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The constructive and cultural significance of children's literature

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Abstract

Children are the essence of life, and nurturing them is crucial for a bright future. Among various methods of teaching and grooming, literature in their native language stands out as the most effective tool. Through enchanting stories, poetry and prose, we can engage, educate and nourish children according to the needs of the time. Many renowned poets have written for children and their writings are a great source of learning and teaching. The topics and techniques of these writings are according to the emotional, mental and psychological demand of the children. The children's Urdu literature has its own tradition and individuality. But all over the world children can enjoy and learn from it. Children's literature possesses unique and captivating beauty.

Keywords: Nurturing, native, enchanting, *engage, renowned, psychological, individuality, captivating, techniques*

Introduction

At any stage of life, a child is always present within a person who constantly learns, forgets, changes his needs and expresses them under the changes of circumstances. The significance of childhood or children is undeniable because not only at the individual level but also in general, children are considered to be the foundation of life as they shape "today" as well as the forthcoming "tomorrow". Children's education and upbringing are crucial for the progress and development of nations and generations.

As Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum aptly puts it:

“A child is not merely the foundation stone, this brick builds walls, minarets, and arches. Strengthening a structure is not its sole purpose; it must also be imbued with elegance and allure. A child is not only considered the first brick but also the middle and last brick therefore, all potential and talents must be present in him”. (1)



For a long time, children were often considered vulnerable and reliant on adults for all matters, lacking significant recognition in literature and society. However, the rapid advancements in science and psychology during the 19th century, coupled with new inventions, brought attention to children's emotions, feelings, and psychological inclinations. This era also witnessed the emergence of the concept of children's literature in the 20th century. Saleem Akhtar says:

“Children are the flowers of the nation and children's literature serves as nurturing garden for these flowers.” (2)

In this garden of flowers, the responsibility of nurturing and grooming lies in catering to all the demands of beauty and aesthetics. While preserving the freshness and vitality of the nation's flowers, we must also appoint them as ambassadors of fragrance and guide them towards the future. To embark on this journey, it is essential to provide them with appropriate education and training, ensuring their mental and emotional comfort and satisfaction. Consequently, the creation of literature tailored for them becomes a profoundly delicate matter. Ishrat Rehmani writes:

“Children's literature should be constructive from all its aspects, just like all types of literature. However, children's literature is very delicate matter, just like their ages and minds. Just as every type of food cannot suitable for children and their weak digestive system cannot accept heavy food and faces difficulty to digest it properly. Similarly, their literature should also be carefully chosen and tailored to their uniqueness.” (3)

Children create their own fantasy world, where their imagination and emotions set it apart from the adult world. They soar among the clouds, play with the stars, converse with the moon and create a fragrant atmosphere with their love for flowers, where beauty, love, and innocence prevail and cunning, deceit, and trickery are far removed. That is why they also need such literature that provides solace to their souls and connects with this world. Mirza Adeb says:

“Children prefer literature that resonates with their own world, irrespective of whether it is poetry or prose. By "children's own world," we mean their unique environment—a blend of their natural inclinations, emotions, and sentiments, aligned with their cognitive abilities and level of contemplation. Therefore, children's literature should mirror what surrounds them daily, what they observe regularly, and what stimulates their imagination.” (4)

It's also a fact that whatever is written for children should not be so far-fetched that they fail to connect with the real world and get lost in a world of fantasy, unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood. As Begum Mukhtar Masood says:

“Children's minds are like clear mirrors, which accept all kinds of impressions according to their nature and mediation. Therefore you should follow extreme caution and thoughtful consideration before shaping any impression, because the swords of their life will be sharpened on the whetstone that you provide for them.” (5)



Indeed, since the beginning of the 20th century, or rather since the onset of the scientific and industrial revolution, it has been understood that children's literature should also follow the same path then it will be considered valuable if it goes through the stages of construction and completion. However, this is not the case, because imagination dominated over reality in a child's existence. They are fascinated by scientific inventions and use them but at the same time, they have a special attraction to fairy tales. That's why Sohail Ahmed Khan says:

“The frequent use of terms like 'scientific era', 'industrial age', and 'realism' creates an emotional atmosphere that leads to the conclusion that in today's world, it is more advantageous to educate children about modern scientific advancements and scientists rather than fairy tales. I haven't read the biographies of scientists extensively to confirm what scientists may have read in their childhood, but one thing is certain, if scientists were once children, they likely heard or read fairy too.” (6)

