Chapter 4

Themes and Trends in Children’s Literature in English in India

It is exceptionally important to comprehend that children’s literature is significant, effective and will continue to be influential in future too. Interest in children’s literature is growing in every country throughout the globe. Children’s literature echoes the values and ethics of our societies and communicates these values to children. Growing numbers of adults and academics are conscious that children’s literature is a part of the mainstream of all literature, like adult literature. The quantity of publication for children is increasing, and some of the new children’s literature allures curiosity among children. Ms. Madhu Sharma, writes in her article titled as, “Positioning Children’s Literature in World Literary Canon: A Case Study of India”

Children’s literature, thus, becomes avant-garde and most compelling branch of literature which escapes and travels well beyond the bounds of the long-established portrayal and performances expected from it. In the contemporary literary set up children’s literature enjoys encyclopedic and all-embracing fame and aggrandizement due to bizarre and extraordinary production and sales of children’s books which consecutively has produced a remarkable level of enthusiasm and attraction towards the field (378).

The subjects and themes in children’s literature are now becoming diverse. It is essential that children’s books should reflect the entirety of today’s world. Arguments are that children should be protected from contentious matters which they cannot follow and grasp. New consciousness of the realities of the world has been shaped by political and social events and the mass media. These stories help children come face to face
with the real problems. Prema Srinivasan writes in his well-researched book *Children’s Fiction in English in India: Trends and Motif*.

The Scene in the 90’s finds Indian English Fiction firmly established in the literary map of the world. Simultaneously, more children’s fiction has become available, which caters to a wider readership. The writers feel more assured of their craft than before, trying their hands at different types of fiction for youngsters (66).

In multilingual nation like India, the adversities confronted by the poor, both rural and urban children, are grave issues which need to be comprehended by today’s youth through stories. Ecology and preservation of wildlife, gender sensitivity, child abuse, child bullying, domestic issues like divorce effects on children and so on, are fast gaining importance, and contemporary writers in India handles and delivers such themes well. The writers discussed in this chapter, have remarkable story telling techniques which transform the mundane and the ordinary into rich and though provoking. These writers handle realism as well as imaginative excursion. Bickenell and Trotman writes about the reading requirement for children,

Children need at least two kinds of literature. They need books that portray people living the kinds of life they lead themselves [which is why domestic-realistic literature should reflect the widest possible range of life-style] and they need to be taken into other worlds as different as possible from their own in order to stretch their imaginations, or rather… to keep their imagination supple (51).

Considering this the most important need of the young readers of India is that they be given Indian locale and setting so that they can identify and relate themselves to their reading, as Prema Srinivasan writes,
Till two decades ago, Indian children were mostly reading books produced in the west, which portrayed a life-style that was alien but nevertheless enjoyable as it was conductive to fantasizing about alternate exotic childhoods. Altitudes towards English language and literature have been historically constituted and Indian-English writers for children have convey the Indian ethos attractively and authentically to become established and remain memorable (24).

According to Navin Menon, “Thematically children’s literature fall under two broad categories-fiction and nonfiction, fiction can be divided into a) Traditional Literature, that is stories from India’s epics, classics, and folklore and b) Original creative writing in the form of short stories, full length general fiction and scientific fiction, plays, poetry, rhymes and picture books” (57). The researchers focus on full length realistic general fiction and scientific fiction. These novels and stories cover the events based on real happenings, happenings designed to express social reaction towards evil and unsocial behaviour.

In earlier stage of children’s literature in India portrayal of childhood was seen as conventional and romanticized. With the changing times this notion transformed slowly and a more realistic portrayal of childhood is being portrayed with its complications and challenges of life. Children were dwelling in closed spaces of the adult world, and now they seem to be emerging out from this complexity. The young child reader needs is an acquaintance to a diversity of reading materials in the early years, which assist in identity formation and augmentation of knowledge.

Children usually want stories about other children like themselves, about their surroundings, and their home environment. As the child grows up, the desire to escape into imaginary worlds is slowly replaced by curiosity about discovering a more accurate
picture of the world, and realistic stories in broad-spectrum begin to have captivation for the young adult. Prema Srinivasan writes about realistic stories,

   Factual realism is the kind found in historical fiction, science fiction and biographical fiction. Situational realism occurs where the characters may be in identifiable setting, age and social strata, which aids in reader identification. Emotional realism is found when the psychological and emotional overtones of the situation ring true. Social realism involves an authentic portrayal of community life, school and home life, leisure activities and coping with social problems such as violence, racism, poverty and other social ills (108).

There has been discourse between educationists, critics of children, writers and those who are involved with children’s literature on the degree of exposure to realism necessary for children. The reluctant organizations were of the view that child’s innocence would be disturbed. As Nodelman (1997) points out,

   Adults tend to represent their own ideas about childhood, including the notion that it is a time of innocence. He argues that in this way literature potentially becomes oppressive by providing only partial representations of what is possible for children to be. For these reasons, the canon of children's literature has, and will likely continue to have, an uneasy position in the world of literature and in the fields of literary and cultural studies (qtd in Rogers 143).

It has been now a trend for the Indian writers to portray social ills. Mari Steel writes in “Realism, Truth and Honesty”, “The world has not spared the children, hunger, cold, sorrow, pain, fear, loneliness, disease, death, war, famine or madness. Why should we hesitate to make use of this knowledge when writing for them” (qtd in Srinivasan 108).
In the stories of nature, wildlife preservation and the need to preserve a balance in ecology by conversing the resource are recurrent motif. There is remarkable empathy with animals and trees, and all these stories are laden with this recurring motif, with some stories having a ‘Wordsworthian’ relationship with nature. Each of the stories dramatizes the tumultuous experience of Indian children on the brink of adulthood. Alienation, rejection, disillusionment and disappointment are faced and resolved by young protagonists, resulting in deeper understanding of human nature. The protagonists, and the main characters of the stories reach self-understanding after a crisis in which he/she feels themselves and affects the young readers as well. Communal disharmony, gang warfare and identity crises are all familiar problems today, particularly pertinent to the adolescent life. Young readers are likely to be affected by the social codes and messages found in their reading material. Each individual, however, will interpret and take these messages according to his or her own peculiar circumstances and environment. Indian writers have attempted to deal with issues like divorced parents, victims of drug abuse. These stories have been used to convey messages relevant to the present day. Theresa Rogers sums up his article, ‘Literary Theory and Children's Literature: Interpreting Ourselves and our Worlds’

Post-structuralist or postmodernist perspectives may call these issues into question by arguing that certain categories of difference, such as ethnicity, are social constructions, and our notions of "others" are often overly simplified. Yet if we are to situate ourselves historically as well as socially and culturally, we cannot turn away from privileging the meaning of some differences over others or ignore the weight of past injustices and current power differentials. We may need to more fully articulate our goals for literature teaching,
schooling, and societal change in order to clarify our current understandings of what is possible for children, books, and reading as we work toward social change (143).

4.1: Science through Children’s Literature

No one can deny that much of the progress of mankind springs directly from the discoveries and innovations made by men with an infinite curiosity to probe deep into the mysteries of nature and to understand the power latent in the gifts of nature and to harness them effectively. Modern man claims to have a scientific temper, technological minds and readiness to accept far-reaching changes much faster. It is in this context that science fiction gains importance and especially science fiction for children. Jagannath Mohanty writes, “Since the modern age is an era of science and technology, literature in general and children’s literature in particular are apt to be influenced by scientific theme, temper and attitude. In the beginning children’s curiosity and inquisitiveness are satisfied through the environment them. Then they eagerly look for more information like what, why, how, etc of the physical as well as the living world” (137).

Science Fiction, abbreviation SF or sci-fi, are well recognised, widely discussed and has become more widespread in modern times. M. H. Abrahams and Geaoffery Galt Harphan defines Science Fiction in, “A Glossary of Literary Terms” as “… encompasses novels and short stories that represent an imagined reality that is radically different in its nature and functioning from the world of our ordinary experience. Often the setting is another planet, or this earth projected into the future, or an imagined parallel universe… SF applied to those narratives in which- unlike in pure fantasy- an explicit attempt is made to render plausible the fictional world by reference to known or imagined scientific principles, or to a projected advance in technology, or to a drastic
change in the organisation of society” (356). Roger C. Schlobin collected twenty six definitions of science fiction by different writers who are well versed in science fiction. The following two important definitions among them would give a clear understanding of what Science Fiction is. Firstly, Damon Knight writes,

In an attempt to find out [what science fiction is], I wrote out a list of promising definitions and checked them against works published as science fiction to see how well they matched. Here is the list: 1. Science (Gernsback). 2. Technology and invention (Heinlein, Miller). 3. The future and the remote past, including all time travel stories (Bailey). 4. Extrapolation (Davenport). 5. Scientific Method (Bretnor). 6. Other places—planets, dimensions, etc., including visitors from the above (Bailey). 7. Catastrophes, natural or manmade (Bailey) (Schlobin 504).

Secondly, Peter Nicholls defines it as,

First, it [science fiction] is the great modern literature of metaphor. Conventional literature has a limit, set by everyday realism, to the juxtapositions of imagery it can allow itself. Science fiction, which creates its own worlds, has access to new juxtapositions.

The second major strength of S F is related to the first. It is able to incorporate intellectually shocking material, partly because it is so pre-eminently the literature of change, as opposed to mainstream literature, which is the literature of human continuity. Third, Science Fiction is the literature of the outsider, in the extreme sense. Traditional realist fiction observes its action from the viewpoint of a partaker. It shares the illusions of the society which produces it. So
does all fiction, but it is science fiction which makes the conscious effort, sometimes quite successful, to stand outside, to give us the Martian eye view of affairs. Fourthly, science fiction allows us to escape, but gives us the choice of escaping into a world where all is not easy. Fifthly, the freedom of imagery available to the science-fiction writer allows him to derive a potency of effect, whether consciously or unconsciously, from his own hopes and fears, which, in the way of archetypes, are likely to be ours too (Schlobin 506).

Therefore, all definitions converge to the assertion that science fiction is generally a literature of change, which suggests that all science fiction writers dream of changing the world, and with it the readers of science fiction texts.

The term ‘Science Fiction’ was first used in Britain in 1851 in William Wilson’s _A Little Earnest Book upon a Great Old Subject_. Science fiction in nineteenth century was represented by the work of Jules Verne and HG Wells. However, science fiction for children was rare until Christopher (1967) published his book _The White Mountains_. Since then, a great number of authors of science fiction for children have appeared in Britain; for example, Peter Dickinson, Geraldine McCaughrean, Jan Mark, ElenMacGregor, Eleanor Cameron and William Sleator.

Like any interesting fiction, science fiction too is full of action, romance, thrill, fun and possess all attractions of a children’s book. Science fiction stories are modern fantasies which suitably substitute for fairy stories and stories of magic. With sound logical basis of science concepts, science fiction satisfies both the fancies of the unknown and intellectual understanding, in order to make the implausible and the way-out science believable. Science fiction takes off from reality into the realm of the
unknown and the unexplored; it has tremendous impact on people of all ages, and particularly the young.

Tracing the beginning of Science fiction writing for children in the west, the first magazine on the subject, edited by Hugo Gernsbach and titled Sci-Fi was started in 1926. The name of the magazine was later changed to Science Fiction. The stories were either space oriented or invention oriented which visualised scientific gadgets. These thrilling wonder tales could even encourage child readers to ultimately pursue careers in various science disciplines. “Children’s books have a vital role to play. They can make science and the universe more accessible to the young people. They can stand for and appeal to the finest characteristics and aspirations of the human species” (Pringle).

Famous American Children’s science writers Seymour Simmon writes about the importance of science fiction for young, “I think it is very important to get kids to read science books from a very young age. If they are not reading books about science by the time they are twelve, you are probably lost them… thus if we want a (science) literate citizenry, we have to start children on science books when they are young” (n.p).

Science writing is about a two century old phenomenon in India, when in the early part of 19th century, Indian magazines started publishing articles on science. It gathered momentum in the early 20th century, when Indian scientists like J.C. Bose, S.N. Bose, M.N. Saha and others made a mark in the world of science. Shobit Mahajan writes in his article, “Popularising Science” that,

Though the first science fiction story in India was written by J.C. Bose in 1897, science fiction as a genre never really developed in our country. Apart from isolated attempts in Marathi and Bengali, science fiction never really caught the imagination of the writers or even the
readers. The situation changed in the seventies when many Marathi authors, including J.V. Narlikar started writing in periodicals and newspapers (Mahajan).

The advantages and disadvantages of science have been profoundly analysed by western novelists in their Utopian and Dystopian writings. Indian writers also have begun to explore this rich source of material presented by science in an explanatory form for children. Science writing for children was actually initiated in the Bengali language in 1940’s by a great scientist S.N. Bose when he founded an organisation, ‘Bangiya Bingyan Parishad’, a magazine devoted exclusively to popularising science among children and the young. After the independence of India in 1947, when science was taken up in a big way in the country, the efforts to popularise it in regional languages like Bengali, Marathi, Assames etc. continued. Programed publication of popular science books began by setting up organisations. But the organisations did not produce books. Books need writers who are committed to communicate science to the young. This trend has started in recent times only in English and some other regional languages. More and more writers, NGO’s and publishers have begun to realise the importance of popularising science among the young. Perhaps this trend can be attributed to several factors, such as, growing awareness about science, media, curriculum changes in the school, parents’ emphasis on more scientific information for their children, purchase of popular science books in bulk by various Indian states, the efforts made by several publishers of national repute like CBT and NBT.

In the last two decades there have been significant number of children’s books written on science as the theme. Writers like Dilip M. Salwi, Arvind Gupta, RK Murthi, Ira Sexena, Karthi Das and many others are devoted to draw focus upon science. All these writers have tried to give scientific facts and figures in more friendly, story- like
manner, in texts such as *Robots are Coming, The Aliens Have landed, Aliens Encounters* by Dilip M Sawi, *Earth and Mars* by R. K. Murthi and *From Somwhere Out There* by Karthika Das.

Thousands of children's literature books are published each year. Not only do these books have the power to help our children construct an understanding of language and literacy but also of scientific concepts. Children's literature books have the potential to lead children to construct an understandings of science. Dilip M. Salwi (1952–2004), an Indian writer who pioneered science fiction writing for children has authored stories, plays, novel, biographies, and several books based on science. His attempt was to make science interesting and fun for children. Salwi himself took great pains to write well-researched books, focusing on little-known facts about science and scientists. His stories demonstrates how the “Indiannes” of Indian science fiction comes from cultural setting rather than a distant, imagined culture.

His best sellers are *Scientists of India, The Story of Zoo, A Passage to Antarctica, Robots are Coming, Tales of Modern Jungle, I am a Computer, J. C. Bose, C. V. Raman and Meghnad Saha, Inventions that Made History, Mr. Sun Takes a Holiday, Fire on the Moon*. His works has been highlighted in *The Cambridge Guide to Children’s Books*. His writings are informative, and his talent makes science interesting. He ensures that each story differs from the other, and cleverly avoids the trap of formulaic science fiction. Salwi has experimented with a variety of genres and styles in his attempt to produce interesting books. He offers comments on environment, education, lifestyles, and attitudes; what makes these comments especially interesting is that they are always voiced by aliens. In his stories Salwi speculates on life in the future, creating worlds with several problems, mostly of man's making. Prema Srinivasan writes in ‘Contemporary Trends: English Writing for Children’, 

Kumar 153
Science fiction writers like Dilip Salwi, make use of a ‘thought-through’ interpretation of where today's trends will lead us to tomorrow (Srinivasan).

However, it is not a wholly hopeless scenario, and Salwi shows how, with some care, our earth can be saved.

Dilip M. Salwi touched the area carefully, and most of the time in his stories creates the idea that, “Does the machine capable of thinking, learning and feeling and have rights? Can it be good or evil?” (Gamble 202). Robots are a recurring motif in science fiction, mainly because they permit writers to generate cognitive estrangement, a state that places readers in a world dissimilar than their own, letting readers interpret or observe world from a different viewpoint. In ‘Better Made Up: The Mutual Influence of Science fiction and Innovation’ Caroline Bassett et al. writes, “SF creates an enabling ‘space’ for innovation. Although not universal, it may be said that evoking a ‘sense of wonder’ or more precisely, working with cognitive estrangement, is a broadly shared aim of SF works” (43). The arrival of the Robots to replace human beings in certain types of jobs is the result of this attribute of science which is the basis of technology. Prema Srinivasan writes,

In the present day, technology has replaced magic and fantasy and is “reincarnated as science fiction”. In India, Jayant Narlikar and Dilip Salwi have made notable contribution in this sphere, making strategic use of computer and robot technology (19).

Robots are Coming (Dilip Salwi)

Robots have been popular in Children’s Literature, and the usage of the subject varies form lightly entertaining, revolutionary to totally disturbing. For older teen agers Dilip Salwi’s Robots are Coming is a collection of twelve stories that explore the
interaction between humans, robots and morality. These stories explain the world of robots to children. Robots simply do as they are programmed, designed to learn, think and make choices. Salwi is interested in the moral dimensions of advanced robotics. His stories give a vivid insight into the possible consequences of such a possibility not only in near future, but even the distant one. *Return of Vaman* (1991) by Jayant Narlikar’s also has futuristic theme, and explores the grave possibility of the robots eventually taking the place of man the inventor. On asking why he writes Science Fiction, Jayant Narlikar replies “I like storytelling and felt that science has so many interesting aspects that one can tell them in the form of stories. I saw how Fred Hoyle had made a name for himself in this way and so felt encouraged to try myself” (Shenoy).

Gautham Shenoy writes,

> Jayant Narlikar’s stories…charming, contain scientific fact, prophetic vision, make for tremendously interesting reading and are instructive, sometimes cautionary, and additionally, are ‘Indian’ in spirit and outlook, reflecting its long history and rich culture (n.p).

Science Fiction is different from fantasy because it provides hypothesis, which makes children curious. It has a number of values and one of the values of SF is its ability to develop imagination, improvisation, intuition, speculation and flexibility in the minds of readers. Graham Green writes, “Perhaps it is only in childhood that books have any influence on our lives…but in childhood all books are books of divination, telling us about the future, and like the fortune-teller who sees a long journey in the cards or death by water, they influence the future” (qtd. in Sinyard 109).

Carol. M. Butzow and John W. Butzow writes, in their article, “Science through Children’s Literature: An Integrated Approach”
Fictional literature can be used as the foundation of science instruction. Because literature has a story line, children may find it easier to follow the idea that are part of a plot that comprehend facts as presented in textbook. Science is very abstract for youngsters and must be seen as part of their own personal world if it is to be understood and remembered (29).

On the contrary Dr Sulabha R. Devpurkar writes in her book, *Children’s Fiction in India. A Critical Study*, “Fantasy is food for children’s fiction. It is the basis for all types. The science fiction is not ever scientific; it is nothing but fantasy in the strict sense. Sometimes a writer takes a story to illustrate a scientific phenomenon, but usually there is an element of surprise and thrill created by imagination that is just as wild as that of in fairy tales. Is there a theory behind an invisible man, no. there cannot be an explanation in the science foe such explanation” (53).

Children’s literature is growing in the direction of incredible science fiction to stories with ground realities and characters more like the ones whom one sees in day today life. The old literature has more of a world of fantasy and as one advances towards the modern age, one see more of reality. We see Harry Potter series of novels, deal with the world of magic, and is popular throughout the globe. The modern age requires fantasy of its own since it provides a utopia to the children. Martha Thindle writes in his research paper, “The Fantasy Chronotope in Popular Children’s Authors: Enid Blyton and Eoin Colfer”

Fantasy then maybe considered as a generic heading for a variety of narratives, taking place in a fairy-tale realm, depicting travel between different worlds, talking animals, supernatural powers, medieval universe, mythical beings and such like, thus bringing magic into the
mundane reality of everyday. Fantasy formed the mainstream of Western literature until renaissance brought about a rejection of superstition in favour of science and reason (2).

Salwi’s stories for children may look for a re-expansion of the far horizons. These stories are splendid vehicle for ideas, setting human nature and human problems in new context and catching the attention of bright young minds at an early age, at which they often lose interest in reading for pleasure. Science Fiction writers for children have made full use of the genre, their versatility and ingenuity are often startling. Prema Srinivasan writes, “Science communicator Dilip Salwi feels that the excitement of scientific advancements should be made accessible to children through the form of fiction” (69).

Salwi creates stories in such a way that children seems entirely at home with, astronomy and space technology, and he knows very well how to maintain suspense. Salwi is skilful at constructing future stories. In one of his stories ‘The Lost World’ in The Robots are Coming he writes, “Some years ago, A.D. 4977 to be exact, the spaceship Vayager, launched from the earth was approaching the star Alpha Centauri” (86).

Salwi closely mix the spatial and temporal frame of the narratives to create their secondary worlds. But the manner in which he creates and maintains it is what differentiates their expression of fantasy. Robots are recurrent image in these stories and most of the stories talk about the future of robotics and aliens and their activities and communications with the humans. Some stories have one or no humans at all. This indicates that the future will be in the hold of technology. Martha Thindle writes

The concept of the secondary world can be understood in conjunction with the concept of the chronotope. The fantasy chronotope
predominantly applies only to secondary worlds as the blurring of
time and space dimensions happen only in these worlds (5).

