

DECEMBER 2022

VOLUME 13

ISSN 2319-4189

DIOTIMA'S
A JOURNAL OF NEW READINGS



Children's Literature

Peer Reviewed Journal

Published by

THE POSTGRADUATE & RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

PROVIDENCE WOMEN'S COLLEGE

KOZHIKODE-673009

KERALA

(Affiliated to the University of Calicut)

web: <https://www.pwcenglish.com/diotimas-a-journal-of-new-readings/>

EDITORIAL BOARD

Janaky Sreedharan

Professor, University of Calicut

S. Nagesh

Associate Professor (Retd.)
St. Joseph's College, Devagiri

Navaneetha Mokkal

Assistant Professor
Jawaharlal Nehru University

Vipin K. Kadavath

Assistant Professor
Banaras Hindu University

Kavyakrishna K.R.

Assistant Professor
IIT (BHU) Varanasi

Leonard Dickens

Assistant Professor, IIT Delhi

Chief Editor

Bindu A.

Head, Dept. of English

Editor

Preethy Mary George

EDITORIAL TEAM

Shyama E.

Shanthi Vijayan

Surya K.

Elizabeth Antony

Aparna Nandakumar

Prathibha P.

CONTENT

December 2022

Volume 13

No Kidding: The Evolution of Children's Literature Studies

Diti Vyas

1

Wild Uncharted Waters: Racial Subtext in *The Little Mermaid*

Athira Unni

16

Jules Verne's India : Exoticism or Distorted Reality?

Manjula Balakrishnan

26

Beyond Adult Intervention: Study of Contemporary Childhood in Indian English Fiction

Gurpreet Kaur Saini

40

Nonsense Poetry in Colonial India: A Study of Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol*

Anisha Sen

49

Media Addiction to Inspiration Porn: Reports and Reflections on Kerala School Kalolsavam

Rashida Muneer Chalilakath

68

Japanese Wave in Malayalam Children's Magazine: Manga Series in *Balarama*

Farha Jalal

76

List of Contributors

88

EDITOR'S NOTE

Literature as a medium for cognitive appraisal, an instrument for conveying meaning, imparting knowledge and skills, represents non-imaginative as well as imaginative works. Besides facilitating the interpretive function, they encompass composite ways and means to highlight aesthetic values in individuals, institutions, socio-cultural embodiments, languages, genres, historical periods and so forth. Furthermore, historically, literary works spanning across domains have influenced individuals of various age groups. Relying on the literary taste of such diverse readership for their appeal and acceptance, they are found to help strengthen character, build intuitions, and instil motivation and resilience in the young, adult and old alike. Literary genres that range from fiction to mystery, thriller, horror, historical, romance, western, bildungsroman, speculative fiction, science fiction, fantasy, dystopian, magical realism and so on occupy a central position in the contemporary literary scene besides also lending themselves to broad taxonomies such as fiction and non-fiction.

While categories do exist, one area that has still remained abysmally explored is children's literature, whether picture books, poetry/verse, folklore and fairy tales, fantasy, science fiction, realistic fiction, historical fiction, biography and/or non-fiction. Children's literature helps children to empower their personality and develop their skills, and transmits literary essence from generation to generation. This unpretentious and pragmatic insider observation aside, the literary world outside reflects only a modest appreciation of children's literature, understanding it only partly, for, contemporary discourses on children's literature tend to be heavily loaded by unwarranted adult perspectives on its thematic content, stylistics, idiom, readership, interpretative modes and the like.

Yet, children's literature, in particular, acts as a vehicle for social change, resisting conventional and conservative ideas and customary nomenclatures. No doubt, it is emerging as an area looking forward to reasonable exploration and worthy critique, not to be discarded as an unadorned and elementary corpus of amateurish literary ramblings. Varying templates of axioms and assumptions vis-à-vis this discourse include the following thematic queries: first, unlike previous volumes, this is an attempt to examine how children and childhood are represented in literature with reference to gender, social, economic, racial and political constituents; second, it analyses to what extent writers represent children as protagonists or prominent characters in their composition; third, whether contemporary writers emulate aetnormativity in their creative works or there are alternative ways and patterns that override one-dimensional outlook of the adult-writer constructing the child reader; fourth, elucidate whether writers have shifted their attention from fantasy/supernatural to more realism; and finally, assess how digital, technological and other postmodern developments reflect in contemporary children's books.

Besides these, this research takes into consideration re-creations of classics, adaptations of stories, illustrations, cartoons on social media platforms, regional children's literature, e-books, films etc. Lying within the above-mentioned theoretical and operational frameworks, the essays in the present volume address the thematic concerns in addition to conceptual arguments on children's literature.

This volume begins with Dr. Diti Vyas' article that traces the history of children's literature, the importance of children's texts within the academic circle and the salient features of children's literature in India. Athira Unni's article explores Ariel's liminal anthropological role in the new Disney live-action remake *The Little Mermaid* and its relevance to the racial subtext of the story especially the oceanic

patriarchal imaginary surrounding Triton juxtaposed with the terrestrial matriarchal role of Prince Eric's Queen mother. The article uses the shoreline as a useful paradigm that separates these querulous worlds which are shown to reconcile at the end of the film but not before Ariel and Eric set off towards 'uncharted lands.' Dr Manjula Balakrishnan attempts a different perspective on children's literature by analysing the widely read Children's author in Spain, Jules Verne, placing his novel *The Steam House* within the historical context of Sepoy Mutiny and propagating the work as an example of geopolitical literature which helped the young readers to mature. Gurpreet Kaur Saini surveys the inclusivity of children's literature with special emphasis on Indian English. Through the narratives "Eat the Sky, Drink the Ocean" and *Mayil Will not be Quiet*, the author draws readers' attention on the marginalized and the need to empower young girls. Focusing on nonsense literature, Anisha Sen analyses the selected poems from Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol* which generates multifaceted interpretations through humorous situations. Rashida Muneer Chalilakath delves into the objectification of disabled ones, popularised by various media platforms and the article particularly engages with the Kerala State School Youth Festival reports. Farha Jalal brings an overview of children's literature, the origin and the various aspects of Manga, and the Manga Series in the Malayalam Children's magazine Balarama.

This volume, fundamentally, is an attempt to redefine children's literature in a unique manner by engaging with various aspects and genres rather than merely touching on traditional fairy tales or didactic conventional children's stories. We hope the volume ignites the scholars to explore new arenas and bring out the relevance of children's literature in the contemporary literary world.

Preethy Mary George

No Kidding: The Evolution of Children's Literature Studies

Diti Vyas

While the significance of children's literature in the educational, linguistic, intellectual and social development of its child readers is unanimously acknowledged, it is commonly perceived as literature to be outgrown in order to move to more 'complex'/'serious' 'adult' literature. This general perception of children's literature being the lower rung of a ladder leading towards 'complex'/'serious' 'adult' literature has often led to children's literature falling outside the purview of serious consideration within mainstream traditions of literary scholarship. This article traces the history of the entry of children's literature into the academic sphere and attempts to encapsulate approaches undertaken by children's literature studies.

In the Anglo-American context, the serious study of children's literature within literary scholarship is a relatively recent phenomenon. In spite of the educational importance of children's literature during the late 17th and 18th centuries, as Hunt observes, those "critics who wrote about children's literature were regarded as eccentric" (Children's Literature: The Development 4). Until connections were forged between mainstream criticism and children's literature studies, children's literature had to face condescension and being too easy or perhaps worse, too much fun. Or the whole undertaking could be presented as regrettable since it shattered the fondly remembered 'magic' of children's books, or even innocence of childhood (Grenby, "Conclusion" 200).

It is the 1980s that mark a noticeable waning of this suspicion about children's literature being academically inconsequential (Grenby, "Conclusion" 200; Lesnik Obsertein 2; Meek 10). One of the significant reasons for this radical shift in the status of children's literature studies has been "the take-over of the whole baggage of critical theory derived from adult literature" (Meek 10). By interrogating set hierarchies, dismantling established canons and devising tools for newer readings of literature, literary theory has opened the space for a discussion of children's literature in established disciplines.

This academic approbation has visibly influenced the saleability not only of children's literature but also of children's literature studies. The commissioning of books such as *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (1984), *The International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature* (2004), *The Edinburgh Critical Guide* (2007), *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature* (2009) and *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature* (2010) is a testament to the increased respectability and saleability of children's literature studies.

The increasing number of academic journals dealing exclusively with children's literature such as *The Lion and The Unicorn*, *The Book Bird*, *The Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, *The Horn Book Magazine*, *The Journal of Children's Literature*, *The Children's Literature Review* and many more bear witness to the same phenomenon. In his discussion of the newfound centrality of children's literature, Grenby reiterates this idea of increased saleability of children's literature studies by pointing at the sheer popularity of children's literature courses amongst the students in the west ("Conclusion"). The role of organizations such as the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSL), International Board of Books for Young (IBBY), Centre for Children's Literature in Denmark, and the International Charles Perrault Research Institute in Paris, in creating and consolidating international scholarship on the subject is commendable. Thus as far as western children's

literature studies is concerned, it can be safely asserted that what once was "an eccentric minority sport" has turned into a formative influence on contemporary thinking in the Anglo-American context.

One of the major impacts of this refurbishment of the status of children's literature is seen in the way approaches specific to children's literature have combined with an array of theoretical approaches already in use in mainstream criticism. The latter have been readjusted to focus on children's literature. Put together, these approaches either focus on reception, production and content of children's texts or attempt a productive interaction amongst these categories. Focus on reception is one of the earliest approaches to this literature, whose authors and critics are almost never members of its presumed audience. Michael Benton, an exponent of Reader Response Criticism, places the beginning of this approach to children's literature in the 1960s as a reaction to the anti-reader stance of New American criticism of the 40s. Since the 1960s, children's literature critics have used this method to forge new connections between reading and teaching literature by embracing the plurality of meanings and by encouraging creative participation of the readers. Critics have used this approach to match children's responses with developmental models (J. Thomson), to trace development in reading through exploration of personal childhood reminiscences (F. Inglis), to trace the growth of the child's sense of story in relation to the Piagetian stages of development (A.N. Applebee and Tucker), to discern the development of literacy by matching individual and age group needs, (M. Fisher and Margaret Meek) and to discern personal reading styles (J. Many and Cox).

Reader Response methods are also employed by critics such as Beverly Naidoo to bring about issues such as race sensitivity. R. Bunbury and Tabbert use this method to generate cross-cultural studies by comparing the responses of Australian and German children to an Australian bushranger story. Though theorists acknowledge the importance of reader response theory, they have pointed out the difficulties

of empirical studies of reader's opinions. According to David Rudd, these opinions have "limited provenance and therefore generalizability" ("The Development of Children's Literature" 9). In addition, he terms the notion of 'real children' as misleading because these children are frequently white, middle class, male constructions (3).

In order to counter these oppositions, critics have defended reader response theory. In *The Nimble Reader*, Roderick McGillis seeks to address how an adult might orient towards a literature whose target audience does not produce its texts or its critical discourses. McGillis defines his critical goal as an attempt to "raise to consciousness our own presuppositions when we interpret literature" (21). He proposes to do so by reading "with some chance of situating ourselves outside dominant beliefs... [using] several means at our disposal" (21). According to McGillis, adult readers, armed with more awareness of their own ways of reading, as well as the codes of the texts, should encourage children to be active readers. Peter Hunt extends McGillis's idea into a fuller approach called Childist Criticism. Intended to work in parallel with feminist criticism, Hunt's approach seeks to foreground the views of its child readership. Hunt advocates a way of reading where the critic would put aside his adult preoccupations and would undertake to read like a child. However, critics such as David Rudd have questioned the adult readers' ability to enter into a child's perspective and have pointed out the mistake of assuming that there is a distinctive 'child' perspective.

In order to move away from the problems created by this focus on 'real' readers, both children and adults, an alternative approach adopted by critics is to focus on the text. Such an attempt to move towards the book to understand the nature of the actual texts is undertaken by Aidan Chambers as early as 1978, in his landmark essay "Reader in the Book", by employing the concepts of 'implied reader' and 'intertextuality'. Using examples from children's books ranging from Enid Blyton's *The Mystery of the Strange Bundle* to Roald Dahl's *Danny: The Champion of the*

World and from Lucy Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe* to Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War*, Chambers demonstrates that the image of the implied child reader in these texts is created through manipulating literary techniques such as point of view, forging alliance and leaving referential tell-tale gaps which the readers are expected to fill up in order to understand the story .

Theorists have employed this notion of implied reader to generate a variety of insights about children's literature. Michael Benton traces the historically changing relationship between the implied author and implied reader in Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days*, Day Lewis' *The Otterbury Incident* and Garner's *Red Shift*. John Stephens adds another angle to this notion by arguing through a study of *The Selkie Girl and The Seal Mother* that the implied reader should be understood on ideological grounds. Zohar Shavit extends this concept by exploring how the prevailing notions of childhood determine the character of the implied reader in various versions of the story of "Little Red Riding Hood". The idea that the category of child has no intrinsic referent has led critics to explore how it is determined by societies. This notion that childhood is socially constructed is explored by psychoanalytically influenced cultural theorist, Jacequeline Rose. Rose, in her assessment of Peter Pan, goes to the extent of proclaiming the impossibility of ever having something called children's literature. She opines:

Children's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple. If children's fiction builds an image of the child it does so in order to secure the child which is outside the book, the one who doesn't come easily within its grasp.(1-2)"

Rose's notion of the impossibility of children's literature has prompted many theorists to explore the psychoanalytical aspect of the production of children's texts. Theorists such as

Hamidah Bosmajian have read children's literature as an expression of psychopathography providing therapeutic emotional release to the author. Bosmajian reads Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen* as texts through which the author transfers his infantile sexuality and communicates it to the child. Critics like Karin Lesnik-Oberstein extend Rose's argument a stage further by evolving it into a new approach termed as Childhood Studies. According to Lesnik Oberstein, if childhood is a construct by adults and so are 'children', then evoking the same children would be a futile exercise. The responses of the same constructed children to know the text would only reflect what the adults made them out to be.

Thus finding and fixing a child would be a self-defeating process and so Lesnik- Oberstein prefers a method of "not resting on or reintroducing at some point overtly or indirectly – the real child and a wider real of which it is a part" (19). She specifies that hers is not an abandonment of the child but refusing to rest on the child and an effort to expand the limits of criticism by exploring other areas like authorship, readership, intertextuality and metafiction. However, critics such as Stainton Rogers and David Rudd criticize Lesnik-Oberstein for smuggling in an essentialist notion of child in her insistence on its lack of voice and overrating the agency of the adult. These critics uphold the idea of 'constructive child' with both agency and voice. While there are theorists who are busy discussing various ramifications of childhood as a social construct with special regard to children's literature, another group of critics, following Chambers' line of thought, have focussed on the form and style of the texts. While Perry Nodelman and Marvis Reimer analyse common characteristic

patterns of children's literature, Barbara Wall has stressed on the narrative style. To Wall, the relation between the adult author and the child reader can be understood by investigating the relationship of the narrator with the narratee. She divides this relationship into various forms of address. According to Wall, single address is used when the adult writer writes for children, adjusting the narration to them, without asides to their peers, and double address is used where the writer talks over the children's head as is done by 19th century children's writers. The third form of address is termed dual address, in which though the language, concepts and tone are accessible to the child, the child is no longer central, and concern for "something other than purely child's interests dominates" (35).

In "'Cross-Writing' and the Reconceptualization of Children's Literary Studies", this emphasis on dual address is further extended by Mitzi Myers and U.C. Knoepflamacher into an approach termed as crossover writing which stresses on the two-way exchange of influence involving "a dialogic mixture of older and younger voices" (10). Unlike Wall, who attributes the author with the power to adapt his form of address, for Myers and Knoepflamacher, children also do the necessary adaptations and adjustments as crossover writing travels from adults to children.

Indian children's literature critics collectively agree that "children's and young adult literature as a distinct genre is a recent phenomenon in India" (Bhattacharji Rose 5). They remind us that though India has a tradition of telling stories to children from a vast repertoire of folk narratives, religious myths, legends and regional histories, imaginative literature in print, specifically for children, is not a part of Indian literary tradition (Sunder Rajan, "Fictions of Difference" 101). Conscious efforts to develop

children's literature as a separate body of writing, distinct from literature for adults, began under the colonial influence. During the 19th century, the idea of children's literature took root in Bengal as its socio-political conditions facilitated interaction with the British. As a result, the first recorded specimen of children's literature in India is a Bengali journal called *Digdarshan* published in 1818. This trend of writing for children was carried forward by Bengali writers such as Upendrakumar Ray and Sukumar Ray. Historians of Indian children's literature document the trend of writing specifically for children in most of the Indian languages by the mid 19th century. However, Indian children's literature in English seems to have begun even later as its deemed forerunner, Dhangopal Mukherjee started publishing only in the 20th century (Govindan 72)

After emerging as a separate body of writing in the post-independence era, Indian children's literature developed within the framework of education. In children's literature in Gujarati, the 19th century poems of Dalpatram Tripathi commissioned especially for children's textbooks under the aegis of the Gujarat Vernacular Society, provide a case in point. This development within the boundaries of formal education is the characteristic that Jafa finds Indian children's literature sharing with the literature of other colonised nations ("Indian Subcontinent" 1028). What is conspicuous about the evolution of children's literature in different Indian languages, including English and Gujarati, is that their trajectories are perceived to demonstrate almost a similar movement. Navin Menon, one of the first critics to approach Indian children's literature in English academically, summarizes its evolution as a movement from missionaries to textbooks, then diversifying into magazines and later into 'stories for children', focusing on enjoyment rather than education.

