

The Evolution of Children's Literature

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Abstract

Children's literature is literature for children and about children, maybe written by children or adult writers. The article sheds lights on the meaning and importance of children's literature. It mainly focuses on how children's literature in general has been evolving in the English and Nepali contexts of literary history. Some writers and their books have been consulted and some critics' opinions have been cited in order to find out the general trends of the evolution of children's literature. Efforts have been made to observe some commonalties and contrasts in the evolution trends between children's literature, mainly in English, and children's literature in Nepal. It is observed that the sources and themes of children's literature are similar both in English and Nepali. The oral trend of sharing folk and mythic stories is also similar in both cases. Writing books that can be leveled as children's literature started very late in Nepal, however the story-telling tradition in village houses by grandparents, parents and uncles is very old.

Keywords: children's literature, innocence, experience, internationalism, commonalties and contrasts, oral.

Introduction

Children's literature embraces the contents that induce pleasure and education for children. Children themselves can write books, comics or any thing or others can write for them. The essential quality of children's literature is to amuse children. Moreover, when adults read the books for children, they also return to their childhood and feel nostalgia. Children's literature, thus, connects the world of the adults to that of children. Children's literature easily influences children. They learn from what they read or write. Children's books often portray words and pictures which draw their attention and increase their curiosity to read. Such books provide children with a sense of reality about the society where they have lived. Jan Amos Komensky's *Orbis Pictus*, published in Bohemia in 1658, is said to be the first picture book for children.

Children are innocent. Adults are experienced. Children's literature often connects innocence with experience and vice versa. Things passed, passing and to pass can sometimes be assimilated to each other. Today's child is tomorrow's man. The man can come back through reminiscences. The memoirs can inspire him to live further. In this perspective, the Romantic Poet William Wordsworth is right to say "The Child is father of the Man" (52, line7).

History of Children's Literature

Generally children's literature began from the adults' mouths. Adults orally shared interesting stories about animals, birds, ghosts, angels and wars with children. Fables, biblical stories, miracle plays and moral tales were sources of children's literature. In Homer's poems children

feel delighted. Likewise Aesop's fables became popular worldwide. They contributed a lot to promote children's literature. Children's story books like *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Cinderella* were published in Europe in the seventeenth century. Children gradually learnt how to read. Through literature, adults wanted to teach children manners, behaviors and morals. Values and ethos were given priority in children's books. MacLeod writes:

Puritans wrote literature for children. It was not what is recognized now as 'children's literature'; it was meant entirely for instruction, and religious instruction in a difficult doctrine. Yet it was written for children and designed to match children's capabilities and tastes as the authors understood them. (103)

A major purpose of children's books is to delight children. Children really enjoy *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* by John Newbery, published in 1744. Writers of children's literature in the beginning till the nineteenth century emphasized the theme of religious faith. People viewed children in relation to God's gifts. God's grandeur was highlighted and disseminated among children and all people. The motto "God alone can save me" was conveyed to children. In course of time, with the advent of science, people's perspectives and cultures changed and children's literature also had a new dimension. Children were observed under the influence of theology but later they were seen from the point of view of science. Briggs says, "Children were 'savages', awaiting the education that would transform them into civilized adults" (169).

Some popular books are found to have highly entertained children. They were published in Europe in the nineteenth century. They include Grimm Brothers' *Hansel and Gretel*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. American writer L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and English writer J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* can be regarded remarkable among children's books in the twentieth century.

Children's literature was basically limited to a narrow domain of knowledge. Children's literature has flourished worldwide and it has become an important literary genre. Some factors that contributed in the development are child rights, democracy, mass communications and academic institutions.

In Nepal the primary sources of children's literature are the folk tales and mythic tales narrated by grandparents, parents and uncles. Specially, grandchildren even today love grandmothers as they can listen to various stories from them. These stories are deep-rooted in their heads and hearts. Such stories are retold and finally they can be collected and published as children's literature. The Hindu mythological texts can also be regarded as the good sources of children's literature. In the *Bhagavata Purana*, Krishna and child age friends from Gokul and Mathura have real fun in curd-stealing and cow-grazing in Brindavan. In the *Ramayana* also, Hanuman's interesting and devotional services to Ram and such other episodes delight children. In the *Sri Swasthani*, Goma, a girl child, suffers a lot and later on, an elephant coronates her son Nawaraj in Lawanyadesh. From the *Shiva Purana*, the Ganesh-Kumar

episode is also very interesting. There are many events and narratives in the *Puranas* that inspire and entertain children.

In Nepal, moral stories helped the evolution of children's literature. Gangadhar Shastri's *Gorkha Pahila Kitab* (1949) and Jay Prithvi Bahadur Singh's *Balbodh- Part I* (1959) consist of various stories which teach children moral values. Likewise, Chakrapani Chalise, Parasmani Pradhan, Dev Kumari Thapa, Krishna Prasad Parajuli and others have written for children. They have focused on morality, justice, equality, science and environment. Ramesh Bikal's *Panchatantra* with animal and bird stories has also helped children's literature in Nepal. Papers and magazines addressing children have promoted children's literature in Nepal. *Balpatrika* (2009), *Balak* (2022), *Khelauna* (2035), *Muna* (2047), *Baltara* (2058) and so forth have remarkably enhanced children's literature in Nepal.