Salwi offers at the end of each story a solution and some endings are full of
suspense. ‘When there is a Robot in the House’ started with the conversation between
Robot Manku and the boy Ajay, It is interesting for the school going boys and highlights
how robots observe the humans. “Oh no,” thought Ajay, “I bet that’s Dinish, ask me
out for a game of telentennis. I told him I’d go with him, but if I don’t finish my
homework, Manku will tell Dad and then I’ll be in trouble” (RC1 9). There would be
place in every respect for robots in near future. Salwi himself predicts future when says,
“Today fear lurks in the human mind as to whether the slave might not turn into
masters” (preface to RC). The stories vary from house or homes to offices where robots
do various kinds of household chores and office work to the other planets of universe
for exploration of these planets. Robots don’t lie as humans and Ajay always thinks that
robots are supposed to help humans, and not make life more complicated by questioning
every order. Ajay complaints to Robotics International on phone, “Your robots make
things really difficult for me it tells tales to my father. It lets in visitors I don’t want to
see, it has no sense of diplomacy” (RC 11). The man on phone replied, “you must
understand that the Manku robots is a product of science and technology, in which there
is no room forlies and unclear statements … if you and your family have not understood
this and if you cannot speak truthfully and in clear sentence, I’m afraid that Manku
robots one day cause a mishap” (RC 12). From then onwards Ajay promised that he
would not go for lies, “But I’ll be honest from now on. I’ll never tell lies again. I’ll do
my homework. I’ll give clear instructions…he thought frantically” (RC 12). It indicates
how human failing like dishonesty can have no place in the world of Robots.

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1 Robots are Coming
Possibility of robots and their communication with humans is one more theme in Salwi’s stories. The theme is echoed through Commander Frazer in ‘Songs of the Alien Ships’ when the message from the space was deciphered by earth’s most skilled cryptologists and astronomers. The message read:

The birds have been sent into space by thinking being who live on the 4th, 5th and 6th planets of a star called Venox in the Swan constellation. It would seem that these worlds are similar to ours, and are inhabited by beings that are not too different from humans except that they have dome-shaped heads, long ears and claw-like fingers to suit their environment. What we have called the ‘Song of the Alien Ship’ is transmitted on the frequency of water, which is present in abundance on their world.

In an effort to contact other similar being in the universe, the inhabitants of Venox system have constructed and sent out twenty bird-like crafts. These are robot-controlled, hydrogen-powered interstellar ships. They are programmed to approach any worlds similar to their own in order to make contact. In case of threat, they accelerate and move on to the next object. The intention seems to have been to establish communication within the universe. We fear we have lost the opportunity (RC 25-27).

Salwi keeps readers in doubt at the end of the story which also is the main component of SF, “Twenty ships, “Commander Frazer exclaimed. “Twenty?” “But only eighteen ships reached us!” Then as the meaning of this dawned on him, he sank back into his chair, his eyes staring into the starlit sky. “We are not alone,” he murmured. “But now, we’ll never know…” (RC 27). In the story Salwi repeatedly
shows that there is a possibility of other creatures as he writes, “the universe is infinite and mysterious” (RC 23). So Science Fiction is called as the, “future popular form of children’s literature” (qtd in Prema Srinivasan 69) Martha Thindle writes

Children accept naturally the possibility of the range of phenomena that fantasy deals with: alternate worlds, nonlinear time, extrasensory perception, time travel and in general all kinds of supernatural events that cannot be logically explained. It is precisely for this reason that fantasy literature is considered appropriate for children because children easily suspend judgment and disbelief (3).

Neil Gaiman affirms this opinion when he writes,

Sometimes writers write about a world that does not yet exist. We do it for a hundred reasons. (Because it’s good to look forward, not back. Because we need to illuminate a path we hope or we fear humanity will take. Because the world of the future seems more enticing or more interesting than the world of today. Because we need to warn you. To encourage. To examine. To imagine.) the reason for writing about the day after tomorrow, and all the tomorrows that follow it, are as many and varied as people writing (Gaiman n.p.).

Commander Frazer has read before “his mind flew back over the years, to when he had first become aware of the fact that mankind could not possibly be the only living beings in the universe. Several hundred other alien species must exist in the Milky Way alone.” (RC 20). Salwi creates and showed hope for the young children as Commander Frazer did not leave it and continued his study, Salwi writes, “Frazer, grew older, his hope of encountering alien being faded. But, he continued to enjoy his work he did it
completely and now, in his forties… Frazer’s youthful enthusiasm had given way to disbelief. He trained youth pilots and kept his station in perfect order…”

In the next story “Marooned off a Meteored” Salwi has crafted a story from a report: a voice from a captain (of Armstrong IV spaceship which was crashed at high speed in the other planet) who left an audio record for future generations. The soft and mechanised voice says at the end of the report:

That’s all. I was wounded on impact, and fear I haven’t much longer to live. The spacecraft seems damaged beyond repair. My robot team has done all it can, but I fear this is the end. If someone from earth should find us some time in the future, I hope my report will be of use in solving one of the riddles of the universe. As, to the creature, we have no information at all, except that it was vulnerable to the laser gun, and yet large enough and strong enough to overcome the thrust of our engine and damage… badly damage the spaceship.

I am reporting man’s first encounter with a living being in our universe. I hope those who come after me will find my account of some use, and perhaps will find a means of establishment contact and peaceful relation with these creatures, whatever they are… (RC 37).

The story takes place on the other planet and we come to know about it at the end of the story when the explorers and robots are in conversation. Martha Thindle quotes C. S. Lewis, “a child does not ask whether the character in a fantasy story is real or whether he/she exists, but is interested in knowing “Was he good or was he wicked?” (3). Prema Srinivasan writes,

When supernatural becomes possible, we’re no longer dealing with unbridled fantasy but science fiction, a protean term which embraces
everything from the crude comic strip, interplanetary star wars to sophisticated, psychological drama (19).

Frances A. Smardo also writes in, “Using children’s literature to clarify science concepts in early childhood programs”

Children’s literature about science should not become a substitute for direct science experiences, storybooks and activities can be effectively blended in an early childhood science program (268).

In *Robots are Coming* robots were saying, “Man made us, first in a very rudimentary form, and then, slowly perfected improved upon what he had done, we were first designed to think, then learn, memorise and utilize logic…Man, our maker, vanished from the face of the earth. It is thought that climatic changes, brought about by gross pollution of the earth, destroyed Man and his species. We remained. They created us half knowing that they were on the path to destruction themselves… (RC 39). Here not only we come to know that the story is on another planet but it indicates us that that the new generations or the robotic world of post-climatic change is an important aspects of science fiction. As George Papantonakis writes “It is also worth noting that scholars of children’s literature associate science fiction with every kind of disaster threatening Earth, with the whole planetary system, with the threat of a nuclear holocaust and with ecology” (RC 50). It makes readers conscious of their own actions. These kind of stories can be related to Enid Blyton and Eoin Colfer’s fantasies. As Martha Thindle writes,

The concept of the secondary world can be understood in conjunction with the concept of the chronotope. The fantasy chronotope predominantly applies only to secondary worlds as the blurring of time and space dimensions happen only in these worlds. Blyton and Colfer closely integrate the spatial and temporal frame of their
narratives to create their secondary worlds. But the manner in which they create and maintain it is what differentiates their expression of fantasy (5).

Salwi’s stories give the impression that Salwi has followed the ideas "three laws of robotics" of Isaac Asimov’s, it says “1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm; 2. A robot must obey orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law; 3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law” (Gevers 385). In the next stories, ‘The Error of Sherlock Holmes’ from *The Robots are Coming* Ketan, the child protagonist of the story sought help from a robot Sherlock Holmes to get his lost dog named Jemmy. Before he went on the search along with the robot there was a warning red card, given by the Counter 66 of the robot store. Ketan read it:

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WARNING

THIS ROBOT IS PROGRAMMED TO FOLLOW IN EVERY RESPECT THE BEHAVIOR PATTERS OF THE GREAT DETECTIVE SHERLOCK HOLMES. THE MANUFACTURERS DO NOT TAKE ANY RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HIS IDIOSYNCRATIC OR ECCENTRIC BEHAVIOUR, NOR FOR ANY INCONVENIENCES SUCH BEHAVIOUR MAY CAUSE THE BUYER (50).
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While reading these stories readers mind develop and the child reader starts to uncover their own stories. After Ketan found his dog, Ketan wants to know how the detective was able to nab Mr.Surjit, the thief of the dog. Detective replied, “It was all a matter of observation and deduction. The clues were all there. It was a fairly simple
curious to learn too. To the continuous questions by Ketan the robot detective replies, “As I said, it wasn’t a particular complicated case. A few simple observations, a few enquiries, and that was that…. It’s all a matter of minute observation and analyses of fact…” (RC 57) As Francees A. Smardo writes, “Sometimes a storybook which distorts or ignores a scientific law will arouse a child’s interest more easily than a factual book (268).

In Rudy Rucker’s war series, Software, Wetware, Realware, and Freeware, robots rebel against the human-centric rules of Asimov and form a free, anarchist city on the moon called Disky. The robots eat a lot of human brains in an effort to convert as many people as possible into robots. On the contrary Salwi continued to follow Asimov’s laws and has portrayed a good relationship between robots and humans. Prema Srinivasan writes, “The question intrigues the reader, who is also aware of the possibility that man, the creator of the robots, may one day prove redundant in a world peopled by robots” (75-76).

In “Robots are Becoming Clever” robots begin to develop human characteristics. Doxie is fed up with the daily routines and replies to Deepa and her parents.

“Yes,” Doxie replied. “An Indian scientist discovered some time ago that metal too can suffer from fatigue due to overuse. It began to weaken and cannot function as metal should. I think that is what has been happening to me. I am used every day without a break. And, as you know, I am not a new model. I have been used before I came to your house. My parts are old, and they are tired. I am suffering from a metal fatigue” (RC 67).
Salwi’s stories of science engage children with technology. Modern technology in its many shapes, from nuclear science to cybernetics, genetic engineering and computing and information technology, has become an inextricable part of our daily lives; it not only transforms what we do but also how we construct our world. Margeret P Esmonde writes, “Science Fiction has emerged as a significant sub-genre of Children’s Literature. Blending the realism of today’s technology with the magic of future possibility, it is particularly suited to fire the imagination or boldly go where no man has gone before” (Makhijani 23).

Scientific thoughts and concepts that come from informational literature support children’s individual needs, become knowledgeable and up date citizens, and grow significant career selections. Science has now become a major part of children’s everyday lives. Children are enclosed by an environment they must act together with and technology they must use in the quest of scientific information and critical thinking. Today's children are more aware, more concerned and more informed than any preceding generation. This is an exciting genre for them. It meets their needs to verbalize societal concerns. It reflects the implications of technology and the possibilities for the future. Through it children can be provided a method for developing an awareness about some of the alternatives to the world's future.

*From Somewhere Out There* (Karthika Das)

The novel *From Somewhere Out There* (2009) is a racy science fiction for teenagers written by Karthika Das. She has written one more science fiction *The Cat Spirit* (2003). She is from Tamil Nadu and currently translating Tamil children’s stories in to English. The main characters of *From Somewhere Out There* are the Fourteen year old twins Sidhart and Sowmya who are extraterritorial Intelligence- volunteers. They are unable to understand the signal that their home observatory receives at a particular
time every day, “the pages showed a particular pattern of a signal at exactly the same
time every day for the past three days… there was a pulsed signal between 2142hrs and
2146hrs everyday” (FSOT² 27-28). NASA at the same time is also bewildered by the
focus of the unidentified satellite moving in orbit around the earth.

Karthika deliberately involves the parents in the matter of the children so that they come to know what their children do. Days after Sidarth and Sowmya tell their parents Mr.Murli and Mrs Saritha wanted to know the outcome of their study, “What have you actually got in that study of yours?” asked Mrs.Saritha.” In the reply to this question Sowmya replied, “A full scale observatory would contain observatory domes, CCDs, optional filters, spectrometers, photons, detectors, computers, signal processing hardware, data storage mechanisms, processing software, the necessary accessories, ETI laser beacon simulators, video/audio photon noise converters and much more. We have got only the essential ones” (FSOT 11). Das herself says, “It has a devastating effect on her parents” (11). It not only affect the reader as a whole. Children always wanted to please their parents too; they love the involvement and the attention of their parents which lift children psychologically. As their parents thought, “they had believed that their children were getting deeper into astronomy. Secretly, both of them were thrilled with the choice their children’s subject. They both loved astronomy and were very disheartened they could not devote more time to.” (11). Karthika conveys the message every time in the text to the teenage readers. Children must share their thoughts with their parents like the twins at the beginning of the story, though the scientific jargon their parents cannot understand. The parents were all time ready to listen,” The SETI program is situated at UC Berkely, USA, they have made arrangements with the Arecibo telescope, (the largest, single-dish, most sensitive radio telescope, with the

² From Somewhere Out There
large curved focusing antenna in the world) in Puerto Rico to watch the skies for signals. The data from Arecibo are recorded on high-density tapes which fill a 35-gigabytes tape per day. The data is divided into 0.25 megabytes chunks called work units. This work unit is then transmitted to people all over the world who have volunteered to do the individual analyses. And this is what we will be getting” (13). Later after conversation they both were satisfied, “they both thrilled that they had impressed their parents so much. And they also found it a joy to share their sense of adventure and excitement with such keen listeners…” (16). The writer not only makes parents participants, but stimulates the reader with scientific terms deliberately and force the children into curiosity. The writer throughout the text uses scientific terms like, ‘gigabytes’, ‘Arecibo telescope’, ‘high density tapes’, ‘ETI’, ‘broadband’, ‘Gaussian Signal’, ‘Doppler shifting’, ‘Chirped signals’ etc. in order to divert the child readers to scientific knowledge before they go to the practical scientific fields. The writer not only uses these terms but gives detailed information about these scientific words, “the Arecibo is not a moving telescope, since it is fixed in position, it takes about 12 seconds for a target beam of the Arecibo’s dish. So we expect an ETI signal to get louder and then soften over a 12-second period, a Gaussian signal, this Gaussian is the one we are looking for in all the mass of data” (FSOT 14).

Alien presence in science fiction written for children is a recurrent theme. Karthika has written the plot of the story very artistically for children. Human characters encounter with the alien and the children encounters with other parts of the galaxy. Children’s encounter with the aliens is recurrently utilised as a literary approach in children’s literature to provide child characters time away from their everyday mundane lives in order to be able to experience adventures outside the protected realm of innocent or unexperienced childhood. This method also offers the author with a means to release
the fictive child from the restraints of authority. In this regard Martha Thindle draws the idea from the Bakhtinian notion of medieval carnival as a celebration of temporary liberation,

The idea of a carnivalistic time out offers an alternative social space where the child characters enjoy freedom, abundance and experience a temporary empowerment in the alternate world which is explicitly visible in the secondary world fantasies (7).

Karthika Das describes beautifully Maya’s appearance in front of the children

The air seemed to shimmer and pulsate around them and they stiffened in anticipation. A vague blob of diffused light seemed to slowly materialize in the air and it gradually turned into a shimmering golden orb that hung in the air, suspended by invisible threads. Suddenly it flashed brightly, forcing them to shut their eyes. When they opened them again, the golden sphere had disappeared and its place stood, what looked like an Angle. Her hair flowed down her form in dark waves and she seemed to be dressed in mist that moved and flowed around her soft eddies. Only her face was clearly visible and warm glowing aura emanated from her (FSOT 136-137).

Through Maya, Karthika Das gives much more information of extra-terrestrial to children. They are from as the title says, “From somewhere out there” (139). Here both the children Siddhant and Sowmya enquire repeatedly about the other parts of the world and the advantages and disadvantages of technology. One of the replies from Maya is:

Yes, you are, from yourselves. You see, we were once at the cross roads you people are now. We are technologically advancing in leaps
and bounds, and before we knew it, the technology had bought us to the very brink of extinction...we had developed weapons of such awesome power that we perpetually stood on the threshold of an all-out war that would destroy our own existence and our planet... A few wise ones realised the gravity of the situation and pulled us back from the disaster... I was sent to warn you to turn back or face extinction.

The threat is not from anywhere else but from within you (FSOT 143).

This discussion of children’s science fiction has shown that Indian authors of children’s science fiction have been able to depict scientific temper related to children. In these works, we characteristically encounter an awareness of a global identity that at times co-exists with an awareness of national identity.

Both the writers deal with complex plots, advanced concepts like time stop, time reversal, time travel, and technological gadgetry that is thrilling for a child. These writers locate their stories in an entirely self-contained secondary world which has its own rules and laws governing it. Both authors provide for a space of fantasy and science the idea that it is possible to escape into a different reality that helps soften the rough edges of reality for the children.

Indian science fiction for children can shape awareness of children. Indian authors concentrate on scientific achievements, mainly in the field of space sciences. They have explored travel and the discovery of extra-terrestrials, at times to attack against Earth by extra-terrestrials. This may be because they consider such stories more attractive and easier to expand upon and express an intimate desire of a large part of mankind to scrutinize outside the realms of the Earth. In this way, science fiction is transformed into a vehicle for attracting children. Indian writers have invented a range
of techniques in order to structure the various episodes of their stories, increase suspense and retain the interest of child readers. These include techniques such as accepting rejection, creation of a false sense of security and sudden surprise, concealment, slowing down of pace, parallel action, intervention, anthropomorphism, opening all expectations, emotional intensity and pauses.

Science both fiction and fact provides ample scope for the curiosity and restlessness of the children both boys and girls at an early stage of life. Scientific thoughts and methods that come from high quality informational literature help children meet individual needs, become informed citizens, and develop important career decisions. JG Ballard answers,

I think science fiction always has had a predictive role, and many of its prophecies have come true. I don't think now, oddly enough, that the predictive function is the main task of SF – in the sense of the nuts and bolts of our lives. I don't think it's the job of the science fiction writer any more to predict a new kind of air travel or a new kind of washing machine. I don't think it's on the level of technological change that science fiction has its greatest value. I think it's the psychological realm where SF is most valuable in its predictive functions, because what it does is to put the emotion into the future. It looks at our conscious and half-conscious responses to all sorts of trends that are flowing out of the future towards us. I think in its anticipation of this strange mental environment of the world of tomorrow that it has its greatest value now (Adams n.p).

Since space travel and astronomy started, the speed of scientific revolution in the world has increased. Every age group and feature and characteristics of human life has been
influenced by science. Content reading has also increased towards scientific and technical. Most subjects in children’s science books are spaceship, robots and computers. Hugo Grensback in his lecture delivered at Massachusetts Institute of Technology on Oct. 1960, emphasises, “It has been said that the space technology age belongs to the young. Equally true is the fact- it has always been a fact since its inception, the science fiction is the domain of youth. The gifted young mind often has been the faculty of the imagination that can soar and ferret out the secrets of the nature” (Sexena 19).

It is clear that these texts contain a message of hope about the future of mankind, a message that only a science fiction text could contain. From this point of view, children play an active role as heroes, making their own contribution to resolving universal problems such as the energy issue, environmental pollution, and promoting issues such as space ecology, from a pedagogic viewpoint.

These texts are therefore beneficial rather than soul-destroying for the reader. The innovative action that the children are allowed to develop as heroes is likely to influence the child as reader. Consequently, it educates the child reader in a completely natural manner without any obvious morals or didacticism. Values that may be identified and promoted are: cooperation, mutual respect, mutual esteem, and freedom. At the same time, the action of the heroes is depicted in a way that promotes such feelings as a sense of safety, self-confidence, self-respect and self-awareness.

The idea of the pedagogic function of children’s science fiction literature does not undermine its ability to be aesthetically pleasing as a text. This is achieved in a variety of ways such as humour, suspense, conflict and expressive means and techniques that are invented by the author in order to attract the interest of the child.
Carol. M. Butzow and John W. Butzow writes, in their article, “Science through Children’s Literature: An Integrated Approach”

The story does this by putting facts and concepts into a form that encourages children to build a hypothesis, predict events, and test to determine whether their ideas are correct. In this way the lesson becomes relevant and conceptually in tune with the children’s abilities. The method is best conveyed through an integrated lesson that involves reading, writing, language arts, and science, as well as math, social science, language, creative arts, and physical activities (29).

Moreover, the idea that a child may learn to enjoy a text from an aesthetic point of view is in itself part of the pedagogic function of a work of literature.

In the future, new authors will appear who will specialise exclusively in writing works of science fiction for children; alternatively, well-established authors might dedicate themselves solely to science fiction. Manorama Jaffa in her introductory remarks in a workshop on “Writing Science Fiction for Children” said, “That we are already in the age of computers, robots and push buttons. We must now open new vistas for children to provide them fresh experience and enable them to have a peep into future possibilities” (Makhijani 22). It should be noted that science fiction does not refer only to stories relating to space and extra-terrestrials, but also cover other sectors of the presence of life in the wider universe. Issues such as arbitrary or non-arbitrary systems, psychological or other pressures, medical, biomedical or biotechnological issues, issues of species cross-breeding, asexual reproduction, immortality after the development of genetics, and cybernetics and bioethics are areas untested from a literary point of view by Indian authors of children’s books. It is suggested that these issues should be
explored in a manner that science has not yet developed in order to prove the value of their imaginations and to inoculate science fiction against the antibodies.

