INDIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
A RESEARCH REVIEW

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ABSTRACT :

Children's literature plays a crucial role in fostering essential competencies, providing knowledge, enriching vocabulary, and offering emotional support. While traditional Indian children's literature emphasized moral and ethical narratives, the new millennium has witnessed a significant transformation driven by social change, technological advancements, and globalization. This review examines these shifts within the Indian context, focusing on the emergence of bold themes in fantasy, realistic fiction, and classic stories.

Specifically, this study analyzes how contemporary Indian children's literature addresses revolutionary themes such as gender equality, sex education, and transgender awareness. By exploring these evolving narratives, this review aims to understand how children's literature in India is adapting to reflect and shape modern social realities. Furthermore, it assesses the current state of research, identifying gaps and providing recommendations for future studies.

This review underscores the importance of aligning children's literature with contemporary educational needs, ensuring it not only imparts moral values but also equips children with the tools to navigate the complexities of the 21st century. It emphasizes the necessity for Indian children's literature to serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity, fostering critical thinking and social awareness.

KEYWORDS : *Indian children's literature, children's literature, the new millennium, revolutionary themes.*

INTRODUCTION :

Children's literature serves as a cornerstone for literacy development, offering new knowledge, enriching vocabulary, fostering emotional support, and enhancing communication skills. Within the Indian context, this role is particularly vital, as children's literature lays the foundation for educational success, both in primary education and throughout life. It cultivates imagination, stimulates cognitive and linguistic growth, and provides transformative learning experiences that can address literacy challenges. Moreover, as Educationist & Activists suggests, children's literature plays a significant role in shaping and representing cultural and national identities. In India, with its rich tapestry of traditions and diverse regional cultures, this function is paramount. It serves as a crucial avenue for children to internalize societal values and develop an ideological framework that influences their lives.

In India, traditional narratives like the Panchatantra and Jataka tales have long instilled moral and ethical principles. However, the evolving socio-cultural landscape, marked by changing family structures, shifting moral values, and the impact of globalization, necessitates a re-evaluation of children's literature. This has sparked extensive debate on how to adapt content to resonate with

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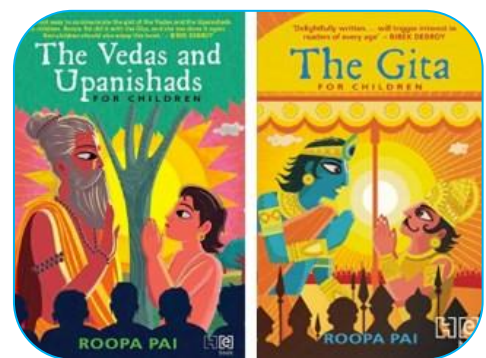
contemporary Indian children, reflecting their lived experiences and addressing emerging social issues. This includes navigating the complexities of modern family relationships, addressing evolving perspectives on morality, and fostering an understanding of India's place in a globalized world.

The ability of children to apply lessons learned from literature to their daily lives underscores the importance of relevant and culturally sensitive content. In India, this means balancing the preservation of traditional values with the need to address contemporary challenges. The conflicting issues arising from this dynamic landscape have become central to discussions surrounding children's literature. Consequently, there is an ongoing dialogue about the content that is most relevant and beneficial for Indian children, ensuring it aligns with their developmental needs and prepares them to navigate the complexities of modern Indian society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

➢ **Gender Role Evolution:** The 21st century witnesses a significant shift in gender role portrayals in children's literature, moving away from traditional inequalities. Educationists and activists advocate for equitable representations, reflecting the changing societal norms in India.

➢ **Challenging Gender Stereotypes**: Modern Indian children's literature, including comics and fiction, actively seeks to dismantle gender stereotypes prevalent in 20th-century works. This aims to instill a mindset of gender equality in young readers, reflecting the nation's growing focus on women's empowerment.

➢ **Statistical Evidence of Gender Bias:** Studies like Mermelstein (2018) highlight the historical imbalance in gender representation, with male characters dominating children's books. This necessitates a critical examination of how female characters are portrayed in Indian literature and the impact on young minds.

➢ **Female Empowerment in Contemporary Narratives:** The emergence of female superheroes and strong female protagonists in Indian children's literature marks a significant departure from past trends. This empowers young girls and promotes the acceptance of gender equity as a fundamental value in modern India.

➢ **Introduction of Sex Education:** The growing emphasis on sex education in Indian children's literature reflects the need to address the early exposure to sexual content through online sources and media. Age-appropriate narratives aim to educate children about gender, sexuality, and sexual health.

➢ **Addressing Sexual Orientation:** The ongoing debate about sexual orientation, including same-sex relationships, has permeated Indian society and is increasingly reflected in children's literature. This raises questions about the appropriateness and impact of such themes on young readers.

➢ **Transgender Representation:** The discourse surrounding transgender education and representation is gaining traction in India, mirroring global trends. The inclusion of transgender characters and themes in children's literature is becoming increasingly relevant.

➢ **Impact of Digital Media:** The rise of online sources, television, and films significantly influences children's exposure to diverse themes, including gender and sexuality. This necessitates a critical analysis of how these media impact children's understanding of these issues in India.

➢ **Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation:** The introduction of sensitive topics like sex education and sexual orientation requires careful consideration of cultural sensitivities and age-appropriateness within the Indian context. This calls for a nuanced approach to adapting global trends to local realities.