In Nepal, fairy tales and moral tales are popular among children. Various writers wrote stories and poems for children but later one-act plays were also introduced. Promod Pradhan et al in *Preface to Children's Stories from Nepal* opine:

The year 2036 BS holds a special importance in the field of Nepal children's literature. The writers and publishers started taking the task of writing and publishing children's literature seriously. In this period, Nepali children's literature, limited to children's poems and stories, started expanding to include one-act plays and illustrated stories/ picture books as well.

Writers and poets like Vijaya Chalise, Sarubhakta, Lekhnath Paudyal, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Madhav Prasad Ghimire and Siddicharan Shrestha promoted children's literature by their publications. They have written about birds, animals, insects, family, rural life and so on. The themes of their creations include beauty, nature, love, humanity, patriotism and values. They have further focused on truth, beauty and goodness. After the 1990s, Nepali poems, especially by National Poet Madhav Prasad Ghimire, have the Romantic touch. Devkota's works like *Putali* and *Sunko Bihan* and Ghimire's works like *Ghampani* and *Ballahari* have tremendous impacts on the evolution of children's literature in Nepal. These giant literary figures really loved children. They view that good children can contribute a lot in the future. Some writers in the later days produce children's books in Nepal. They are Shanta Das Manandhar, Parasu Pradhan, Biswambhar Chanchal, Dhruva Ghimire, Shailendu Prakash Nepal, Pramod Pradhan and so on. Themes of any literary works get changed as per time and context. Books on children's literature today disseminate the subject matters related to education, science and technology. However, they also speak about the themes associated with religion, morality, nature and so on. Publications on children's literature have many things to say. They speak of child psychology, the reality of the society and the prospects of the nation. Hunt writes "children's books - perhaps like children - see more, or at least, say more" (xi).

Today there are many writers involved to promote children's literature in Nepal. The Nepalese Society for Children's Literature always focuses on the motto "Good children's literature for good citizens". Various seminars and workshops on children's literature have taken place and

made necessary strategies and decisions to promote this genre. Literature shapes the mind of the people and thereby shapes the mind of the nation. Children's literature can prepare tomorrow's nation builders. Children's literature may appear simple but in depth it can address the adult world and create hope for tomorrow's better world. To write for children is not an easy job. The writer should act as a child in terms of children's feelings, behaviors, words and psychology. Sadler says, "These texts may look deceptively 'simple' but the books of children encode adult modes of signification" (6).

When a book on children's literature is published, it can be translated into one or more languages and the people of different countries can read it. Internationalism in children's literature is not a new trend. Nepali writers like Gangalal Pradhan have translated some English stories into Nepali. These stories are based on morality and values. The publications of such translated stories played an important role to enhance children's literature in Nepal. *Meetho Geet Gaune Chara Ko Bisayama* (1967) is a beautiful translated work which highly entertains children. Thus, children's literature has become an internationally popular trend. At this juncture, we can remember Watkins and Sutherland's writing:

Children's literature was also being recognized as part of the mainstream of literature, and its study in colleges and universities grew rapidly. Although this was initially in library schools and education departments, children's literature increasingly became normal feature of English Literature departments, (293).

Internationalism has brought a sense of solidarity in culture and literature. When a work gets translated into a foreign language, its range of access broadens and makes coverage over more readers and thinkers. As a result, new perspectives and trends appear in creations and gradually a world voice can have a similar tone for children. Stahl writes, "Internationalism is an important dimension of children's literature" (19).

Basing the views on the general information of children's literature, similar themes and trends can be traced. Generally, children's literature was oral across the globe. The sources of children's literature such as fairy tales, fables and mythological texts were also similar in general. More probably, grandparents' narratives may be more common in Nepal. The major themes like religion, morality and values were similar. The shifts in themes such as science, technology, space etc. can also be similar in Nepal and other countries. Internationalism is also a common phenomenon. Grimm Brothers' *Hansel and Gretel* can be available in Nepali. Such can be the case as to other works be rewritten in different languages. So today children's literature can not be limited to a particular geography, domain and race. It is a literature of all and for all.

Conclusion

Children's literature can help the feeling of "Love the children, love the nation". If one is kind and considerate to a child, one can love the nation. The world cheers when a child smiles. Children's literature amuses children and helps evoke their latent talent in order to

bloom and perfume in different domains of life. Children's literature teaches children what truth is. It prepares them to make a quest for quality in grown up life. They, by virtue of the morals of the texts they have read, grow wise and responsible. They come to learn in case of mistakes, if any, self-realization is a moral victory. States should care the genre of children's literature. To love this genre is to love children. All associated people should work together with zeal and zest for promoting children's literature.

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