4.2: Eco-Consciousness and Contemporary Indian Children’s Literature in English

Children’s Literature offers one of the most extensive sources for the study of ideas about nature, the environment, ecology and the role of humans in relation to all of these (Lesnik-Oberstein 208).

The environment is a vital concern of man on earth. Having ruthlessly subjected it to destruction for a long time man is now waking up to realise his idiocies and his trying to make amends for his earlier damage and destruction of nature. This segment of the thesis discuss the tie between nature and children, nature as a place of escape or comfort, issues and the presentation of nature portraying children’s literature in English in India.

Nature refers to the phenomena of the physical world and also to the life in general. Right from the existence of human race on the planet, man has looked at nature as a source of energy and life. In the primitive stage, man was totally dependent on the natural resources to survive. As in the prophetic vision of a Kashmiri saint Nund Reshi (1438 AD), “Food will last as long as forests last” (Ann posh teli yeil wann posh)” (Razdan 44). These resources helped man immensely to achieve different stages of development and progress both socioeconomically and spiritually as well. He has capitalized on these sources and made his life better from ancient to modern period. But in this modern scientific and robotic age man has forgotten nature and ecology.

Ecology has been a distinctive feature of many an ancient literature. There is close relationship between Nature and literature, in the past and the current times writers in almost all cultures and civilizations of the world have written about the subject.
Ecocriticism, as defined by Cheryl Glotfelty in her 1996 introduction to the *Ecocriticism Reader*, is: “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty xviii). It seems simple enough, well designed yet open ended; this definition leaves a lot of flexibility. In fact, one of the most useful and promising characteristics of ecocriticism is its potential for comprehensiveness. Currently ecocriticism is expanding, it promotes opportunities for critics from other schools and disciplines to enter and participate in its discussions, opening up rich opportunities for interdisciplinary study. Richard Kerridge suggests:

> The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as response to environmental crisis (qtd. in Garrd 4).

Ecocriticism validates how nature exists in literature. A literary text has always strong and larger outside issues to deliver as Foucault says in the first chapter of ‘Unities of Discourse’ of *Archaeology of Knowledge*, “The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut… it is a node within a network… The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative” (qtd. in Harris 125). Today the close relationship between the nature and surroundings of the human is being studied and highlighted in all branches of knowledge and progress. U. Sumathy writes in the preface of her book *Ecocriticism in Practice*,

> Literature can effectively create awareness about environment. None can deny the fact that along with issues like racism and feminism, it
is time for environmentalists to occupy centre stage. Just as postcolonialism champions the cause of the ‘other’, ecocriticism upholds the voice of the ‘nonhuman other’. With environmental problems mounting by the day, and when survival is at stake for planet earth, ‘eco’ has become the much south-after prefix for all fields, Literature included (Preface).

In this regard ecocriticism became the need of the hour as most critical theories. The literary critic in the field of ecocriticism attempts to research the interrelationship between nature and society and how it has been put into the texts by the writers. Our planet is being polluted by humans and their advanced technology. Nowadays, people invent innovations to make their lives easier. However, natural resources such as trees, animals and water are used as raw material to produce energy in order to improve or achieve their innovative projects. The more innovations are developed, the more environment is destroyed. In order to raise environmental awareness effectively, the process must start from the root. Children have curiosity in nature and always pay attention to their surroundings, so it is easier to start raising awareness among children. U. Sumathy writes in her book Ecocriticism in Practice, “It has been said that man does not inherit the world from his parents; he borrows it from is children. In order to ensure that, the world that is passed on to children is healthy one, man needs to preserve and protect the environment. In addition, he has to create awareness among children” (119). Primarily environmental awareness is main endeavour of ecocriticism. It is more effective and beneficial to strengthen awareness about environment from the early years of the children. Ecoerciticism is being discussed very less in world of Children’s Literature. Karen Lensnik-Obsestein comments her essay “Children’s Literature and Environment”
The tie between children and environment emerges primarily because John Locke’s belief in the existence of a true nature in a child. Locke’s implies that nature of child at once definable and real while it also mirrors the pure and simple nature of a child. This pairing of children and nature allows adult and parents and also writers for children to create a connection between the presence of nature and child’s own understanding (210).

Children’s literature and environmental criticism are well paired. If we wish to pass on a safe and healthy world to children then protection of environment will be an issue of immediate concern. Children’s and Young Adult literature’s role in regulating and reshaping adolescence has parallel associations with the literary construction of nature and our perceived relationship to it. Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy writes, in Zai Whitaker’s *Andamans Boys: A Critique of Postcolonial ‘Development’”*

One of the central tasks of postcolonial eco-criticism has been to contest western ideas of development (Huggan and Tiffin 27). These ideas, based on occidental consumerism, took root during colonization and continued thereafter in the new avatar of neo-colonization, resulting in the wiping out of the traditional societies by the dominant culture. Concern for indigenous people and the dangers to their environment has also pervaded the area of Children’s Literature (45).

Many Indian writers like Ruskin Bond, Ira Sexena, Deepak Dalal have written effectively on ecology for children. Indeed, wilderness settings have long been a strength of Indian adult fiction and no less so in our children’s fiction. There are lot of environmentally and ecologically oriented information books available in Children’s
literature in English in India. The Indian environment, possibly due to the unique qualities of its flora, fauna, geological formations and extreme weather patterns features as an integral part of Indian Children’s literature. There has been a proliferation of environmentally themed children’s books in India over the last few years of the twentieth century and in to the twenty first. We may say that increase in environmental thematic books published within last ten years has provided a rich source of texts for children and for research as well. The texts focus on an exploration of children’s development as an ecological subject. Such texts as the *Curse of Grass* (2010) by Ira Sexena and *Ranthambore Adventures* (1998) by Depak Dalal to name a few. Ira Sexena is the recipient of Shankar’s Silver Medal for Writing in 1996 and White Raven’s recognition in Germany in 2000. She is committed to the cause of Children’s literature in India and written extensively about the various aspects of Children’s Literature. She writes both in English and Hindi and has twelve books to her credit and numerous research articles on children’s literature in India and is a founding member and Secretary of the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC). She is involved in development of good literature for children in India. Her award winning books are, *The Virus Trap* (1998) *Gajmukta ki Talaash* and *Manmaji Mamaji*. Some other of her writings are *Island of Seagulls, Caught by Computer* (1988), *For the Green Planet* (1991) and other Non-Fiction and Picture Books.

**Curse of Grass (Ira Sexena)**

*Curse of Grass* by Ira Sexena is a story about a village’s rebellion for environmental protection. Through this story, she addresses the problem of depletion and decline of forest resources and makes an effort to create awareness against the coming ecological catastrophes, especially among the younger generation. The story is set in the eighteenth century, it is the story of the Bishnois of Ramsari and Khejarli villages, situated near
the lavish green Khejari forest of the Luni valley. The forest was full of greenery in the Thar Desert and loved and worshiped by the villagers. Plundering of the forest wealth and resources were common problems but the Bishnoi men took up arms to guard the Mother Nature against such evils. However, to protect the forest from being converted into a summer palace for Diwan Girdhardas, the Khejarli Village started the ‘Chipko Movement’, to save the trees and the wildlife. Initiated by young women, hundreds of villagers, both men and women, young and old, joined in and hugged the khejari trees protectively, to save them from being chopped off. What started as a peaceful protest against deforestation and desertification, soon led to bloodshed and hundreds of Khejarli villagers lost their lives.

Curse of Grass is told from the point of view of Gauri, a thirteen-year-old Bishnoi girl from Ramsari. She had grown up listening to the oral stories from her grandmother. It is through her the reader know about Bishnois and their interdependent affiliation with the forest.

No one dare to assault our forests and wild animals. Chopping a tree is the most grievous sin and killing animals worse than a heinous murder… We worship our forests. If we do not protect them and keep growing our forest territory, the desert will gulp all his greenery. Then, there will be no wild life, no firewood, farming, no crops and perhaps no Bishnois. We live as long as our faith lives (CoG3 8).

Bishnois as a community were complete against those who speculate to attack their forests and wild animals. According them cutting a tree or ransacking the forest resources is the most terrible sin. Forest for the Bishnois are religion. Sexena Writes

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3 Curse of Grass
Bishnoise were decedents of gallant Rajputs, men with true grit, the teachings of their Guru Jambeshwar Maharaj had detached them from battlefield to cultivation and preservation of Nature. Now, their main profession was farming and had turned into peaceloving people. Until driven against the wall, they did not think of lifting weapons (CoG 89).

Gauri along with other children and women protected this faith of her community and to prevent clashes between her tribe and the Diwan’s army, she took this responsibility to stop attack on the trees and animals. She received the support of her brother Bhinya and friends Bhagu and Ratni. The non-violent approach ‘Chipko’ was her brainchild. She is portrayed as a brave girl with an indomitable will. A strong personality, she inspired an entire village to contribute towards protecting the environment. Through the efforts of children the Bishnois were awarded the title ‘Guardians of the Forests’ (CoG 118) by the Maharaja.

Encouraged and motivated by eighteenth-century martyrs, Chipko was invigorated in 1970 by female hilly labourers from the Himalayas. Chipko is Gandhian in spirit, and gained fresh life under Sunderlal Bahuguna’s direction. Sasikala A.S writes in ‘Environmental Thoughts of Gandhi for a Green Future’ “The key agenda of the Chipko movement was that carrying forward the "vision of Gandhi’s mobilization for a new society, where neither man nor nature is exploited and destroyed, which was the civilizational response to a threat to human survival." All these together made Gandhi an exponent of Indian environmentalism” (Sasikala n.p).

*Chipko* is tree-hugging, a symbol for environmental conservation, both protection and renovation. Chipku activists believe that, “forests sustain society; thus society must sustain the forests” (Murphy, Gifford Yamazota 320). Gouri’s thoughts flows
reflectively when she thought, “Why die for the devil… if the situation demands thus and the trees are threatened just cling to the trees - Chipko! If they come to hack our trees – Chipko! Do not be scared, just Chipko! No arms, no violence is necessary for resistance. Surely, nobody can chop us off with the tree” (CoG 98). Chipko has become a constructive resistance of ecological struggle for the writer. When Diwan Girdhardas thought to axe down the kejari trees in order to make room for a summer palace, Amrita, the village headman’s daughter wants to kill herself before the Diwan’s eyes in order to save the trees. “Chipko will be our war cry… we will just cling to the trees. We won’t let them go and nobody will hurt the trees” (CoG 109). Amrita spoke loud and clear, “We won’t leave our tree. Chop our heads off first, before you touch our sacred sami... remain clinging. If khejari lives you live, if khejari dies you die. Jai Guru Jambeshwar Mahraj ki!” (111). In all, three hundred and twenty three Bishnoi’s laid down their lives at the altar of their faith, “Karmaji, his cousins and uncles, the entire Bhudiya clan lay dead amidst the prostrate khejari trees. Chipku! Chipku! Chipku!- they shouted offering their life”(CoG 123). The writer of the novel herself in the epilogue of the novel

The non-violent tree hugging has become a symbol for environmental conservation, both, protection and restoration. It aroused interest towards increased ecological awareness, hazards of deforestation and demonstrated the viability of people’s power in the winning control over their forest resources – a true gift of a women’s struggle, more than three hundred years old (CoG 128).

The title ‘Curse of Grass’ in the author’s words means that, “If the grass cursed the land, there will be no vegetation. No vegetation means no forests, no animals, no birds, no water- none of us” (CoG 72). The Bishnois were fighting for their forests to prevent
themselves from this very curse. But it proved to be strong enough to cause slow death of the Luni valley, which is now devoid of all forms of life.

The story begins to highlight various environmental issues that are staring at us in the face today. Many wildlife species are on verge of extinction due to poaching, despite a ban on it. The need for development and population pressure has been responsible for wide scale forest depletion and degradation. The problem of over exploitation of forests resources needs to be addressed more seriously now, otherwise soon other places will meet with the same fate as Luni valley. This message is clearly expressed in the book.

Look after your land – it is a precious gift of Nature. Tend to it, protect it – don’t let the curse of grass destroy it (CoG 70).

In the present day scenario, cutting of trees cannot be stopped entirely. Young readers learn from this narrative to plant more and more trees to balance out the loss because of timber needs. The story shows a path to children and young adults, and helps them to deal with this global concern. There is always a non-violent method of dealing with difficult situations. In Gouri’s words

No arms, no violence is necessary for resistance. We don’t need weapons to show our anger, we only need to get rid of our fear and show our resolve (CoG 98).

The writer believes that the youth have the power to show the way forward and find solution to conserve the environment. The author is urging the young blood to follow in Gouri’s footsteps to prevent our mother earth from becoming uninhabitable within the next few centuries. Amrita askes fellow children,

Are we going to sit and watch our sacred khejari being chopped?...We made a promise to our ancestors that we will worship our trees. Who will protect our deities, if we cannot? We grew up
under the shade of \textit{khejari}; our children desire the same too. Are we going to leave behind a barren land captured by the Thar demon? Just because another demon wants to have his way, must we submit?

There are our trees, our land” (CoG108).

\textit{Curse of Grass} is blend of Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism, and the narrative can be ecofeminist reading. Chipko moment is an example where women have taken part as activists in order to prevent depilation of the forests. Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy writes, “Women have been perceived, down the ages, as nurturers and protectors. Women have often taken on the role of activists, the Chipko movement being a prime example of their participation in the effort to prevent deforestation” (21).

According to Eco-feminists women and environments are interlinked together, the former is regarded as closer to nature and men are seen closer to culture. In India genesis of ecofeminism has long history, as in the words of Shiva,

Women environmental action in India preceded the UN Women’s Decade as well as the 1972 Stockholm Environment Conference. Three hundred years ago more than 300 members of the Bishnoi community in Rajasthan, led by women called Amrita Devi, sacrificed their lives to save their sacred ‘Khejri’ trees by clinging to them. With that event begins the recorded history of Chipko (qtd. in Jain 189).

The notion is prevalent in the narrative of \textit{Curse of Grass}. Set up at the time when women were considered to be much weaker than men and completely reliant on them, what Gouri did is praiseworthy. Brought up in a society where people believed that woman could not do anything except sacrifice herself, Gouri did not let herself down because this ideology. She showed great willpower to initiate a peaceful revolt. Ira
Sexena writes about the confidence of this girl child, “Surely we cannot fight a war but we are not weak. are we? We have the power to endure suffering. Don’t we? All we need is a strong will to resist. Let us decide that we will save our trees. There is no way left for the menfolk. It is for us to show the way now” (CoG108-109). The lead character Gauri has been created as a role model.

The author has used an oracular voice of a sage namely Muni in the novel, who informed them to protect Mother Nature, and warned about the curse of grass, “Nature is amazing. These forests are a wonder on earth. I am blessed having seen them and you all are blessed for protecting them, Muni uttered in deep voice… O, Children of Nature, both of you are blessed and those with you are blessed … I am pained to witness a ghastly scene of killing – the corpse of an innocent black buck….Muni explained in his cause of distress”(69). Children remained confused particularly Gauri who is a very sensitive child “Was the sudden appearance of the Muni a sign of things to come? Why did he come with the news of the black buck’s killing? What did he mean- don’t let the curse of grass destroy it? What is the curse of grass?” (CoG 71). Children are conscious and in search of answers throughout the narrative. She thought and wondered, “row of khejari trees created voluminous umbrellas of Nature for shelter. What would it be like, without these trees. Gauri had wondered many times?” (39). In the later part of the novel the prophetic voice comes to the mind of child Gauri when she saw, “the face of Muni appeared before Gauri’s eyes, and his words rang in her ears-You young ones... Protect your land... don’t let the curse of grass destroy it. For a long time, she remained silent, shivering with tearless sobs” (CoG 124). The author tried to convey the message that children has the ability and courage, as depicted through the two young girls and a five year old child who refuse to obey the commander who wanted to chop the trees, “Ratni and Bhagu pulled him away. They defied the commander. “We, Bishnois are not
cowards like you. We live for our faith and die for our faith, we do. Do we look old? If not, slash your swords because we will not let you chop our trees.” Then both of them let out their war cry – Chipko - and clung to the nearest tree” (CoG 122). Girls are more vocal as they are protecting the environment and against deforestation, and at the same time they oppose outside intervention of villagers particularly men who had economic, material relationship with trees.

A conscientious effort has been made to create a rhetorical effect. The story will be able to influence the thought and conduct of young readers so that they can help the environment in their own way. The author has written in a very articulate and eloquent writing style so that it may appeal to children. Words have a smooth flow and the story is well planned out. She has clearly expressed what she meant to say, and has a strong feeling about environmental issues. The writer replies in “Inside an author’s mind- Dr Ira Saxena” when asked what is important to write for children,

The Children’s Literature, unlike adult fiction, is purposive, educative, to a certain extent moralistic (the anti-hero does not become the hero) which is given to the reader like a sugar-coated pill, in the garb of entertaining and pleasure reading material. Honesty in writing impacts. Even in creating fantasies of parallel worlds, honest expressions and portrayal of characters emerge as the X factor. In realistic fiction, as I have been mostly sticking to, the plots picture reality in its true demeanour (“Inside” n.p).

The author gets poetic as well, and the message is clear as she writes in a rhythmic style in Sanskrit “Sarsate roonkh rakhe, tab bhi sasto jaan...(Take my head, let the tree live, A noble bargain for us to give)” (51). She further encourages children through this poem:
Two starlings from heaven, pretty ‘n shimmering
Fair as lilies, fragrant jasmine blossoms so enchanting.
Lovely Gauri, gorgeous Karmani, Raised in sami, lived in sami.
Joyful birdies of their father’s fold, Fawns of sami, doves in sami.
Delightful Gauri charming Karmani, lived among sami
The devil’s eye met the forest greens he loved
For his dream resort, a fine spot he fixed,
Clear the trees; his demon shattered the tribe,
Leave them! Begged the people offering every bribe
Pleaded Gauri tearful Karmani, Daughter of glorious sami
He raved and raged, the villain did not heed
Mercy for sami was not his creed
Tears and prayers shot up his ire
Two little finches danced inn bridal attire
Lovely Gauri fabulous Karmani, Darling girls of sami Unfeeling villain did not care
The girls of sami dare a glare
Thrust dagger in their heart, right in the village square
Fearless Gauri valiant Karmani, Precious darlings of sami
Victorious they lay silent in red, sleeping
Zooming into stars forever shining, forever shimmering
Dazzling Gauri stunning Karmani, Darling daughter of sami (CoG 52).
The objectives of the novel is to develop an interest in children for planting and protection of trees, and make them understand the function of forests and its resources, it also provides information of wildlife and its role in the context of global ecological balance. It places the children particularly young females at the centre and acts as an educator of the environment. Saxena writes at end of the novel:

The three friends got busy extracting the saplings. They spent their day collecting the sapling and planted them beyond the edge of the forest. Neither of them chatted as they always did. Rather a strange force of will quietly prompted them to work arduously, to counterbalance for the slain trees across Luni, to spread the forest cover (CoG 125).

Deepak Dalal is one of the main writers of Indian Children’s Literature today. He is a specialist on environment and wildlife. He has authored several adventure novels set in exotic locales of India. He aims at creating awareness for the environment at the grass root level by influencing young minds through his writing so that they are inspired to save our beautiful planet earth. The idea behind his writing is to create a connection between children and the ‘wilderness areas’ through the medium of adventure stories based in India. In one of the reviews of his novel Sahyadri Adventure: Anirudh’s Dream on ‘Buzzing Books’ Sajad Girdar writes:

As he writes with refreshing candour. His writing reflects a love for nature and a spirit of adventure. Importantly, he tries to do all of his with stories set in the India, with Indian characters, which makes his books all the more special, being his dream of offering Indian children stories about their own people, in our beautiful country (n.p).

Talking to India Today, Deepak says,
Children's fiction has a purpose … It would be very easy to write an urban adventure. But essentially I want to set my books in all the exotic locales in India… Through these books, children could be at one with the flora and fauna of the place - get the feeling of exploring some of the world's most beautiful coral reefs as in *Lakshadweep Adventure* or feel the thrill of a chase in the wildlife game sanctuary as in *Ranthambore* (Chowdhury n.p).

He further writes in “Creating Awareness of the Environment through Storytelling”

The aim of my work is to attempt to create a connection between our children and our wilderness areas. Resorting to management jargon here, jargon that I believe appropriate in this context: I will say that my primary objective is to ‘leverage’ the medium of an adventure story. My intentions is to tap the powerful potency of a story, to kindle a love for wilderness in the reader; to spark a bond between children and the environment; to create in them a genuine desire to save and conserve that remains (Dalal 76).