Hence, children's literature is expected to serve as not only a guardian of innocence but also a guarantee of their upbringing and education, providing solace and recreation. For this purpose, writers' creative endeavour should aim to make their literature as beautiful, accessible and engaging as possible, keeping it close to children's world and offering opportunities for entertainment and learning while acknowledging the various aspects of children's psychology. This is especially important in today's world, when the internet has made information readily available at our fingertips and we need creative work that meet the demands of the times and also preserve the innocence of children. Whether it is children's stories, poetry, literature, imposing restrictions on using simple words for children's literature can potentially impede children's cognitive development, depriving them of the opportunity to learn new vocabulary and benefit from it. To highlight the characteristics of words, Bonamy Dobree writes:

“Words are like worn-out coins that gradually lose their luster and we are unable notice what is written on them. They may be useful for communication but they are merely bland in terms of impact and attraction. A new coin may bring us joy when we see it, but an old coin does not evoke the same pleasure. The same holds true for words and metaphors.” (7)

Children, however, do not reject new words, but rather accept them with delight. Repetition is also used to create a beautiful style of expression and numerous examples of this can be found in children's literature. The renowned poet Ismail Merathi, for instance, has masterfully employed repetition in his poetry. For example:

Darakhton ke jhund aur Jungle khulay
Yon he pat'tay pat'tay se mil ke banay

Aab-e-Rawaan ke ander machli banye tun ne
Machli ke tairnay ko Aab-e-Rawan banya

This is an undeniable fact that the children's taste is highly refined and discerning. They always prefer good and beautiful things. Their search for elegance in food, drink and clothing reveals their excellent taste. It is a well-known fact that children have a highly refined and exquisite taste. They always gravitate towards good and beautiful things. Their quest for refinement in food, drink, and clothing accentuates their excellent taste. They are averse to anything unpleasant or unpalatable and their tongue is quickly rejecting anything that does not meet their standards. They crave delicious and refined food and any lack of these qualities can make them unhappy and discontented. In such cases, offering them chocolates or sweets can be a good gesture and these treats can also be found in children's literature. We cannot impress children without giving anything we need to use praising words and expressions that are appealing to them, like chocolates and sweets. (8)

Children's literature should be simple, yet not merely a collection of easy words; it should be engaging and captivating -Elias Ahmed Mujeebi says:

“Simple language should be used for children... If someone interprets this as merely inundating them with easy words, they haven't understood at all--neither children nor children's literature.”(9)

Children's psychology reveals that they are constantly on a quest to learn and explore new things. The essence of curiosity is deeply ingrained in their nature. This is also evident in their fascination with words - children constantly try out new words, influenced by their structure, arrangement, and rhythm and incorporate them into their vocabulary.

The use of term "Aab-e- Rawan" may not be easy for children, but due to its style, they like these lines of the poem and memories it. Similarly, this distinctive trait is reflected in Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum's poetry, despite of using simple language, he uses new words that leave the reader amazed. For instance

Kare tar tar , kare tar tar.

Tari laari, tari motor

Chale chham chham Chale chham chham

maira Gorha meri tam tam

Cheecho cheecho chacha.

Gharhi pe chuha naacha

Regarding this, Patras Bokhari says:

“The harmonies and rhythms of "tar tar" "Chham Chham," and "tam tam" encompass all the pleasures that cannot be attained in adulthood even through the miracles of Tansen.” (10)

Indeed, whether words are simple or complex, the basic aim for children's literature is their joy and happiness. To achieve this, authors and poets have pursued through innovative styles and themes. The thematic diversity and style in children's literature are a testament to this fact. Children are a valuable asset to any nation, and the foundation of a strong and prosperous society is built on their development. If their emotional and intellectual foundations are properly laid, then the resulting edifice will also be beautiful and impactful. Therefore, literature created for children should not merely be a collection of fairy tales akin to fantasies, but rather, it should embody culture and civilization. Consequently, it should be as innocent and pure as children themselves.



The first short story written in Urdu which included in children's curriculum was "Khaliq Bari". The seed of children's literature was first sown in Deccan's land. The Sufis wrote religious magazines for the purpose of preaching and they were considered as the pioneering books for children. Even these books did not take into account the emotions and children's psychology although their importance remains significant. These writings show the reality that these books were the guardians of moral and cultural values in the upbringing of children.

