Annexure-2

Interview with Paro Anand


Paro Anand is a versatile writer of fiction for the young reader in India. She has published a number of stories for young children and teenagers. She has worked as Editor, National Council for Children's Literature for five years and at present working for Rupa & Co., as Commissioning Editor for Children’s Books. She conducts workshops for children on story telling.

The interview was held at her residence in New Delhi, on May 3, 2004. We had a long discussion covering the various aspects of writing for the young reader in India. We touched upon the important areas like Writing, Editing, Publishing, Distribution and Marketing (sales and promotion). We had worked together as Editors in National Book Trust India, New Delhi, a premier Publishing House, for some time. We shared a common concern for lack of good literature for children in India and the poor promotion of books for this group of vociferous readers.

Writing:

Lalita: How are writers and visual form literature tested with children prior to producing children’s books? Are there serious differences between spoken and written language causing lack of understanding on the part of children?

Paro Anand: There is no pre-publication testing. Writing needs to break out of formal modes to be more inclusive of spoken styles greater success.
How do you use your material with children?

I have a program 'Life Store in Action', wherein I use my own and other's writings to trigger issue based discussions.

How does one write well for children satisfying the need of identity, emotional release or fulfillment, entertainment, information etc?

By instinct. By being disciplined about one's craft and by reading as much as you can.

Is the children's writer treated with respect in India?

Not at all enough. But the recognition is growing, albeit slowly.

Editing:

Do books for Adolescent readers need illustrations? Do Indian books meet the criteria?

Each book has to be treated separately. These are some excellent picture books for teens in the West. It is slowly growing. (Indian Book Scene)

Is editing children's books taken seriously? Is there a need for special editors for children's books?

Absolutely -many editors work on children's books, as a stepping stone but it is a very specialized field.

Is there a need for a special viewpoint in selecting books for reprint, translation and new manuscript?

You have to know your audience- it's a very demanding one. You have to break out of 'safe' modes.

What is the most difficult task for editor for children's (Adolescent) books?

Getting the writers. You have to be brave and try new things-new people. Convincing publishers is tough.
Publishing:

Do you feel that the design of children’s books is important? Do we have well designed books for Adolescent Children in India?

Very important. Children today don’t accept shabby products whether it is jeans or books. It is great to see publishers like Zuban, Rupa, Tulika looking at this. Also it is wonderful that a literary publisher like Indialok has come in.

It is generally agreed that a lack of good writers and illustrators prevents publishers from publishing more good books for children’s in economically developing countries? What other major difficulties are encountered in publishing children’s books?

(1) Need to connect writers with their audience.

(2) Experiment with new ideas.

(3) Not stick to the tried and tested.

(4) I believe there is no dearth of the producers (writers, publishers, illustrators) or end users (children, parents, schools) but we need to fill the gaps.

What responsibilities do publishers have towards children in general? Is the responsibility greater with regard to adolescent children’s books than other types of books?

(a) To produce quality/ quantity/ variety.

(b) Much greater because they (adolescents) are on the threshold of adult life and a reading adolescent is a very powerful person.

What kind of books should we publish for adolescent children?

Any good story that is well written and produced. There should be a great variety to serve all interest areas and reading levels.
Do you get reports or feedback from your child readers?
Yes. I work with a vast range of children from rural, semi-literate to urban upper middle class and I depend a lot on my interaction, for my writing and editing.

Distribution:
Is there a market for children's books in India? If yes is that market difficult to reach because of poor distribution system?
Huge. I couldn't, for the life of me believe that publishers can't sell out a 3000 print run.

Do you believe that books are still an appropriate medium through which we can reach the children? Have they been down graded in importance because of radio and television?
Very. I strongly believe that you need to hook your audience once with a great book. After that no TV/Computer can compete. But you have to continually upgrade.

Promotion:
How do you see children's books being used in the home in India? Are there too few homes that can afford books? Is there large enough middle class and lower middle class that could be encouraged more with their children and buy more books for them?
We need to develop our non-existent library system. Need to feed into school Libraries, and have training programs on the 'why' and 'how' of reading. Promotion is pathetic here. Look at what promotion has done for Harry Potter!

Do you see any future in public library in India where children can access more books easily?
We desperately need to put as much resource into libraries and also train librarians on running a friendly accessible library. Too often librarians see their role as someone who has to protect her stock from enthusiastic children

Place-New Delhi. 

Date- May 3, 2004 

Sd/

(Paro Anand)