He is a fictional adventure writer who has written many interesting and famous books like, *Lakshadweep Adventure, Ranthambore Adventure, Ladakh Adventure, The Snow Leopard Adventure, Andaman Adventure — The Jarawa, Andaman Adventure — Barren Island* and *Sahyadri Adventure: Anirudh’s Dream.*

**Ranthambore Adventure (Deepak Dalal)**

*Ranthambore Adventure* is a thrilling adventure story of Vikram and Aditya who are considered as the ‘Hardy Boys’ in Deepak Dalal’s Adventure series novels. Vikram Singh and Aditya Khan are two young boys, intelligent, sensitive and skilled at solving mysteries. *Ranthambore Adventure* also narrates the story of the tigers, Genghis and
Padmini. Packed with tiger-lore, it traces the moments of Genghis’s life – from his birth as a feathery, helpless ball of fur, to his advent as a proud and authoritative predator. It begins with his birth and narrates how Genghis soon occupies a key place in the sequence of events. Dalal has succeeded in creating a great bond of empathy and concern for Genghis. He has created a bond, and the reader follows where the tigers go throughout the book. He skilfully created an atmosphere for child readers through his vivid description of the birth of two cubs in the very first chapter of the book:

The cubs were born sometimes during the cold season. On a chilly, misty morning, in a valley nestled between steep cliffs, the tigress choose a thick, leafy bush. As the sun climbed high and the mist dispersed, she gave birth to two squealing, whimpering balls of fur… the cubs did not open their eyes for a week… the cubs peered at the world around them with large, inquisitive eyes. The bush was alive with all forms of life (RA4 1).

Genghis’s fight for survival in a poacher-ridden world is consumed with a sense of urgency, as from the very beginning his mother was aware of the poachers. She took many great precautions to avoid predators, especially those of the twolegged variety, “the tigress was aware that humans in jeeps posed no threat to either her or her family. She trusted humans seated in vehicles, but humans on foot were another matter altogether” (RA 9). The narrative shifts then to two young boys namely Aditya Khan and Vikram. The story provides their young protagonists with a chance of redeeming the damage to the natural world that has been caused by the culture of humanity. The young adults in the novel are charged with the responsibility of recovering the damage which was caused by the poachers to tigers. Children like to see their heroes take on

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4 Ranthambore Adventure
problems and situations which adults too will find difficult to handle. In the Harry Potter books, without any help from adults, Harry and his friends, handle very difficult situations. Children’s writing and their expectation from their readings have evolved. Lesnik – Oberstein suggests, “Through its identification with the natural, and with the fulfilment of its own future as the adult it must become… the tradition has been invoked of the child, innocent and pure of perception, as enlightener and redeemer of the adult” (213). The damage to the wildlife is brought to their notice through Vikram’s father Uncle Govind or Govindh Singh, who heads the Wilderness Conservation India (WCI) Aditya informs Aarti “There are all sorts of people who slaughter wildlife. Some do it for meat, which is forgivable, Uncle Govind says, if forced by hunger. Many hunt simply for fun, which he says is unpardonable, but the worst part offenders by far are those that kill for profit. That’s where ‘Wilderness Conservation India’ steps in” (RA 15).

These children were curious to know about those who mutilate these forests and animals, and were stimulated when they heard words of Raveer who was Mr. Reddy’s (CFO Ranthambore National Park) deputy “the problem is that nobody cares. So what if few tigers die? So what if cattle graze in the forest? Who cares? The public doesn’t; the authorities don’t, and the judiciary ignores wildlife. No one is bothered! We forest officers often wonder why we take trouble. Why should Reddy saab risk his life if nobody is concerned? All has to do is turn a blind eye. Let the cows enter, a few tigers here and there – what does it matter? Certainly not worth dying for” (RA 83-84).

Dalal has developed an understanding for children, as he wanted to create an awareness among children and young adults, Most of the times children question, as Aditya asks, “What happened to that poacher you were after when I left? The man Uncle Govind called the master poacher. Did you capture him?” (RA 20). He further questions, “Why
is this man free? Can’t you arrest him if you know he is a criminal? .... You said the man possess a ton of tiger bones. Isn’t that enough to put him away?” (RA 22). Mørch believes “that we need to inspire children and support their curiosity in all ways so that they themselves experience the urge to act, to be engaged and to care, be it about nature or literature” and “if their engagement is rooted in their own enthusiasm, it is sustainable” (46). In one more opinion Bittu Sahgal. Editor, Sanctuary Asia magazine writes about Ranthambore Adventure:

I am convinced that books like Ranthambore Adventure will make a difference. They foster within children a much needed sympathy for wildlife. It is the young generation of today that will dictate the future of our forests and sanctuaries. Our task is to prime them correctly now and the story Ranthambore Adventure, in my opinion, is a valuable tool in this endeavour (RA).

Out of curiosity they come to know about the master of the poachers, Shankar Chand, who has killed more than fifty tigers, stocked and collected the bones from them and transported them to Chinese dealers at huge profits:

Chand hated the forest and all the creatures. He was descended from a princely family. One of his ancestors had single-handedly killed more than three hundred tigers in his lifetime. His father and grandfather had been great hunters too. But Chand was afraid of all forms of wildlife. He despised animals. His fear was deep-seated and irrational. His father had tried to help him overcome his terror. He had often dragged his reluctant young son into forests, along this same path. He had shown him the various denizens of Ranthambore’s wild and beautiful word and had patiently explained that animals
were scared of humans. Tigers, leopard, bear … name any animal; large or small it mattered not, they all backed away from humans (RA 161).

It was the effort and energy of these children; Aditya, Vikram and other young ones who caught the big fish, Shankar Chand, “Shankar Chand, the greatest poacher of them all, was lying in the grass, curled in a tight ball. His head was buried in his arms and even from the distance Vikram could see that his body was shaking… Genghis had humbled the poacher. The tiger had won the encounter without even trying. Shankar Chand had passed out” (RA 167). Shankar Chand is based upon a real life character, Sansar Chand, known to have joined the trade at the age of thirteen. Sansar was in headlines in most of the renowned papers and magazines of India and on NDTV’s in 2013” “Jailed for killing hundreds of tigers, Sansar Chand to walk free”, Times of India “Sansar Chand, notorious tiger poacher, dead” Indian Express, “Cancer kills poacher Sansar Chand who wiped out Sariska tigers”.

The novel ends with a big question whether these forests and animals would remain in peace, and would humans let them live in tranquillity, “Vikram looked at the cubs. The three young ones were playing without a care in the world, happy and content in the presence of their mother. If no one interfered in their lives, the animals would live. They would grow to be the future rulers of the forests. But would they be left alone…? Would the peace and tranquillity of the forests remain…? Vikram had no answers. Only time would tell” (RA 173). In Deepak’s own words:

Animals and birds are doubtless the main draw of a forest, but there is more. No forest experience is complete without absorbing the peace and tranquillity of a wilderness area. Imagine the absence of the rumble of traffic, of the bustle of humanity, of the drone of
engines and motors that run our world. Take in instead the rustle of
the wind through the trees, the call of birds and animals, and the
serenity of a forest. Understand what primal human beings enjoyed
and what cities and civilisation have robbed us of – the grandeur of
nature (Sharma).

Dalal’s stories are set in wilderness areas. Some of these wilderness zones are chosen
as national parks and some aren’t. Children who live in urban areas know very little
about hill areas and wilderness. The settings Dalaal has selected help build a bond
between children, ecology and environment. The stories generate love for wilderness
amongst youngsters. Dalal spoke in an interview, “I noticed that there are hardly any
Indian writers in the adventure story space. To imbibe good adventure stories our
children are forced to read books by foreign authors that are set in countries that are
alien to them and that they might never visit. I thought this to be a shame, especially
since India can be such a vibrant setting for stories, given its fabulous diversity in people
and geography” (Khattar n.p). He further says,

I decided to use this wonderful canvas that is India as the backdrop for
my stories. Accordingly, I have written books set in the Lakshadweep
Islands; in the Andaman Islands, at Ranthambore, in Ladakh, and in the
Sahyadri range of mountains (the Western Ghats). The aim here is that
through my stories children can learn about India’s fabulous
destinations and its diverse peoples….I have carefully researched these
stories and presented facts of what is happening to our wilderness areas
to our children. In addition, I have also tried to communicate my deep
love for Nature to my readers. Today, most of our children are born in
cities and rarely travel beyond them. They know little about Nature and
will probably see no reason to protect them when they grow older. My stories, in a sense, are an attempt to create a bond between children and wilderness areas (n.p).

Writings of these writers above analysed offer varying portraits of the Indian environment that tap into the idea of multiple perspectives of Indian histories, cultures, and environments. The authors exhibit how children are empowered to develop their identity, take solace, or validate their place in the world through their presence and interaction with the natural environment. Nature functions in these novels as a sustaining force and educate the young ones. These stories depict physical movements from the historical land of Bishnois of Ramsari and Khejarli to Ranthambore sanctuary, albeit in different directions and/or for different purposes for children.

These stories validates eco-critical analysis as seen in the interaction between character and setting, portrayals of the landscape, flora and fauna; portrayal of eco-friendly and eco-activist behaviour as well as in depiction of ecological problems such as animal-human encounters and poaching.

Ruskin Bond has also written widely on nature. He is India’s foremost writer for children and young adults. British Indian by birth, he is truly an ‘Indian’ writer whose stories emerge from Indian context, especially from the small Himalayan towns and villages that surround him. The natural scenic hills of Dehradun and Mussoorie almost invariably form the setting of his works and reflect his enthusiastic faith in the healing powers of nature, “having grown up in the hills, in the lap of nature… in once idyllic Mussorie, Kasauli, Shimla, Dehradun and Jamnagar… no one understands nature like Ruskin Bond and it takes his ability to put this wonder into words. He is indeed nature’s favourite child” (Reddy 172). Bond’s profound and enduring love for nature, his simply approach to living, and his mild and gentle behaviours find a magnetic presence and
voice in his writings. Hence, his distinctive trait as a writer for children is a pure and simple style which pervades his plots, characterization, and prose. Through his writing for children, Bond explores his own and his protagonists’ changing relationship with the Himalayas from the freedom of childhood to a deep love and communication with the various manifestations of nature. He is known as the “pioneer of modern Children’s Literature in India” (Aggarwal 86). Titles like ‘The Coral Tree’, ‘Flames in the Forest’, ‘The Prospect of Flowers’, ‘The Last Tiger’ ‘The Cherry Tree’, ‘My Father’s Tree in Dehra’, The Leopard, Sita and the River’, ‘When You Can’t Climb Tree Any More’, Dust on the Mountains and Garland of Memories’ shows children’s affinity to nature and somehow these titles engage children’s psyche to ecology and develop their consciousness, about nature playing pivotal role in their lives.

Ruskin Bond’s writing shows ecology not only as an important or dominant theme, but there is also fear and concern for natural decline that is happening now a days. Children are introduced to the world of nature in stories of Bond, they gain awareness about the protection of the environment which paves way for their overall healthy development. In *The Adventures of Rusty* children run away from the regiment of British boarding school in Shimla to discover the mysterious world of nature. They explore the Himalayan jungles, splash through mountain streams, and have close contact with wildlife. Their young lives are charmed as they travel long distance through these mountains. Through his short stories for children Bond has tried to transfer an important message to everyone, that is, the importance of nature in our life. Environmental stories like ‘Panther’s Moon’, ‘Dust on the Mountain’ and ‘Tigers Forever’ emphasise the necessity of living in harmony with nature. Ambhika Bhatta writes:

> Through his short stories for children he has tried to convey the importance of nature in our life. In his ‘An Island of Trees,’ through
the story that the grandmother reveals to her granddaughter, Koki, Ruskin emphasizes the importance of the deep bond that grows between humans and nonhumans, only if there exists love and compassion between them. Similarly, ‘No Room for a Leopard’ is the story of deforestation and its accompanying aftermath. It also presents the predicament of the animals after deforestation. In ‘Copperfield in the Jungle,’ the author shows his abhorrence towards unjustified hunting for pleasure. ‘The Tree Lover’, ‘The Cherry Tree’, ‘All Creatures Great and Small’ and many others are the depictions of the chain which binds man and nature, like the chain of ecosystem, showing their interdependence. Ruskin’s basic mission in his stories is to emphasize the friendly relationship between man and nature. He has brought before us our need for each other in his works. Thus, his works are replete with pity for the unsympathetic and cruel attitudes of human beings towards nature (3-4).

Nature always exists in his works with all its vivid vibrating and comforting forms. Child protagonists of Bond find solace in nature’s peaceful embrace, its importance, and take refuge in the lap of nature. Child characters in his stories love to play, and take shelter beneath nature. The whispering and murmuring sounds of small rivers and streams, muttering sound of the wind, swirling of dry leaves and grass and the shadow of clouds on the ancient Mussorrie hills captivate the readers’ mind and soul’s eye. Bond is genius at depicting nature.

Eco-writing in the form of children’s literature heightens environmental literacy. Through Bond’s stories children are made aware of the preservation of the environment. It encourages the children to get involved with the environment and improve their
knowledge of environmental concepts. Mr Dinesh A. Borse concludes his paper, “A Study of Ruskin Bond’s Selected Short Stories in the Light of Ecocriticism” writing

...let alone the writer’s ecological consciousness implied in the stories. Actually, in such an ecological-crisis-ridden time, it is very realistically significant to analyze Frost’s ecological consciousness, as he is still widely read even today. ‘Copperfield in the Jungle’, ‘No room for a Leopard’, and ‘Dust on the Mountain’ are all about the great chain of being which binds man and nature, as in the chain of ecosystem, showing interdependence and all-inclusiveness which emphasizes on the eco-friendly, cohabitative and symbiotic relationship between man and nature (113).

These stories aim to educate its readers about the bounties of nature and how man’s unthinking destruction is depriving the earth of its wealth in terms of wildlife and natural resources. The author has managed to do it in his simple and easy style, using everyday incidents to impress the need for environment protection among the young readers. In the process of inculcating the need for environment protection, he gives a wealth of information about rare species of wildlife, which are in danger of becoming extinct.

Children’s literature can be an effective medium to illuminate environmental consciousness. Children’s literature with a touch of ecological issues can help promote eco-consciousness among the future generations. It will be highly beneficial because if children are encouraged to explore nature from childhood, they will not face the dangerous experiences in future. Children’s literature, interweaved with ecological issues, can strengthen and provide the most valuable service to humanity. As Stephens claimed:
Children’s fiction belongs firmly in the domain of cultural practices which exist for the purpose of socialising their target audience. Childhood is seen as the crucial formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it . . . (8).

There are lots of books available in Indian market these days which have a strong power to create environmental consciousness among children. Among them the best books are, *Tigers for Dinner* by Ruskin Bond, *Snow Leopard* by Deepak Dalal *Children of the Enchanted Jungle* by Timeri Murari. The strength of these books play a vital role to counter the catastrophe that ecology faces. The children of this country will soon be responsible for the vast challenge of shielding nature and respecting the right of its habitants. It is through books they will get the asset and the stimulation to battle for the survival of the environment.

4.3: Gender Role, Representation of Girl and their Voices in Indian Children’s Literature in English

Children in every culture learn to obtain particular roles and behaviours as part of the socialization process. Many of these behavioural roles are based on identification with a particular sex. The development of gender role identity is important to children's self-perception, and it influences the way children are treated by adults and peers, affecting the expectations that others have for their behaviour. The gender identity of most children is shaped by the universally shared beliefs about gender roles that are held by their society. These shared beliefs often take the form of oversimplified gender role stereotypes. As Pam Gilbert (1994) has pointed out, “by entering into the storylines of their cultures, children come to ‘know’ the range of possibilities available for femininity and masculinity. It is through this ‘constant repetition and layering [that] story patterns
and logic become almost naturalized as truths and common sense” (qtd. in Trousdale 127–128).

Children’s literature has many purposes and utilities. As a means of passing on social standards and customs, children’s literature can be seen as reflecting the ideals of society and the intrinsic partialities within it. The established gender role stereotypes shared by society form the gender identity of children. Kathryn Jacobs writes:

For many years a bias has existed against young adult literature. The writing was considered simple and the plots of little real substance. As with any genre of literature, some young adult novels could still be described as such. Today, however, this is not the norm. Presently there are many books written by talented authors that explore a variety of important issues (1).

Gender roles are significant and play an important role in the reading choices of young boys and girls. Children receive a large amount of information in their impressionable early years, and this contributes to the development of their social identities. Problems arise when children are offered stereotypical constructions of masculinity and femininity that may constrain their development at an early age.

The process children go through when constructing their gender roles is an important part of their knowledge construction. In fact, gender is considered "the basic dimension" through which children identify their place in society (Taylor 310).

Gender role stereotyping is the identification of social norms with natural characteristics of males and females as if these were dependent on physiological characteristics. The view that sex roles are innate has been challenged in both children’s Literature and society since the late 1960s. Jack Zipes writes,
The distinctiveness of Children’s Literature across such a range of elements substantially shapes critical practice. On the one hand, it defines the field of concern within particular parameters, and on the other hand it tacitly discourages routine adoption of critical approaches grounded in complex theory. A pertinent example is feminist theory: from the mid-1970s, feminist analyses of the nature of gender inequality prompted studies of gender politics and power relation in children’s literature (365).

The beginning of the seventies conveyed a close examination of children's books in terms of the roles for boys and girls. Earlier to this, little or no thought had been given to the conscious or unconscious roles children were learning through their literature. Not only literature but textbooks were very influential in the conditioning of girls and boys regarding their traditional and expected gender roles. Thus, Children’s literature also began responding to such changes in the society through stories and books that gave female characters a reasonable representation.

“Heroism is gendered”. Writes, Margery Hourihan “this is readily apparent in C.S. Lewis’ Narnia stories in which both girls and boys are transported into Narina to play heroic roles, but the girls are required to behave exactly like the boys: they become proficient with bows and arrows, take part in the fighting and never give in to weakness” (68). Female heroism was not seen as interesting in India, and traditional Indian oral stories which were often told to children tended to represent women in lower status, or as being less heroic. Female heroism has been degraded and devalued ever since the emergence of hunting oral narratives. Diti Vyas writes, in ‘Intersectional Analysis of Gender in Indian Children’s Literature: Comparison of Novels Written in English and Gujarati’
In line with the observations of Ipsita Chanda, Maitrayee Chaudhuri and Sunder Rajan, Superle argues that the new girlhood in ICLE (Indian Children’s Literature in English) novels perpetuates class hegemony insofar as empowered inspirational status is exclusively granted to the urban, middle-class girls. She discusses how these girls use their bodies, voices and clothing to become ‘a new girl’ and contribute to nation building, improve lives, strengthen relationships and negotiate between modernity and tradition (159).

These tales were entirely about masculine encounters, because women’s role was to give birth, stay at home with their children, and provide an audience for men’s stories. Rizia Begum Laskar discusses in “Negotiating Home in Indian English Children’s Literature: A Study of the Selected Works of Ruskin Bond, Arup Kumar Dutta, Anita Desai, Shahi Deshpande, and Salman Rushdie”

Thus it can be categorically said that when children’s literature first made its beginnings in India, it was essentially a gender biased literature aimed specifically at the male child, who represents not only the hopes and aspirations of the family but also of the nation. In such a context, the concept of national identity and Indianness reinforces itself to be treated seriously in the works for children. And to a large extent this can be seen to be the accepted trend in the early writings when children’s literature in India made its beginnings mainly through the Bengali writers (Laskar 33).

Children’s oral and traditional stories in India often represented exalting men and boys as heroes while girls and women were too passive and submissive to be heroic. These oral narratives therefore featured young men carrying out heroic deeds. This
characteristic of oral narratives was transported to written children’s fiction because many of these stories begin with the notion that the hero is male. Dr Sulabha R. Devpurkar,

In the different categories of stories, there was for a long time one common trait. The absence of a girl character or her very marginal appearance along with the other characters is a common feature in the stories till very recent times. The hero of the adventure stories was invariably a boy. With the beginning of girl’s education, there appeared a need for different books for girl readers (57).

The appearance of feminism encouraged the freeing of the female figure from male-controlled penchants and other systems of subordination in both the traditional and modern society, and made literature one of the tools for proposing these redeeming paths. Children’s literature in India also responded to such changes in society through writing books that gave female characters a reasonable representation.

In many ways, India seems to have embraced gender equality wholeheartedly. Not only does its constitution promise equal rights to all citizens; the nation was also led by a woman prime minister, Indira Gandhi, from 1966 through 1977, and then again from 1980 to 1984.6 Further, many middle- and upper class girls and women, particularly those living in urban areas, participate fully in educational opportunities and professional careers, apparently on equal ground with boys and men (Superle 44).

Most of the traditional stories of past like Panchatantra and Mahabharata were laden with animal stories and adult characters, and these had very few female characters. The
girl child was completely ignored and hardly present in these stories and the male was the centre of attention. Devika Rangachari writes,

Traditional and cultural constraints have made the development of a modern ‘young adult literature’ difficult in India, hence the very applicability of the term is debatable in the Indian context. As a consequence, gender as an issue in books for children in English in India was not considered particularly significant until very recently (Rangachari).

Traditional Children's books frequently portrayed girls as acted upon rather than active. Stories of demons, gods and fairy tales with happy, moralistic endings probably formed a memorable part of your childhood. “You may remember reading these stories, but do you remember asking why the princesses were always soft-spoken, swooning, fair-skinned women waiting to be rescued?” (Mantri n.p). Girls were represented as sweet, naive, conforming, and dependent, while boys typically described as strong, adventurous, independent, and capable. Sharda Iyer writes, “Rousseau’s prescription has no hope for the girl child. She is deprived of the limitless joys of childhood experiences which implies growing up before one’s time. This impression strengthened when one reads the ancient Indian Literature. There are no girl children as leading characters or for that matter, a character making its presence felt.” (Iyer 60). Children’s Writer Manorama Jafa writes that:

In traditional Indian Literature for children, the ideal woman is sweet-natured and one whose mere presence brings happiness to her husband and to all around her. She is always contended and never brings to her mind even the image of any other person save her own husband, whom she worship as God...if there is heaven on one side
and the happiness of her husband on the other, she chooses to vote for the latter, and does not betray her husband even under the worst possible circumstances (3).