Scholars have pronounced that in line with late evolution of children's literature as an exclusive genre, its criticism too is a "relatively unexplored area" (Srinivasan 1). Santhini Govindan in her overview of

children's literature in the study commissioned by the Department of Culture, Ministry of Tourism of India, states:

Unlike in foreign universities, where the study of children's literature is taken seriously, and there are courses and degrees to be had in different areas of children's writing, in India, children's literature as a genre worthy of study and scholarship has largely been ignored in the past both by the government and universities...There is neither debate nor discussion nor even critical evaluation of children's books, be it in English or in Indian languages. (160) This low status of Indian children's literature as a field of serious study can be partially attributed to the fact that children's literature studies largely functions as a separate island, unconnected to mainstream literary criticism, as evident from the trends in Indian children's literature criticism. Most of the critical endeavours in the area are confined to book reviews, bibliographical compilations and historical investigations. While children's literature researchers like K. Jamuna, Arvind Dave, Navin Menon and Santhini Govindan have attempted historicizing children's literature in India, those like Meena Khorona have undertaken the arduous task of compiling an annotated bibliography of Indian children's literature. However, amidst these trends, which segregate children's literature as a separate field of study, an interesting trend of critical scholarship has started emerging since the 1990s which integrates issues in children's literature with those in Indian literature at large. Amit Das Gupta's compilation of essays on Indian children's literature in *Telling Tales: Children's Literature in India* (1995) with themes ranging from the role of mythology and cross-culturalism to fieldwork in rural areas and the nuances of writing for children in English, and Prema Srinivasan's analysis of trends in Indian English children's fiction are significant steps in this direction. Rimi Chatterjee and Nilanjana Gupta's collection of eclectic essays ranging from the comparison of Dhan Gopal Mukherjee and Rudyard Kipling to Lila Majumdar's sweeping across boundaries in *Reading Children* and Laly Mathews' *(Re) Reading Classics in Children's*

Literature which seeks to rediscover classics from *Panchtantra* to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* are exemplars of the fact that Indian children's literature studies is gradually forging linkages and forming connections with mainstream Indian literary studies.

However, though *Creators of Children's Literature* identifies that Indian children's literature produces books for children in sixteen languages, children's literature studies embraces this multiplicity only to a limited extent. Paro Anand in her address on "Challenges of Children's Literature in Regional Languages" observes: "Worldwide, the challenges of children's books are universal but the linguistic plurality in our country, makes our challenges unique" (61). While one strand of children's literature scholars deal with this plurality by charting separate trajectories of literature in various languages (Jamuna, *Children's Literature In Indian Languages*), another does so by arriving at overarching conclusions about Indian children's literature in general or by grouping them into the categories of Indian children's literature in English and in regional languages (Jafa, "Indian Subcontinent"; Mohini Rao "Children's Books in India: An Overview."). What remains problematic is the way such work either deals with one body of literature by disconnecting it from literatures in other languages or elides over specificities of literatures in different languages by making sweeping generalizations. As Indian universities such as Ambedkar University, Ashoka University and Azim Premji University have started offering courses on various aspects of children's literature, the comparative studies in Indian children's literature can offer fruitful possibilities.

As children's literature is entering into the Indian classrooms for higher studies, it is important to remember Deborah Cogan Thacker's advice. In her discussion in "Criticism and the Critical Mainstream" Thacker lays down that the 'shared project' between mainstream criticism and children's literature studies "should be a two-way street" with children's

literature contributing to mainstream criticism as well as learning from it (45). An inclusion of Indian children's literature as part of mainstream criticism is crucial in bringing it "out of its ghetto" (Cogan Thacker 47). In defining how children's literature studies operate within this 'ghetto' in the Anglo-American context, Cogan Thacker states:

...children's literature specialists are often concerned only with children's texts and, though they embrace the terminology of theory and the methodology of mainstream research to critique these texts, they retain a separation that perpetuates the false sense that there is little in the nature of a 'shared' project. (47)

An overview of Indian children's literature studies reveals that though linkages are beginning to be established between children's literature and mainstream criticism, these linkages remain problematic in light of Cogan's argument. *The Book Review Magazine* which publishes an annual issue devoted to children's literature every November can be cited as an example. Though the effort of this magazine to bring children's literature to the mainstream is worth appreciating, it is important to note how it retains a sense of exclusivity about children's literature by only incorporating children's literature specialists as contributors in this special issue and leaving out children's literature from the remaining eleven issues. The problem that Jerry Griswold vocalizes in the context of Anglo-American children's literature is also prevalent in the case of Indian children's literature, and the solution given by Griswold is equally apt. He states:

Sometimes, essays on Children's Literature give the impression of having been written in a closed system. It needn't be that way. When someone writes, for example, about colonialism in Burnett's *The Secret Garden*...reference might be made to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or Aphra Ben's *Orinooko*. (238-9).

The study of children's literature can generate enriching insights about children's books that are analysed but can also point to interesting avenues for further critical exploration in mainstream literary studies. As children's literature studies warms up to the "academic studies of children's books" (Lesnik Oberstein 1) on an international level, it is time to use Indian children's literature as a focal point to interrogate unqualified generalizations, challenge elision of subtleties, to cross pre-defined boundaries and to engage in more meaningful ways of reading literature.

Works Cited

- Anand, Paro. "Challenges of Children's Literature in Regional Languages." *Aspects of Children's Literature*. ed. Sharmila Sinha. Delhi: National Book Trust, 2001.
- Applebee, A. *The Child's Concept of Story: Ages Two to Seventeen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1978.
- Benton, Michael. "Reader-response Criticism." *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. Ed. Peter Hunt. Vol. II. London and New York: Routledge. 2004.
- Bosmajian, Hamida. "Psychoanalytical Criticism." *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. ed. Peter Hunt. Vol. II. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Bunbury, R. and R Tabbert. "A Bicultural Study of Identification: Readers' Responses to the Ironic Treatment of A National Hero." *Children's Literature in Education*. 20.1 1978. 25-35. Springer. Web. 19 Mar. 2014.
- Bhattacharji Rose, Jaya. "Children's Literature in India." *The Book Review* xxxv.11 (2011): 5-6.
- Chambers, Aidan. "The Reader in the Book: Notes from Work in Progress." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 1(1978): 1-19. Project Muse. Web. 23 July 2013.

- Chatterjee, Rimi, and Nilanjana Gupta, eds. *Reading Children: Essays on Children's Literature*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009.
- Creators of Children's Literature*. New Delhi: AWIC, 2003.
- Dasgupta, Amit. ed. *Telling Tales: Children's Literature in India*. New Delhi: New Age International Publishers Limited, 1995.
- Fisher, M. *Intent Upon Reading*. London: Brockhampton Press, 1964.
- Grenby, M.O. "Conclusion." *Children's Literature: .Edinburgh Critical Guides*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008. 199-204.
- Hunt, Peter. ed. *Children's Literature - The Development of Criticism*. London: Routledge, 1995
- Jafa, Manorama, "Indian Subcontinent." *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. ed. Peter Hunt. Vol. II. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Jamuna K. ed. *Children's Literature In Indian Languages*. New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. 1982.
- Khorana, Meena. *The Indian Sub-Continent in Literature for Children and Young Adults-An Annotated Bibliography of English-language Books*. Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1991.
- Many, J and C. Cox. Eds. *Reader Stance and Literary Understanding: Exploring the Theories, Research and Practice*. Norwood NJ: Ablex. 1992.
- Mathews, Laly. *(Re)-reading Classics in Children's Literature*. Proceedings of the International Seminar Dept. of English, Bharat Mata College and Children's Literature Association of India. Nov 2010. Eds. Laly Mathew and Anto Thomas C. Kerela: Children's Literature Assoc. of India, 2010.

- Lesnik-Oberstein, Karin ed. *Children's Literature - New Approaches*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2004.
- McGillis, Roderick. *The Nimble Reader-Literary Theory and Children's Literature*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.
- Meek, Margaret. "Introduction: Definitions, Themes, Changes, Attitudes." *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. ed. Peter Hunt. Vol. 1. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Menon, Navin. "Children's Literature in India: The Changing Trends." *Telling Tales*. Ed. Amit Dasgupta. New Delhi: New Age International Publishers Limited, 1995. Print.
- Myers, Mitzi and Knoepfelmacher, "Cross-Writing" and the Reconceptualizing of Children's Literary Studies." *Children's Literature* 25 (2000): vii-xvii. Project Muse. Web. 7 Nov. 2013.
- Nodelman, Perry and Marvis Reimer. *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003.
- Rudd, David. "The Development of Children's Literature." *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*. Ed. David Rudd. Oxon: Routledge, 2010.
- Govindan, Santhini. *Children's Literature in English In India, Its Growth, Development and Future*. Diss. Department of Culture and Ministry of Tourism, 2004. Print.
- Griswold, Jerry. "The Future of the Profession." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 26.2 (2002): 236-42. *Project Muse*. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.
- Shavit, Zohar. "The Notion of Childhood and the Child as an Implied Reader: Response to Literature." *Journal of Research and Development of Education* 16:3 (1983) 60-67.

- Sunder Rajan, Rajeshwari, "Fictions of Difference." *Girls, Boys, Books, Toys*. Eds. Beverly Lyon Clark and Margaret Higonnet. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 97-111.
- Stainton, Rogers, Rex and Stainton Rogers, Wendy. *Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern*. London: Simon and Schuster, 1992.
- Thacker, Cogan Deborah. "Criticism and the Critical Mainstream." *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. Ed. Peter Hunt. Vol. I. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Tucker, Nicholas. "Good Friends, Or Just Acquaintances." *Literature for Children-Contemporary Criticism*. Ed. Peter Hunt. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Thomson, J. *Understanding Teenagers Reading: Reading Processes and the Teaching of Literature*. Sydney: Methuen, 1986.
- Wall, Barbara. *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.

Wild Uncharted Waters: Racial Subtext in *The Little Mermaid*

Athira Unni

The fairy tale 'The Little Mermaid' written by the Danish children's writer Hans Andersen was first published in English in 1845. It was first adapted into cinema by Russian and Czech filmmakers in the 1960s and 70s before Disney made the popular animated version in 1989. The latest live-action adaptation by Disney was released in May 2023, starring the African American singer-songwriter Halle Bailey as the protagonist and mermaid Ariel. While Andersen's story had specified that the mermaid is of clear skin and blue eyes, the animated Disney version had a white Ariel. The racist anxieties of audience in the casting of Bailey as Ariel drew some attention on social media with the hashtag #NotMyAriel trending when its trailer was released. Critics wrote about the validity of arguments about historically accurate depiction of mermaids and rebuttals for racist critiques of the casting (Dickson; Romano; Willingham). With the release of the movie, however, the attention shifted somewhat to other aspects of the movie including how exciting and deserving of praise (Diggins) or bland, but good-natured the movie is (Kermode). It has been critiqued for oozing "obligation and noble intentions" while injecting some contemporary misfortune such as polluted seas (Morris). It expects to be taken seriously (Morris). The narrative of the new adaptation then is set in the politically cautious world of today with direct references to the Anthropocene and the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The movie has also sparked discussions on whether Ariel is a feminist Disney princess with critics commenting that her killing Ursula

in the fabulous finale of the movie makes for a much-needed reclaiming of Ariel's feminist voice (Muir). Earlier opinions point out that Ariel has been a feminist Princess even in the animated Disney version (Kerver). Given that some women celebrities have talked about preventing their children from watching Ariel giving up her voice for a man, it is worth thinking about whether the depiction of Ariel independent of her love for Eric qualifies as feminist or not (Aspinall). The Disney animated version significantly differed from Andersen's story where the mermaid wanted to become a human to have an immortal soul. The Disneyfication of Andersen's moralistic narrative ended up not just infantilizing the mermaid protagonist and exaggerating the romance, but also removing the original tragic ending of the mermaid's suicide after the prince marries someone else (Coillie 137). Even before Disney's immortalisation of Andersen's story, the mermaid had become an icon for Denmark with Edvard Eriksen's bronze statue of a mermaid lining the Copenhagen waterfront since 1837 (Mortensen 437). It is therefore critical to ask what the new live adaptation with its controversial casting adds to the legacy of the most famous mermaid in popular culture.

The new adaptation has marked differences from the previous versions. Ariel kills Ursula and saves Eric twice. Significantly, Bailey's Ariel has amnesia about Eric's kiss saving her from eternally being deprived of her voice. Ursula's curse makes her forget that this vital act will return her voice and Bailey is deprived of any possibility of cunning that she might employ to achieve these ends (Morris). There are three new songs and more race-blind casting with Ariel's sisters being a multi-ethnic mix of mermaids, Eric's adoptive mother Queen Selina and her servant being Black, and Ariel's father the underwater king Triton speaking Spanish-inflected English (Morris). The racial subtext and the ending where Ariel and Eric take off to explore the 'uncharted waters' is refreshing but also invites questions about how the movie engages with race. This article focuses on the racialized female lead and explores the unsettling

aspects to the racial subtexts of the film which only makes “skin-deep renovations” (Morris). I explore Ariel’s liminal anthropological role and its relevance to the racial subtext of the story especially the oceanic patriarchal imaginary surrounding Triton juxtaposed with the terrestrial matriarchal role of Prince Eric’s mother. Given that the film juxtaposes the querulous worlds of multiethnic mermaids and humans, I use the shoreline as a useful paradigm that shows the divides between the worlds of Eric and Ariel, but also one that acts to reconcile both the groups in the end before the couple set off towards ‘uncharted lands.’ I also briefly consider how Ariel’s transformation comes at the price of her siren powers and how the racialized depiction of such a transaction with Ursula, given the importance of word/sound/voice to the African diaspora, renders an added dimension to the story.

Ariel as an anthropologist

The characterisation of Ariel in both the Disney versions are largely consistent. While Andersen’s mermaid is a theologically charged figure, yearning to get an immortal soul, Ariel is fascinated by the world of humans and falls in love, hoping to start her life anew on land. Ariel’s fascination with the world outside the sea and specifically with humans is rather unexplained in both the narratives. Ariel collects artefacts from shipwrecks and stores them in her underwater cave. She gathers collectibles from what she sees as the world that she wants to inhabit. However, her character comes across as a stubborn teenage daughter only made more headstrong by her father’s restrictions on exploring the surface of the ocean and beyond.

In the live-action version, King Triton expressly forbids Ariel from exploring the surface of the ocean citing that it is dangerous, and that Ariel’s mother was killed by humans. But Ariel remains curious and inquisitive about the human world, and does not hesitate to defy her father’s orders. Citing that Andersen’s mermaid faces no such restrictions

and that Ariel’s fascination with humans builds as a response to King Triton’s restrictive parenting, critics have tried to explain Ariel’s stubbornness with parental repression: “Andersen’s mermaid quests for a soul, but Disney’s mermaid, Ariel, quests for a mate” (Trites 145). Ariel’s character becomes a weaker portrayal of Andersen’s mermaid, when her proclivity towards the human world, outside of her love for Eric, goes ignored. The story becomes moralistic for parents and also gets a romantic happy ending.

But clearly, Ariel is not simply a mermaid who fell in love, but an anthropological agent from the sea, curious about the life of humans. It is crucial to pay attention to Ariel’s actions: her continuing curiosity despite her father’s restrictions, collecting artefacts, being inquisitive about the human world, sacrificing her siren voice in exchange for becoming human, and maintaining her curiosity about that world even after she becomes a human. Ariel is an anthropologist, an avid researcher with a curious mind who studies the world outside the sea with an openness. She actively tries to piece together what that world could be like from the artefacts she finds:

Legs are required for jumpin', dancin'
Strollin' along down a... what's that word again? Street
What's a fire and why does it... what's the word... burn?
When's it my turn? Wouldn't I love
Love to explore that shore up above? ('Part of Your World')

Ariel’s instinct to explore the world outside the sea cannot simply be explained by her love for Eric. She was already curious about that world. Her instinct to make sense of the artefacts she collects and to hypothesize about the function of a fork (whether it is to comb one’s hair or not) is evidence of her anthropological instinct. She even learns the human language, building her vocabulary with words like “feet”, “street” and “burn.” Her analytical approach to piece together details about the

human world cannot be explained as just an instinctive and stubborn girl's reaction to parental repression. She also actively claims that her collection in the cavern is not a sign of vanity, but her curiosity about the world outside the sea. If Andersen's mermaid was keen to get an immortal soul, Ariel is fascinated with the Grecian statue of a man, the physical form of the human that she partially identifies as a version of herself. Denying her character, a deeper reading by suggesting that her fascination with the human world is a reaction to repressive parenting is unfair. Ariel's proclivity towards the human world is not just a hobby or a tendency to hoard "gadgets and gizmos aplenty," but an instinct to study the world that might perhaps even explain the existence of her part-human, part-fish self. It is important that this part of Ariel's character is not written off but is subjected to further study.

Racial subtext of *The Little Mermaid*

Given that Ariel's character has anthropological proclivities, how does this inform the racial and feminist critique? Seen from this perspective, Ariel's actions attain a new feminist vigour of a woman owning her dreams and even falling in love with someone who might share her interests. In the live-action movie, Eric is also of an inquisitive mind with a conservatory in his mother's castle complete with maps, telescopes and a small statue of a mermaid. If Ariel was a collector, Eric is also portrayed as one. Eric's room in the castle has unsettling symbols of a sea explorer, of having collected items from distant lands, perhaps even a metaphor for a proto-colonial who travels to distant places and brings home treasures. At the same time, Eric's ocean adventures as the heir to a trade-centered island country fall in direct opposition to the secluded, and mysterious lives of the mer-people. Eric's world is in direct opposition to Ariel's world, with the former adopting a fearful and prejudiced attitude towards the sea, and its dangers. King Triton encourages such sentiments in his people as well, and does not agree with Ariel's insistence that

humans cannot all be bad. His attitude is explained by his grief for Ariel's dead mother.

