CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The thesis has two parts namely: (A) An analysis of original children's fiction written in English by Indian authors and (B) the extended reading programme experiment to measure the improvement in reading comprehension of the readers of Indian juvenile fiction.

The introduction also has two parts: the first part dealing with the analysis of books and the second part describing the reading programme experiment.

Part A : An Analysis of Original Children's Fiction Written in English by Indian Authors

Before proceeding to explain how the research was carried out, it is worthwhile to say first of all how the idea of doing an analytical research in Indian children's fiction took shape and secondly to explain the design framework.

A desire to carry out the research in children's fiction with respect to the suitability of plot, theme, characters, setting and background as also format and illustration, had taken a vague shape in my mind as early as 1976 perhaps even earlier when I was reading children's stories myself as a child.
The factors that kindled the idea were:

(1) Experience as a teacher of English in colleges and schools dealing with children of different age groups and home backgrounds.

(2) Experience as a freelance writer. Since 1976 a few stories and articles both for children as well as for the grown-ups were published in some magazines.

(3) Experience as a mother who had to teach her restless children the language skills and later on, to cope with their increasing interest in listening to stories.

Childhood experience:

English was started in our school from the VIth standard. But even in the VIIth standard the textbooks were of a high standard. I started reading English stories when I reached the XIth standard.

At first they were the animal books like Black Beauty and some dog stories the titles of which I don't remember. I felt that they were too childish for a student of the XIth standard. Then I borrowed Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver's Travels, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde etc. from the library. Though the language was not simple for me, the books were finished fast as the stories were gripping and full of events.

Then I switched over to Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy, and Agatha Christie. In my late teens my favourite
authors were Pearl Buck, Somerset Maugham and A.J. Cronin. There was a kind of honesty and stark reality in these books.

I also read Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea in a single sitting. Hemingway could carry the reader into the turbulent sea with the old fisherman. The incidents were so various that the reader experienced the thrills, agonies and ordeals along with the protagonist's fighting for life.

It is said that classics are seldom read or understood by the common man. Whatever may be the truth, classics are classics. They have stood the test of time. Yes, the comprehension of a classic, say War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy is not easy but if the reader makes an earnest attempt, it is not difficult or impossible. The classics are great oceans of invaluable treasures of knowledge and language.

I read some of the master-pieces written by the 16th and 19th century novelists and enjoyed them immensely. But... something was lacking, perhaps hard to digest in all those great works. Yes, the names, the topography and the setting and background were totally unfamiliar. I could not succeed in getting familiar with those alien names and places. If only these wonderful stories had Indian names and an Indian setting and background.

Such books I could read at a later stage. Some novels of Shri R.K. Narayan and Mayantara Sahgal and also of Khushwant Singh, I relished well. Tagore's novels and short
stories were totally absorbing. I found that the novels and stories written by the Indian authors were more easily understood and one could identify with the characters without much difficulty. Thus began my interest in the fiction written by Indian authors.

**Experience as a teacher:**

The same opinion was expressed by the students of VIth, VIIth and VIIIth standards in 1975 when I was working as a teacher of English in the Atomic Energy Central School. The idea of a reading programme took birth there.

Many times substitution periods were given and in the last periods it was difficult to keep the class engaged. I used to tell them stories often and they were all interested in listening to stories. But besides being poor in telling tales, I felt exhausted in the last periods to talk. The alternative was to give story books to the children to read on their own. From the library I took about 50 story books most of which were abridged versions of the famous Western classics. They were distributed among the students.

The students read the books with interest but found the names and the places totally unfamiliar. In that library there were no books written for children by Indian authors. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata also were given to read and they were read by all.
The students' interest in reading increased so much that we decided to form class libraries. Some parents and teachers donated old books and magazines. The libraries were started and continued for 2 years in the 3 classes for about a year and a half. The students became disciplined and their knowledge and language improved. These particular batches of students got very good marks in the S.S.C. examinations.

Subsequently I worked in a few other schools. In all those places I encouraged the students to read books and magazines. It was found that the younger children of Vth and VIth standards often liked to read animal or bird stories and the high school children liked mystery or adventure.