It is clear that gender stereotypes are visible in Indian traditional society, “gender bias in the attitude of Indian parents is evident unfortunately even in the present-day social structure” (Srinivasan 111). It is well prevalent also in Indian children’s fiction and oral tales. The following portion of this writing examines whether the selected texts from children’s fiction suggest any form of empowerment or liberation from the traditional fixation, or from the already established stereotyped literary tradition.

The role of a child is often distorted and the conventional demands are imposed upon the individuals from the young age. The social surroundings of the child decide what actions of a child hero and heroine are praiseworthy and what the blemishes (Devpurkar 59).

Change was seen in the publishing houses with regard to avoiding stereotypes in children’s literature, “Sometimes an unthinking society needs a bit of a shake; in the 1970s children’s book publishers had several. The first, ironically, came from the Women’s Movement” (Clark 70). It was only after 1990s that the girl child was on forefront in literature in India when SAARC countries took up the issue of girl child. Prema Srinivasan writes “In 1990, the SAARC countries celebrated the “Year of the Girl Child” and, since then, there has been a spate of writing protesting that women and children has been “invisible” too long particularly in the under-developed countries” (110). Other occasions like The International Womens Year (1975), the Year of the Child (1979), the International year of the Girl Child (1991) and Decade of the Girl Child (1990 - 2000) have all contributed to creating a new awareness about the status of the girl in society. Prema Srinivasan writes,
In 1990, the SAARC countries celebrated the “Year of the Girl Child” and, since then, there has been a spate of writing protesting that women and children have been “invisible” too long, particularly in the underdeveloped countries. Ardent exponent of feminism have been suggesting for decades ways of escape from physical and psychological entrapment which has been their lot hitherto (110).

The above mentioned conferences have greatly influenced the writers who write for children. These last two decades have seen a drastic change in portraying the girl child in children’s literature in India.

Most of the writers are female writers who have highlighted gender issue in their writing. Michelle Superle has named this girl as “New Indian Girl” and writes, “Indian women authors have begun to create children’s novels which refute this pattern, in particular by positioning girls as capable of contributing to national goals. In this sense, most of the novels by women Indian children’s authors can be considered a form of feminist children’s literature” (38). She further writes, “The imagined new Indian girl in children’s novels by Indian women writers counters traditional portrayals and questions traditional images of girls and women, replacing them with empowered girls as the new role models” (Superle 48).

The texts in contemporary children’s literature in English which support hegemonic constructions of gender ignore the presence of the girl and projects her as passive and weak by making them marginal. In contemporary Indian children’s literature in English, feminist ideology is validated through the occurrence of girl characters and the pursuit of gender equality. Jennifer Earles, writes in, ‘Reading gender: a feminist, queer approach to children’s literature and children's discursive agency’, “One of the primary
jobs of any feminism is to critique hegemony and to improve the lives of women/girls” (3).

There are abundant writers who are aware of this issue and have portrayed the Indian girl as active, strong, independent and capable and have broken the stereotypes. Dr Sulabha R. Devpurkar writes

The stories with new set ups and urban background are not always free from myths of different types. Shashi Deshpande, along with a beginning of the art of storytelling through her novels has brought a change in the perspective towards girl child and role in the childhood adventures and fun. She is quite near Enid Blyton. Girl behaving like boys is not her image of child girl (61).

The Indian girl portrayed in the stories of children’s stories represent anti ‘subject positions’ notion of Foucault which are provided by social discourses. For Foucault, “subjects are positioned by hegemonic discourses in terms of status, power, and legitimate knowledge. This helps determine their interpretation of self, world, and others” (qtd in Earles 11).

The 1990’s Indian children’s literature has seen a drastic change in portraying girl child. Indira Ananthakrishna’s Nivedita New Home and Other Stories (1991) depicts the girl child as having potential to rise to new challenges, and should be given the same opportunities as her counterpart. The Exquisite Balance (1987) by Poile Sengupta, The Modern Short Stories (1990) by Vijaya Ghose, and Heroes Never Die (1992) by Sigrun Srivatasava are all stories with contemporary setting, dealing with themes related to girl child of India. Some women writers of 1990s who have contributed for Indian Children’s Literature in English are Shashi Deshpande’s A Summer Adventure (1978), The Hidden Treasure (1980); The Only Witness (1980) and The Narayanpur Incident

The books that will be discussed here are *The Battle for No. 19* (2007) by Ranjit Lal and *Go Girl Go Beyond Boundaries* (2015) by Deepa Agarwal.

**The Battle for No. 19 (TBN519) by Ranjit Lal**

Ranjit Lal’s feminist novel *The Battle for No. 19* (2007), features a group of strong girls cooperating to survive and help others in the 1984 Delhi riots. Ranjit Lal born (1955) in Kolkata, is one of the prominent faces of contemporary English-language fiction for children and young adults. Besides being a novelist, he is a freelance writer and columnist. Ranjit Lal is a freelance writer cum columnist for over two decades, has written over 1,000 articles, short stories, features and photo features that have been published in over 50 newspapers and magazines. He says his books are “for everyone from age 10 to 100.” His books include *The Crow Chronicles, Faces in the Water, Battle for No.19* and *Mostly Birds, Some Monkeys and a Pest, Bad Moon*

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5 *The Battle for No. 19*
Rising, Miracles and The Secret of Falcon Heights. His works are marked by humour and satire. His book, "Faces in the Water" won the 2010 Crossword - Vodafone Award for Children's Fiction and the Ladli Media Award for Gender Sensitivity 2011–2012.

The Battle for No. 19 sketches the worries that youngsters predominantly girls face in day today’s world. The setting and background of the book is 1984 Sikh uprisings in Delhi, and “features a group of strong girls cooperating to survive and help others in the 1984 Delhi riots” (Superle 48). It gives its teenage readers a look into the grave and dangerous world of terrorism. The cover page of the book writes, “A gripping and powerful story, The Battle for No. 19 highlights the moral dilemmas of young people in today’s world – where violence erupts round every corner, and the lines between right and wrong runs dangerously thin.” (TBN19 Cover Page). Eight schoolgirls arrive in Delhi from the hills on an educational tour the very day Indira Gandhi was assassinated. They are trapped and wedged unexpectedly in the middle of a bloody war that threatens to jeopardise their lives. Devika Rangachari writes,

A group of schoolgirls, caught in the middle of mindless communal violence, seeks refuge in an abandoned house and fights to keep savage human marauders at bay. This gender sensitive book maps the emotional journey of the girls, who must draw on unknown reserves of courage and ingenuity to survive, and of Puja, their leader, in particular. Puja, already deeply troubled by her uneasy relationship with her father, must battle fear, self-doubt and overwhelming odds in a personal Odyssey (Rangachari n.p).

There are only female characters within the periphery of the story, and a feminine ethos prevails in the story through characters, who do not rely on a stereotypically masculine kind of power. The narrative opens with the portrayal of eight
girls that create a peaceful setting. The girls between the age of eight to sixteen, on their way home after an educational trip, are driving into Delhi. The laughter and jokes they share, the healthy respect they have for their teacher and their families, left behind in the hills, all form the contours of settings familiar to them. Ranjit Lal describes the girls:

Squashed between Sheetal and Ritika on the middle-row seat of the jeep, twelve year-old Payal nudged Ritika… Ritika, just a year younger and the baby of the group, giggled and tucked her peppermint into one cheek… Sangita, dark with teeth so brilliantly white, Payal had once asked her if she cleaned them with surf. Her own elder sister Seema, with the same whiskey-coloured eyes…Ritika’s older sister Gauri with her placid, oval face, so, so complacent-looking – almost sheep like… And Jaya, with that weird ‘spaced-out’ stare of hers (TBN 19 1).

Ranjit Lal has portrayed these girls as being strong and resilient who are caught in the violence of riots. The girls show their strength even when their parents were reluctant to send them for the education trip only because they are girls. As Payal remembers, “when Aruna Ma’am had come to ask permission for this wonderful ‘history tour’ of Delhi and Agra (and Fatehpur Sikri, of course) that she wanted to take her and other girls on, armed to teeth with reasons why they should be allowed to go, Papa had completely taken the wind out of her sails with his dismissive indifference…. Aruna Ma’am had had a much harder time with the parents of the other girls. Straight- backed and determined, she had stormed into their homes and bulldozed, browbeaten, cajoled, sweet-talked, out argued and flattered their parents into letting go away”(3). The reluctance of the parents clearly shows how the girls are not allowed freedom as
compared to boys. In a way we can say these girls’ attempts to proceed beyond stereotypes traditionally limiting female roles. They captures the spirit of female Indian innovator and are able to break gender restrictions.

From the moment their smiling and jovial Sikh driver Kartar Singh is dragged out and brutally murdered by a furious mob, they are forced to battle one challenge after another. The mob of thirty men loaded with weapon and lathis chant, the anthem of the devil “[Emphasized in text] Khoon ka badla khoon! Khoon ka badla khoon!” (8). Kartar Singh’s murder leave them all alone without any assistance and support. Kartar Singh shouts and screams at the girls when he was caught and blood was gushing down his head “What are you waiting for, girls? Get out there! Run! ... Get out...run! Run! Go” (8-9). Frequent words like, “Time to go! Now...Come on! Everyone out! Now... Come on! Out of here.... [Emphasized in text] Don’t panic and don’t scream! You panic now everything will scatter like peanuts out of a paper bag. And get out of here! Go!.... No time.... Come on!” (9-10)., indicates that the writer tried to make an environment and setting for the plot and the survival of the girls without the interference of the male world.

Lal initially in the story described girls as innocent and helpless against strength of the mob of men and to set the platform so that readers can be impressed by the courage of the girls at the end. Primarily they question their abilities which prove them to be confident by the end of the story, “Will any of us ever be able to actually use these? Will we be able to throw a spear at someone or stab and slash at them with these words and daggers? Aim an arrow at them? God, please don’t make us find out...” (TBN 41). There was another question, “What could they, eight schoolgirls, do against twenty-five rioters? Most of them had never seen a real sword, forget about knowing how to use one” (43). The author shows the girl characters stereotypically “prone to
emotion” such as helplessness. In order to avoid and repel such kind of helplessness they initially engage themselves in entertainment and birthday parties, “In a very short time, the dining room was looking quit festive as they tied bunches of balloons to the chairs and fans. “[Emphasized in text] This must be most bizarre and ludicrous impromptu birthday party ever, even crazier than the Mad Tea Party. We are hiding from goondas who want to burn us alive with flaming tyres, and are now having a midnight birthday party” (TBN 105). These kind of parties and amusements gives a clear cut message to people in general. The celebration of birthday, while they are held hostage in No. 19 is an additional example of the manner in which sentiments are used to help the girls come to terms with the extraordinary way in which the world around them has become infuriated.

A midnight birthday party for Jaya in the house of a missing millionaire whose little children have been hiding from us and everybody else for two days in the barsati of their own house … while the good citizens of the great capital of India dragged people out of cars and burnt them alive and played host to primeval mobs that has chased both these little children and us to this house… When, how, would this end” (TBN 108).

It was a sense of understanding among the girls they deluded the intentions of the mob when they wanted to enter in the Sikh house, by unscrewing and playing anagrams on the nameplate at the main gate of the Sikh house. It was their intelligence and wisdom they changed “19 RAVINDER SINGH SODHI POONAM M MALICK” to “19 SRI SWAMI RAO MP CONG I” (37-39). The owner’s name can help identify them as belonging to the Sikh community and make the house a target for the rioters. They didn’t stand still but investigated, probed and questioned throughout while they
stayed in the house. For a short period of time the girls felt safe, and unravel the reason for the riots, “completely entranced by the magical Rashana Room (which is what they called it), they had temporary forgotten the traumatic events that had chased them here.” (21). That relaxed and safe feeling disappeared the moment when one of the girls switched on the TV and learnt, “Indhra Gandhi had been shot by her Sikh bodyguards and later died… so that is why they went after poor Kartar uncle… they are going after the Sikhs!” (22).

Later in the book Lal explores the female “power”, and highlights the importance of the strong role for girls in society. As a consequence, the girls started to change, taking on more conventionally masculine traits and undergoing challenges usually associated with bildungsroman protagonists. This paved the way for female characters in Indian children’s books to be more assertive and strong. Lal describes how these girls started to think and use the different kinds of weapons, “Four swords – two have broad curving blades and the other two, long and narrow ones. Six daggers, four of which have these funny handgrips and triangular blades. The two others are more ordinary, but have stunning hilts…. Two pairs of bows and arrows, two spears and one battle-axe – which is mine! And two exquisite shields… Wow! That’s more than we can handle,” (51). The innocent and inexperienced girls turned into courageous girls. Puja the frontrunner of the group orders, “Okay, so that means six of us have to be armed. Each of us gets dagger – we can tie our dupattas around our waists like sashes and stick them in. Sheetal, you take the axe and a spear, Sangita, Seema, Gauri and Jaya you each take sword. I’ll take the other spear, and a bow and arrow” (TBN 52). At this moment Puja’s thoughts go back to school where the girls were told by the trained monks and Lama that bows and arrows are not meant for girls. She thought,
She had casually picked up a bow and loosed off three reed arrows in quick succession and crowded them whock! whock! whock! Dead in the centre of the small circle of red in the straw bale target, thirty meters away... A deathly hush fell on the young monks who had seen this, and then the lama had charged out, apoplectic, shouting (most un-lama-like) that girls must never, never pick up a bow and arrow, it was inauspicious, the god would be displeased, but had stopped dead in his tracks, eyes goggling when he had seen where her arrows gone... (TBN 53).

Lal continuously in the story generates Pujas’ thoughts regarding discrimination of girls at every step of their lives in and outside of the home, “Just as Lama Dorji had given her, after she had sent those first three arrows, wock! wock! wock! Dead centre into the target. His apoplectic rage – ‘girls must never, never pick up a bow and arrow!’ – had melted in the shock, even as she had mumbled and apology and hastily put down the bow and arrow” (TBN 90). The girls wanted to learn archery but societal pressure did not allow them to do so. Michelle Superle writes,

No matter how much physical freedom and strength girls are shown to have, there are checks at work. For example, in children’s novels published in India girl characters are often told by their male peers to stay home during activities deemed unsuitable for girls. The girl ignores such advices and participate regardless, offering unique and invaluable information, cooperation, and physical contribution to help solve the problem at hand and enhance their communities, thus fulfilling national aspirations as equally valuable citizens” (162).

Same is the case with Puja, Lal peeps into the mind of the girl and writes her thoughts:
[Emphasized in text] “I’ll have to ask my father” . . . ‘but I would love to learn.’ It had been a soothing balm – the act of picking up the bow, pulling the string back the arrow against the cheek and aiming. Everything fell away and all the tensions was channelled into the bowstring and then released so gently- not at all like a tantrum or hysterical flood of tears. Just a velvety ‘pfft’ and the arrow was on its way . . . ‘what? Archery? What the hell for? Had been Pap’s response- and what are you trying to prove? . . . ‘Go if you want to but take someone along’ (TBN 90).

Further thoughts occupied Puja’s mind, the girl whom all others looked up to in moments of a crisis, battles her own monsters as she wonders, “Papa? Would he care? Or would he just shrug in that hateful indifferent way of his and stalk out of the room as he had done when I told him I had won the archery tournament and he pretended he hadn’t heard? . . . I knew something like this would happen, I knew it... what will everyone say. . . A girl missing in Delhi for two nights . . . Running wild . . . who would marry her now?” (TBN 113). This ostensible uncertainty in Puja’s thoughts only helps to throw into relief her cool headed determination to combat the rioters.

Girls throughout the story became strong in their will. They tackle every hard situation cleverly and are determined in their will, and plan strategies against the mob of strong men, whom they fought and succeed. The girl characters in the story are able to exceed female stereotypes by embracing and celebrating certain characteristics traditionally gendered as feminine. Sheetal one of the girls fought with a spear against one of the attackers, “she raised the spear high with both hands and brought its flat surface down on his head, using it like a lathi rather than a spear . . . it caught him squarely on the head, making him reel back dazed, drop the iron rod and fall flat on his
back…. The world whirled for a bit, before steadying again so that he could focus. The
girl was standing on top of him, the spear poised, ready to plunge into his throat.” (TBN
124) The man attacked them a third time but all his attempts were in vain. This time it
was Jaya who, “raised the hockey stick and swung a cross-batted arc with it. Thudding
it hard against the back of his head. It made contact with an ugly dull sound, the man’s
head jerked forward, spittle flying out of his mouth… he crumbled like potatoes,
imcomprehension bulging his eyes before they folded up into his skull.” (128) The
barbaric attitude of men was evident in the thoughts of children, when they thought,

[Emphasized in text] “this monster. Did he go around burning tyres around the necks
of children and defenceless people? Did he have children of his own ... where did such
people come from? So many of them . . .” (131). The last attack on these eight school
girls has been presented by Lal in the chapter, ‘The Battle for No. 19’ where each of
them are energetic and with full power. One of the energetic girl Puja thinks,

“[Emphasized in text] I’m not prepared to accept that. Defeat ... No way, but step
carefully” (167). They prepared boiling hot water to attack the men. , “the eight men
who had been caught amidships on the stairs had been worst hit… for the first time,
y they had become victims of the agony they inflicted so easily on others” (151). Puja’s
father too was there in the mid of ‘Hunter’s Draw’ who had come there with the army
as an officer but it was Puja who killed the monster, “she suddenly stepped clear of the
box and in one smooth, skin, dancer’s movement, raised the bow and drew the string
back against her cheek, and closing one eye, aimed, and so gently and gracefully
released the arrow that it might well have been a flying kiss, A swing draw. Hunter’s
draw.” (176). And at the same time Puja complains to her father in her thoughts

“[Emphasized in text] Please don’t look at me now, not now. You sidelined me for
sixteen years, ignored me. For too many years. What can I do now?” (174). Her father
realised that girls are not what people think of them as weak and feeble. He comprehends, ‘‘No, damn son could have shot like that!’ whispered, to himself really, but she heard him alright. And corrected himself, ‘No damn son would have had the guts to attempt a shot like that! One smooth motion.’’ (TBN 178), Here Ranjit Lal raises the gender issue though the girl’s father when he tells her, “I have to debrief you my dear,… debrief you for the last sixteen years. It might take a while’” (182).

In the epilogue of the novel Ranjit Lal describes the girls as grownups and working at different places all over the globe, “Puja runs a school in the hills…her school turns out the best archers in the country. Sheetal and Jaya run a very successful veterinary clinic in Delhi. Seema teaches higher mathematics in New York, and Payal, a brilliant Lawyer.” (183). But what annoys them most is,

How frequently such events – be the riots, terrorist attacks and bomb blasts – keep on happening around the country. And their victims are nearly always ordinary innocent people. People like the girls themselves… Our minds must be sick. No society does this can think of itself as civilised’’ (TBN 183).

Over all Ranjit Lal evaluated behavioural characteristics of girls, depicted as energetic, determined and hardworking throughout the novel. He has portrayed roles as fighters, adventurers and rescuers and portrayed them as strong and enduring as contrasted to traditional passive roles as caretakers and in need of rescuing. Lal suggests, we can also distinguish actual practices that modify people.

**Go, Girl, Go! (Deepa Agarwal)**

Deepa Agarwal an eminent writer who writes for children fiction in India was born in Almora in the foot hills of Himalayas Uttarakhand. She has about fifty books published in English and Hindi. Her children’s fiction include adventurous, traditional
and mysterious has been published by publishers in India. Among other honours, she
has received the N.C.E.R.T National Award for Children’s Literature for her picture
book *Ashok’s New Friends* published by Children’s Book Trust, in 1992-93, several
prizes in the Children’s Book Trust (CBT) competitions for writers and the first prize
in The Asian Age short story competition for her story “Cradle Song”. Her book,
*Caravan to Tibet* (2007), a masterpiece, was on the Honour List of the prestigious
International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) as the best book from India
and translated into Korean. Five of her titles have been listed in the White Raven
Catalogue of notable books brought out by the International Youth Library (IYL)
Munich. She has also received fellowships to research children’s literature from the
Austrian government and the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Her notable
works for children are *Chandrakanta* (1988), the first mystery novel in the Hindi, *The
*Chanakya: the Master of Statecraft* (2013), *Spinning Yarns: The Best Children's Stories
from India* (2013), and a Hindi translation of her poetry collection *Do Not Weep Lonely
Mirror* (Mat Ro Ekaki Darshan). Her work has been translated into several Indian and
foreign languages as well. Deepa, founded a forum the Habitat Children’s Book Forum
(HCBF) in New Delhi. She says, “I got the idea from the two book clubs for adults
running at the India Habitat Centre at the time (2003). I had attended sessions at both.
Why not a book club for children? I thought. There was something else at the back of
my mind—visibility for Indian writers. At that time Indian children’s books were far
more confined to the literary boondocks than they are now. And over the almost ten
years that I was involved in the HCBF, I am happy to say children discovered many
home-grown books with delight,” (Gopalakrishnan). Deepa Agarwal has extensively used the urban class children and placed them in forefront

Deepa Agarwal’s book, *Go, Girl, Go!* , a collection of eight girl-centric stories, set in both rural and urban areas, gives the readers a chance to ponder upon questions the girls pose in all the stories. Deepa has crafted skilfully eight real life parallels to eight fictional stories. The protagonists in the stories are lively young girls from various strata of society, in closed setting dealing with minute, mundane features of everyday life. These stories are replete with girl children, as a central character which has been ignored completely in the past. Deepa has given role to girls in all the eight stories and validate feminine voice. These stories provide rich insight for exploring issues and dilemmas of the human experience as perceived by the young females. Deepa Agerwal has discussed and grapples in these stories in detail issues related to girls ranging from gender bias in sports to bullying. The other wide range of themes related to girls being discussed by the author are self-esteem, child marriage, gender bias in sports, career dream, women domesticated, speaking out and self-identity. Deepa has given strong voice to girls in all these stories. One of the most predominant ways by which the following stories convey a feminist position is the creation of a central space for girl characters. The representation of girls illustrates the change of the female image from a more traditional one, which is dependent, caring, domestic and weak, into a more modern one, which represents independence, intellectuality and strong mind. A huge number of stereotypes are introduced in these stories and they create beliefs that are learned as early as a young reader starts to read. Nandni Nayar comments about the place of girls in Agarwal’s writing,

Agarwal pays special attention to the boy-girl equation in her books, and attempts to be fair to both the sexes. As for as possible the girl-
boy ratio is maintained. But in most cases the girls display courage and initiative that marks them out as braver (322).