The racial subtext here suggests an uneasy relationship between the mermaid species and the humans. The opposition between the sea and the land still stands. The oceanic patriarchal imaginary represented by King Triton and the terrestrial matriarchy of Queen Selina host enmity, fear and hatred towards each other. Such an opposition does not have easy interpretations especially due to the race-blind casting. Triton with his powerful trident is a figure clearly inspired by the Greek mythological figure of Poseidon, the god of the seas. Queen Selina is a sharp and assertive ruling figure of the island country and fiercely protective of her adopted son, Prince Eric. Both the humans and the mer-people are portrayed as multi-ethnic. In the live-action movie, Eric's adoptive mother Queen Selina is Black. The optics of a white royal family arguing about whether to accept a Black mermaid is offset by the casting choices made to clearly avoid such easy answers. There is no direct reference to race in the movie. However, what is said in the light of what remains unsaid is interesting.

It is also interesting to note how Ariel's loss of her siren powers and her voice takes on layers of meaning in the movie. As a Black mermaid, the loss of her voice symbolizes her loss of agency and her only possibility towards an unconditional freedom to live as a mermaid, or a human. In the original fairytale, the mermaid's tongue is violently severed, and her fish tail removed, allowing for scholars to discuss disability in light on the narrative (Yamato; Sebring and Greenhill). Trapped by Ursula's curse, Ariel's loss of her voice can be read in the context of how scholars have written about Black women's narratives and their voices. DoVeanna Fulton suggests that word/sound/voice and orality is still a powerful aspect of Black women's narratives. When her voice is lost, the haunting rhythm of Ariel's song still plays in the background, as if reminding us of what she has been deprived.

The shoreline and 'uncharted waters'

In the movie, the shoreline acts as a useful paradigm to portray the longings of both Ariel and Eric at multiple instances. It also functions as something to be defied and relegated to the background, rather than allowed to separate worlds. Ariel is repeatedly shown to either emerge from the ocean surface staring at Eric's island, or hiding from behind a rock directly facing the shoreline. It is evident that the worlds of Ariel and Eric are separated by the shoreline which is also directly referenced in the song 'Wild Uncharted Waters.'

Now I am on the shoreline
But I'm still lost at sea
In these wild uncharted waters
Come find me again ('Wild Uncharted Waters')

The shoreline, then, is where Eric feels as if he has felt Ariel's presence. There is a shot in the movie with Eric standing on a cliff at the shoreline looking down at the expanse of the sea in a direct invocation of the German Romanticist Casper David Friedrich's 1818 painting 'Wanderer above the Sea of Fog.' The shoreline is where the rest of the world by way of the sea presents itself to Eric's eyes. It is also where he first sets eyes on Ariel, when he wakes up after being rescued from the storm. Thus, his quest to explore the world is tied up with finding Ariel. Eric's curiosity about the world beyond his island even gets him the new song 'Wild Uncharted Waters' in the movie. Written to mirror Ariel's signature song 'Part of Your World', Eric's song however makes direct references to his love interest. Even though it begins with his need for freedom from his mother's restrictive order to stay on the island after almost drowning at sea, in the rest of the song, Eric yearns to explore the seas and find the girl who rescued him. The shoreline represents not just Ariel's lasting impact on Eric's life, but the continuing separation between their worlds. But for Eric, the shoreline is also what he must

leave to find Ariel again in the wild uncharted waters. Eric's need to explore is tied up with his desire to find his rescuer with her siren voice which he admits has charmed him. Moreover, Eric's song also asserts his instinct that the woman who rescued him was no ordinary person and that he *will* have to travel the seas to find her siren voice again.

While Ariel's song clearly only invokes her need for freedom, her anthropological interests and her desire to be part of the human world, Eric actually states: "I cannot get over you" ('Wild Uncharted Waters'). In a neat feminist reversal of roles, it is also Eric that is rescued during the storm and Ursula's final attack, making Ariel the heroic figure. Ariel also rescues her father from death's clutches by returning the trident to him. After Ursula's death and Ariel's transformation into a human by courtesy of her father, both Eric and Ariel set off towards the 'wild uncharted waters' to begin a life together. This ending is fitting for two individuals who are both inquisitive and curious by nature. The exploring of 'wild uncharted waters' however, comes with an unsettling reference to establishing human presence in virgin lands. As history has proven, this is rather questionable given how expeditions for finding uncharted lands ultimately lead to conquest, systematic oppression, colonization, ecocide and genocide. Such a reading might slightly dampen the happy ending of the movie, but the subtext that directly refers to uncharted waters and provides some tension about proto-colonial undercurrents, does require to be read in a serious way. The scene of reconciliation with a multi-ethnic mermaid population rising out of the ocean surface along with the islanders bidding goodbye as the couple leave is naïve even for a Disney movie. The shoreline and the uncharted waters then provide much food for thought.

A Black mermaid turned human with an anthropological proclivity setting off with her white explorer boyfriend to find uncharted lands is an interesting adaptation of a centuries-old fairytale about a mermaid wanting

an immortal soul. While being race-blind, the casting offers interesting insights into how a Black mermaid could add layers to the narrative. The shoreline and the invocation of uncharted waters add to this subtext and also provide interesting insights.

Works Cited

- Aspinall, Georgia. "The Celebrity 'Feminist' Takes On The Little Mermaid Are All Wrong _ Grazia.Pdf." *Grazia*, June 1, 2023.
- Coillie, Jan Van. "How Immortal Is Disney's Little Mermaid?: The Disneyfication of Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid.'" *Never-Ending Stories: Adaptation, Canonisation and Ideology in Children's Literature*, edited by Sylvie Geerts and Sara Van den Bossche, Academia Press, 2014, pp. 127–42.
- Dickson, EJ. "Racists Are Worried About the Historical Accuracy of Mermaids," *Rolling Stone*, 14 September 2022.
- Diggins, Alex. "The Little Mermaid, Review: An Exciting, Enveloping Remake That Deserves to Make a Splash." *The Telegraph*, 26 May 2023.
- Fulton, DoVeanna S. *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of Slavery*. State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Kermode, Mark. "The Little Mermaid Review - Bland but Good-Natured Disney Remake." *The Guardian*, 27 May 2023.
- Kerver, Julianne. "In Defense Of 'The Little Mermaid: Why Ariel Is a Feminist Princess.'" *The Daily Fandom*, May 24, 2021.
- Morris, Wesley. "The Little Mermaid' Review: The Renovations Are Only Skin Deep." *The New York Times*, 26 May 2023.

- Mortensen, Finn Hauberg. "The Little Mermaid: Icon and Disneyfication." *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2008, pp. 437–54.
- Muir, Robyn. "Disney's The Little Mermaid Review: Ariel Finally Finds Her Feminist Voice." *The Conversation*, May 30, 2023.
- "Part of Your World," Genius. Accessed April 26, 2023. <https://genius.com/Halle-part-of-your-world-lyrics>.
- Romano, Aja. "The Racist Backlash to The Little Mermaid and Lord of The Rings Is Exhausting and Extremely Predictable," *Vox*, 17 September 2022
- Sebring, Jennifer Hammond, and Pauline Greenhill. "The Body Binary: Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Desirably Disabled Futures in Disney's The Little Mermaid and The Little Mermaid II: Return to the Sea." *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2020, pp. 256–75. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.13110/marvelstales.34.2.0256>.
- Trites, Roberta. "Disney's Sub/Version of Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid.'" *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 18, no. 4 (January 1991): 145–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01956051.1991.10662028>.
- "Wild Uncharted Waters." Genius. Accessed June 29, 2023. <https://genius.com/Jonah-hauer-king-wild-uncharted-waters-lyrics>.
- Willingham, AJ. "Analysis: A Definitive Rebuttal to Every Racist 'Little Mermaid' Argument," *CNN Entertainment*, 17 September 2022.
- Yamato, Lori. "Surgical Humanization in H. C. Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid.'" *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2017, pp. 295–312. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.13110/marvelstales.31.2.0295>.

Jules Verne's India : Exoticism or Distorted Reality?

Manjula Balakrishnan

This paper offers a detailed examination of one of the novels of Jules Verne which, although part of his *Voyages Extraordinaires* series, has significant socio-political content. *The Steam House* (1880) recounts the adventures of a hunting expedition in central India in the immediate aftermath of the so-called "Sepoy Mutiny", an attempt to win Indian independence from British Imperialism. This paper analyses the political situation as interpreted by Jules Verne from his perspective as a Frenchman, his geographical descriptions and human depictions of the country as well as his fidelity to contemporary linguistic models. The novel offers a critical vision of colonialism and was one of the first Western works to address this historical event.

Jules Verne has always been considered the author of children's and young adult literature. Almost all his works are based on fantastic adventures which have captivated the imagination of generations of young people, journeying twenty thousand leagues under the seas, to the centre of the earth or around the world in eighty days.

These fantastic voyages, however, carry significant political and social baggage, disguised beneath beautiful descriptions of exotic landscapes. The author recounted real political events through a particular prism, diluting and distorting the truth, perhaps stylistic reasons or simple patriotism. Thus, along with the enjoyment produced by these stories, we must also consider these "adult" opinions which also helped young readers to mature.

In this paper we will analyse an example of this type of geopolitical literature.

One of the historical facts that has been most misrepresented to justify the discourse of colonialist imperialism has been the so-called "Sepoy Mutiny" which took place in India, the crown jewel of the British empire, in 1857, the events of which "have provoked more impassioned literature than any other single event in Indian history (Keay 436)".

This rebellion was a frustrated attempt to achieve national independence from the British Empire. The revolt began in Meerut on May 10th, 1857, as a popular uprising and rebellion by Hindu and Muslim rulers. By March 1858, the British had regained control of the city of Delhi, although the guerrilla war would continue for some months. The last Mughal ruler, Bahadur Shah II, declared the Emperor of India by the rebels, was deposed, tried and exiled, putting an end to the rebellion.

This event has been the subject of detailed study, but only within the context of Indian history. "What has remained out of the focus of study during the last 150 years is the possible impact of the Revolt elsewhere, its so to say international dimension (Dasgupta 2011, 221)". It is in this context that the novel *The Steam House* gains relevance. "It is enlightening to study the history of a rebellion or war through the eyes of a third party 'neutral' nation (Choudhury 2011, 237)".

Colonial interests used the rebellion as a propaganda opportunity, insisting on the savage nature of colonised peoples and the moral duty of colonisers to "civilise" them, Kipling's so-called "white man's burden". Thus, the official histories were altered to present the West with a terrible vision of what could happen in those remote places. The level of violence and number of victims was exaggerated, presenting a Manichean vision of virtuous, well-intentioned whites and demented, sadistic natives. A struggle between dominator and dominated, a great number of other

factors also came into play, giving rise to a multitude of interpretations, clearly demonstrated by the varying names given to this historic event. "Known to the British as 'the Sepoys', 'Bengal' or 'Indian Mutiny', to Indians as 'the National Uprising' or 'the First War of Independence', and to the less partisans of both nations simply as 'the Great Rebellion', what happened in 1857 defies simplistic analysis (Keay 437)".

Considering the Manichean vision of the conflict, it is important to note the words of Jawaharlal Nehru in his book *The Discovery of India*: "The villain of the British in India is often a hero to Indians, and those whom the British have delighted to honour and reward are often traitors and quisling in the eyes of the great majority of the Indian people (Nehru 290)". This is a factor which must be taken into account before analysing the literary depiction of such a polarising and polemical event.

The frustrated rebellion served as a pretext for England to tighten its grip on India. From a simple protectorate, or a series of protection treaties with small kingdoms, the British political domination of India became complete. The East India Company, a private commercial enterprise enjoying government support, with significant influence in the various small kingdoms of India, gave way to complete British control with Queen Victoria as Empress of India.

The size and exoticism of India captivated the European imagination; its ancient and mysterious culture became a favoured setting for fiction during the Romantic period. The dramatic Indian uprising produced a host of literary works not only in the Anglo Saxon world but also across Europe. Verne was part of this trend in depicting colonial worlds although his contributions have not drawn a great deal of critical interest. In his extensive and well-documented book *India and World Civilization*, renowned philologist, Damodar P. Singhal deals at length with the "French interest in India, which is reflected in their literature, especially during the Romantic period (Singhal 241)" noting numerous

works on Indian themes by many 19th century authors including Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Jean-Jacques Ampère, Hugo, Verlaine, Louis Jacolliot or Anatole France. The book, however, does not dwell on Jules Verne.

Indian themes appear in four of Jules Verne's novels. *The Begum's Fortune* (*Les cinq cents millions de la Béguem*) makes only vague, distant references which have little bearing on our theme. In *The Mysterious Island* (*L'île mystérieuse*), the enigmatic Captain Nemo is revealed to be an Indian prince who escaped the country after the rebellion of 1857 and whose hatred of the English led him to withdraw from the world, sheltering in the depths of the oceans in an ingenious vessel (a future submarine) of his own making. "A more captivating science-fiction hero than Jules Verne's creation of Captain Nemo the world has not come by - anywhere, at any time (Dasgupta 2005, 87)".

In *Around the World in Eighty Days* (*Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*) there is an episode in which Phileas Fogg and his valet rescue one of the protagonists of the novel from the practice of *sati* which so horrified Europeans. But these are merely episodic scenes when compared to the fairly extensive novel set entirely in India. It is in this work, *The Steam House* (*La maison à vapeur. Voyage à travers l'Inde septentrionale*), that we will focus our attention. Written in 1880, this novel cannot be classified as a "scientific novel" as Verne's other more famous works. It is simply an adventure novel, and it seems that in writing a Romantic novel, Verne followed the famous advice of Schlegel to seek "supreme Romanticism in the orient".

The novel is not among Verne's best known works, despite its undeniable brilliance. The website "Journey to the Centre of the Unknown Verne" (*Viaje al centro del Verne desconocido*), supposedly specialising in the less celebrated works of the author, provides only a list of published editions and chapters. What is surprising is that Verne did not focus on

India earlier as a setting for his adventure novels, considering the success of his contemporary, the Italian Emilio Salgari, author of action adventure novels that were highly popular in Europe at the time. Between 1893 and 1911, Salgari wrote over 25 novels similar to Verne's, set in India, demonstrating that "the mysterious India of the British era was an ideal setting for the exotic post-romantic novels and thus a literary theme of the first magnitude (Gallud Jardiel 2016, 167)".

Since the 17th century, reliable texts have been available in France about India and its culture, such as the travel accounts of François Bernier and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier. In the 18th century, some of the leading Indologists were French who laid the foundations of a solid and enduring scholarly tradition. These authors include Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, Antoine Léonard de Chézy, Eugène Burnouf, Louis Renou, among many others. (Stacy 17).

By the 19th century, the French relation with India was even greater although in part mirroring the British model of official propaganda: "the Crown of England followed a policy which did not allow any information capable of damaging its so-called 'civilising task' to come out in the open (Gallud Jardiel 1992, 64)". Fortunately, Verne's patriotic devotion led him to rely solely on French sources (or so it appears) and the deformations and prejudices are not as great as they might have been, although these are still clearly apparent. "The risk of the author falling in the trap of inaccuracy was greater than the one faced by the latter *literateurs* like M. M. Kaye, E. M. Forster or Pearl S. Buck, who wrote about India with a larger amount of historical material at their disposal (Gallud Jardiel 1992, 66)".

In reality, Verne read extensively about India and was also able to consult with specialists. Nevertheless, three specific sources can be identified with certainty, as these are cited in the novel itself: the travel writings of Grandidier (*Géographie*) or Valbezen (*Nouvelles Etudes sur*

les Anglais et l'Inde), described by Verne as "highly remarkable" and to which he made frequent references and, finally, *La vie de Hionen Thsang* by Rousselet.

The novel *The Steam House* is set in March 1867, ten years after the uprising, and partly refers to its aftermath. It is narrated in the first person, naturally, by a Frenchman, M. de Maucler, who finds himself in the company of top British officials in India. Typically, the group is made up of various men and their servants. "It is curious the scant visibility of women in Verne's novels, with the exception of ladies who add a touch of love or romance to the story (Ortego)". In his tastes and the somewhat simplistic classification of his characters as good and bad, Verne has very clear sympathies in terms of nationalities. France and her sons predominately enjoy his favour, followed by Americans (due to their energy and initiative), the English and Russians, in that order. Verne is dismissive of the Spanish and hates Germans. In this, Verne is typically French. The novel, however, poses a dilemma. What position should it take regarding the native Indians compared to English imperialists? Although Verne in part sympathises with the Indian nationalists he also favours Christian Englishmen over Hindus, Western progress over oriental backwardness. "This novel [...] had a clearly pro-British stance with examples of exaggerated cruelties perpetrated by Indians towards Europeans (Gallud Jardiel 1992, 65)".

The final result is confusing and Verne retreats to the personal level, with positive and negative characters, regardless of what they represent. This is perhaps the technical failing of the novel, which depicts the antagonism between a fictional English official (Edward Munro) and the famous Nana Sahib, "whom the British depicted as a fiend, embodying all that they hated and feared in the land they fought to hold (Mansingh 277)". Both maintain a personal *vendetta* and neither are depicted in a positive light, and the reader's sympathies are directed towards secondary characters.