Seeing the students' spontaneous response to the casual reading programme (I occasionally counted the number of books read by the students and their reading speed to see if there was improvement) and their improvement in reading proficiency, I decided to take it up in a systematic, detailed manner if I got a chance.

**Experience as a mother**

My experience as a mother is more or less the same. Arun and Girish often tested my patience being restless, naughty and stubborn. They would become quiet if somebody narrated interesting stories to them. Arun was weak in constitution and would fall sick very often. In order to cheer him up, stories were told. I found that reading out stories was easier than telling them.
When they were put to school, I was rather in a hurry to teach them to read independently. When they were in the third standard, they could read books for small children independently. They began to read the comics like Phantom, Mandrake the Magician, The Spiderman, Laurel and Hardy. Gradually they began to read books as much. Then from the VIth or VIIth standard, they began to read the Hardy Boys stories and later the Hitchcock stories.

Their interest in reading helped them to score good marks in studies.

Experience as a freelance writer:

I had a desire to express myself through writing from childhood. When the feelings were intense or when we wanted to emphasise some point, writing proved to be the ideal outlet.

As the household work demanded almost all my time, till 1974 I could not spare time for writing. I began to write since 1975. A few short stories, poems, one-act plays and articles were published in some magazines. They were meant for the grown-ups. In 1974-75 I had to teach the VIth, VIIth and VIIIth standards. Till then I had been teaching in the high school and higher secondary classes.

My contact with the younger age group of children was a new, rewarding experience. They were more spontaneous in love and sincerity. They wanted more stories from me. My contact with these young children of 10 to 15 years gave me the inspiration to try writing for children.
It was not easy. My stories were often returned with the comment that either the language was too difficult or the theme was too serious or, sometimes, both.

Writing for young children is an art. The language has to be forceful but very simple. The theme should be interesting. Most of the children like animal-adventures. The teenagers like mystery, adventure and crime stories.

In India there are not many children's magazines in English. Even the few magazines get the articles written by the staff writers.

In Champak, the stories are not written by the staff writers but mostly by freelancers. I could succeed in seeing my short stories in print in Champak.

After my research began I discovered that young children love adventure stories with animal characters. A number of stories are of this formula.

In general, the language has to be simple with simple words, short sentences and short paragraphs. Very long dialogues are not liked by young children. They want action and movement.

Being a writer interested in writing for children, I was curious to find out how far our Indian juvenile fiction has developed. In shops there was no dearth of attractive Indian story books but one did not know how suitable they were for our children with the Indian background. I felt, I
would be happy to do an analytical study of these books if and when I got the time and opportunity.

In 1981 I took up a job in Dakshina Vidyalaya, Nargol. It was a residential, co-educational institution. The periods were divided into two sections, the morning and the evening. In between the students had 2 to 2½ hours' interval. They would roam from place to place or indulge in mischief climbing a tree or on to the roof. As a trial, I made them sit in the library to read stories.

In the library there were many Indian story books published by Children's Book Trust, India Book House etc. Many children took an interest in reading these books. When I recommended classics like *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Vanity Fair* etc. children flinched from the books at the very first sight of them. But they felt at home with the Indian stories with the Indian names and Indian background.

From the library books it was discovered that before 1970, the number of books written by Indian authors for children were not many but after 1970, there was an increase in the number. Now my desire to carry out an analytical study of such books became keener than ever before. I decided to carry out the research at Nargol itself.
The Pattern and Method of Research in Part A

Without any idea or pre-plan, books meant for Indian children were procured from a few shops in Bombay, Nagpur, Bulsar and Calicut. Some old books were purchased from the library of Dakshina Vidyalaya, Nargol.

About 160 books were collected thus. Out of these more than 10 books were lost by students. So, ultimately 149 books were analysed. Only original fiction was analysed omitting the traditional type of stories like fables, parables, legends and fairy tales. The books had to be divided into different categories as per the predominant theme. So they were read a few times.

They were found to fall into different categories and were divided as shown in the following table.