She further notes

Agarwal has made a conscious attempt to introduce younger children to the idea that girls and boys (and hence men and women) can break out their assigned roles in society…. Deepa Agarwal consciously adheres to this agenda in her later books (323).

The story ‘Fire’ gives the portrayal of three rural girls; Puja, Mitu and a maid’s daughter Paruli. It narrates their heart-rending story of broken friendship as well as the grim reality of child marriage. Deepa Agarwal says, “Some of my short stories are indeed, based on early experiences like the short story “Fire” from my collection Not Just Girls which is based on a true incident when a friend and I unthinkingly set fire to the forest. I wrote it to try and answer a question that had always troubled me” (“Scholastic” n.p).

“Fire” narrates that girls are only meant for house hold chores. Paruli’s mother always believe that, “girls were meant to be kept busy with household chores all the time.” (GGG6 23). But on the contrary Paruli was an adventures girl and has adventurous ideas as well. She was the one who, “discovered the places where the fattest, juiciest hissalu berries grew-crunchy orange cups that fell into your hand as soon as you touch them” (GGG 24). The story is full of playful activities of the girls. They all have fun and engage in blame game as to, ‘who broke the fire’ in the nearby forests where they live, and their forgiveness of one another. Pooja says “actually, she was ready to make up with Paruli now. Their games felt tame and kiddish without her.” (32). In her absence she thought again of her, “slashing away the stinging nettles from their

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6 Go Girls Go
paths on one of their excursions to the forest, so they wouldn’t step on them by mistake and suffer. Picking up thorny branches and casting them aside… and then … standing there hesitantly with jacaranda branches in her hand” (33). Both friends of Paruli; Puja and Mitu come to know later after the visit of Paruli, “An older and subdued Paruli, who hardly spoke to Puja. Actually, she hardly spoke at all. Getting married seemed to have thrown her into a permanent state of embarrassment. She was busy helping in the kitchen most of the time. Or she sat outside trying to knit something from a much-travelled ball of wool” (GGG 34). They knew, “Paruli was not their playmate any longer. She had entered the world of grownups, where Puja couldn’t follow” (34). The story gives an insight as to how early marriages destroy the early years of the girls. The girls are also socialized to be subordinate and are accustomed to getting married at an early age. Deepa Agarwal provides a real parallel story of Alice, an office cleaning staff in Delhi who says, “I lost my parents at an early age. My uncle who took over as my guardian, decided to marry me off. I was only 15 then, and did not know what was right for me. Life has been difficult since… I am able to earn for my family when my husband cannot. I will never marry off my daughter early” (GGG 35).

‘Do you Want to Play Football?’ is the story of aggressive and bold girl Monica, Deepa Agarwal described her as, “her big eyes shone as she gazed in to the distance, nibbling hungrily at a thumb as though it were her favourite chocolate bar” (GGG 36). Monica and her friend realised and pondered, “Why can’t we have a football team? …why shouldn’t they have a football team? Why couldn’t girls play football?….. it is not written anywhere that there’s a law against girls playing football!” (37). The girls are curious to play football as they know their strength and vigour but they fail to get a chance from the school authority, and were repeatedly told by school principal, “it is not the game for girls. I’m really sorry” (GGG 39). Monica encourages the girls in the
story as well as the young readers, “Monica made up her mind to do something, she had to do. And she did. First, she rounded up a group of girls in the colony. Then she persuaded them that it was very important for them to learn play football” (41). Later they joined the neighbouring football club of Summit and Anuj. At first both the boys didn’t give them a chance to play the game. It was wit as well as resistant force against conventional norms that girls can’t play games, “You’re afraid to give us a chance. You’re a silly, old fashioned, stick-in-the-mud – that’s what you are! Stuck in the ancient times.” (42). After getting a chance to play football with the boys they became ecstatic and jubilant, “Nidhi felt as if she, too, were flying off to some wonderful faraway place along with the ball” (43). Their thoughts were full of questions and aspirations, Monica thought, “I wish I could tell the Princie, …I wish I could tell her that we’re playing football… she should know that girls can girls ca play football” (43). Post playing football these two girls catch a running thief. The news reach the reluctant principal, who this time was overjoyed by the brave act of the two girls from her school. After narrating their story the girls were praised by the school authorities, “We are all very proud of our two heroines. And this advice is particularly for those of you who aren’t keen on sports. If you play any game regularly, it will teach you to think fast. It will also make you physically stronger and swifter…. Girls don’t commonly play football …but may be playing it helped the confidence to tackle the thief” (45). The parallel story of Anaya Upendran says,

Walk into any school in India and you will see a group of boys playing cricket …. But have you seen girls playing cricket? I guess not. Here lies the starting point for any story about Indian women cricket. Girls on India have particularly no opportunity to play cricket at the school level, and that is the biggest concern for women’s
cricket in India. if cricket is not played by schoolgirls, where will the
talent feed for U-19 and state cricket come from?” (GGG 46).

Indian girl in children’s novels does deliver motivation that girls can achieve
whatever they want to. Deepa attempts to add a taste of trustworthiness and to build a
pillar of assistance for girls. One more story from the book is, ‘The Interview Game’,
the story of a fourteen year rural girl, Govindi. The story gives a special account of
female innovators who are able to start from nothing and extend their dreams by hard
working ethics. Her dream is to become a journalist. She is fascinated by her favourite
anchor Sunita Raj, “if only she could become someone like Sunita Raj!” (48), whom
she has watched her on a TV show. She used to imitate her favourite anchor with the
cows as her audience, named it an ‘interview game’. She would be puzzled and
questioned herself, “Did women like her actually exist? But there was, right in front of
Govindi” (GGG 48). Hailing from far-flung area, she grazes the cows after returning
from the school plagued with questions, “why couldn’t they repair the roof? Surely the
government had enough money for that? Those important people probably felt that a
rundown structure was good enough for the girls. If only Sunita Raj could take up this
problem! She would make things happen. Yes, she would grill the ministers
mercilessly” (49). Govindi had developed amazing skills by rehearsing question answer
sessions with the cows. Govind’s dream comes true when Govindi appears in Sunita’s
show for her brother’s case. Adriana Bharali of St Mary’s School, Guwathi says, “When
I told my mother about it, she mocked me and said, “Forget about it. You are not a boy
to have such dreams!.... It was very disappointing to know that my mother would have
supported my dreams had I been a boy…. I don’t know how to dream like a girl because
I always thought that dreams and aspirations do not discriminate between boys and
girls. But perhaps I was wrong” (GGG 61).
The ‘Great Paratha Challenge’ has bullying as its theme. One more story ‘When Haria Comes’ is a heart rendering story of a twelve year old village girl Madhuli and her maternal grandmother. The story talks about Madhuli how she handles the home in absence of her father and brother who had gone to Delhi to earn their livelihood. She becomes the main support of her family. It takes her time, space and lessons to learn and grow, understanding, accepting and adapting to the absence of her father and brother. This is in fact a reflection of the expansion of femininity, the process of girls becoming independent of males, learning the rights and responsibilities of girls and becoming more important in families and societies.

It is the strength and heartiness of this young girl which helps her to manage the house even at odd times. Initially she thought her brother (Haria) would come and support the family and the ailing grandmother. But her inner strength didn’t allow her to wait for her brother’s support, “Madhuli really got tired of waiting, and sometimes she felt so despondent that she wondered if Haria would ever be able to save enough to take Amah to Delhi” (GGG 82). Her ability questions her, “Why can’t I do anything? Just because I’m girl? She had thought resentfully. She and Amah coped with so much on their own, without Babuji and Haria’s help.” (82-83). It was her will and enthusiasm that she was able to withstand turbulent times with her grandmother lying on bed, “The medicine didn’t help at all. Amah’s groans grew louder. What was she to do? Madhuli’s heart beat uneasily as she tries to recall the curse Amah used when she had a stomach ache. Quickly, she heated a lump of asafoetida and put it on Amah’s Navel. It was quite effective. To her dismay it didn’t work at all then warmed pads of cloth on the dying fire and pressed them on Amah’s belly. That didn’t work either”. (85). She couldn’t not stay calm and tried her best to tackling the situation, “No, no, she couldn’t give up like that. How could she let Amah lie there suffering without doing anything ... Desperately
she racked her brains for any idea that might help” (87). The story revolves around this
twelve year girl’s wisdom and thoughts, her continuous efforts and success. She had
rescued her grandma without having any support of the male member of the family. Her
decision to take her grandma through the darkness of night in the jungles on a palanquin
to a new hospital won the hearts of the young readers. Deepa Agarwal suggests young
readers that they too can handle even the toughest times of their lives with ease without
any male support as Madhuli did, “she wouldn’t have to wait till Haria came. Madhuli
could manage too! And very well!” (90). Mou Gosh a shop owner from Kolkata speaks,
I have been able to lift my family out of poverty and earn respect and
recognition. I remember my father telling me, when I was just 7 or 8
years old, that I had been a boy, my mother would not have any
sorrow. It felt awful to hear that then. Today, I am glad I was born
girl. I have no regret over my gender (GGG 91).

One more story in the book is ‘Speak Out’ The story addresses the issue that girls cannot
take decisions of their own and they don’t have enough control over their lives. After
winning the prize for debate in school, Shakshi a young girl of ten years, expected a
show of appreciation and praise from her parents at her home, but when Shakshi
questions the early marriage of her cousin sister. She was told, “You have to learn,
Shakshi, that girls should not be so outspoken. You’ll create problems for yourself.”
(96). She is a teenaged girl who learns to develop and grow up on her own. Deepa
Agerwal describes the deep agony of the young mind. Shakshi thought, “How strange-
in school she was awarded for expressing her opinions forcefully, and at home Ma
wanted her to remain silent when something didn’t feel right to her” (97). She further
thinks,
How could there be such a vast difference between the opinions you could voice at school and those you could voice at home? How hypocritical it seemed! What was the point in these activities? If you did not believe in the cause you are speaking for, how could you be convincing? She had believed too sincerely— that was her fault, it suddenly struck her. The thought make her sick to the heart (GGG 101-102).

It is common for girls entering adolescence to experience a ‘loss of voice’, meaning a struggle to realize or come to terms with their own experiences and opinions. Sudhir Kakar comments, “Girls and women have no sphere of their own, no independent livelihood or activity, no area of family and community responsibility and dominance, no living space apart from men, within which to create and manifest those aspects of feminine identity” (qtd. in Cooper 118). She wants to become independent physically, emotionally, psychologically and intellectually. Deepa Agarwal gives a provides voice in the form of Shakshi’s father when he speaks out,

“I feel speaking out at home is far more essential than speaking on a platform to win a prize. We need to learn from the young, Maya. We adults get so blinded by self-interest that the difference between right and wrong gets blurred. I’m proud of you, Shakshi, my dear (GGG 101).

Bidyapati Thingbaijam, Deputy Superintendent of police, Manipur, says, “I have been able to make my parents proud, so much so that they feel that I have not given them any room to complain for not having a son. I stood up for myself for the girl I was, and still today I stand up against all the wrongs that have happened to me or will happen to any girl child or woman” (GGG 105). Such incidents halts the development of children
as Egan and Perry argue that “feeling strong pressure for gender conformity is generally harmful (rather than beneficial) to mental health because of the limitations that are imposed on possibly fulfilling opinions, which weakness feeling of autonomy and puts children under stress” (34 qtd in Arta Toçi and Melek Aliu).

(Girl) is the main character in these stories. They are round characters who develops from a more traditional girls into much more independent young girls. These types of stories are actually very much influenced by changes in society and culture. Young girls demand independence physically, psychologically, emotionally and financially. Therefore, teenage stories tend to reflect the change in social values and culture. As Nandini Nayar comments in her article, ‘Deepa Agarwal and Indian Children’s Literature in English: An Introduction’ in an edited book, Perspectives on Indian English Fiction

*Not Just Girls*, is a cry against generalizations against or about girls. And I her book she makes a conscious attempt to fight these, to set records right and to feature girls who are more than just ornaments (322).

Representation of the young teenaged girl has changed. The image is no longer ideal. She is round and realistic. All female characters are a representative of high qualities with different interpretations. The themes of these novels encourage young readers to grow up and be independent. The ‘new girl’ in society are independent, brave and strong. They are shaping into the new women of society and need to ‘learn’ and ‘grow up’ to be the new women through their own effort. These writers have functioned as visionaries, continually pushing back the boundaries to craft new paradigms for gender representation. These stories opens before these girls, a horizon of great opportunities to disclose and prove their ability. Each of them comprises distinct

girls certainly are disadvantaged by patriarchal constructs of gender, ‘boys’ performative choices also are diminished for fear of penalty. As a result, the collectivity of educational spaces may be lost as feminine boys come to dread these settings. However, by providing children with better literary examples of collective interactions, cooperation, and love, authors and educators could help further deconstruct hegemonic notions of gender at school for the benefit of all students (16).

She further suggests,

Children do still require the educational tools to understand how meanings and objects impact their choices. This is where books that feature stories about love and adventure, acceptance and security, bodily agency and change, collectivity and self-determination could help to break down those dichotomies that inform hegemony and hardship (17).

In these stories girls are more aware of their own identities and qualities. They are no longer subordinate or mediocre. These girls show us that they not only have traditional qualities, such as kindness, love, care, mildness but also acquire new-fangled qualities, such as bravery, strength in facing difficulties and crisis. Not only do these work in question address issues of gender representations in Children’s Literature, they also create a platform for challenging established hierarchical systems. These writers who write for girls, attempts to show that the girl child has the potential to rise to new challenges, and should be given the same opportunities as her male counterpart. Happy
endings may not always be convincing, and children should face real life issues in the books they read which would finally help to build enough confidence to cope with them if the need arise.

4.4: Mystery, Detective and Adventure Tales in Indian English Children’s Literature

Children ask for dreams of glory in a story with action-packed adventure, lively characters solving real-life conflicts and portraying universal sentiments to be cherished. Adventure stories are best providers of entertainment, enjoyment and it stimulates the children to go beyond the mundane and ordinary lives, in order to increase the imagination level. Rebecca Lukens writes in her *Critical Handbook of Children’s Literature* about readers’ motives:

We choose literature that promises entertainment and, sometimes, escape. If other discoveries come to us too, we are pleased and doubly rewarded. However, our first motive for reading a novel or a poem is personal pleasure. We may lay the book aside with mixed feelings, but if there is no pleasure, we reject it completely or leave it unfinished (3).

Adventure stories are one of the leading categories of books in both adults and young adults, the purpose of this genre for children is to tell children about unfamiliar or imaginary setting and places, as in the classic works such as *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe* or *The Jungle Book*. They are stories that comprise of exciting and daring events and situations removed from the everyday.

When adventure stories are written especially for children, and with young characters as their true centre, the writer’s task is necessarily more complex. The stock motif of adventure fiction-chase and
escape, a difficult quest, the solving of a mystery involve danger, physical stress, violence (273).

Adventure and mysteries are the most popular genre in children’s fiction. Elements of mystery, crime, and detection have long been important characteristic of stories appreciated, adored and enjoyed by young readers. While these books fulfil the need to educate and convey a valve system, they are not blatantly didactic and hence are acceptable to young readers. Their underlying themes retain a safe distance from the ugly side of the society—violence, trauma, terrorism and evil effects of political and social conditions. In the British Empire adventure stories have ample advantages, recognizing the attraction that exotic overseas adventures could hold for children. In imperialistic and colonial point of view, M. Green and D. Butts writes

Adventure stories have flourished in periods of imperialistic territorial expansion, and have contributed to the formation of the imperial gaze. In fact, these stories have been employed by authors from colonized nations as well as from imperial suzerains; however, the relationship of the two has not been sufficiently explored (qtd. in Han 100).

Hyunjung Han points out, in his article, “Adventure Stories and Geographical Imagination in Japanese and Korean Children’s Magazines, 1925-1945”

Adventure stories are important materials for examining the relationship of space and identity, which becomes even clearer in the asymmetric power dynamic of colony and empire (100).

The adventure story normalized the idea of the empire both for young British children and for overseas readers, while at the same time imparting in them moral values that
were identified as distinctively British. As Seth Lerer comments, in his book, *Children’s Literature: A Reader’s History from Aesop to Harry Potter*

Read *Robinson Crusoe* for its canoes and you find scenes of individual accomplishment, moments of observation, and narratives of the encounter between European and savage. The canoe stands as a project not just of maritime mechanics, but of the literary imagination: the thing we make ourselves, to take us places we have never been (132).

The main elements of adventure tale are, a heroic protagonist; Heroes in adventure stories are usually male but now the trend has changed drastically and the girls are taking part in the leading roles, (e.g Recha in *Mystery of Falling Mountains*) in children's literature. Earlier, in an adventure or mystery story it is generally a boy whose intelligence and cleverness saves the girl from insecure and threatening situations. The famous classic heroic protagonists are Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and Don Quixote. Margery Hourihan writes, “Hero stories are essentially optimistic for they assert, against all the evidence, that victory is possible. The hero triumphs over the wilderness, and therefore over chaos, nature, evil, death itself” (27). The heroes from adventure-fantasy, are the heroes of magical territory, children these days are inclined towards these characters, and they include Bilbo Baggins, Harry Potter, and Lewis Carroll's Alice. The other elements of the adventure story is, a journey of quest, without it there is no adventure, to adventure to unusual locations action and danger.

The generic label, adventure story, signifies a loose, catch-all category of children’s literature. In the nineteenth century it was almost synonymous with the term “boys’ story,” and it is in this connection that it is used here. “Adventure” implies a noticeable level
of danger and excitement in the narrative, and it also means that sometimes of tactical manoeuvre in either a war or wilderness setting.

Books of this sort were usually a mixture of types: partly about school, hobbies, friendship, first love and so on. But in many, battle tactics became a major focus of the narrative (97).

These kinds of books propel their readers into boisterous and energetic adventures. Children love a puzzle and challenging element in a narrative and at the same time like the challenge of solving these puzzles and challenges. The mystery component in a story offers children to think critically and this quality also is essential for a successful book. The young reader always wants to know ‘what next’. These types of stories, and mystery thrillers, offer some resolution and a sense of closure. Children remains involved till the puzzle solves, and this resolution satisfies the emotions of the reader.

Indian writers dealt with or borrowed western thoughts but they altered it in their own way and, focused on the group of children as characters, using their imagination to create fantasy, depicted them occasions pitted against the evil of adults. Girl readers are also viewed as a major consumer group, and more girl characters are present in the stories in order to enhance their appeal to audiences of young girls. Prema Srinivasan comments,

Indian children who have been brought up on a diet of the western adventure story are being offered an assortment of stories in this popular category by Indian authors. Though there are a number of Enid Blyton clones, some writers have succeeded in rendering the mystery element within a credible Indian milieu. Ray’s *The Imperial Ring* (1965) and Dutta’s *The Kaziranga Trail* (1979), ushered in new
kind of adventure mystery that was satisfactory Indian in tone and texture (16).

Children of India has inherited a number of stories and the heroes of the Ramayana and Mahaburtha, most children in India, rich and poor, still have access to it. Children seek heroes for inspiration, hope and identification, in their dramatic play and assume roles of such heroes. Characters like Ram; person with high values, Hanuman; devoted, sacrificing and powerful, and Sita; courageous. These traditional adventurous stories are for all ages. Ira Saxena writes in, “Children Love Heroes in the Ramayan”

The Ramayana is a story for all ages. It sweeps the fancy to a world of kings and rakshasas and general goodness but all the actors in the story remain real, with the basic human qualities. They are ordinary people, in flesh and blood, who become heroes, fitting Mollie Hunter’s description of hero: “an ordinary person who can still draw on the source of some emotion common to all mankind, yet still one which enables that person to transcend his or her ordinariness and to become for a moment, an inspired or inspiring figure.”” (27).