The plot of the novel is as follows: Nana Sahib has arrived in Bombay Presidency to organise a new uprising against the English invaders. There is an old enmity between him and Colonel Munro since the massacre at Cawnpore (Kanpur) and the disappearance of Lady Munro, presumed dead but not found among the victims. Nana Sahib is depicted as a murderous psychopath seeking to defeat the English only to install himself as ruler of India if the revolt is successful. We are also told his hatred of the English stems not from patriotism but from a financial dispute: the East India Company has refused to pay the pension he believes is his right. Nana Sahib also believes that Colonel Munro murdered the queen of Jhansi. By inventing this "evil" character Verne resolves the problem of positioning mentioned above.

Munro, Maucier and various friends undertake a hunting expedition through India and construct for themselves the "steam house" or the Iron Giant, "a piece of technology that is situated half-way between a natural marvel and a scientific marvel (Huet 54)". The machine is a locomotive in the form of an elephant with wheels adapted to the dirt roads of India. "This mobile mansion epitomises the bourgeois dream of taking along one's entire home when travelling — a kind of 19th century fantasy (Evans 2013, 134)". Compared to characters exposed to dangers and difficulties found in other novels, Verne here offers the opposite: "those who fulfil the charming vision of the "house in tow", with such representative examples as Captain Nemo and his marvellous Nautilus, the Garral family travelling in their *jangada*, propeller island, the floating city and, of course, the steam house (Martin 10)".

These aspects of Verne's novels reveal his capacity and belief in technical invention, which will improve our world beyond imagining: "This imaginary vehicle exemplifies (or, even better, encapsulates) two of the most fundamental properties of the traditional utopia: namely, autonomy and comfort. But one might also view them as a richly symbolic expression of an even more ubiquitous Vernian obsession: the impulse toward

enclosure (Evans 1999, 104)". Within the vehicle are all types of comforts, although Verne's descriptions are far from convincing: "... all those heaps of things in a circular space hardly more than two metres in diameter, and without toilets! What an imagination! (Deschamps 108)".

The protagonists undertake a hunting expedition to the north of the country, to the foothills of the Himalayas, travelling from Calcutta to Allahabad, and on to the Kingdom of Oudh (Avadh) and Tibet, returning via Kanpur, Gwalior and Jabalpur to Bombay. The novel is a description of the journey and the adventures they encounter, especially related to hunting, a subject of particular interest to readers of the time. Verne places particular emphasis on these episodes, depicting the characters Hod and Fox as devoted hunters who believe that Indian tigers were created to be hunted. Between the two they would kill almost one hundred tigers and even consider it inhumane to catch tigers without killing them.

During the course of their journey, other characters appear, such as "Roving Flame", a madwoman who wanders the forests with burning torch, who at a particular moment, recognises Nana Sahib who follows the expedition incognito, intent on revenge. Kalagani, the brother of Nana Sahib, is another character who joins the Englishmen as a guide while serving the intentions of his brother. They also meet an eccentric naturalist who lives deep in the jungle who gives detailed descriptions of the fauna of India: panthers, tigers, bears, wolves, etc and their habits.

The climax of the story is the confrontation between Munro and Nana Sahib who, at the head of a band of *dakoits* or bandits, takes Munro prisoner and ties him to the mouth of a cannon, recalling that it was Munro's grandfather who invented and first used this terrible form of punishment. These final chapters are filled with great melodrama. During the night Munro spends tied to the cannon, expecting to be blown to bits at dawn, the "Roving Flame" appears, who is in fact his wife, miraculously spared from the massacre at Cawnpore, but who has lost her mind and

is about to light the fuse of the canon with her torch. Eventually, one of Munro's faithful servants releases him at the last minute and he and his companions flee in the Iron Giant towards Jabalpur, with Nana Sahib and his men in pursuit. The Englishmen eventually capture Nana Sahib and tie him to the trunk of the mechanical elephant, overheating the boiler until it explodes. Months later, Lady Munro recovers her senses. This is a typical example of adventure fiction and a beautiful example of the genre, "an authentic manual of geography, history and natural sciences on a region of northern India, artfully balanced with the narrative to never become boring (Martin 7)".

"The geographical and linguistic sources consulted by Verne are evidently British (Gallud Jardiel 2016, 144)", revealed by the transliteration of the proper names and toponyms in the novel, for example, Adjuntah (Ajanta), Jubbulpore (Jabalpur), Ramghur (Ramgarh), Cawnpore (Kanpur), Pattyalah (Patiala), etc. The final 'h' is typical of English transliterations. Other words, however, are Frenchified, such as El Tadge (Taj), with the 'd' accompanying the 'j' to approach the original pronunciation. Geographically, Calcutta and Bombay are the most important cities in the narrative as points of reference while the "real India" is that of the interior, the jungles of Kipling. On this point there is a revealing passage:

"There are, however," said Banks, "some very interesting towns in the north-west, such as Delhi, Agra, Lahore..."

"Oh, my dear fellow! Who ever heard of those miserable little places?" (Verne 126).

In terms of the Hindi lexicon, the novel contains some two dozen vernacular terms, more or less incorrect, in their spelling (*gurgkha*, *tchita*, *nilgo*, *mulvi*) or their meaning, such as *hang* or "liquid opium" (most likely *bhang*, a derivative of *cannabis*), *bhil* or "savage" (taken perhaps from the *bhils* tribe), *mhowhah* or "plant" (the *mohwa* tree), etc. There is also the almost quintessential error confusing Mughals with Mongols.

Nevertheless, the novel is filled with original and surprising elements, something on which all critics agree. "Everything referring to the functioning and adventures of the "Steam House" are as detailed and imaginative as any of Verne's work; the comings and goings of the mechanical elephant are the best parts of the novel (both in its encounters with humans and with its proboscidean brethren (Migoya)".

The adventures described are vividly exciting, even in India, and much more so for European minds. "This novel has the peculiarity of being overwhelmingly spirited, fun-filled, even jovial; the hatreds are implacable, the action is thrilling, traitors are truly traitorous and the slaughter is bloody. A true gem for lovers of traditional narratives (Guelbenzu)".

Verne gives all that can be expected of a novel about India, from descriptions of Everest, the Himalayas and the feats of intrepid climbers, to the dangers of tiger hunting in the jungle. The author describes in painstaking detail the holy city of Benarés and the Kailasa Temple in Ellora, with elements drawn from well-documented sources. The novel also includes a fight between the Iron Giant and a number of real elephants of a Raja they encounter on the journey, the dangers of a tornado during monsoon season, an invasion of their camp by snakes, an attack by wild elephants and many other small events that give the novel the flavour European readers hope to find. "One is always amazed by the level of detail Verne offers in recreating scenes and situations never seen or experienced (Migoya)".

Naturally, respect for the religious sentiments of his country led Verne to express scepticism about the mysticism of the Hindus of Benarés, the penances and immersions in the Ganges. He refers to India as the "Holy Land of Aryavarta" but also contrasts "native barbarism" with modern, Western civilization. Although there are virtually no derogatory references to Hinduism or its practices, Verne does mention,

perhaps without a great deal of knowledge, how the Brahmins of Bihar displaced the Buddhists of Magadha, 330 million Hindu gods and describes the fanaticism of some Hindus, claiming that some even threw themselves to the ground wishing to be trampled under the wheel of the Iron Giant as if it were the Chariot of Lord Jagannath.

Finally, there is the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the basis of the novel's plot, which Verne describes in detail in Chapter 3, with an outline of the political situation in India since the year 1600 with the founding of the East India Company. Here, Verne ascribes the failure of the rebellion to the lack of a truly national sentiment in India. According to Verne, the uprising failed because the rural peasantry was not interested in the struggle and a large part of the army remained loyal to the British. He also mentions the famous incident that is said to have sparked the uprising:

The British government had just introduced into the Indian army the use of the Enfield carbine, which requires the use of greased cartridges. One day the rumour spread that the cartridges were purposely greased with cow or pig fat, depending on whether the cartridges were intended for Indian soldiers or Muslims in the Indian army (Verne 35).

“What is most interesting from the point of view of a reader today is, obviously, the moral perspective Verne offers about the colonisation of India: his sympathies (it could hardly be otherwise) are clearly with the “civilising” role of European power but neither does he shy away from revealing certain examples of the savagery of imperial rule (Migoya).

Verne speaks of the excesses of Nana Sahib, but also mentions how then Major Munro vigorously put down the revolt, having twenty-eight rebels tied to the mouths of cannons, just as his grandfather had done. Verne describes the British repression in the wake of the failed rebellion in all its cruelty:

On the 30th of July, 1237 prisoners fell successively before firing platoons, and fifty other prisoners only escaped to die of hunger and suffocation in the prisons in which they were shut up. (Verne 38)

He also mentions the heroic stoicism and phlegm of the Indians in the face of death.

It is unfortunate that this novel is not better known in Europe. It is also unfortunate that, although Verne's inventive technique and contribution to science fiction has been widely recognised, the literary qualities of his work have not been appreciated. Verne deserves to be reconsidered, no longer denigrated as a “second class author”. A writer can be judged on the degree of success in their literary intentions. Verne aimed to cultivate a literature of fantasy and evasion, and in this he fully succeeded, producing works which have delighted generations of readers throughout the world. It should not be forgotten that Jules Verne shares with the great Balzac the honour of never having been accepted into the French Academy.

Works Cited

- Bissondoyal, Basdeo. *India in French Literature*. Luzac, 1967.
- Choudhury, Suchita. “A Great Insurrection!: Jules Verne and British ‘Mutiny’ Fiction”. *Insurgent Sepoys. Europe Views the Revolt of 1857*, Routledge, 2011.
- Dasgupta, Swati. “Jules Verne Re-discovered”. *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2005, 87-106.
- Dasgupta, Swati: “Lost in Translation: Jules Verne and the Indian Rebellion”, *Insurgent Sepoys. Europe Views the Revolt of 1857*, Routledge, 2011, 221-236.

- Deschamps, Jean-Marc. "Les machines fantastiques de Jules Verne". *Jules Verne: Les Machines et la Science*, Coiffard, 2005, 107-114.
- Evans, Arthur B. "Jules Verne's Dream Machines. Technology and Transcendence". *Extrapolation*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2013, 129-146.
- Evans, Arthur B. "Vehicular Utopias of Jules Verne". *Transformations of Utopia: Changing Views of the Perfect Society*, AMS Press, 1999, 99-108.
- Gallud Jardiel, Enrique. *India in the Literature of Spain*. B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1992.
- Gallud Jardiel, Enrique. *La India en Occidente. Influjo filosófico y literario*. Miraguano Ediciones, 2016.
- Garrat, Geoffrey Theodore. *La civilización indobritánica*. Pegaso, 1950.
- Gimeno Agiús, José. *El imperio de las Indias*. Revista Europea, 1885.
- Goupil, Armand. *Jules Verne*. Larousse, 1975.
- Guelbenzu, José María. "La casa de Vapor", Javier Coria: <https://javiercoria.blogspot.com/2011/02/la-casa-de-vapor.html>. Accessed 3 Feb 2022.
- Hibbert, Christopher. *The Great Mutiny*. Penguin, 1986.
- Huet, Marie-Hélène. "L'Ecrivain tératologue". *Jules Verne 3. Machines et imaginaire*, Minard, 1980, 53-66.
- Key, John. *India: A History*. Harper Collins, 2001.
- "La casa de vapor". Sociedad Jules Verne de Vigo: <https://vigoverne.com/resenas/la-casa-de-vapor/>. Accessed 10 Feb 2022.

- Lacroix de Mârlès, Jules. *Histoire générale de l'Inde ancienne et moderne*. Emler Fréves, 1828.
- Majumdar, Ramesh Chandra. *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*. People's Publishing House, 1963.
- Maldonado Macanaz, Joaquín. *El imperio indobritánico*. Revista de España, 1901.
- Mansingh, Surjit. *Historical Dictionary of India*. 5th edition, Vision Books, 2003.
- Martin, Charles-Nöel. "Introducción" to *The Steam House*. Penguin, 2016.
- Migoya, Hernán. "La casa de vapor: un Verne a medio gas". Cualia.es: <https://cualia.es/la-casa-de-vapor-1880-un-verne-a-medio-gas/>. Accessed 5 Feb 2022.
- Moré, Marcel. *Nouvelle explorations de Jules Verne*. Gallimard, 1963.
- Muir, Ramsay. *The Making of British India*. OUP, 1969.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. 22nd edition, OUP, 2002.
- Ortego, Alicia. "La casa de Vapor". Leer y Viajar, 2012: <https://www.leeryviajar.com/novela/la-casa-de-vapor-2/>. (Accessed 8 Feb 22)
- Singhal, Damodar P. *India and World Civilization*. Rupa & Co., 1993.
- Sordo, Enrique. *Julio Verne: su vida y su obra*. Gasso, 1966.
- Stacy, Robert H. *India in Russian Literature*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1985.
- Stokes, Eric. *The Peasant Armed: Indian Revolt of 1857*. Clarendon Press, 1986.
- Verne, Jules. *La casa de vapor*. Translated by Antonio Álvarez Práxedes, 2nd edition, Aguilar, 1978.

Beyond Adult Intervention: Study of Contemporary Childhood in Indian English Fiction

Gurpreet Kaur Saini

Problematizing the idea whether children's literature is an appropriately titled distinct category in itself or inclusivity can be aimed to achieve through addressing the differences in writing style and by calling it as literature produced for children and young adults, my study will reflect how the latter proposition is complementing the approaches adopted by fiction writers in our contemporary times. While considering the recent shifts in writing techniques adopted by authors associated with this genre, my project will analyse how several social issues are being introduced within the contemporary narratives without patronizing the young protagonists or employing the didactic approach in order to teach them a life lesson. Taking into account one recent collection *Eat the Sky, Drink the Ocean* (2014) edited by Kirsty Murray, Payal Dhar and Anita Roy, and primarily, by examining *Mayil Will Not Be Quiet!* (2011) by Nivedita Subramanian and Sowmya Rajendran, in this study I intend to argue that contemporary writers are exploring the potential of fictional narratives as a tool for creating awareness and social change to empower youth in today's world.

The acknowledgement of childhood as a distinct stage and therefore, the needs of children being considered as widely different from adults, is one of the pertinent reasons that has led to proliferation of literature specifically addressing them. Though literary productions specifically for children do not necessarily convey that readers belonging to only those particular age groups should read them rather such

categorizations defy the essence of writing itself. In other words, even if certain parameters such as simple language and illustrations are incorporated within the narratives for the comprehensibility of young readers, the content can be such which caters to readers of all age groups.

To take some examples from the Indian context itself, contributions of Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhuri, Sukumar Roy, Satyajit Ray and many others, need to be recognized not just for the formation of Modern Bengali Children's Literature but for authoring such varied narratives that delight readers of all ages equally and till today serve as models for capturing the inhibited curiosity and spontaneity of children. Gautam Chando Roy in the article "Upendrakishore Ray Chaowdhury's "Sandesh": An Exploratory Essay on Children's Literature and the Shaping of Juvenile Mind in Early 20th Century Bengal" notes how Ray Chaowdhury's intention was to "make children consciously aware about the physical world, instill in them awe and wonder at its workings..." (900). Though it would not be incorrect to state that his writings such as *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*, *Tuntunir Boi* and several other narratives are cherished by people of all ages till date.

It is significant to note here that over the years due to emphasis on providing the right kind of education to children and shaping them further into ideal future citizens, a didactic approach has been adopted by several fictional writers. Subsequently, it becomes crucial to understand that if only adult impulses and supervision govern the majority of the narratives then how far children would be able to connect with such narratives and ultimately, what would be the output of such an unimaginative regime? Recent research works by eminent scholars associated with this field, such as David Rudd, Alison Lurie, Peter Hunt and many others, have suggested the need to discover the subversive potential of narratives produced for children and in fact "Childist criticism" should be developed in order to relate with the way world functions for

children (Hunt 10). Such critical interventions are necessary and hence, reconsideration of the label – children's literature in this regard.

By putting forward the categorization as literature produced for children and young adults, in some ways inclusivity can be achieved and hierarchies replaced. As such marketing processes will not just remove the restrictive idea of readership imposed by the initial one, simultaneously it is also indicative of the contextual changes that are being brought over by contemporary authors, who are interested in much more than simple fantastic or moralistic representations. By placing young protagonists at the centre and identifying their ways of interactions with the world around them, nowadays attempts are being made to reduce the distance between the adult author and young reader.

A similar approach can be observed in the works of Ruskin Bond, who has achieved both national and international acclaim for his writings for children. In addition, he is considered as one of the foundational figures due to his contribution in the constitution of Indian Children's Literature in English language, just few years after the independence of the country. Describing about his writing process in the introduction to the text *The Night Train at Deoli and other stories* (1988), he outlines "in writing for children one has to adopt a less subjective approach; things must happen, for boys and girls have no time for mood pieces...I can enter into their minds when I am writing about them. As children we are individualists; it is only as we grow older that we acquire a certain grey similarity to each other" (Khorana 94).

This kind of insistence on capturing the individuality of children and not patronizing them while acquainting them with the realities of the world is one of the major shifts that can be observed through the study of varied kinds of fictional narratives being produced for children in the last few years. Moving away from simplistic representations in which adult impulses governed the actions of young protagonists and in some

narratives even fantastical adventures would just indulge readers in sheer pleasure with no specific purpose, nowadays, authors are invested in unearthing the deeper conflicts of our societies.