**TABLE 1.1**

**CATEGORIES OF BOOKS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr.No.</th>
<th>Category of Books</th>
<th>Gr.I</th>
<th>Gr.II</th>
<th>Gr.III</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Animal stories</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Domestic Themes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mystery, Adventure and Crime</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Imaginative stories, Folktales etc.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** 49 47 53 149
The next step was to find a suitable scheme for assessing the books. Various books on children's fiction were consulted. (Refer Bibliography). The maximum and most useful points could be obtained from *Children's Literature in the Elementary School* by Charlotte S. Huck and Doris M. Kuhn. The plot, theme, characterization, setting and background as also the format and illustration of each book of the total number of 149 were analysed as per the following marking scheme:

(a) **Plot** (7 marks)

1. Is it organic or not?
2. Is it interesting?
3. Is it credible or incredible?
4. Is it original or imitation?
5. Is suspense maintained well?
6. Is there a variety of incidents?
7. Is the climax natural and convincing?

(b) **Theme** (3 marks)

1. Is there a clearcut theme?
2. Is it relevant to the children's experiences?
3. If there is any moral, does it emerge naturally?

(c) **Characterization** (6 marks)

1. Are the characters true to life?
2. Do the characters fit well in the particular category of story?
3. Are they consistent in their behaviour?
4. Do they develop and mature?
5. Can the reader identify with the characters?
6. Are they original?
7. Has the author shown the causes of character behaviour?
8. Are all the characters necessary for the development of the plot?

(d) Setting and Background (5 marks)
1. Are the setting and the background vivid?
2. Are they relevant?
3. Are accuracy of description and authenticity maintained?
4. Do they develop the progress of the plot?
5. Are they informative?

(e) Format and Illustration (1+1 = 2 marks)

Overall Assessment = 7 + 3 + 8 + 5 + 2 = 25.

All the books were tried out at random among the students to determine their suitability for each age group.

The students were divided into 3 groups namely:

1. Group I = 5 - 8 years
2. Group II = 9 - 12 years
For assessment, the following grading scheme was used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr.No.</th>
<th>Marks obtained (Out of 25)</th>
<th>Assessment Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22½ - 25</td>
<td>Excellent (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19½ - 22</td>
<td>Very Good (VO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16½ - 19</td>
<td>Good (G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13½ - 16</td>
<td>Fairly Good (FG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10½ - 13</td>
<td>Average (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7½ - 10</td>
<td>Below Average (BA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Less than 7</td>
<td>Poor (P)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment of the books and its result:**

All the 149 books were assessed according to the criteria given on pages 10, 11 and 12. Again they were put into the particular assessment remark category (excellent, very good etc.) according to the marks they had scored. The following is the result of the analysis of 149 books at a glance.

Table 1.2 ...
## TABLE 1.2
RESULT OF THE ANALYSIS OF BOOKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Category of Books</th>
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<th>G</th>
<th>FG</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>BA</th>
<th>P</th>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mystery Adventure and Crime</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>III</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Imaginative stories</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment of all the books together at a glance:

1. Excellent (E)  
   \[(22) - 25\] = 18
2. Very Good (VG)  
   \[(19) - 22\] = 31
3. Good (G)  
   \[(16) - 19\] = 34
4. Fairly Good (FG)  
   \[(15) - 16\] = 27
5. Average (A)  
   \[(10) - 13\] = 25
6. Below Average (BA)  
   \[(7) - 10\] = 9
7. Poor (P) (Less than 7) = 5

**Grand Total = 149**
For each category of book a separate chapter has been written. The analysis of all the books (for example 54 in animal stories and 36 in Domestic themes) is not possible. So for each assessment remark representing each age group a typical book is taken for a sample analysis. At the end of each chapter some general remarks also are given.

From the overall analysis result given above, it is obvious that most of the Indian story books are good. More than 80 books out of 149 have been graded excellent, very good and good.

In the chapters that follow, the sample assessment analysis is shown.

**Part B : The Extended Reading Programme Experiment**

The second part of the research was to ascertain the improvement in reading proficiency contributed by the Indian juvenile fiction.

Proficiency in reading is not a well defined term. It could mean excellent reading with expression or fast reading in which expression and clarity are not the criteria.

For our convenience it is interpreted as reading at a normal, fluent speed and with good comprehension.