The collection of Mir's poems such as "Mohni Billi," "Mornama," "Machar," and "Kahtmal," Nazir Akbarabadi's poem "Gulhari ka Bacha aur Reech ka Bacha," Ismail Merathi's poem "Gaaye," and Shafi-ud-Din Nehar's poem "Reech Wala," serve as evidence that literature created for children not only entertains and inspires them but also fulfills the duty of their upbringing. Mirza Ghalib's "Qadir Nama", Mirza Qasim Beg's "Taleem-ul-Atfal" Muhammad Hussain Azad's, "Naseehat Ka Kiran Phool" and Munshi Muhammad Mirza Agha Khan Dehlavi's son Ahmad Mirza's "Tehzeeb-ul-Atfal" represents a

seminal contribution in the children's literature by molding and refining the personalities of the children. From the beginning of the 20th century up to the partition of India, we see the influence of the Sir Syed movement on children's literature. During this period, Allama Muhammad Iqbal also wrote poetry specifically for children. According to Abdul Qavi Desnavi:

"They aimed to shape the child's mind in such a way that would enable them to become a conscious individual—embodying truth, compassion, devoid of pride and arrogance, appreciative of kindness, committed to service, supportive of the poor and weak, lovers of language, advocates for humanity, free from wrong doings and active in their deeds." (11)

These poems by Allama Iqbal are remarkable in terms of content and style, such as "Ek Makra aur Makhi", "Ek Pahar aur Gilahri", "Bachay ki Dua", "Parinde ki Faryad", "Hindustani Bachon ka Geet", "Maan ka Khowab", "Ahd-e-Tifli", "Bacha aur Shayar". Jagan Azad writes:

"Iqbal was deeply interested in the future of the children of his country and nation. For their mental upbringing, he wrote on such topics that can draw the attention of the nation towards the betterment of children. He composed such captivating poetry that children read with enthusiasm, follow the teachings conveyed in them, and not only become good citizens of their own country but also of the world." (12)

Durga Sahai Sarur Jahanabadi also wrote poems for children, mostly based on natural and religious themes, which formed the foundation of his poetry. Munshi Premchand addressed children's issues in his stories. Stories such as "Sachai ka inaam", "Ibrat", "Efaay-e-Ahd", "Jugnu ki chamak", "Nae Dunia", etc., highlight the aspect of upbringing and character development of children.

Hamedullah Afsar penned reformatory and ethical stories for children and composed influential poems. His notable works include "Subh Ki Dua", "Ilm Ki Maya" and "Bete Ka Jhoot". His collections of stories were published under the title of "Char Chand" and "Janwaron Ki Aqlmandi". Hafeez Jalandhari's contributions to children's literature are unforgettable; he also served as the editor of the children's magazines "Nunihaal" and "Phool". He selected various classical prose works and presented them in a simplified and accessible language for children, making them easier to understand. The two-volume masterpiece "Dastan-e-Amir Hamza" and the renowned characters of "Tilism-e-Hosh Ruba" are exemplary instances of his work.

"Urdu literature has produced many renowned poets, but only one poet has been dedicated to children's literature and that is Hafeez." (13)

Imtiaz Ali Taj also made significant contributions to children's literature, creating stories and poetry besides managing the magazine "Phool." Additionally, Hijab Imtiaz Ali Taj wrote stories for children, notable among them, Aladdin ka "Chiragh." is merely important. Chiragh Hasan Hasrat revitalized ancient historical, traditional, and religious stories, emphasizing the nurturing children's character and morals. Ghulam Rasool Mehr penned informative articles for children, including significant events from Belgium and Italy's history. Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum's poems "Gap Shap" and "Tot Batot" are unforgettable. Ahmed Nadim Qasmi and Mirza Adeeb also produced stories for children. Mirza Adeeb even wrote dramas for them, including "Inaam" and "ustani." "Chacha Chonch" is their first humorous novel, shedding light on the importance of education.

After the creation of Pakistan, there was extraordinary progress in children's literature, resulting in the production of books that allowed children to become familiar with the Pakistan Movement, its objectives, and the struggle for freedom. The life stories of great Muslims who excelled in their respective fields also became significant subject for literary exploration. Noticing the increasing popularity of stories, several renowned writers directed their attention towards this genre. Shaukat Thanvi, Asmat Chughtai, Bano Qudsia, and M.S. Suroor weaved numerous stories. Aftab Rabani's stories often highlighted constructive and moral aspects. Nazam Zaidi, Jameel Jalibi, Rashida Rizvi, Ashraf Subohi, Intizar Hussain, Altaf Fatima and Maqbool Anwar Dawoodi also contributed writings for children.