Enraged by the crimes committed against young women across the globe and gradual recognition of how fear became a dominant emotion in one's life, several writers came forward to express their suppressed angst in their own words. That is how the collection of short stories *Eat the Sky, Drink the Ocean* (2014) edited by Kirsty Murray, Payal Dhar and Anita Roy came into being. In their own words this collection is about "the desire to have and do impossible things, especially things that girls aren't meant to do. We asked our contributors to re-imagine the world, to mess with the boundaries of the possible and the probable" (viii).

Published by Young Zubaan, this collection contains narratives by women writers and artists from India and Australia. In order to substantiate my argument and delineate the above-mentioned shift in representational domain, I will be briefly referring to one of the short stories from this collection titled "Cast Out" by Samhita Arni. Charting out the atrocities enacted upon women and in this story's case even upon young girls who dare to do magic, Karthini, the young protagonist of this story is urged by her mother to never step out of the accepted societal rules. Otherwise, she will become an outcast like other girls. Unable to exercise the powers bestowed on girls or women by nature itself, Karthini undergoes a period of angst as it is very difficult for her to curb her innate desires to perform magic.

On the other hand, the mother who is well acquainted with their society's mindset even tries the age-old remedies, concoctions and potions to put her daughter's desires to sleep. However, later while saving one of her cousin brothers, Karthini accidentally uses her magical powers and instead of being rewarded for that act, she is subjected to banishment

like other girls. Brutally punished and dressed in a sackcloth, Karthini was also about to be pushed out into the ocean when another woman named Satyawati came sobbing towards her along with her infant and shoved that baby into Karthini's lap. Satyawati was already mothering five children and this baby girl was born a few months after her husband died. Therefore, underlining the fact that due to deprivation of resources to provide for all her children, she had no other option but to give up her baby.

Raging storms, demon clouds and fire-rain challenge Karthini and baby in that ocean and just when Karthini was about to give up, she spotted a ship. In the desperate attempt to save themselves, Karthini uses her mental powers for communication in order to stop that ship. But once the ship stopped a lot of questions disturbed Karthini: "how would these people treat us? Would they, like the Headman and Blacksmith of my village, flog and sentence girls to death for practicing magic? Would they take in Sari, or would they cast her out to sea, the way my mother had my sister?" (70). But much to her astonishment, she meets all the women on that ship, which is named Pearl, and then they are taken to a floating island that was called Shiptown.

This world that Karthini encounters is in complete contrast with her native place as women here perform all the tasks and gradually, they become a part of this place which cannot be found on any map. Sari, the baby, also grows into a young child and learns various vocations by watching Karthini. Arni's narrative ends on the point that after being accepted and becoming capable of managing one's own existence with dignity, Karthini is engaged in this task of using magic to weave stories and maps into things they make. So that any woman or a girl who wants to make connection with them anytime, will just have to "snip off a piece of this cloth, tease out a thread of this carpet, or break off a piece of this tile" and carry with themselves in order to send across the message that they need help (73). A signal would definitely be sent across once that

piece of cloth touches water and someone from this island will surely come for rescue.

"Cast Out" is a fantastical story that functions at several levels of experience and meaning simultaneously. Apart from its obvious fantastical indulgence and adventures, it brings out the perspective of the marginalized through the eyes of a young girl. The narrative situates her in tradition which denies any scope of having a fulfilling existence for a woman, then in a storm where even the natural world threatens her mere survival and next, due to her realization of her own powers in an island where she can relate with others like her. But again and again, it is manifested within the narrative that this journey is not going to be an easy one due to social, financial and emotional oppression being embedded within the society's framework itself.

The questions that Karthini raises throughout the narrative highlights how mere inculcation of values set up by adults in such an oppressive society will never let girls like her and other women rise above their marginalized status. Rather it is through her own experience, self-recognition and knowledge that changes can be brought. Moreover, the narrative culminates by paving a way forward for other women to join this island whenever they want and hence, putting forward the idea of sisterhood. Interestingly, which is also being facilitated by girls like Karthini, who is involved in the magical process of weaving stories with clothes. Thus, covering a journey from being a victim or marginalized person to the position of provider and facilitator.

Another narrative that captures this shift towards realism and social awareness through the young protagonist's active participation in varied situations, taken up for study in this paper is authored by Nivedita Subramaniam and Sowmya Rajendran, and is titled– *Mayil Will Not be Quiet!* (2011). In the text, Mayil is portrayed as an inquisitive girl, who almost has an irresistible tendency to ask questions. As a result of her unrestrained behaviour, her Appa (father) gifts her a diary and in a way an

opportunity to explore her artistic self. Thus begins a series of diary entries in which Mayil notes all her doubts, curiosities, changing relationships and development of an artistic self that eventually she is not able to recognize while re-reading her work, though still finds it pleasantly relatable.

By employing the technique of first-person perspective, and usage of visual emphasis such as italics, underlined words, doodles, illustrations depicting Mayil's current temperament, both Subramaniam and Rajendran, have managed to build a world of a teenage girl, who closely observes every situation around her. Unlike adults, who have accepted the norms of a cultured society and feel comfortable when they stick to their routines, children's developing perspective in contrast is projected as curious and perceptive.

While it is a given fact for a value education teacher in Mayil's school that King Dasharatha only wanted a son to "carry" his name and Rama's skin colour was blue (9). For Mayil, comprehension of these facts is problematic. As Mayil questions her Amma, why didn't "King D" want a daughter to take his legacy forward? (9). Similarly, contemplating about Rama's colour, she inquires how her dark skin needs to be cured, whereas questioning Rama's skin colour is disrespectful according to her teacher (9). These questions reflect how patriarchal societies have always suppressed women and considered them as inferior species. Though by simply raising these questions, Mayil puts forward the point that in her view, girls would have been equally capable of carrying "King D's" legacy forward if given a chance (9). Later, she humorously elaborates that "just because I like sambar doesn't mean I can't rule a kingdom" (10).

Apart from countering the sexist issues, this text also underlines how even the educated section of our country has contributed in dehumanizing transgenders till today. In one of the episodes, when Mayil is travelling in a train, she looks at a "weird" lady in her compartment and

recognizes that such people "usually come in groups," but this one was sitting alone and the seat next to her was also empty (15). Later, she requests her father to allow her to sit on that empty seat as she was extremely tired, but her father adamantly refuses and this refusal in turn puzzles Mayil. In contrast, Mayil's mother is depicted as a woman, who is an ardent believer in the rights of women and the one who takes stand against sexist ideologies. She encourages her daughter to read Virginia Woolf so as to gain a broader perspective of one's place in society. But in this case, when Mayil inquisitively asks— why a man was dressed like a woman, she stereotypically explains how "it was wrong to force people to give you money and that's what those people did" (17). No attempts are made on her part to understand why earning livelihood in this manner is the only option available for them even in the present-day scenario.

Govindasamy Agoramoorthy and Minna J. Hsu in their article, "Living on the Societal Edge: Transgender Realities," observes how even after the Supreme Court's landmark verdict in 2014, which declares that transgender people have access to equal opportunities in contemporary Indian society, nothing has been quite effective in changing their marginalized status. In addition, they mark how the use of the term "eunuch" is highly problematic, as in their view, transgender would be a more appropriate term both biologically and socially (1454). This aspect is also brought up in the narrative through Mayil's friend Jyothy, who calls that lady - man as eunuch (16). However, when Mayil cannot stop thinking about the whole incident, she finally approaches Zainab aunty and it is then, she is made to realize that eunuch is not an appropriate term. Moreover, it is nobody's fault for the way they are and how they feel about themselves is also emphasized within the narrative (17).

Thus, by giving agency to young protagonists as delineated in the above paragraphs to follow their passions, curiosities, and intelligence to decide what is wrong or right for them over the course of the narrative, depicts a move away from the usual power dynamics where adults hold

supremacy over children. Keeping the imaginativeness, curiosity, wildness, carefree nature intact in several ways, contemporary authors are engaging more and more with the real-world issues which up till now were considered as inappropriate subjects to be included within narratives for children. Such introductions sometimes humorously or spiritedly are taking this endeavour of writing for children into a different direction where children are no longer the bystanders instead the active participants who will make contributions in the recent future.

Works Cited

- Agoramoorthy, Govindasamy and Mina J. Hsu. "Living on the Societal Edge: India's Transgender Realities." *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2015, 1451-1459. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/24485502.
- Arni, Samhita. "Cast Out." *Eat the Sky, Drink the Ocean*. Edited by Kirsty Murray et al., Young Zubaan, 2014.
- Hunt, Peter. "Childist Criticism: The Subculture of the Child, the Book and the Critic." *Children's Literature: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Edited by Peter Hunt, Routledge, 2006, 10-49.
- Khorana, Meena G. *The Life and Works of Ruskin Bond*. Praeger, 2003.
- Eat the Sky, Drink the Ocean*. Edited by Kirsty Murray et al., Young Zubaan, 2014.
- Roy, Gautam Chando. "Upendrakishore Roychaudhuri's "Sandesh": An Exploratory Essay on Children's Literature and the Shaping of Juvenile Mind in Early 20th Century Bengal." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 73, 898-905, 2012. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44156287>.
- Subramaniam, Niveditha, and Somya Rajendran. *Mayil Will Not Be Quiet!* Tulika, 2011.

Nonsense Poetry in Colonial India: A Study of Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol*

Anisha Sen

The mode of nonsense literature, contrary to its meaning, often serves as a playful mode of appealing to the sense of the readers. Though conventionally meant for child readership, this genre does not stand simply for entertainment, but generates a multiplicity of meaning that renders it suitable for multifaceted interpretations. Sukumar Ray, a product of colonial Bengal and Bengal Renaissance, uses his humour, vibrant imagination and an inexhaustible repository of words to form a topsy-turvy world, which is seemingly absurd, but actually an exaggeration of real life scenarios. While we laugh aloud at his queer anthropomorphic animals and idiosyncratic characters, we end up laughing at our surroundings and people who are not really strangers to us. Laughter can be a strong form of ridicule or criticism, and the poet has that in mind as he presents an amusing cross-section of the society with all its absurdities and incongruities. If we ground Ray's poetry in the contemporary times, we can read between the lines of his poems on misruled kingdoms and tyrannical regimes. His disorderly topsy-turvy world is actually a subversive one, which poses a threat to the real world, being run by the colonial ruler. My study of a few selected poems from his collection *Abol Tabol* will try to uncover how a seemingly meaningless form of expression can become a powerful tool of socio-political criticism. For my study, I have focused on a few poems from Sukumar's Ray's nonsense poetry anthology *Abol Tabol* and for the English translation of the poems, I have used the translations by Satyajit Ray (he has not translated all the poems in *Abol Tabol*) and Niladri R.

“Indeed, nonsense usually emerges from an excess of sense rather than a lack of it...” (Introduction) says Michael Heyman, and goes on to quote Wim Tigges regarding the multiplicity of meaning in nonsense literature. T. S. Eliot meant something along similar lines when he commented that Edward Lear’s nonsense “is not a vacuity of sense; it is a parody of sense, and that is the sense of it” (Eliot 56). While the absurdity in nonsense literature can be a source of sheer enjoyment for the reader (often, a child readership), it cannot be denied that those absurdities often highlight certain incongruities in the society and are simply an exaggeration of real life scenarios. As we laugh out loud at a piece of nonsense literature, we might be unwittingly laughing at outdated social practices or the contemporary political scenario. One of the most effective forms of criticism is ridicule and nonsense literature employs it perfectly. Whether it is Lewis Carroll parodying the irrational world of grown-ups through the eyes of Alice, or Sukumar Ray portraying certain socio-political realities through his topsy-turvy world, a closer look at these works reveal that the “nonsense” element is often a garb or a ploy to appeal to the sense of the reader in a playful way. Sukumar Ray’s jocular poems and humorous stories run the risk of being taken at face value, but grounding them in their context reveals to us a poet who is keenly aware of his surroundings. It cannot be ignored that his works are products of colonial Bengal and my analysis of a few of his poems will try to trace how the seemingly innocuous form of nonsense literature, can act as a critique of the contemporary times.

Sukumar Ray (1887-1923) was born in Calcutta to Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury and Bidhumukhi Debi. Upendrakishore was a pioneer in the field of children’s literature and printing. Interestingly, his story *Goopey Gyne Bagha Byne* (later made into a popular movie by Satyajit Ray), which tells the story of two musicians thwarting a tyrannical king, can be read as a threat to dictatorial regimes. Even his story about a bird, Tuntuni, talks about how a little bird manages to teach a lesson to

an oppressive king, resulting in the king’s nose being cut (which metaphorically stands for the loss of prestige). These covert criticisms of the colonial enterprise, in a way, pave the path for Sukumar Ray, who makes the use of a similar allegorical mode to veil the subversive intentions of his poetry. His sister, Punyalata Chakrabarti, in an introduction to *Chirokaler Shera* (a complete collection of Sukumar Ray’s original works in Bangla) recounts the jovial, flamboyant nature of the poet, who had the capability to entertain and amuse people from his very childhood. She narrates how it was common for Ray to make the use of laughter to deflate unpleasant situations or gently criticize certain people. It was this disposition that churned out pieces of nonsense literature that would, on one hand, amuse people, and on the other, function as socio-political satires, “Sukumar’s humour too was free of malice, but not of satire” (Satyajit Ray, Introduction).

Sukumar Ray studied Physics and Chemistry in college. Soon after leaving college, he founded the Nonsense Club, with his friends and relations as members. He wrote two plays for the Club- *Jhalapala* (Cacophony), *Lakshmaner Shaktishel* (*Lakshman and the Wonder Weapon*) and ran a magazine, *Sarey-Batrish Bhaja* (*Savoury Mix*). These carry the early indications of humour that would become his trademark. With the magazine *Sandesh*, which was started by his father Upendrakishore Ray in May 1913, we find his distinctive brand of nonsense taking shape. Sukumar Ray had been to England to study printing technology. He got inspired by the nonsense writings of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll and brought back those ideas with him as he returned to Bengal a few months after *Sandesh* started. What Lear and Carroll started off in English, Sukumar Ray created in Bengali. Traces of early nonsense can be traced to nursery rhymes, folk tales, lullabies, but these authors can be credited with giving it a shape and carving out a niche for themselves in the field of literature. Ray named his vein of nonsense the *kheyal rasa* or the spirit of whimsy. Michael Heyman terms it the tenth rasa. According to Bharata Muni’s *Natyashastra*, a *rasa* is

meant to produce a particular emotional effect and he lists out eight distinctive *rasas* and *bhavas* or the responses they are meant to evoke. Ray and Heyman feel the need to extend this to incorporate the emotion evoked by nonsense literature, marking it as a genre with its own set of rules.

The late nineteenth century, in which Sukumar Ray was born, was an exciting time in Calcutta as it was going through the period of upheaval. The cultural, intellectual and artistic movement that paralleled the socio-political changes came to be known as the Bengali/Bengal Renaissance. By this time, a number of upper class Indians had access to Western education and this, contrary to the expectations of Macaulay, resulted in creating defiant minds rather than subservient ones. They had already started questioning the established conventions after the intellectual reawakening that started with the founding of the Brahma Samaj by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828. The period following his founding of the Samaj saw a spurt in the production of Bengali literature, art and music. Writers and thinkers of this age had a great interest in the development of the child's mind, the result of which was a vast, diverse body of writing for children.

When Lord Curzon attempted to redraw the borders of Bengal in 1905, even the nationalists who were conciliatory in their attitude towards the British, tended to revolt and challenge the British rule. From this defiant temper, sprang the *swadeshi* movement, which celebrated everything that was locally produced. Not only in clothes and other goods, but the spirit of *Swadeshi* touched the field of literature as well,

Thus the mood in Bengal was one that not only celebrated all things homegrown and local, but also one that was defiant towards all forms of official authority. This attitude, I propose, filters into children's stories written by Upendrakishore Ray and his son, Sukumar Ray (Goswami 136).

The simultaneous rise of the British Raj and Bengali children's literature indicate that this genre is inextricably bound with the contemporary socio-political scenario. Just as Upendrakishore Ray's works can be read for anti-colonial intent, Sukumar Ray's nonsense poetry showcases a whimsical world which subverts and challenges the existing norms. The mode of nonsense literature was a clever choice on the part of Sukumar Ray, because on one hand, it enabled him to evade the possibility of censorship (which was very common in the colonial times), and on the other, equipped him to communicate even a complex message in a lucid and humourous way. The popularity of his nonsense poetry with a child readership ensured that the message fell on the right ears, "Bengali children are, therefore, far more capable of subverting empire and challenging the laws of the land than Bengali adults, who are often enfeebled or emasculated by colonization" (Goswami 4).

Sukumar Ray's nonsense poetry that was extensively published in the magazine *Sandesh* between 1915 to 1923, was compiled into the anthology *Abol Tabol* (1923). We are invited into his topsy-turvy world through the very first poem, which also acts as a preface to the collection, "Come ye muddled, to a world befuddled/ In impossible, whimsy verse". With a brush and a pen, he brings to life a bizarre menagerie of animals and some unforgettable characters. In his poem *Khichuri (Stew Much!)*, Sukumar Ray presents us with portmanteau animals that have undergone a transformation after coming in contact with each other, like Porcuduck (porcupine and duck) and Stortle (stork and turtle). Without giving any background of this odd experimentation, Ray describes how one animal's torso is now fused with another's head and the illustrations which accompany the piece, make it easier to imagine the combinations. Though it might seem amusing at a first glance and an attempt to engage the imaginative nature of children who keep wondering "what if", on a closer look, the poem reveals a more serious undertone. As a result of Western

Education, there arose a *Babu* culture, which churned out foppish Bengali men who would be contemptuous of Bengali traditions. The arbitrary combination of the several animals can be symbolic of the ambivalent position of such people and their vacillating stance toward the imperial rule.