So the experiment had again two parts namely: (a) to measure the reading speed improvement and (b) to measure the reading comprehension.
Reading can mean either silent reading or reading aloud.

The plan of the experiment was as follows:-

Before the students began to read the books tests in reading speed and reading comprehension would be given. Then they would be given books to read. After an interval tests in reading speed would be given again. After the specified period of reading books, tests in reading speed as well as reading comprehension would be given. The difference between the first test and the last test would indicate the improvement or the deterioration.

The experiment was conducted in 3 schools. They were :  
1. The Dakshina Vidyalaya at Nargol (Gujarat)  
2. Sanjeewan Vidyalaya at Panchgani (Maharashtra)  
3. Navasrjan Vidyalaya at Bhilad (Gujarat).

One hundred and seven students from the Dakshina Vidyalaya (Classes IVth to Xth), 37 students from the Sanjeewan Vidyalaya (VII-A Class Marathi medium) and 40 students from the Navasrjan Vidyalaya (Classes IVth to VIIIth) were chosen for the tests.

Three reading speed tests were given to the students of Dakshina Vidyalaya, 7 reading speed tests to the students of Sanjeewan Vidyalaya and 3 tests to those of Navasrjan Vidyalaya.

Two tests in comprehension were given to the students of Dakshina Vidyalaya and Navasrjan Vidyalaya. The students
of Sanjeewan Vidyalaya could not write coherent sentences independently and so a comprehension test could not be given to them. Instead their first and second terminal examination marks were taken into account.

Silent reading was tried but the students gave wrong figures for the number of words they had read. In silent reading there was no way of measuring the number of words. So reading aloud was used.

The records were collected from different schools between 1982 and 1985.

Next, the students were divided into different reading groups according to the number of books they had finished reading. In Dakshina Vidyalaya and Havasarjan Vidyalaya there were 5 groups and in Sanjeewan Vidyalaya only 3 groups. In the latter there were the regular readers and the non-readers.

For each group the total books read divided by the number of students gave the average number of books read. The maximum improvement, minimum and average improvements in reading speeds were taken.

Graphs were drawn with the readings thus obtained. The number of books read were marked along the X-axis and the improvement in reading speed along the Y-axis. The curves for the maximum improvement, minimum improvement and average improvement were drawn like this.

From the graph it is obvious that the lines do not have downward bends. The improvements are not steady or
uniform but none the less definitely positive. The results are therefore very encouraging. The graphs indicate the far greater progress made in reading speed as well as comprehension by the students who participated in the reading programme.

Out of curiosity, I assessed the clarity of reading of the students of Navasaran Vidyalaya, Bhilad.

From the graph it is observed that the improvement in clarity is less steady and less systematic than the improvements in reading speed and reading comprehension. But there is positive improvement even in clarity.

The publishers of these children's stories are:

1. Children's Book Trust
2. Orient Longmans
3. India Book House
4. Vishva Vijay Prakashan
5. National Book Trust
6. Thomson Press
7. Ratnabharati
8. Publicity Division, Information and Broadcasting Service, Government of India.

More details about the various publishers and the quality of their books etc. are given in the concluding chapter.
Originally I had an idea to write a separate chapter on humour. But it is conspicuous by its absence and there is not enough material found in the Indian juvenile fiction to fill a chapter.

Another point is, the quality of illustrations. The Indian artists are competent and the illustrations in our books are pleasing. More comments are given about the illustrations in the concluding chapter.

Regarding the children's reactions with respect to the reading programme, they were varied. They are described in the concluding chapter.

Books on children's fiction were referred to, to learn about the various categories of books (like animal stories, domestic themes etc), to know about child psychology, reading habits, the process of learning etc. Children's Literature in the Elementary School by Charlotte S. Ruck and Doris K. Kuhn proved particularly helpful.

In the following chapters sample analyses of books from each assessment group from the 5 different age groups are given.

Every answer could not be substantiated as then each chapter would become voluminous. Wherever it is necessary, the answer to the particular question has been justified or substantiated briefly. And the questions are the same for all the categories of books as otherwise the assessment will
not be uniform. So, to some extent, the analysis might appear monotonous. But this could not be helped.