments. This may be a platform for shared and dynamic discourse for children and adults. This is not a new idea but a different version on debates on merits of children's literature as a part of formal education in schools 1765-1845 in England. The debate remained unconcluded. The major concern of the debate was education through children's literature should be formal or informal. Should it be part of children's domestic life or academic life? Till date we may see it basically as a part of domestic pedagogy in their family life. Generally children's literature includes domestic life as a subject. This has been using as a tool to fulfill a rising need for instructive substance at home. Governments, social thinkers and social reformers should set a vision for entire



reformation structure in societies of all countries of world. Children's literature may become a tool in both home pedagogy and school pedagogy for entire reformation in society. As only education may bring changes therefore children in formative years should be educated including this as an essential activity. Producing literature should be importance equal to sports and games.

From the beginning of recorded culture, people have grown up with the books they learned and loved. For ancient Greece and Rome, the progress of the child was measured through the book, and if there is a children's literature for classical antiquity, it lies in the texts and tales adapted from the canons of the Greek and Roman lives and libraries. For nearly a millennium the life of children centered on performance. The two poles of early learning were memorization and recitation. Students would be given passages from poets and dramatists and would be expected to learn and then recite them. The teacher would call attention to correct pronunciation and accent. But more than simply spewing back remembered texts; the student would soon be expected to generate performance of his own. Literary study led to a proficiency in rhetoric, and law, politics, and military leadership were all rhetorical activities in Greek and Roman culture.

Children should be encouraged to write their diaries. Special journals should be initiated where children can express their original attitude towards themselves, society, life and world. If a child starts to construct an ideal imaginary character this imaginary character might be imbibed. Without ethical and moral development our education is incomplete. In order to eliminate evils from society we should introduce composing literary pieces as a part of education for growing children. When a child re-generates imaginary situations that resemble their real life situations he feels relaxed and safe in adverse conditions. This is also helpful in feeling psychologically safe. This phenomenon ensures healthier ways to confront with inner struggle, nervousness and stress. Crafting story makes them constructive and provides productive patterns of behaviours. They may grow into constructive models of character.

Children were equated with "nature"—the dynamic, organic universe of both Romanticism and evolution—in three respects. First, if one conceives nature as "the subsistence of things on their own, their existence in accordance with their own immutable laws", then unself-consciousness, self-completeness, physical harmony, the identity of body and mind" in children. Second, in their obvious vitality and power of growth, children are indigenous of nature. Third, in the view of one group of American anthropologists, children are the very prophets of the evolutionary process, foreshadowing in their physiology the future of our changing, ever immaturing race whose destiny is to become ever more childlike (Children's Literature 6). As nature's own creature—a being of growth and change in a universe of change, the child is the goal as well as the source of the adult. The Romantic transvaluation also assigned to children a new set of unitary psychological and cognitive powers, making in Bronson Alcott's words, "nothing... too metaphysical for the mind of a child". The innate



powers of childhood consciousness were deemed to be idealism, holism, animism, faith, and psychological self-sufficiency—all modes of outgoing the world and the self at one. At the time of romantic age of English literature childhood was associated with forces, energies, growth, and development of nature, as well as with the mental and spiritual capacities to perceive the world as meaningfully unified. The romantic transvaluation presented child as a powerful trans historical symbol.

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