Khichuri or stew is a broth where different vegetables and pulses are blended together to form one single dish. Just as the animals lost their individual identities by teaming up with each other, the cultural contact between the East and the West had also changed the Indians and the British people, bringing together a bit of both in certain individuals. This can be taken as a critique of the hybrid existence that the *Babus* were leading at that point of time; the Whalephant in the poem is shown as torn between two realms, "It's obvious the Whalephant is not a happy notion:/ The head goes for the jungle, while the tails turns to the ocean" (see Fig 1 a). The struggle between two different species can also be viewed as an unequal power structure- the illustrations suggest that there had been some expansion and shrinking to accommodate each other, but all of them do not undergo equal transformations. This, in itself, can be a political statement, as Poushali Bhadury points out, "His illustrations in this instance present a visual critique of the politics of forced and/or unthinking cultural amalgamation with one dominant culture giving undue prominence or control over the other" (Bhadury, 20). While some are happy with their transformations, some combinations seem unwieldy- the lizard with the parrot's head is confused about his diet (see Fig 1 b), while the illustration suggests that the giraffe with the grasshopper's limbs will be rendered immobile (see Fig 1b). In bringing together these impossible combinations, Sukumar Ray shows the undesirable effects of hybridism and how it can be an uneasy and problematic experience.

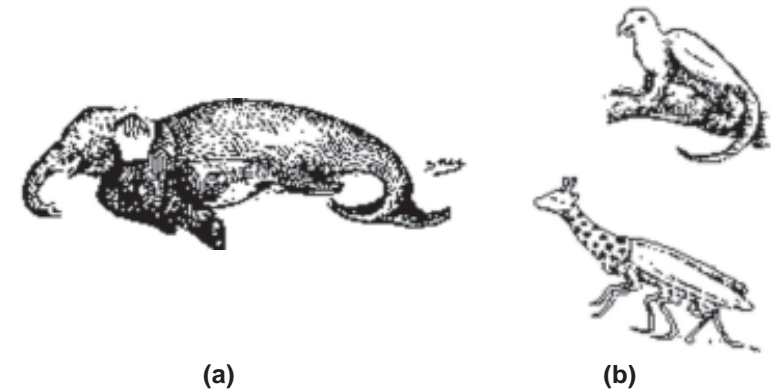


Fig. 1. "Khichuri" (Stew Much!); Sukumar Ray; Abol Tabol; Sukumarray.freehostia.com; Web

Ray's satire is not only limited to critiquing the hybrid individuals, but also mocks the idea of mimicry. There was a tendency among westernized Indians to imitate the dressing, food habit and language of the colonial rulers. The problems of incorporating elements from different culture that Ray hints at in *Khichuri*, become all the more clear as we reach the poems like *Kimbhut (Wacky No-One)* and *Tynash Goru (Crass-Cow)*. Both the poems contain a central animal who is a again an amalgamation of different species, but clearly not at ease with what they have become. Here, Ray's stand also becomes clearer as he terms them "kimbhut" which is a term used for an ugly appearance and the word "tynash" is a derogatory word which is still used to refer to people who are overtly westernized in their habits or appearances. The animal Kimbhut, who was not happy with his appearance, suddenly ends up as a combination of different species (a bird, an elephant, a kangaroo, a lion and a lizard), just as he desired. But, not only is this mix a visually grotesque one (see Fig 2), but he himself recognizes the futility of the combination as he gets confused about his activities and his diet, "Does an elephant jump whoosh up high?/ On a diet of plantains, do kangaroos die?" He feels strangely out of place and is anxious about being ostracized,

"Airborne elephant, if accepts no one?/ If they box his ears, twist tail, make fun?/ Charges someone straight to his face:/ Who're you, bud? What name, what race?" Through this uneasy situation, Ray attempts to mock the people who abandon their own individuality and culture to incorporate fashionable elements from a different culture, albeit unthinkingly and ignorantly. Just like some of the animals in *Khichuri*, who are caught up between two identities, the weird beast in *Kimbhut* runs the risk of losing his identity and individuality in the process, "Not bear, nor deer, or dinosaur long gone-/ It seems I'm a Nobody-I am No-One!".



Fig. 2. "Kimbhut" (Wacky No-One); Sukumar Ray; Abol Tabol; Sukumarray.freehostia.com; Web

Nothing represents the idea of nonsense literature better than these strange animals that inhabit Ray's world- just as in fables, anthropomorphic animals represent human follies and wisdom, in Ray's poetry, the incongruous beasts exposes the odd behavior of certain people. This idea becomes more prominent in another poem *Tynash Goru* (*Crass-Cow*), which also revolves around a hybrid creature, similar to those we have looked at so far (see Fig 3). Even the creature herself seems to have a doubt regarding what she is- "Not quite bovine, she's rather, a bird, really". Even as the poet gives this disclaimer, it seems to be a verbal irony as he uses the creature to critique the "bovine" nature of the people who have chosen a similar hybrid identity for themselves. The combination is again an uneasy one as the illustration suggests that the

creature can hardly move and the poem affirms that she has the tendency of falling down, if scolded. The shaky legs, a delicate digestive system and a strange diet (soap and candles) can be taken as a satire on people who had adopted the British customs and food habits, regardless of whether it suits them. The creature can also be taken as a caricature for the clerks in the government office who were subservient and always eager to please their British. But, their lazy nature is also highlighted by drawing the animal with closed eyes, which is also representative of a blinkered vision, "The heavy-lidded eyes point to her having shut out reality. It also conveys the impression of Crass Crow looking down upon others, with a supercilious air, through half-closed eyes". This superior air and the carefully parted hair is a comment on the foppish men, suffering from an overdose of westernization. The scarf around the neck of the creature reaffirms this and suggests that she is not far removed from human civilization (maybe, not unfamiliar to the reader). The last two lines gives the most sardonic twist to the satire- "If interested to buy her, any Crass-cow lover, Will make you a good price- you think it over". Ray puts down this creature as a sell-out and contemptuously turns the entire poem into a piece of advertisement.



Fig. 3. "Tynash Goru" (Crass-Cow); Sukumar Ray; Abol Tabol; Sukumarray.freehostia.com; Web

If *Crass- Cow* is a satire on the clerks of a government office, Ray does not spare the office Head Clerk either. Bengali middle class gentlemen, who had received a Western education, often aspired to these lucrative clerical posts in British merchant establishment. Having achieved the rank of the Head Clerk, there was a tendency to treat the subordinates in an imperious and high-handed manner, which mirrored the oppressive colonial rule. In *Gnof Churi (The Missing Whiskers)*, Sukumar Ray draws a similar portrait of the Boss Babu, whose dressing reflects the Western influence on him (see Fig. 4). We see him dozing off in the office, which is a comment of the lethargic nature of such clerks, who would give out orders, but do precious little themselves. He raises a hue and cry as he wakes up under the impression that his whiskers have gone missing. His subordinates cannot reason with him as he wants them to take even his imaginary concerns seriously. Even when they held up a mirror to his face, he disowned the moustache that he saw and angrily deducted their wages. This can be a covert criticism of the British who would levy unfair taxes on the Indian subjects. The Boss Babu gives an inordinate amount of attention to his moustache, which is clearly more precious to him than his employee's well-being, "Man is slave, Moustache is master,/ Losing which Man meets disaster". This slave and master binary again hints at the colonial enterprise. The term "gentle fellow" which is used to describe Boss Babu is used sarcastically as he proves to be anything but that. The arbitrary and unfair actions of a man who is in power can be taken as an allegory for the oppressive British rule. The poem highlights his vile nature as it refers to him in animalistic terms through the expressions "whiskers", "Call the police!" No- the vet", "he might bite yet". With his humourous pen, Ray playfully undercuts the power that he represents, even as he makes his readers laugh at his absurdity.



Fig. 4. "Gnof Churi" (*The Missing Whiskers*); Sukumar Ray; *Abol Tabol*; Sukumarray.freehostia.com; Web

Gnof Churi is not the only instance of a scenario where the person in power is trivialized and ridiculed. If he look at the poems of *Abol Tabol*, there are several instances where Ray portrays tyrannical regimes in a bid to subvert the power structure. In *Bombagarer Raja (The King of Bombardia)*, Ray presents us with a topsy-turvy kingdom with strange practices and customs. The outlandish customs can be seen as an effort to imbibe the Western culture, which seems out of place in India. Niladri Roy detects "a common theme of mocking Indian politicians under British rule, Indians aping British manners and customs, and also, satire on British laws for India" (Roy, 165). The image of the King is an absurd one- he simply sits on his throne and howls away, while his minister sits on his lap, beating a canister. The sound effect would be startling and it can refer to the idea of propaganda. Following the logic of "empty vessels sound much", it can be understood that they are more intent on making noise rather than performing their duties. Even the throne, which is symbolic of the imperial power, is decorated with broken bottles. Such

descriptions undercut the King's authority and trivialize his imperial position. King's old aunt plays cricket with pumpkins; even she does not have any interest in the affairs of the state, but whiles away her time in an idle Western pursuit. Ray uses another poem *Nera Beltolaay (Once Bitten Twice Shy)* to depict a King who had given up his kingly pursuits to ponder on a foolish, imaginary conundrum. His face has turned red in heat and in exasperation, which can be a covert reference to the ruddy-faced British officials. The depiction of incompetent rulers thinly veils Ray's contempt towards the colonial rulers.

Things take a more serious turn in the poems *Kumropotash (Pumpkin-Pudge)* and *Ekushey Aeen (The Twenty-One Law)*. These are not simple descriptions of lawless kingdoms, but of clearly tyrannical regimes. Kumropotash is a strange, rotund beast (see Fig. 5), whose despotic rule presumably makes his human subjects cower in fear. The poet issues a warning in the poem, where he prescribes desirable responses on the part of the human subjects during each activity of the beast. The absurd, but specific customs hint at arbitrary impositions on the subjects, and yet again, critique the figure of the ruler, "However, the utter daftness of the above "rules" allows Ray to satirize the arbitrariness of British rules and regulations when it came to their Indian subjects, along with the censorship of free speech, movement and action" (Bhadury, 26). The political satire is taken a step further by the amusing illustration, which trivializes the beast and undercuts the fearsome air of authority that was ascribed to it by the poem. But, it also builds him up as a figure larger in proportion to his human subject (a typical Bengali Babu), which implies the meekness of the ones he rules over. Ray presents to us a strange kingdom, ruled over by an unfamiliar creature (he is not an amalgamation of familiar beasts) in an attempt to undermine the authoritarian image of the British rulers; the beast incites fear in the mind of his subjects but laughter in the readers.



Fig. 5. "Kumropotash" (Pumpkin-Pudge); Sukumar Ray; Abol Tabor; Sukumarray.freehostia.com; Web

What appear as simply strange customs in the land of Kumropotash become stringent rules when it comes to *Ekushey Aeen (The Twenty-One Law)*, where Ray's critique of the despotic colonial rule becomes all the more clear. Just before this poem was published in 1922, the extremely unpopular Rowlatt Act had been passed in 1919 and Nilardri Roy points out how this poem could have been a reaction against such repressive rules imposed by the British government. Centering around the arbitrarily chosen number twenty one, the poem talks about how the king's men try to control even the spontaneous activities of the citizens like sneezing and snoring. According to the draconian laws, the magnitude of the punishments outweighs the trivial "offences". There is a sense of constant surveillance as the king's men seem aware of every little action of the citizens and are ready to take actions immediately. There is an implicit reference to the literary censorship of the British, as they were constantly paranoid of seditious pieces of writing- "Those people who poetry write,/ Get locked up in cages tight". While the rest of the offences are related to human activities, this is the only one which is related to a profession. Poets are seen as threats to the empire and this was probably a moment of self-reflection for Ray himself as he carefully

sheaths his criticism in the folds of nonsense. The illustration accompanying the poem shows stiff, almost one-dimensional figures like paper cut-outs; the king's man has his hands clamped on the shoulders of a citizen- the entire scene is representative of the repressed, mechanical existence that the poem talks about (See Fig. 6). Interestingly, Ray makes a point to clarify the setting as "Shiva's own country", indicating that the oppressive regime is closer home than we think.



Fig. 6

Ray's clever satire is not only limited to strange hybrid creature and misruled kingdoms, but also extends to other poems which express his stance in a more symbolic way. In the poem Baburam Sapure (Baburam the Snake Charmer), the speaker asks the snake charmer for two snakes that will not be harmful. This could be a criticism of the ineffectual political leaders whose token opposition to the British had been of no use. Nilardri Roy points out how the two snakes can also refer to the Congress Party and the Muslim League, both of which proved ineffective at this point of time. If the figure of the snake-charmer is taken as the British ruler, the Indians are shown as dancing to his tunes. Interestingly, an illustration published in the Punch Magazine of London in 1924, expressed a similar idea as the British Secretary of State for India is seen charming a snake labelled *Swaraj* (see Fig. 7). *Swaraj* was

the carrot that was dangled in front of the Indian political leaders to make their attitude conciliatory towards the British. The speaker in the poem intends to feed milk and rice to the snake; this unusual diet for the snake can again be a reference to the Indians mimicking Western food habits. The poem brings in a note of sudden, casual violence in the last line as the speaker expresses his purpose of buying the snakes, "Do let me have one, Baburam, so I could bash its head". There could be an implicit warning in these lines- the non-violence ideals propagated by Mahatma Gandhi were ineffectually pitted against the brute force of the British Raj, which believed in crushing out all oppression ruthlessly.



Fig. 7. <https://punch.photoshelter.com/image/I00003W2Esconf9M>; Web.

Implicit and explicit references to the imperial rule and cross-cultural interactions are strewn throughout *Abol Tabol*. In the poem *Bhoy*

Peona (Fear Not), a monster invites a man to stay with him and his family for a few days. Though the invitation is addressed in endearing tones, the gigantic proportion of the beast and the cudgel that it sports does not suggest a benign creature (see Fig. 8). The man in the picture (supposedly, the listener) is of the same opinion as he is seen running away, due to what Paushali Bhadury terms as “the fear of the Other”. The poem takes a sudden turn as the monster threatens the man with violence, as he fails to entice him, “Together we’ll bite you. Be unafraid-at once!”. After *Baburam Sapure*, violence recurs in this poem as it becomes clear that the monster will have his way, whether by enticement or by punishment. This could be seen as the colonizer’s stance towards the Indian subjects, specially if we take the three-pronged horns in the head of the beast as a crown and the cudgel as a scepter, symbolic of the imperial rule. The Indian subject is an unwilling “guest” in his own land; the “cordial” invitation is an attempt to make him subservient and make him believe in the benignity of the creature, which is verbal and superficial. This can be compared to the purpose with which the British people introduced Western learning- it was apparently a noble effort, but Macaulay had proposed it in the hope of creating a certain band of individuals who would serve the imperial rulers.



Fig. 8. *Bhoy Peyo Na (Fear Not)*; Sukumar Ray; *Abol Tabol*; Sukumarray.freehostia.com; Web.

There are several poems in which Ray talks about the hybrid existence of the Indian subject and mocks at how they become the “mimic men” under Western influence. The poem *Narod! Narod!* (*Neighbors*) is apparently a squabble between two neighbours, over inconsequential issues, which ends with pacification and amity. But, it is interesting to note that while arguing, the two men use certain English expressions, albeit in an Indianized way. The Western influence on them is clear, as Sukumar Ray invites us to laugh at such people, at their foolish quarrel and ludicrous use of language (e.g., one of them pronounce “stupid” as “ishtoopit”). If we follow the illustration, we can see the two people dressed in contrasting clothing- while one is dressed in a typically Indian attire, a dhoti and sports the sacred thread of Brahmins, another has donned a coat over his dhoti (see Fig. 9). The latter is representative of the hybrid existence and their mock fight at a deeper level could also be the conflict between two ideologies. In the light of the “divide and rule” policy of the British, the quarrel between two neighbors can be symbolic. Ray issues a gentle warning regarding the dangers of fighting with one’s own kind, as it would simply make the divisive politics of the British people all the more successful. Niladri Roy’s claim that the sacred thread indicates a Hindu man, while the goatee of the other person makes him a Muslim, is in tandem with this idea, as communal disharmony was the premise on which the colonizers had devised their “divide and rule” policy.



Fig. 9. *Narad!Narad! (Neighbors)*; Sukumar Ray; *Abol Tabol*; Sukumarray.freehostia.com; Web.

It is extremely easy to take Sukumar Ray's poems at face value as one cannot help at being amused at his delightful use of puns, ludicrous situations and impeccable illustrations, serving as a parallel text. But, the timeline and the nationalist inclinations of Sukumar Ray indicate that the anti-colonial strains that many have detected in his poetry, is not a far-fetched thought. Niladri Roy calls Ray "a nationalist at heart" and to illustrate this, he refers to an incident narrated by Ray's sister, Punyalata Chakraborty, where Ray chides her for rejoicing at a British victory during the Boer War. The hidden satires in Ray's poetry often hint at contemporary political occurrences and his nationalistic agenda. The seeming aberrations of Ray's whimsical world actually constitute a distorted mirror that exaggerates and reflects the actual flaws of the society. Interestingly, Ray got influenced by the English works of nonsense literature and uses the same mode to subvert the empire,

Thus S. Ray's brand of literary nonsense, which successfully fuses Bengali and British literary traditions, creates a topsy-turvy world which trivializes empire, parodies the laws of the land, and subverts all forms of official power and authority- in many ways, mirrors the most effective phase of the Swadeshi movement from 1905 to 1907 (Goswami, 151)

Sukumar Ray's poetry is indeed a rich mine and it is a pity that unlike his son, Satyajit Ray, his fame is mostly limited to Bengal. Even Rabindranath Tagore had tried his hand at nonsense poetry, but was forced to confess on one occasion that he could perhaps be everything else but never a Sukumar Ray.