Nilima Sinha one of the writers for children in English comments in, “Potter Mania in India” “the success of Harry Potter has encouraged Indians to look at their own heritage with new eyes. Modern ways of presenting ancient elements from our mythology are being explored, both in the print and the electronic media. Animation films on Rama, Krishna, and Hanuman the monkey god as modern super heroes, and comics based on Devi, the goddess turned into power woman, are some examples of the trend set by the boy wizard” (28).

She further explains,
In our epics, the good as well as the evil possessed extraordinary powers. Skilled in battle, they knew spells or mantras that set off weapons capable of great destruction. The noble Rama protected the sages in hermitages or *ashrams*, where lessons were given to students on good conduct and the art of war. He protected them against the powerful giants, the *rakshasas*, who disturbed their peace (Sinha 27).

These writers have taken up the challenge of better informed and wider readership by offering to the young tales of adventure where action and character are truly interdependent and interacting. Adventure stories, like any other class of fiction, reflect in varying degree the social attitude of their times. The writers of west Ballantyne, Rider Haggard, Buchan, and Arthur Ransome have offered to their readers generally accepted social values.

I feel that the young adventure story in the future will most successfully reflect the contemporary world, not by going over the top in inventing new scenes of horror and violence but by carefully balancing the element of entertainment with the element of reality and, most of all, by considering carefully the respective roles of children and adult in a story, the likeness and differences in the way they accept a challenge, their independence of one another and their interdependence (Fisher 279).

There is influence of regional literature on the writers of children’s literature. Mystery novels have a great history in India. *Chandarakanta* published in the early twentieth century is a creative attempt of Devaki Nandan Khattri, and set a landmark in the literary world. *Chandrakanta* is an adventure story written in Hindi, translated into English by Manju Gupta under the title *In the Mysterious Ruins*, replete with all the
elements of fiction that awakens the senses – magic, fantasy, bravery, bewitching beauties, vamps, venom, duels, danger, chase and above all suspense at every turn. It is a tale of magical achievements of realistic goals in dark dense forests, raging storms won over by intelligent manipulations. Action dominates the nerve of the plot. Action was the key in those times as the society was on the move, ideologically and politically. It represented the zest of a free spirit casting a shadow on the existing feudal system. It evoked such suspense that long queues stretched outside the printing press to buy their copy as the book unfolded chapter by chapter and was distributed like a pamphlet. Chandrakanta appealed to the youth and the buoyant spirit of the times which has not faded with times. A balanced growth of adventures continued the creative energy of Chandrakanta when a large chunk of mystery and adventure stories blossomed. Deepa Agarwal writes in her article ‘Rediscovering Chanderkanta in English’

True, in many ways, Chandrakanta seems tailor made for the contemporary juvenile reader, more than other classics. The labyrinthine but racy plot, with its innumerable twists and turns, the incredible level of suspense that is maintained right to the end makes it truly ‘unputdownable’. The independent minded heroine, Chandrakanta and her fearless companions Chapla and Champa are almost like present-day young girls while the teasing, irreverent exchange between Prince Virendra, Tej Singh and the other aiyaars is what you would find in most books for young adults (Agarwal n.p). These novels affirm values of scientific reason, logic, and teleology, and the enlightenment idea that society is progressing towards a perfectible point. These novels tend to suggest that everything can be known through empirical presumption, thus most
crime novels have conclusive endings in which villain is exposed. Deepa Agarwal comments,

But what really makes up the core of Devakinandan Khatri’s enduring masterpiece? There is the main action, which revolves around the romance between Virendra and Chandrakanta and Krur Singh and Shivdutt’s villainous attempts to prevent the lovers from getting together. The Aiyaars’ battle of wits is connected to this, while the baffling mysteries of the tilism, the astonishing mechanisms that trap Chandrakanta and Chapla in the maze pose further obstacles for the lovers but also provide an opportunity for Virendra to prove his mettle. Then there are the enchanting descriptions of his settings—the dense forests, mysterious tunnels, even the grotto in which Tej Singh confines his prisoners that are such a delight to read (Agarwal np).

The genre of adventure, detective and mystery fiction in India is largely a western import and even in adult literature progress has not been extensive. In the context of Indian English children’s literature, which is itself suffers from a legacy from the west, it is necessary to understand the complexities that go into the making of an Indian English children’s detective or mystery novel.

As discussed earlier, Superle commented that the plot has been Indianized to give it a local color and feeling. Other than that, most detective fiction for children in Indian English remains what she terms an “Indian Blytonnade”. Claire Chambers in “Postcolonial Noir: Vikram Chandra’s “Kama”” writes,

Yet, particularly, since the period of rapid decolonization of the most European colonies that occurred immediately after the Second World
War, an increasing body of what may be termed as post-colonial crime novels and stories is being produced. Writers such as Jamyang and Satyajit Ray rewrite the classical crime novel, overturning the genre’s usual stereotyping representations of formerly-colonized countries. In addition to Norbu’s English-Language novel and Ray’s short stories (mostly available in English translations from Bengali), there is also of course a profusion of postcolonial detective texts in other languages (32-33).

There are prolific writers around the globe who have developed mystery and adventure novels for children, Enid Blyton. J. K. Rowling etc. The awakening about children’s Literature promoted creative writing and the fast pace of modernization expressed itself in realistic literature in India. In India writers like Ruskin Bond, Arup Kumar Dutta, Nilima Sinha, Deepak Dalaal, Deepa Agarwal, Shashi Deshpande, A. K. Srikumar, Deepavali Debroy have extensively written adventure and mystery novels for children. Ruskin Bond, one of the known and familiar writers for children in India, has contributed significantly to the development of children’s literature in English in India. Prolific writings on children’s literature have been steady for the past so many years. For the past forty years he has been writing poetry, biographies, folktales, and fiction specially directed at Indian children. He has contributed to adventure genre immensely in his works. *Vagrants in the Valley* (1957) is a sequel to *The Room on the Roof* (1956) Both are twin novellas of adolescence. *Rusty, the Boy from the Hills* (2002), revolves around Rusty, an inquisitive, sensitive and lonely boy. Bond narrates the adolescent Rusty’s wanderings and adventure in search of identity with his friends. Maya P. writes If you're a reader who wants car chases and evil villains and fast moving, complex plots this book is not for you. This book was
written to provide an escape from the harsh reality of life and to transport us to another world, without the complications and trappings of the modern day life (P Maya np).

In Bond’s *Rusty and the Magic Mountain* (2015), Rusty and his friends Pitambar and Popatand spotted adventure when they begin to start to climb a mysterious mountain. It was believed mountain was surrounded with witches and superstition. Intermingled with humorous events, the uncertainty, suspense and ecstasy of adventure and the horror of an unknown landscape and people, Rusty’s newest adventure becomes a fascinating tale. Tayan Singh in ‘Ruskin Bond Brings Back Rusty. After More than a Decade.’ writes

This time, Rusty, an orphaned Anglo-Indian boy, goes out with his friends Pitambar and Popat, to explore a mysterious mountain – a mountain that has several bewildering legends behind it (Singh np).

Dehradun is a back drop in *Vagrants in the Valley*. Here, Rusty is joined in his travel by Kishen, another ran way. The novel takes on a journey of the countryside seen through the eyes of a 16-year-old boy called Rusty. *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* (1991), received Sahitya Academy Award in 1992, this collection of Short Stories, traces the life from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. It runs through massive mountains and is full of adventure.

The most important aspect of the Indian stories is its inseparability from the children, the story is not only his; the hero’s story. The reader perceives the world of the text and the events which occur in it from the ‘children’s’ point of view. As we see characters in adventure stories of Arup Kumar Datta, Nilima Sinha and Deepa Agarwals. The events may be focalized through the consciousness of one or more of the child characters. As we find in the very beginning sentence of Dickens’s David Copperfield,
David’s role as a hero is announced as, “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (Dickens 1).

These stories generate suspense in the readers mind once the reader is eager to find the solution, the story takes the form of a journey and the point of plot development is well built, it consists of flash backs, memories and linear progressions. These stories are thrilling and easy to read for children. Children feel pleasure by arousing anticipation, the reader desires to know ‘what will happen next’. As plot of the story concludes the desire of the reader is momentarily satisfied. The enthusiasm regenerates in the reader only if the hero or more than one hero (children) move on to the next encounter. Sara Innis Fenwick writes, in her article, “Evaluating Mystery Stories for Children”

An aspect of mystery reading by children which should always be kept in mind by those doing reading guidance with children is that for the majority of children the appeals of mystery fiction are broader than the puzzle interest. Only a small percentage of children who ask for a mystery will refuse any story which does not have "Mystery of" or "Secret of" in the title. The other appeals of this group of stories, e. g., change in circumstances, adventure, are present in many stories not classified as mystery; and it often develops that it is fundamentally these elements, made exciting by the suspense of the mystery tale, which attract readers. Thus, an opportunity for broadening reading interests of juvenile mystery stories is always present, and reading guidance should be especially thoughtful and careful (524).

*The Kaziranga Trail* (Arup Kumar Dutta)
Arup Kumar Dutta is nationally as well as internationally acclaimed as the Blyton of India, and has contributed to children’s literature in India. He has given the young as well as the old a literary feast for the last three decades with his exhilarating and colourful literary creations. He has written a number of adventure stories, and the writer has the distinction of having one of his popular books, *The Kaziranga Trail* (1978), translated into various foreign and Indian languages, including Japanese, German, Russian, Czech, Hungarian and Italian. The story of *The Kaziranga Trail* has been filmed by the Children’s Film Society as “Rhino”. Couple of other stories by Arup Kumar Datta are also being filmed. *The Kaziranga Trail* has won Shankar’s Award in 1979. It was followed by *The Blind Witness* (1984), *Revenge* (1986), *Smack* (1990), *The Lure of Zangrila* (1986); which won a National Award, *Trouble at Kolongijan, A Story about Tea*; all are based in the Northeast and are filled with adventure and mystery. Two of his books have been included in Literature of the World Series by the Asahi Shimbun. For his contribution to journalism he has bagged Siva Prasad Barooah National Award in 2004. He has been chosen for the ‘Lifetime Achievement Award’ by the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC), New Delhi, and the Indian Chapter of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) for his contribution to children’s literature. In ‘The Tireless Wordsworth: A profile of Arup Kumar Dutta’, Kuntal Sharma Pathak writes

A freelance columnist and journalist, his short-stories and articles have appeared in many of India’s leading journals and newspapers. *The Kaziranga Trail* and *The Blind Witness* have been brought out in Japanese Braille for blind readers. An astute short-story writer with encyclopaedic knowledge, his art of telling his story is simple. He manages to draw the immediate attention of his readers by the
simplicity of his, making even a serious subject of study truly engaging. In his engrossing and thought-provoking book *The Brahmaputra* he has attempted to sketch a profile of this fascinating river and has at the same time enlightened the readers with the society which evolved on it banks and the heights of civilisation it attained (Pathak n.p).

Arup Kumar Dutta tried to follow the purposes of Ruskin Bond in trying to resuscitate and initiate to write better books for children in India. Dutta digresses from the style earlier writers used to write, they (writers) solely use to regenerate the available traditional format, he remains focused on bringing new ideas in his writing from western writers at the same time we find ingrained Indian sensibility in his writing. He shaped through his works an opportunity or a space which eased developments in Indian writing in English for children. His writing is in a way new venture and new beginning for Indian English children’s fiction. Change of traditional stories to more realistic approach is apparent in “Indian writing in English for children” with his publication of *The Kaziranga Trail*.

*The Kaziranga Trail* is set amidst the reserve forests of Kaziranga in North-East, the simple local lads, devoid of urban sophistication, discover and follow the trail of poachers in the sanctuary emerging as heroes. The exotic locale of the sanctuary substitutes for the thrill of unknown space and unreal people. Thrilling adventure story that takes the reader on a delightful trips, the writer’s passion has been to introduce children to various unusual regions and kindle their interest in the exotic and wild bounty of nature. As Julia Eccleshare comments in *Contemporary Classics of Children's Literature: A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels*
Children read more readily for action than they do for mood; their need to know 'what happens next' must be satisfied if they are to become readily engrossed (16).

Margery Hourihan also provides the same opinion, she writes, “These stories (hero tales)…create pleasure by arousing excitement and desire, the desire to know ‘what will happen next’” (46). The first few sentences of the book establish the atmosphere of the sanctuary, and even send a thrill down the spine through the pages of the book as the mystery part becomes more and more gripping. Arup Dutta’s story-telling abilities is very well mirrored in this memorable story that is The Kaziranga Trail. Prema Sirinivasan writes, “The Kaziranga Trail ushered in a new type of adventure story, Indian in tone and texture. Without relying on contrivance and coincidence, the plot moves in tightly constructed episodes” (61). Here the whole plot revolves around three attentive young village boys Dhanai, Bubul and Jonti, along with their young elephant Makhoni and their thrilling adventures and encounters with the rhino poachers in the Kaziranga sanctuary, finally nabbing them with the assistance of the district forest officer. The author in this story displays wide-ranging mastery and skill by keeping his curious and readers enthralled. R. Krithika writes in her article, ‘Have you read any of these?’

This journalist from Assam is probably best known for The Kaziranga Trail about how three young boys outwit poachers in the national park. The book won Shankar’s Award in 1979 and was also made into a film by the Children’s Film Society of India. Apart from this, Dutta has 16 other books for children, all of which are based in the Northeast and are filled with adventure and mystery (Krithika n.p).
Arup Kumar Dutta brings in a completely different perspective to Indian English children’s fiction. He tried his hand in a manner that was a direct imitation of the western mystery stories that the likes of Enid Blyton made very popular. His glory doesn’t lie in a blind copying of the style and refurbishing them with an Indian milieu and names, something that most Indian English children’s authors tend to do. Prema Srinivasan writes,

Dutta easily circumvents the usual pitfalls of the unwary author the idealisation of objectives and sentimentality of approach. His aim has been to create an awareness of the preservation of wildlife, which he does in the spontaneous construction of the story schema. Without relying on rhetorical persuasiveness, he gets across his message on ecology and his adventure story transcends its existence as a mere entertainer and has something more substantial to offer to children (62).

The brilliance of Arup Kumar Dutta lies in the fact that, unlike many of his predecessors and successors, he created an original setting using the very local circumstances and gave a feel of the regional flavour which doesn’t jar our senses. Prasant Das writes

In The Kaziranga Trail Dutta appropriates the formulaic patterns of the books he read as a boy to create a children’s story rooted in a regional, Indian milieu. The book does not strain the reader’s credulity unlike some currently popular children’s fiction. Dhanai, Bubul and Jonti move about on a pet elephant, a potentially exotic substitution for the Blytonic dog, but this is quite natural given the
story’s context. The plot does not feel contrived and the boys are not wonder boys or specially gifted (3).

Dutta tried to portray a picture of the North-East particularly Assam different from the tourist guide’s psychopathic and fawning version. Presma Srinivasan writes, “The casual use of local terms gives the book an Assamese flavour” (61). His portrayal doesn’t emphasise the mystic or mythical aspect of the North-East but holds a mirror to the society about the stark realities like floods, terrorism, rampant poaching, poverty etc. and this picture is more or less true for the rest of India too which find place in his works.

The question of essentialization and homogenization does not apply here, at least with regards to *The Kaziranga Trail*. Kaziranga, as a sanctuary is known probably worldwide but the problem of poaching associated with it remains specific to the region and it is only the people of the region who can understand the gravity of the situation.

At the same time, the question of homogenization comes in when there is a possibility of replicating it somewhere else (Laskar 178).

Prasant Das writes in the article, ‘Indian Writing English from the Northeast’

He (Datta) strikes a neat balance between their roles as detectives and children. Dutta is also completely at ease in depicting Kaziranga and its surrounding villages. His knowledge of the jungle is evident in such details as the use of a common herb to bandage the elephant’s wound. To assert that he is dealing with a different culture within India, Dutta occasionally employs local words such as “dao” and “beel”. Though he often explains unfamiliar words in English, there
are occasions when he refrains from doing so, forcing the non-Assamese reader to puzzle them out by context (3).

One of the main concerns for Datta is to redefine not only the concept of the North-East for the readers outside the region but also to reconstruct Indian English children’s literature into more than a mere lesser or appendage of western children’s literature. This need to build a distinctive Indian identity for Indian English children’s literature forms a backdrop of most of his works and in the process he justifies his position as an Indian English children’s author.

Dutta depicts in his writing the realistic elements at the same time the whole plot of his writing runs through the adventure genre. In one of the reviews on Dutta’s book *Footprints in the Sand* for children, Rubina Sami writes,

> As for Arup Kumar Dutta, he writes in a very crisp manner, phrasing big words but without frills of a decorative language. He doesn’t in any way spoon-feed his adolescent readers. Instead, he stimulates their imagination and spirit of adventure (32).

His ability in writing is also echoed in his use of mystery settings and plot construction, characterization, the strengthening of the climax and vital denouement. He is using a systematic and mechanical pattern that has been created and advanced by western writers. As Michelle Superle criticizes,

> Indian children’s authors have been vigilant in their attempts to infuse the Blytonnades with Indianness. This cultural content positions these novels as recognisably Indian—apparently a sufficient remedy against imitation, although certainly not against potential essentialisation or homogenisation (110).
The time, when Arup Dutta started writing, especially *The Kaziranga Trail*, there was a real dearth of English language children’s fiction in India. Except for Ruskin Bond, there was hardly any author concentrating on children’s writing in India and English language children readers satisfied their needs through western imports. Under these circumstances, Dutta presented *The Kaziranga Trail* where he directly addressed a specific problem of Assam and, probably, the rest of India too. Dutta has used a very Indian setting and made his characters very distinctly Indian. Nita Berry, talks about the Indian setting in Dutta’s writing, in ‘Arup Kumar Dutta’s World of Gripping Fiction’

Dutta’s pen brings alive the dark, dense forests of Assam, and skilfully penetrates the ‘elephant country’ in remote Arunachal Pradesh, painting vivid Indian settings for his thrilling stories themes like animal poaching, drug peddling etc (6).

The particular problem of poaching can possibly be replicated somewhere else in India but the skill of Dutta’s work lies in the nuanced rendering of the landscape and its people, with a sound knowledge of the area. One of the first descriptions that Dutta gives shows his acquaintance with the place and his dexterity in handling the language and the setting. Dutta observes himself

‘Creation of authentic background gives credibility to a story… in the case of younger children, the line dividing fantasy from reality is wafer thin…but an older child desires greater realism in works of fiction’ Although the adventure/entertainment element is most important in a story, a good adventure story transcends its existence as a mere entertainer, and has something more to offer to children, he feels, ‘while it is true that writers must guard against the temptation
to preach sermons, it is equally true that a seriousness of purpose enhances the quality of an adventure story and sets it apart our bookshop today’ (Berry, “Arup Kumar” 8).

*The Lure of Zangrila* is another exciting adventure story after *The Kaziranga Triel* and *The Blind Witness*. It describes the obstacles faced by an expedition of boys attempting to assault a peak, and will specially appeal to older children. Yasu and Charanjit are rivals for the leader of the team. But the slow and steady Yasu wins over the overeager and carless Charanjit. Charanjit harbours resentment, even though Yasu saves him when he has a dangerous fall. And here begins the conflict which creates many problems for the team later on. Meena Khurana writes in *The Indian Subcontinent in Literature for Children and Young Adults*

> The plot is intricately structured to balance the psychological motivation of the characters and the outward progress of their ascent… the inner tension of Charanjit to excel on his own reaches a climatic point (134).

In the thrilling story of boys who have chosen to climb an unclimbed mountain Zangrila, things began to go wrong during the course of adventure. However, plain talk from their trainer’s restore their confidence. The conflict between Yasu and Charanjit’s impatience to hurry results in few accidents. Yasu’s confident leadership and their competent teamwork combine to save them. Yasu, Charanjit and Jasbir continue, while the others elect to remain behind. The three struggled on, Charanjit’s selfish ambitions spell disaster for him. Almost at the summit, an avalanche strikes, and he is trapped in the snow. Once again courageous Yasu risks his life and saves him. Charanjit learns a valuable lesson, that it is more rewarding to help others than to be obsessed with dreams of personal glory.
In addition to provide a vivid account of mountaineering in the Himalayas, *The Lure of Zangrila* makes a philosophical statement: Mountaineering is more than just rigorous training and scientific equipment; each mountaineer must first understand the character and personality of a mountain, and then approach it with a spirit of awe and humility (Khurana 134).

The beautifully crafted book, the careful attention paid to detail, the techniques of mountain climbing are meticulously described and explained by Datta. The tension between Yasu and Charanjit is extremely well depicted and woven skilfully into the action. Both the boys are sharply etched. Yasu- sure of his priorities while Charanjit self-seeking, eager to prove himself at any cost. The thrilling adventure story will provide the readers several elements to learn; the importance of team work, the value of persistence, of keeping cool in the crises to name a few. His *Trouble at Kolongijan* is also an adventure of a young boy, Moina, who becomes the hero when he assists the police and the village council to apprehend some criminals who were determined to destroy the village by blowing up the river embankment.