Ali Naser Zaidi has published numerous books on scientific topics, including works such as "Sitaron ki dunia", "Science ke khail" and profiles of Muslim scientists. Iqbal Salahuddin and Dr. Abdus Salam Khurshid have incorporated great personalities as themes for their stories. Similarly, A. Hameed, Ishtiaq Ahmed, Safdar Shaheen, Kamal Ahmed Rizvi, Latif Farooqi, Saeed Ulfat and Shafi Aqeel have all contributed to children's literature, playing a crucial role in nurturing and educating through their works.

"Rai Sahib Munshi Gulab Singh, a renowned publisher from Lahore, showed great interest in producing dramas and published many books for children. Since the establishment of Pakistan, children's series and dramas have been broadcast on television and many famous writers have been part of this effort. Faiz Ahmad Faiz, for example, wrote some delightful and educational puppet plays for the Pakistan Arts Council, such as "Ticket Khoye" and "Begum Sahiba".

In the early 20th century, the publication of children's magazines also began. Alongside newspapers for adults, some pages were dedicated to children, which were usually published on weekly basis. Over time, these pages evolved into separate magazines. The first Urdu magazine for children, "Bachon Ka Akhbar", was published by Munshi Mahboob Alam in May 1902. Later, Maulvi Mumtaz Ali's "Phool" became very popular among children. After Maulvi Mumtaz Ali, his son Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj took over the editorship. Other notable magazines include Maulana Tajwar Najibabadi's "Prem", Maulvi Firozuddin's "Taleem-o-Tarbiyat", "Maahnama", "Bachon Ki Duniya", "Khilona", "Bachon ke Chanda Mamoon", "and Phulwari", "Nannhi Duniya", "Uncle Sargam", "Nunehaal and Chhoti Duniya". This extensive list serves as a testament to the growing recognition of children's literature as a vital and dynamic genre, which has been gaining momentum over the years. In the 21st century, the significance of children's literature is being increasingly acknowledged, and various

organizations are actively promoting it through conferences, seminars, and workshops, thereby fostering a supportive platform for its growth, development, and evolution.



Considering the importance of children's literature, a question often arises regarding the nurturing and upbringing of children, Is it not necessary to focus on their moral education alongside their formal education? Unfortunately, it is essential and it is disheartening to note that parents are neglecting their children's moral upbringing. They fulfill their children educational needs and spend lavishly on education, but leave their moral training to teachers and society, which has a profound impact on their mental, physical, and social development. We must acknowledge that moral education is crucial alongside formal education, as it shapes their personality and character. Ethics, cultural values, and moral training are essential to raise a balanced and active individual. Literature is an effective tool for this purpose, and children's literature can play a significant role in nurturing their cultural and moral development.



In today's digital World, social media, the internet, and technology have replaced books, and as a result, even if books are written for children, they don't pay attention to read them because they are more attracted to the world of the internet. Writers who write for children often do not receive adequate payment for their works and they also face challenges in selling their books because the media has diminished the importance of books. In this regard, parent's role appears quite weak. They provide children with all the necessities of life but do not prioritize buying and reading books for them. This negative mind set is distancing us from literature. Digital devices worth millions of rupees seem essential to us, while books are considered non-essential. Consequently, children's connection with books in school libraries has also dwindled. As a result, the qualities that can bring about a revolution in society are being neglected. Revolutions in society stem from creation, thought, ideas, and art. Our writers are not inclined to create digital literature according to the demands of the new era. Due to the influence of the internet, our children are familiar with characters of Hindi and English stories but are drifting away from their own culture and heritage. Lack of awareness about our significant historical figures, culture and tradition is fostering a sense of cultural disconnect in our children.

In this digital age, it's crucial that we provide our children with literature that is more engaging than electronic devices. If need arises to create digital literature, then it is not a big deal. By catering to the new demands of the modern era, we can create digital content for children that connect them to their cultural heritage. We can educate them about the unforgettable services of historical figures and make them aware of their rich legacy. This way, they will become the guardians of their heritage, not mere imitators of others. By incorporating interactive films and captivating graphics, we can make literature appealing to children. This is the need of the hour and a modern means of nurturing children's culture and education, ensuring the preservation of our literary heritage and its effective transmission to future generations.

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