Works Cited

- Bhadury, Poushali. "Fantastic Beasts and How to Sketch Them: The Fabulous Bestiary of Sukumar Ray." *South Asian Review* (2013): 11-38.
- Chakraborty, Rima. "Finding Sense Behind Nonsense in Select Poems of Sukumar Ray." *Journal of the Department of English, Vidyasagar University* (2014-2015): 100-109.

- Chaudhuri, Sukanta, translator. *The Select Nonsense of Sukumar Ray*. By Sukumar Ray. New Delhi: OUP, 1987.
- Goswami, Supriya. *Colonial India in Children's Literature*. New York & London: Routledge, 2012.
- Heyman, Michael, Satpathy, Sumanyu, Ravishankar, Anushka (Eds.). *The Tenth Rasa: An Anthology of Indian Nonsense*. Penguin, 2007.
- Maiti, Abhik. "The Nonsense World of Sukumar Roy: The Influence of British Colonialism on Sukumar Roy's Nonsense Poems." *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies* (2016).
- Ray, Satyajit, translator. *Nonsense Rhymes*. By Sukumar Roy. Kolkata: Writers Workshop, 2019.
- Ray, Sukumar. *Chirokaler Shera (Selected Works of Sukumar Roy)*. Kolkata: Mudrak, 1996.
- Roy, Niladri, translator. *Rhymes of Whimsy: The Complete Abol Tabol by Sukumar Ray*. By Sukumar Ray. USA: Haton Cross Press, 2017.
- Sharma, Deepanjali. "Aesthetics of Nonsense in Abol Tabol." *Death Voyage* (2017).
- Tigges, Wim. *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988.

Media Addiction to Inspiration Porn: Reports and Reflections on Kerala School Kalolsavam

Rashida Muneer Chalilakath

Inspiration porn is a problematic term that focuses on the objectification of the disabled in order to inspire, motivate or even boost the self-esteem of the able-bodied. The term typically denotes an intentionally objectified representation of the disabled in a mass medium with the assumption that the audience are able-bodied. These representations lack the ethical concern of assimilating the marginalized group of the disabled to the mainstream society. The disabled here is an alienated object that induces interest in the general public. From advertisements to motivational speeches, inspiration porn can be traced out in various media platforms. The representational form of inspiration porn dresses like sheer encouragement and is often unnoticed. Only closer critical analyses identify the exploitation of the disabled's image for the sake of the able-bodied. This paper probes into the problematics of disability representations in the Kerala School Kalolsavam¹ by analyzing related news reports in convergent news media and other online platforms.

“We are not real people, we are there to inspire,” says disabled journalist, comedian and activist Stella Young. Coining the term “inspiration porn,” she explains:

¹ The Kerala School Kalolsavam or the Kerala State School Youth Festival is an annual set of competitions in the field of the arts for high school and higher secondary school students, organised by the Government of Kerala.

I use the term porn deliberately, because they objectify one group of people for the benefit of another group of people. So, in this case, we're objectifying disabled people for the benefit of non-disabled people. The purpose of these images is to inspire you, to motivate you, so that we can look at them and think, “Well, however bad my life is, it could be worse. I could be that person”. (Young)



Fig. 1 (Manorama)



Fig. 2. (Manorama)



Fig. 3. (Manu)



Fig. 4. (Manorama)



Fig. 5. (Indian Telegram)

Fig. 6. (Asianet News)

The select images show reports on the Kerala School Kalolsavam. It can be observed that these titles invite one's attention to the disability factor rather than to the art or the artistic merit of the performances. It could also be deduced that temporary disabilities are emphasized and embellished in reporting these events. The questionable part of these reports is how the news value of an event escalates when disability is highlighted. "In the context of photographic news media, Beth Haller (2000) has previously observed that if 'they limp, they lead', meaning disability takes prime place in news coverage in order to attract an audience" (qtd. in Ellis 147). It is the generalized ableist perspective of the reporters as well as the receivers that attributes news value to the art of a disabled person as it is perceived as "unusual", "abnormal" and worthy of inspiration. An excerpt from the article "The Enfreakment of Photography" says:

The role of the body of the disabled person is to en flesh the thesis or theme of the photographer's work, despite the fact that most of the photographers had taken no conscious decision to work "on" disability. It is as if the spirit of the photographer's mission can be summed up in their manipulation of a disabled person's image. "The disabled"

emerge, like a lost tribe, to fulfil a role for these photographers but not for themselves. (Hevey 444)

The positioning of the disabled in news media too seems to follow a similar agenda. The news articles use the disabled's image to attract attention or as a "click bait" in virtual media. "These images have taken on an even more sinister significance than simply making the nondisabled feel better about themselves – they are being used as click bait in the commodification of sympathy" (Ellis 152). So the inclusion of the disabled in news further exacerbates their marginalization as the disabled is placed only within the framework of the object with a presupposition of able-bodied subjects on either end. This transfers the limitations faced by the disabled in live space and time to the different news emerging platforms. A study titled *Disability and Spreadable Media* says that:

While the news media typically celebrates the potential digital technologies holds for the social inclusion of people with disability, theorists within critical disability and internet studies recognise that much of what disables people with disability in the analogue world is carried across to the digital. Attitudes, stereotypes and the absence of core infrastructure are once again a major problem. (Ellis 156)

Philippa Willitts too writes about the problematics of "inspiration porn" or "cripspiration" reacting to a viral photograph of Oscar Pistorius, a disabled athlete, running with a small, disabled girl. "The caption, 'The only disability in life is a bad attitude', is a quote from Scott Hamilton, a former figure skater who is also a cancer survivor." Willitts adds that such news and posters ignore the predicaments of the disabled. The fact that inaccessible infrastructure limits the disabled in several ways is disregarded and the disabled people are blamed for their "bad attitude" which the non-disabled attributes to their limitations in life (Willitts).

Nevertheless, there are people who counter arguments for "inspiration porn". For instance, James Abbaticchio comments on Willitts' article that: "this article is a gross overreaction to an image that was simply made to make people feel good." He says that it inspires even the disabled as he claims himself to be one with "minor disabilities". He opines that good attitude could bring the best out of everyone including the disabled and that "this article is much too negative." (qtd. in Ellis 151- 152)

Kanmony Sasi (Fig.5) is presently a post graduate student of music at Sree Swathi Thirunna College of Music, Thiruvananthapuram. The disabled artist had participated at the Kerala School Kalolsavam in various events including classical music, Kathakali music, painting, etc. In a direct interview with her, she said that she is least bothered about the news that amount to emotional patronizing. However, she turns anything that seems like encouragement to her advantage. She had focused on her talent and hard work and was aware of what she deserved. She always tried to make the best out of her opportunities. Nevertheless, she added that her mother had remarked during her younger days that her disability might have given her an advantage in the highly competitive state school fest (Sasi).

Amina Niba (Fig.3) participated in oppana in the Kerala School Kalolsavam (2023) held at Kozhikode. She became an instant viral star out of the Kalolsavam stages when she refused to give up even with her hand bleeding. Her hand was cut from her own glass bangles during the event and she with her group from Panamaram GHSS, Wayanad, managed to grab an A grade for their performance. When asked about the incident, she said that the only goal before them was to secure A grade for which they have put much effort into. She has been praised much since and is regarded as a "true artist" in various news platforms (Manu). However, a few people at least have not failed to comment on the incident as something

should not have been encouraged by the organizers. For instance, Gopakumar K commented on this particular news that the organizers should have called off the event as they observed her bleeding and given them another chance after recovery. (qtd. in Manu)

Kerala School Kalolsavam is Asia's biggest arts festival for school children; the 2023 Kalolsavam had about 11,000 participants competing in 239 events (Kumar). Children participating in the events go through rigorous rehearsals to perform at the fest. They consider the platform as a great opportunity and give themselves beyond their natural capacity in the highly competitive events. The participating children are led forward by their competitive spirit. Their permanent or temporary disabilities downplay before their sense of encouragement and excitement for the fifteen minutes of fame they get to enjoy.

Analyzing the pattern in which these news are presented, a latent sense of ableism can be traced out. Tremendous amount of time and space are allotted to the news reports on Kerala School Kalolsavam, especially to those foregrounding participants' disabilities. This signifies their positive reception. These news are perceived as inspirational and motivational for the disabled and non-disabled alike. Furthermore, these reports are primarily about children who are overwhelmed by several emotions on winning at a prestigious fest. As a result, they fail to engage in critical analysis and recognize how they are being objectified for the benefit of the non-disabled. However, considering the disability highlighting titles and rereading them through the lens of the research on media representations of disability that have been reviewed, emphasis on how disability attracts an audience becomes evident. Besides, the ableist perspective at the production and receptive ends of these reports attributes news value to such news promoted as "inspiring" as they consider them as "unusual" or deviated from "normalcy".

Works Cited

- "Chora Chinthiya Oppana Kanikal Swasam Pidichirunnu", (Fig. 3) *Bullet Manu*, School Kalolsavam Kozhikkode #Kalolsavam #Oppana." *YouTube*, 7 Jan. 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONuqVMAEd-s.
- "Differently-abled Contestants Kanmani Performing Kerala School Kalolsavam." (Fig. 5) *The Indian Telegram*, *YouTube*, 22 Jan. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K5TVZTr60A.
- Ellis, Katie. "Disability and Spreadable Media: Access, Representation and Inspiration Porn." *Disability and Popular Culture : Focusing Passion, Creating Community and Expressing Defiance*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/inflibnet-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1843655>.
- Hevey, David. "The Enfreakment of Photography." *The Disability Studies Reader*, (pp. 432-446), edited by Lennard J. Davis, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/inflibnet-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1125176>.
- Kumar, PK Ajith. "Asia's Yes, but Is Kerala School Kalolsavam World's Biggest Arts Festival of School Children?" - *The Hindu*, 6 Jan. 2023, www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/is-kerala-school-kalolsavam-state-school-artsfestival-worlds-biggest-arts-festival-for-school-children/article66347308.ece.
- "Odiv, Chathav, Ulukk, Neeru; Oppam A Gradeum" (Fig. 2) *ManoramaOnline*, www.manoramaonline.com/district-news/school-kalolsavam/2023/01/07/kozhikode-stateschool-kalolsavam-maim.html

- Sasi, Kanmony. Interview (via Zoom). Conducted by Rashida Muneer Chalilakath. 18 March 2023.
- "Shasthreeya sangeetha vediyil A Grade: Avani ethiyath Cancerine Marikadanna Karuthumayi" (Fig. 2) *ManoramaOnline*, www.manoramaonline.com/district-news/school-kalolsavam/2023/01/07/kozhikode-stateschool-kalolsavam-classical-music-a-grade-avani.html.
- "Urakke Paranju, Thakarthu Malsarichu; Pinne, Ranjini Veenu." (Fig. 4) *Manorama Online*, www.manoramaonline.com/district-news/schoolkalolsavam/2023/01/06/kozhikode-state-school-kalolsavam-ranjini.html.
- "Vedana Kadichamarthi Vedi Keezhadakki Nila Noushad" (Fig. 6) Kerala School Kalolsavam | Nila Noushad." *asianetnews*, *YouTube*, 5 Jan. 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiUcK58yPyA.
- Willitts, Philippa. "Bad Attitudes Do Not Cause Disability Any More than Good Attitudes Guarantee Health." *Accessibility News International | Your International Site for the Disability Community*, 7 Aug. 2012, <https://www.accessibilitynewsinternational.com/badattitudes-do-not-cause-disability-any-more-than-good-attitudes-guarantee-health/>.
- Young, Stella. "I'm Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much." *Ted Talks*. 9 June 2014, www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiradon_thank_you_very_much

Japanese Wave in Malayalam Children's Magazine: Manga Series in *Balarama*

Farha Jalal

There is a Japanese wave in a Malayalam children's magazine like *Balarama*. Manga, which refers to Japanese comics and graphic novels, has gained popularity worldwide, including in India. Manga is known for its unique art style and engaging storytelling, making it appealing to readers of all ages. There is a manga series featured in *Balarama*, it indicates that the magazine is embracing international influences and introducing young readers to different cultures and art forms. This can be a wonderful way to foster creativity and broaden their horizons. Manga often covers a wide range of genres, including action, adventure, fantasy, romance, and slice-of-life stories. The manga series *Balarama* has chosen to feature is *Anjamathe Aayudham* (The Fifth Weapon). The magazine has translated the dialogue and adapted the artwork to suit the regional audience preferences and cultural context. This Japanese wave in *Balarama* demonstrates the global appeal of manga and its ability to transcend cultural boundaries. It's an exciting development that encourages cross-cultural understanding and introduces children to diverse forms of storytelling.

Outside academia, the term 'children's literature' has a largely unproblematic, everyday meaning. From newspapers and other media to schools and in government documents, it generally refers to the materials written specifically for children and young people, published by children's publishers, and stocked and shelved in the children's and/or young adult

(YA) sections of libraries and bookshops. Occasionally, questions are asked about whether something is suitable for a juvenile audience, a question usually provoked by concern about content - is it too sexually explicit? Too frightening? Too morally ambiguous? Sometimes questions of suitability reflect concerns about style - will grammatically incorrect or colloquial language or writing that includes swearing or abusive language or experimental writing counteract lessons taught in school or instil bad habits? More recently, as large numbers of adults have been reading books that were originally published as children's literature (the *Harry Potter* books, *His Dark Materials*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, *The Book Thief*, *Persepolis*), there has been some debate about whether such books are suitable for adults, and if this kind of reading is a symptom of the dumbing down of culture. For the most part, however, what children's literature is, is taken for granted.

For those who research and teach children's literature, by contrast, the term is fraught with complications; indeed, in one of the most controversial studies of children's literature of the last century, Jacqueline Rose (1984) referred to the 'impossibility' of children's literature. Rose was in fact referring to the nature of the adult-child relationship in children's fiction, and her concerns, as well as other of the more theoretical issues that complicate the study of children's literature. In truth, there is no clearly identifiable body of children's literature' any more than there is something that could be called 'adults' literature, nor are the two areas of publishing as separate as these labels suggest. Both reflect ideas about the purpose, nature, and modes of writing at any given moment; they share a technology, a distribution system - often the very producers of works for adults and children, and even some of the texts, are the same.

Currently, everything from folk and fairy tales, myths and legends, ballads and nursery rhymes - many of which date back to preliterate epochs - to such embodiments of our transliterate age as e-books, fan fiction, and computer games may come under the umbrella of children's literature. Additionally, as an area of research and teaching, children's literature encompasses all genres, formats, and media; all periods, movements, and kinds of writing from any part of the world, and often related ephemera and merchandise too. It addresses works that were specifically directed at the young, those that came to be regarded as children's literature by being appropriated by young readers, and those that were once read by children but are now almost exclusively read by scholars.

Another point to bear in mind is that until recently, histories of children's literature were almost exclusively produced in and about those Western countries that had strong traditions of publishing for children, and it tended to be scholars, collectors, librarians, and enthusiasts from those countries who organized conferences, launched journals, and developed terminology for discussing texts for children. This legacy has shaped attempts to define children's literature, what has been included in histories of the genre, and how it is valued and approached by scholars, to such an extent that in many countries where children's literature is studied, it is often works from Britain, other parts of Western Europe, and the USA that tend to dominate. This obscures many other traditions and the extent to which Western children's literature has been enriched by stories and characters, writers and illustrators from many parts of the world. Globalization and use of the internet have further skewed this trend in favour of Anglophone publications. In fact, long before the current phase of globalization, as a consequence of migration, colonization, missionary and trade activities, or occupation, there was considerable commonality in what children read in many parts of the world, so this

broadly Anglo-American history will have a family resemblance to histories of children's literature in many countries.

As children's literature is one of the earliest ways in which the young encounter stories, it plays a powerful role in shaping how we think about and understand the world. Stories are key sources of the images, vocabularies, attitudes, structures, and explanations we need to contemplate experience; because when directed to children they are often bound up with education of one kind or another, they can be important carriers of information about changes in culture, present and past. Indeed, its long history and the fact that writing for children straddles the domestic and institutional, official and unofficial, high and mass cultures, and often includes visual elements, means that material written for children can be a particularly valuable source of historical information about everything from how children in the past looked and the environments they occupied, to shops, servants, the treatment of disease, religion, wars, migration, scientific development, exploration, and much more.

The link of children's literature to the past, work at multiple levels too. Just as the children we once were continue to exist inside and to affect us, so writing produced for children continues to resonate over time and to be implicated in the way societies are conceived, organized, and managed. This is not a straightforward process; traditional ideas may be preserved in earlier texts, or deliberately promoted in conservative contemporary works or unconsciously perpetuated in those that uncritically hold up a mirror to current social trends. At the same time, many stories given to children today are retellings of traditional stories in which writers and illustrators set out to expose, critique, and adjust the schemata by which we interpret the world. The dialogue they create between old and new ways of thinking can be another way both to sow and to nurture the seeds of social change, as seen in the way children's

literature has contributed to developments in the areas of equality and diversity. This capacity was of particular interest to Walter Benjamin, who collected children's books and valued the potential of writing for the young to radicalize rising generations, encouraging them to resist established ways of thinking promoted through formal schooling. Whether radical or conservative, meritorious or meretricious, writing for children is a rich but for long undervalued source of information about culture as well as a contribution to it.