➢ **Diversity and Global Perspectives**: The increasing diversity of themes in Indian children's literature, driven by globalization and changing social norms, expands children's understanding of the world. This fosters a more inclusive and tolerant perspective, reflecting India's growing engagement with the global community.

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN INDIA

Indian children's literature is well developed. It portrays Indian culture, values, and traditions. These literary works often consider India's as individuals who are bound by tradition and cultural tenets. The major aspects of culture include traditions and ways of life, such as clothing, family relationships, and gender. Scholars indicate that Indian children's literature is also loaded with bias, stereotypic views, and ideological conflicts. The objective of literature is to mould children according to the needs of society and to motivate and boost children's cognitive functions.

Scholars depict Indian literature as being deeply rooted in religion. Most literary works are targeted at glorifying and supporting Hindu as the only true religion. The children are taught to indulge their Hinduisms values when facing serious issues that require decision making. Values such as obedience, respect, and support for the poor are emphasized. The values represented in such works emanate from religious teachings—mainly from the Geeta.

Another aspect of research on Indian children's literature relates to culture. Indian culture comprises family values, role relationships, and gender issues. Most India children's literature focuses on the family as the basic unit of society. They consider the specific role of each member of the family. Indian culture has a rigid family structure with clearly defined roles. The children are taught that the father is the head of the family and takes care of all family needs, and the mother is the assistant and supports all household functions. The children are required to obey and respect their parents and elders. Such teaching is acceptable and advised, but children's literature should also be up to date, and there needs to be more effort to change or adapt to modern realities and equality, such as the image of the working professional mother.

Indian literature has undergone limited research in the 21st century. Society is portrayed as rigid, and needs to help to adapt children's education to match the emerging needs of society. Countries in the India world mainly focus on ensuring children are not infiltrated with western values brought about by globalization. There is an obvious lack of enthusiasm for teaching children about fundamental and emerging issues such as human rights, sexual orientation, and gender equality. This is due to society's traditional and religious background; thus, it fears that such literary work would corrupt their children and they might abandon their faith and cultural beliefs. These considerations may limit India children's chances of integrating with global communities of different cultures.

Hence, the limitations in the development of children's literature in the India result from society's deliberately protective measures. These India societies have determined that modern children's literature especially that propagated detrimental to their culture and religion. They contend that adopting foreign cultures may erode their Hindu beliefs and entrench their children in a secular way of life. The argument for such protection is that India's consider any changes to children's literature as emanating from cultures that do not have commonality with their own. As such, they consider it an intrusion that may lead to the corruption of their culture followed by assimilation into a foreign culture. This perspective needs more efforts to revamp children's literature in the Asian countries— however, with some degree of caution, particularly that related sexual matters.

India children's literature needs to catch up in creativity, messaging, and relevance. According to Thomure et al. (2020), India children's literature is complex and full of information that children may need help with to decipher. Such literature is laden with teachings and religious and cultural connotations that children at a young age may not be able to understand. Also, the lack of entertainment value makes the literature "boring" for children. Overemphasis on morality and prescriptive text and religion complicate learning for children, and their enthusiasm for study may wane. This is in contrast to western cultures where children's literature aims at entertainment, and educational information is presented to children so that they can relate to such comics and animated films.

SUGGESTION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ON CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

As noted, the children's literature in the India is laden with cultural issues, religion, and morality. These issues are presented in a complex manner that may be hard to interpret among young children. A key recommendation to the India is to research how the content can be eased into simpler

forms attractive to children. Some forms of content that children may be exposed to include short films containing both entertainment and educational elements. Examples include using cartoons or animated films to showcase various scenarios that educators want to expose children to, and offering simpler explanations. Such methods interest children, heighten their enthusiasm for reading, and communicate the intended message.

Another research recommendation for the India children's literature is to compare the literary works of the Asian countries with those of the rest of the world. With globalization, it is paramount to assess and align children's literature with that of the rest of the world. For instance, the west aims at the holistic development of the child.

Comparing such literary works may demonstrate the enlightenment of the culture of the other, and therefore the child would have some kind of vision of new issues circulating in this globalized world, but in a manner that is moralistic and that does not conflict with their religion. With sufficient authorization, the Asian countries can translate and edit popular literary materials such as comic books. An important aspect to note is that research should assess the impact of implementing multicultural issues and themes in Indian children's literature. In other words, it is important to bring awareness to young children through art in this part of the world; however, it should not clash with religious teachings and values.

CONCLUSION

This discussion has demonstrated the evolution of children's literature in the 21st century. The century has witnessed significant cultural, technological, and social developments affecting children's education. This review has assessed global and the Indian children's literature and provided important recommendations for further research in the India context. The world has responded to such developments by changing and adapting new children's literature so that it resonates with emerging realities. For example, the rise of activism on human rights, gender, and sexual orientation has manifested in children's literature. Modern literature is awash with content depicting human rights, equality between genders, and same-sex relationships which may threaten to violate religious teachings. The Asian countries should emphasize religion, culture, and morality through new issues in children's literature; issues that are bold and keep up with the changing world. These issues should be considered seriously and discussed openly with the children of these societies so that they can be conscious of the world around them. Unfortunately, the India has desisted from changing children's literature to adapt to the changing situations. With globalization, countries need to invest more in research on children's literature to encompass the new global realities in their teachings. The discussion offers recommendations for research.

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