Children's literature, as a category, is often relegated to the position of 'minor' literature in the literary canon. The narratives and voices of children are conventionally thought of as 'immature' or 'innocent'. As an extension of this perspective, the roles and motives of children's magazines are also perceived in a very reductive sense—that they are either for entertainment or for a didactic purpose. Hence, most often, children's literature serves the purpose of constructing childhoods that are temporally and spatially desirable. Childhood is often regarded as a homogenous category by mainstream children's literature, where the experience of every child is represented as being similar. Thus, by homogenizing and universalizing the experiences of children across the world, the dominant children's narratives have erased the differences between intersections of religion, caste, class, gender, race, etc.

Phillipe Aries points out that the childhood we experience and expect is historically constructed and there is no universal idea of childhood. Most of the time childhood is a tool to create and sustain certain political ideas and ideologies. Representation of Palestinians in Israeli or Hebrew children's literature is one of the best examples of how a politically mediated children's literature represents minorities and their life worlds.

Deepa Sreenivas, in her article titled "Telling Different Tales: Possible Childhood in Indian Children's Literature" discusses how children's literature in India addresses the urban, middle and upper caste child and the way it reflects his or her economic resources, family relationships, food habits, school, language, cultural experience, etc. She observes how children from other social backgrounds struggle to find a place in such an 'avant-garde' culture. In order to procure a place in mainstream culture, children from marginalized backgrounds have to show some 'extra power' or 'smartness' that helps to overcome their physical and social disability. This shows the politics of construction of childhood mediated through children's literature. The experience of childhood is not unique and it depends on different ideology, perception, etc.

The State of Kerala, which has achieved near total literacy, has a strong tradition of oral literature in Malayalam. *Bilathi Visesham* by K.P. Kesava Menon is one of the earliest travelogues written for children. Most of the children's literature in Malayalam is based on translations from other languages either Indian or foreign. Adaptations and abridgements have been done extensively to enrich children's literature. In 1948, the first magazine for children *Balan*, a weekly, edited by Mathew M. Kuzhiveli was published. M. M. Kuziveli, V. Madhavan Nair and Sumangala are some of the famous writers. Kerala has a government organization, State Institute of Children's Literature at Trivandrum.

In Kerala there are many children's magazines published by different newspapers and organisations. Earlier attempts to publish Malayalam periodicals for children had been failures in Kerala. However, it was the comic magazine *Poompatta* that established successful readership figures for the first time. *Poompatta* was started in 1964 by Achutha Variyar. Later, Pai and Pai Company took over its publishing. N.M.

Mohan was the editor of *Poompatta* then. But, later he left the magazine and joined *Balarama* as its editor-in-chief. Now, *Poompatta* is published from Thrissur by Sooryaprabha Publications, Thrissur.

Balarama is a Malayalam comic magazine published by M.M. Publications of the Malayala Manorama Group located in Kottayam district of Kerala. Having started out as a monthly in 1972, it turned into a fortnightly in 1984, before becoming a weekly in 1999. *Balarama* is one of the most widely circulated children's magazines in Kerala. A breakthrough for the magazine was when it began syndicating American magazines, followed by the inclusion of graphic strips such as 'Spiderman', 'Phantom', 'Alice in Wonderland', etc. Abridged versions of translated literary classics like *Dracula*, *Jungle Book*, *Les Miserables*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* etc. were serialised in *Balarama*. *Balarama* is also known for its decade-long partnership with *Amar Chitra Katha* as well. *Amar Chitra Katha* is well-known as a project that aimed at introducing children to 'Indian' values.

Nandini Chandra observes that *Amar Chitra Katha* constructed Hindu superheroes who fought against foreign oppression, where the 'foreigner' was the asura (Indian version of a mythical demon), Muslim or British, and the superhero fought on behalf of Hindus or those under the protective net of Hindu rulers. She explores the way *Amar Chitra Katha* naturally organizes its images, narratives and myths to make the transition from the Hindu to the national.

Deepa Sreenivas in her study about *Amar Chitra Katha* discusses how the magazine narrates the 'glorious' past of India through the Hindu mythological lens. And this narration about the past suggests a certain movement to the present. *Amar Chitra Katha* misrepresents or neglects minority characters in the construction of the past. *Balarama's* association

with *Amar Chitra Katha* effectively patronizes this construction of nationalist childhoods.

Balarama and other popular children's magazines try to create a fantasy-oriented and mythological childhood. We see several stories and narratives from Hindu mythology in *Balarama*. Different organisations and groups use childhood and its articulations as a powerful tool to shape young minds of future generation. And these different narrations and articulations co-exist within the same period and space.

Presently, the influence of popular culture and globalisation led *Balarama* in introducing Manga series. There is a manga series featured in *Balarama*, it indicates that the magazine is embracing international influences and introducing young readers to different cultures and art forms. This can be a wonderful way to foster creativity and broaden their horizons. Manga often covers a wide range of genres, including action, adventure, fantasy, romance, and slice-of-life stories. The manga series *Balarama* has chosen to feature is *Anjamathe Aayudham* (The Fifth Weapon) for Malayalam readers. The magazine has translated the dialogue and adapted the artwork to suit the regional audience's preferences and cultural context.

Manga is a Japanese term that generally means "comics" or "cartoon", literally "whimsical sketches." Manga refers to a style of Japanese comic books and graphic novels and has gained immense popularity worldwide. Manga is known for its distinctive art style, often characterized by its large, expressive eyes, exaggerated features, and dynamic action sequences.

Sharon Kinsella, the booming post-war Japanese publishing industry helped create a consumer-oriented society in which publishing giants like Kodansha could shape popular taste. Takayumi Tatsumi sees

a special role for a transpacific economic and cultural transnationalism that created a postmodern and shared international youth culture of cartooning, film, television, music, and related popular arts, which was, for Tatsumi the crucible in which modern manga have developed.

Manga consist of comics and print cartoons (sometimes also called komikku), in the Japanese language and conforming to the style developed in Japan in the late 19th century. In their modern form, manga date from shortly after World War II, but they have a long, complex pre-history in earlier Japanese art.

Modern manga originates in the Occupation (1945-1952) and post-Occupation years (1952-early 1960s), when a previously militaristic and ultranationalist Japan was rebuilding its political and economic infrastructure. Although U.S. Occupation censorship policies specifically prohibited art and writing that glorified war and Japanese militarism, those policies did not prevent the publication of other kinds of material, including manga.

In Japan people of all ages read manga. The genre includes a broad range of subjects: action-adventure, romance, sports and games, historical drama, comedy, science fiction and fantasy, mystery, horror, sexuality, and business/ commerce, among others. Since the 1950s, manga have steadily become a major part of the Japanese publishing industry, representing a 406 billion yen market in Japan in 2007 (approximately \$3.6 billion). Manga have also become increasingly popular worldwide. In 2008, the U.S. and Canadian manga market was \$175 million. Manga are typically printed in black- and-white, although some full-color manga exist. In Japan, manga are usually serialized in telephone book-size manga magazines, often containing many stories, each presented in a single episode to be continued in the next issue. If the series is successful, collected chapters may be republished in paperback

books called tankobon. A manga artist (mangaka in Japanese) typically works with a few assistants in a small studio and is associated with a creative editor from a commercial publishing company. Manga series is popular enough, it may be animated after or even during its run, although sometimes manga are drawn centering on previously existing live-action or animated films (e.g. Star Wars).

"Manga" as a term used outside Japan refers specifically to comics originally published in Japan. However, manga-influenced comics, among original works, exist in other parts of the world, particularly in Taiwan ("man- hua"), South Korea ("manhwa"), and the People's Republic of China, notably Hong Kong ("manhua"). In France, "la nouvelle manga" has developed as a form of bande dessinée (literally drawn strip) drawn in styles influenced by Japanese manga. In the United States, people refer to manga- like comics as Amerimanga, world manga, or Original English-Language manga (OEL manga). In India too, the introduction of Manga series in Children's magazines will make a revolution.

Historians and writers on manga history have described two broad and complementary processes shaping modern manga. Their views differ in the relative importance they attribute to the role of cultural and historical events following World War II versus the role of pre-War, Meiji, and pre-Meiji Japanese culture and art. Other writers such as Frederik L. Schodt, Kinko Ito, and Adam L.Kern stress continuity of Japanese cultural and aesthetic traditions as central to the history of manga.

Manga covers a wide range of genres, like Shonen - aimed at young male readers, Shojo - targeted at young female readers, Seinen - geared towards adult male readers, Josei - similar to seinen, josei manga targets adult female readers and explores more mature and realistic themes, Kodomomuke - designed for young children, kodomomuke manga features simple and lighthearted stories suitable for a young audience.

Examples include “Doraemon,” “Pokemon Adventures,” and “Yokai Watch.” And Isekai - This genre revolves around the concept of a protagonist being transported or reincarnated into a different world. It often involves fantasy or gaming elements.

These are just a few examples of the many genres and subgenres within manga. Manga has had a significant influence on pop culture, not only in Japan but also globally, with many popular manga being adapted into anime, movies, and even live-action adaptations. These manga offer engaging stories, relatable characters, and age-appropriate themes for children.

Manga is a powerful vehicle of influence in the youth subculture, and serves as significant cultural entertainment. Thus the introduction of Manga series in children's magazines like *Balarama* will make a great impact in the younger generation just like the impact of Korean waves in Kerala. This Japanese wave in *Balarama* demonstrates the global appeal of manga and its ability to transcend cultural boundaries. It is an exciting development that encourages cross-cultural understanding and introduces children to diverse forms of storytelling.

Works Cited

Anime and Manga. N.p., PediaPress.

Aries, Philippe, *Centuries of Childhood*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.

C.T., Jawhar. 'The Ideology of Eureka: The Role of Children's Magazine in Creating Scientific Awareness among Children in Kerala' (unpublished work). Hyderabad: Hyderabad Central University, 2012.

Chandra, Nandini. *The Classic Popular Amar Chitra Katha 1967–2007*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

El-Asmar, Fouzi. 'The Portrayal of Arabs in Hebrew Children's Literature'. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16, no.1, (Autumn 1986): 81–94.

Prizing Children's Literature: The Cultural Politics of Children's Book Awards. United Kingdom, Taylor & Francis, 2016.

Reynolds, Kimberley. *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. United Kingdom, OUP Oxford, 2011.

Samad, Abdul. *Islam in Kerala: Groups and Movements in the 20th Century*. Kollam: Laurel, 1998.

Sreenivas, Deepa. *Sculpting a Middle Class—History, Masculinity and the Amar Chitra Katha in India*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2010.

Sreenivas, Deepa. 'Telling Different Tales: Possible Childhoods in Children's Literature'. *Childhood* 18, no.3, New York: Sage, 2011.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Diti Vyas is an Associate Professor in School of Creative Practices and Entrepreneurship at Anant National University, Ahmedabad. Her doctoral research from Indian Institute of Technology focusing on Indian children's literature in English and regional languages, has received national and international accolades by bodies such as International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL). Her research in the areas of gender studies, communication studies and sustainability communication, has appeared in publications of repute such as IRCL and Routledge Taylor and Francis. She represents Gujarat in the collection of Folk tales, Legends and Modern Lore of India, "The Owl Delivered the Good News All Night Long" by Aleph Book House of Rupa Publication.

Athira Unni is a final-year PhD candidate at Leeds Beckett University, United Kingdom. She holds a double undergraduate degree in English and Sociology from the University at Buffalo, State University of New York and an MA in English Literature from the University of Hyderabad, India. Athira's PhD research considers utopian and dystopian texts from South Asia and the Caribbean in relation to women's work. Her research interests include utopian studies, postcolonial studies, environmental humanities and the anthropocene, critical posthumanism and 20th-century American poetics. Her first book of poetry "Gaea and Other Poems" was published in 2020.

Dr Manjula Balakrishnan is currently the Head of the Department and professor in the Department of Linguistic Policies at the Francisco de

Vitoria University, Spain. She leads a research group on literature and religion at the same university. She has several books and articles to her credit. She has been dedicated to the teaching of English and Spanish in several universities in India and Spain for more than thirty years. She is also a founding member of the Instituto de Indología and is frequently involved in the teaching and research of Indian culture, especially in the areas of gastronomy, women, arts and postcolonial literature on India.

Gurpreet Kaur Saini is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Khalsa College, University of Delhi. She is currently pursuing her PhD in English at Dr B.R. Ambedkar University Delhi. Her areas of interest are mother – child relations, maternal theory, childhood studies and cultural studies.

Anisha Sen is a research scholar, pursuing her PhD at Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Head of the Department of English, The Heritage College, Kolkata. She has worked extensively on fairy tales and her areas of interest include children's literature, fairy tales and adaptation studies.

Rashida Muneer Chalilakath is a research scholar, currently pursuing her Ph.D at Providence Women's College, Calicut. Her ongoing research is an intersectional study in the areas of disability studies and motherhood studies. She was a recipient of UGC- JRF in 2020. She has won the Best Paper Award at the International Multidisciplinary conference on "Gender Medicine: Global Perspectives on the Entanglement between Biomedicine and Socio- cultural and Political Constructs" by Universities of LEEDS/SUSSEX and VIT Chennai

Farha Jalal is a post graduate scholar in English Language and Literature at the Institute of English, University of Kerala. Her poems and short stories are published on her blog 'Ifjwala.'

CALL FOR PAPERS

Diotima's: A Journal of New Readings

ISSN: 2319-4189

Theme for Vol. 14: Posthumanism

The Research Department of English, Providence Women's College, Kozhikode, invites papers for the 2023 issue of its annual journal, *Diotima's: A Journal of New Readings*. We welcome well researched and theoretically grounded research papers from academicians and research scholars from the Departments of English, Media Studies, Gender Studies, Philosophy, Social Sciences and other interdisciplinary areas pertaining to the broad area of **Posthumanism**.

Posthumanism promises new possibilities and directions to address the unprecedented nature of our historical location, and the philosophical, psychological, political, cultural and technological norms of human existence. It constitutes a revised understanding of the planetary situation helping us to re-envision human bodies.

This issue of *Diotima's* aims to explore the nuances of the construct of the 'body' in terms of the vast corpus of thought-provoking theorisations and intends to evoke a new interchange of valid responses that would lead us further into pertinent observations. Cultural studies has lately realised that the body emanates meaning in itself. The race, the gender and the basic specificities to a human being's identity are assessed in the scrutiny of one's body. However, the boundaries of the

body do not limit the presence of the human being. The pseudo existence of the being beyond body into limitless forms ranging from one's digital space to memories and more is still under explored. Moving past the philosophical and the biological scheme of humanism, posthumanism explicates that agency is administered through dynamic forces in which humans are just participants. Not possessing idiosyncratic characteristics, humans are envisaged to be part of a larger ecosystem that is ever evolving. The centrality of human existence is attenuated with our confluence with machine. The unrestrained digital triumph prompts a reformulation of the meaning of human. The relationship between humans and technology has become increasingly intimate and imperceptible, leading to a fusion where the boundaries between "us" and technology blur. This phenomenon expands the scope of the human condition beyond what traditional humanism had previously acknowledged, encompassing not only other living beings but also machines. Humans now engage in diverse and increasingly profound forms of interaction, interdependence, continuity, and hybridization with machines, such as cybernetic, bionic, and robotic systems. The rapid and diverse advancements in technology play a significant role in reshaping the human experience through methods like genetic manipulation and digitization of neural circuits. Posthumanism thus embraces philosophical and theoretical positionings that ameliorate the balance between human and non-human entities.

Diotima's 2023 aims to foster new ideas and discussions on the various dimensions associated with the idea of body, pertaining to this (non-exhaustive) list of topics:

- Antihumanism
- Cultural posthumanism
- Philosophical posthumanism

- Existential posthumanism
- Posthuman transhumanism
- Posthuman feminism
- Artificial Intelligence and Cyborg imaginaries

Those interested in contributing to this volume may email their articles to diotimajournal@gmail.com. The papers will undergo blind peer reviewing and the contributors will be intimated regarding the selection of their papers shortly.

Last date for submission of papers: **25 September 2023**

Word Limit: 2500-4000 words

Format: MLA Style 8th edition

Font – Times New Roman, Size-12, Line space 1.5

Email: diotimajournal@gmail.com

Statement about ownership and other particulars of DIOTIMA'S

Form IV

(See Rule 8)

1. Place of Publication : Kozhikode
2. Periodicity : Annual
3. Printer's Name : Dr.Jaseena Joseph
(Sr. Ashmitha A.C)

Nationality : Indian
Address : Principal,
Providence Women's College,
Kozhikode
4. Publisher's Name : Dr.Jaseena Joseph
(Sr. Ashmitha A.C)

Nationality : Indian
Address : Principal,
Providence Women's College,
Kozhikode
6. Name and addresses : Providence Women's College
of individuals who own the Kozhikode
newspaper and partners
or shareholders holding more
than one percent of the
total capital.
7. Printing Press : Print O Fast
Kozhikode, Ph: 9946876494

I, Dr. Jaseena Joseph (Sr. Ashmitha A.C), hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

(Sd/-)

Signature of Publisher