Arup Kumar Dutta in *The Poisoned Pool* and *Baby Elephant* narrates two adventures of the heroes of *The Kaziranga Trail*. Dhanai, Babul and their elephant Makkhni. Dutta has vividly described the crimes being done in Assam regions. In the story “The Baby Elephant” the children encounter three evil-minded villagers who plan to pull out a baby elephant trapped in a ditch and sell it for a profit. The children’s protest are met with threats but they succeed by an ingenious plot to set the baby elephant free. The author’s vivid, masterly description of the beautiful forests of Assam brings them alive to the young readers. The serenity of the forests and the quiet atmosphere set the stage for the thrilling drama to follow. The story unfolds at a rapid pace ending with the success of
the young readers. The author’s deep concern for the sensitivity of the forest inmates is well presented with narration. The author has painted a vivid picture of the helplessness of the animal and this creates a lasting impression on the children reading the story. The author has tried to educate the reader about the ways and behaviour of the elephant. These stories not only make children enjoy reading but it inculcates in children a love and concern for the wellbeing of the animals.

Nilima Sinha is one of the best acknowledged children’s authors of mystery-adventure stories. *The Chandipur Jewels* (1984), *Vanishing Trick at Chandipur* (1984), *Adventure on the Golden Lake* (1986), and *SOS From Munia* (1990) are her best books, and are in category of prize-winners for Best Fiction and *Adventure before Midnight* was shortlisted for the White Raven List for libraries internationally. The most popular novel written by her is *Mystery of the Falling Mountains* (2004). She has been active in writing for children and contributed a lot for Indian children’s literature in English, she is expert in writing in other sub-genres including historical fiction, fantasy, short stories, plays and biographies. In Save the Earth Series *The Yellow Butterfly, So Can I, Rishabh in the Land of the Flying Magicians* are famous titles among children. Most of her books are being taught in school curriculum. Nilima Sinha contributed to anthologies such as *Our Leaders, Triumph of Non-violence, Together We Marched, Kamla’s Story, Mystery Stories- 1 and 2, M for Mystery-1 and 2, There’s Another Way, Stories From Across the Globe, Once Upon a Time in India, Road to Peace and Lighthouse in the Storm.*

Nilima Sinha has written few years before about the future of Indian Children’s Literature. She has emphasised that the requisite is to form literature which would sustain and grip the imagination of the young, to produce work which would motivate
not only this generation but many other generations to come. Nilima Sinha writes, “Author’s Role in Production of Better Books”

The need is to produce characters which every Indian child will love and true to emulate. We have epic heroes such as Krishna, hanuman, and Arjun. But what about the heroes to satisfy the modern child? We have Phantom, there is Superman, there are five Findouters and there is Nancy Drew. But what about indigenous heroes from our own milieu? …. Should we allow our kids to feel that great men are born only in West? What about lovable characters like Noddy, Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse? Should such cuddly characters emerge only in Europe and America? Is it not time we had more cute little creatures of our own-like Chitku, Cheeky-Meeky and Havaldar Oopy? (7-8).

Dr Sulabha R. Devpurkar writes about the importance of mythical heroes in children’s literature,

Among mythical characters Krishna can provide multiple dimensions of a child. He is the lord, who makes a path amidst the flooded Yamuna as an infant. In the west Hercules is such character who performed miraculous strength and power of human will even as an infant. Krishna is Devine in the form of human. His adventures therefore have a shadow of celestial powers not the human effort…… Krishna remains one of the most popular child-heroes in the comic-books and other story books for children (18).

Nilima Sinha’s writings remain firmly set in the Indian locale. She feels that there are endless possibilities for good literature to be created by delving into our rich and
colourful heritage, that we have enough material to write about – exotic locales to set adventure stories in, precious gems from our ancient history to base stories on, folk tales to be revived, epics and mythology to dive into to create the most magical tales of fantasy, and incidents galore from the lives of great as well as ordinary people to build upon. She writes

To create adventure as exciting as *Treasure Island*, fantasy as eternal as *Alice’s Adventure in Wonderland* and characters as delightful as those in *Winnie the Pooh* must be the aim of every author. Not to imitate Western classics or produce imitation Enid Blyton mysteries, but to create something wholly Indian and entirely original which could strike a chord in our children’s mind- this is what we must strive for (8).

Surekha Panandiker says,

Children are free to travel with Gulliver. They can enjoy the thrill of roaring through jungles of India. They can try their hand at solving the mystery of the Stolen Budha or Kanchipur Jewels. They can identify with heroes of innumerable adventure stories. Then there are evergreen stories from the *Punchatantra, Mahabhatra and Ramayana* (102-103).

Nilima Sinha is identified with mystery stories. Many of her stories have won awards. Her childhood adventures are reflected in her stories. Her first book, *The Chandipur Jewels*, deals with adventures of three children, who go to Bihar on holiday. Their search for lost treasure, their growing love for the old house, their exciting adventures through small town of Bihar are all familiar to Enid Blyton fans. But what sets them apart is the Indianess that Nilima has instilled into the tale. Shyamala V. Iyer writes,
Nilima Sinha certainly seems to have become adept at the rather difficult art of writing good, original mysteries. At a time when writers are churning out tame imitations of Enid Blyton, Sinha’s books stand out for their Indianness (48).

Nilima Sinha a prolific writer with lively imagination and a remarkable gift for connecting with children, has dealt with a master plot, pace, suspense and the moral tale. *Chandipur Jewels* is a gripping story by her. What gives the story the stamp of quality is the clarity with which Mrs Sinha gives individuality to the characters, the ease with which the story portrays the natural reaction of children, the deft humour she introduces in the conversations, the confidence with which she narrates the tangles and unravels them, the grip she maintains over the suspense. She recreated the character of Chandipur Jewels in *Vanishing Trick at Chandipur*. Her characterization is vivid and dialogue appropriate. Prema Srinivasan writes,

> As a tale adventure, it may not be exceptional as the author’s use of the standard devices of the adventure story has been well within the prescribed norms. … the author has been able to recreate the Indian ambience in the setting, which creates the mood of the story and highlights the nature of the characters and the action in which they are involved (60).

In these novels children have the curiosity to know the contemporary events happening in the nation. Children are being taught to address and highlight the problems prevailing in the society. In this process children get awareness at the beginning of their life.

In the contemporary novels, children remain enmeshed in such social hierarchies. It is usually empowered, middle-class child characters who work together in the novels to address various problems and
concerns, including those similar to the ones outlined by Abdul Kalam: these classes alone possess the agency that allows them to recognise and act upon problems. However, these characters also frequently elicit the support and aid of a wide variety of child and adult family and community members, sometimes including members of a low castes or classes, highlighting the advantages of group effort (Superle 64).

**Mystery of the Falling Mountains (Nilima Sinha)**

Children are full of curiosity about the world around them. It is in nature of child to ask questions. Adults mostly are apathetic to the child’s need to know and understand. Some appreciate this attribute and answer the child’s questions or direct it towards sources of knowledge. *Mystery of the Falling Mountains* (2004) is full of questions asked by children. *Mystery of the Falling Mountains* has a driving, action-centred plot that forces the young readers to turn the page and get engrossed in it. During the course of reading the young reader finds a puzzle that they solve from clues thrown by the narrators and at the same time it reverberates with personal experience. Indira Kulshreshtha writes,

A child’s instinct to learn comes from his surroundings, his wanderings, his curiosity…. There is so much to fascinate them to learn about, there is so much that fascinates them, and they are so keen to discover their moorings, that is no wonder that their inquisitive and curious minds wish to understand the mysterious and unknown world around them. A book of knowledge or an informational book goes a long way to satisfy their insatiable desire to ‘know’ (115).
Mystery of the Falling Mountains is a story of Ajay, his sister Richa, their Muslim friend Rustom, who decide to spend their holidays from boarding school with their school friend Dipak at his residence at Sivatika in Himachal Pradesh. Rustom was very well off with his father being the head of a former princely state in Uttar Pradesh. Dipak Pant's father had been on good terms with Ajay and Richa's parents till his death. Rustom, Richa and Ajay graciously accepted Mrs.Pant’s (Dipak"s mother) invitation to stay at Sivatika for the holidays.

However, Dipak’s delay in fetching them from the station caused great anxiety to the children but their anxiety was increased tenfold when a landslide occurred on their way to Dipak’s residence, though it was not monsoon i.e the time for landslides. Here the curiosity arisen within the minds of children. “Look, if we had moved just one inch more this side we would have plunge into the dark abyss!” (MFM7 10) the inquisitiveness among the children began as Richa continuously asked the questions. And they shared the answers themselves.

“why did it happen, Dipak?”…. “I am not sure. Did someone deliberatly…try to harm…? No, no … How is it possible?” Dipak gave a nervous little laugh and did not continue (MFM 11-12).

A warm welcome from Mrs.Pant lightened their spirits besides the scenic beauty of the mountains which extended from the lofty ranges of the Himalayas. Their first introduction to Moti, Dipak’s faithful dog was not a crashing success because Moti did not approve of strangers and his suspicions were aroused when Ahmed (Rustom’s dutiful bodyguard) used means not approved by Moti to protect Rustom from the dog.

Nilima Sinha then introduces a series of dramatic situations which must work through to prove themselves in all sorts of ways. The mysterious noises in the night

7 Mystery of the Falling Mountains
during the adventure to the Himalayan village and curiosity among the children, at the
same time the humorous distinctive temperament of Ahmad has made the narrative
thrilling.

Thuck-thuck, the sounds seemed to come from a distance. Prr-grrr…
this sounded nearer. It was the purring of a vehicle. What was it doing
here so late at night? Other sounds followed. Crunch, went
someone’s footsteps. Shhhhhhh…hushed whispers, thump-crash,
grrr-whrrrrrrrrrrr.. it was impossible to muffle the mysterious noises.

Dare she tiptoe to the window to see what it was all about?” (MFM 14).

In the stories it feels that children are always on a mission. Nilima Sinah makes use of
the power of the quest to provide a structure for the narrative drive. There are other
instances where all children desire to know things, about the wondrous cave in the
mountains which was unrevealed and concealed to the humans. It was children’s
discovered secret. Children seem afraid to disclose the secret to the evil world, “No,
no! No geologist must come here. This my secret. You are not to tell anyone. (MFM 30). Children are excited to discover it.

There were no treasures there, nor were there heaps of pearls or gems.

No gold or silver-filled chests, yet all agreed that the cave was
marvellous find. The walls glowed with a strange luminosity,
sparkles twinkling at spots that caught the sunlight that streamed in
through the opening (MFM 29-30).

Children have extraordinary tactics to explore. They have curiosity, as within the cave
these adventurous children examine and touch the walls with probing figures and peep
into caravans and holes we can sense how children can go far beyond given space to explore. As Ajay explores,

“Here we go, into the unknown. No one knows what lies beyond in the dark, where no human foot has trod before” there was an explorer’s gleam in Ajay’s brown eyes (MFM 44).

There is close proximity between nature and children, as children enjoy in the lap of nature in the story. They find themselves mingled with nature’s handiwork, waterfalls, water streams, tall ferns, dense greenery.

Children have fears as apparent in the story, of adult’s intrusion into nature. Children get shaken and offended while seeing thick tree logs floating in the streams. They are very keen to know about who chops the trees floating on the stream. The children felt even more startled when someone breaks into the house in the dead of the night known ironically as ‘visitors’ in the narrative who are a threat the nature.

The children rushed towards the cave. There was no one there. But there was enough tell-tale evidence to show that someone had been present. The loose earth was disturbed. There was footprints that definitely didn’t belong to the children. As if this was not enough, cigarette stubs and used matchsticks lay scattered on the dusty ground (43).

The children were introduced to many more people including Mr. Das, the owner of a neighbouring farm, Shivnath - the contractor, Mr. Hari Lall, his wife - Mrs. Pamela Lall, Motilal - the shopkeeper and Gopi, the gardener. Many buyers were eager to acquire the sprawling property of the Pants. When Mrs. Pant refuses, Dipak was kidnapped. But on the other hand children are nature lovers, they want nature to be get preserved.
The children set out to find Dipak only to realise that their battle was against a very powerful gang of people who were out to destroy the natural resources of the mountains for their own selfish demands.

“I agree now. There is something strange going on here. We promise to catch the enemy and not rest until the ends of justice are met. It is total war we declare, friends. Be prepared, one and all, for the greatest challenge ever faced by man” he declared (MFM 53).

The thriller is interesting and children get engrossed in the story. And at the same time we find some social problems created by man. Children thought, “We must work it out. It calls for a lot of brainwork. Let us all out our heads together and discuss it. The adults call it a brainstorming session” (68). The chapters like ‘Dipak Takes the Walk’, ‘Where is Dipak?’, ‘Letters’, ‘Richa on the Trail’ are both mysterious and full of adventure for children. Children were able to free themselves from the people who have tied them.

Suspicions fell on the Lalls and Mr. Das who were unable to prove themselves innocent. Finally Shibu, the son of the driver was able to locate Dipak but as a result, he himself was held prisoner with Richa. Matters were made worse with the arrival of an anonymous notes to Mrs. Pant threatening her to vacate her house or else suffer. A series of accidents including poisoned milk made it nearly impossible to stay there, but they did not lose hope. Ajay and Rustom by chance came to know where Richa, Shibu and Dipak were imprisoned.

With their wit the children manage to escape and discover the purpose of the notorious gang and their headquarters, office and storerooms.

The furniture was lined up against the opposite wall. A table, three stools, an earthen pot of water, glasses and plates…. Was it an office?

An office in a cave--- the idea amused the girl. What was that? She
screwed her eyes, trying to pierce the darkness. Wood. A pile of slim logs stacked neatly along the wall. Was the cave a storing place for the wood? (MFM 85).

They were too late to prevent the gang to set Dipak’s house on fire but luckily everyone managed to escape unscathed because of Mr. Das”s timely action. “These kids have just told me a shocking tale. There are people who out to destroy our beautiful mountains. They have worked it all out. Everything detail.” (MFM 101). With the help of the police, children manage to capture the gang leaded by Shivnath the contractor and details were revealed about the gang being involved in smuggling tree trunks, minerals from the mountains and such other illegal activities. After making sure that the members of the gang were safely in prison, they were on friendly terms with the Lalls and Mr. Das and resumed their peaceful holidays to enjoy the lush green meadows, covered with thick and green grass, sprinkled lavishly with pale yellow daisies and patches of forests all around Sivatika in the Himalayan region.

Children, children, enough! It is more than I can handle. You seem to know much more than I could even imagine! But now, thanks to you, I am beginning to understand…. Indians have the best brains in the world, I always tell Pamela. In fact, everything here is best. This is why we returned. Look at the mountains, the trees, the people! Everything is just super here (MFM 99-101).

At the end there is cry from a young child Ajay, “it is natural calamity. Human beings are responsible too. They remove vegetation and expose the soil. They blast the mountains with dynamite. They make deep holes to mine rocks. They disturb the nature in so many ways and upset the ecological balance. (MFM 101-102) is heart rendering.
Reading is an enjoyable habit which is becoming increasingly popular, this has become possible with an ever increasing development of reading material and improvements in techniques of publishing.

*More Mystery Stories* (1989) is a collection of stories written by members of AWIC Illustrated by Mrinal Mitra for young children. Each story has all the essential constituents and components of an adventure story. The plot in each story is powerful, has plenty of surprises and excitement, events move fast which grip the reader’s attention thoroughly. Meena Khurana, writes

> Whether it is a misguided robot, a thieving milk boy, a kleptomaniac, or a roaring monument, each story places the young protagonists in exciting, though believable predicaments that challenge them to think logically. Set in various regions of India, both volumes provide an insight into the life of young adolescents, especially those belonging to the privileged class (155).

“Music Behind Doors” by Sigrun Srivastave, writer and a well-known illustrator of children’s stories, is the story of a father who fights to save his child from the world of superstitions and misconceptions which erode the very fabric of human existence. Nita Berry’s “The Invisible Burglar” is about a mysterious business which at once excites the reader’s imagination. Aman and Saman are two young boys who solve a theft case. General Sahib’s medal was stolen, it is the children who uses simple clues as a line of small ants and sticky white stain and help to catch the thief before he gets away. In “Mystery of the Vanishing Biscuits” by Poile Sengupta, the absence of biscuits upsets the boarding schoolgirls and they use all sorts of sums and additions and subtractions to solve the problem of missing biscuits which lead to their adventure. One more adventure story by Vaijaynati Tonpe, “Lost and Found”, begins along the icy waters of
river Teesta where the children go to collect some drift wood. The four children amidst Oohs and Ahs, manage to catch a gang of smugglers. Young readers feel themselves engrossed and enchanted with the dense forest in backdrop. “Detective” by Kamini Kausal, is a dramatic story, all about a set of naughty children and their harassed ‘Masterji’ who forms the comical central figure of the story. The recovery of secreted treasure from the mountain in the most casual of manners is what makes the story fascinating. “The Roaring Mountains” is by S.G. Haider, writer of several prize winning books for children, who is actively involved in promotion of good literature for children in Urdu. The story is all about the school children on camping trip. The scene is set in a village covered with ruins of domes, crumbling walls and heaps of stones from broken graves. As the children decided to settle down sunset around the camp-fire, they hear loud roars coming from the ruins.

“The Lucky Coral Ring” written by famous writer for children, Swapna Dutta. The story is woven around the delicate theme of obsession with the idea of lucky talismans. “Treasure Island” by Arup Kumar Dutta, revolves round the recovery of missing boat on the banks of Brahmaputra. “The Antique Necklace” is by Savitri Makhijani, and the Violin which holds the secret message is the subject of a hot pursuit. Excitement increases through the lines of the story as the plot builds up. It is an action packed story. “Secret of the Hollow Tree” by R.K. Murthy, revolves around secret messages being sent around in code form. Solving puzzles in code form has always been passion with growing children.

Adventure stories does have ample benefits and advantages for the growth of the children. Literature for children particularly adventure stories greatly gratifies the psychological requirements by giving an atmosphere of thrill which is an important requirement for children. The child gets in adventure stories plenty of pleasant and
adventurous situations which he usually misses in real life. For his own adventurous creativities, he gets great motivation from the stories he may read. His mind desires for an adventurous expedition on the top of a mountain or a voyage to the deep seas. In imagination, he wants to perform the challenging roles of the mighty heroes. This he does by reading about the triumphs of great travellers, warriors, explorers, navigators or social workers. He places himself in the position and identifies with the hero he reads about. He draws nourishment in his mental life from the versions of the adventures he reads about in the books.

These stories are driving, action-centred plot that forces children to turn the pages. And puts forth a puzzle that the readers solve from clues thrown by the narrator and the stories echo with personal experience. Struggle, freedom, national duties are recurring themes in adventure stories. All these stories teach self-sufficiency. It teaches children to imagine themselves in potentially real situations. These novels apart from fostering fantastic or imaginative place for the child, offers a model for particular experience and in experience lies education.

4.5: Bibliotherapy: Children’s books in India

Perhaps the most convincing argument for the effectiveness of bibliotherapy comes from writers themselves. There's the case of George Eliot, for example, who recovered from the grief of losing her husband George Henry Lewes by reading Dante with a young friend, John Cross, who subsequently married her. "Her sympathetic delight in stimulating my newly awakened enthusiasm for Dante did something to distract her mind from sorrowful memories," Cross later wrote. "The divine poet took us to a new world. It was a renovation of life" (Morison n.p).
Bibliotherapy is an age old concept in library science. The simple definition of bibliotherapy is, the use of reading materials for help in solving personal problems. Webster's dictionary offers the following definition: “Guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading” (Gove 212). Zipora Shechtman writes,

The knowledge of healing through books is not new; it can be drawn from long ago from the first libraries in ancient Greece. The usage of the term ‘bibliotherapy’ goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when Crothes (1916) labelled it as such. Most of us recognise the power of therapeutic reading. We find ourselves entering the world described in the pages of a good book or appearing in the scenes of a good movie, and we become involved with the characters. We feel happy or sad, we cry with the character who suffers; we want the good ones to cope and the bad ones to be punished. We really care. We usually end up gaining new insights and ideas for our own lives as well. Just reading high-quality literature, then, is a healing process that can enrich our selves (21).

Presently, bibliotherapy is used by almost all assisting professionals in psychotherapy or instruction, like school counsellors, social workers or health providers as well as teachers and librarians. In the school atmosphere, it can be used as an operative method of prevention. Child psychologist, writer and critic of children’s books Dr. Ira Saxena writes

Book Therapy is the art of healing through literature. The concept pre-supposes the potential of literature wrapping a protective shroud of words and imagery around the reader, skilfully transporting the reader away from distress and anguish of reality of the plot and
characters, showing a way through conflict situations (“Psychological” 10).

Shetchtman further make us understand how use of literature is useful in healing and he names it an affective bibliotherapy

Affective bibliotherapy uses fiction and other high-quality literature to help the reader connect to emotional experiences and human situations through the process of identification….Through identification with literary characters, individuals are exposed to a wide range of emotions, of which they can recognise something in themselves, thus reconnecting to their own emotional world. Experiencing is enhanced through the richness of human life, characters, situations, and problems that the literature presents (26).

Book therapy is a technique which is useful not only for adults but also for children. It is not only useful for children who are in difficult circumstances but also for those who are going through problems which may just be developmental in nature. Book therapy can be embedded in the paradigm of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. Generally these are based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques. The central idea is based upon three predominate factors, which are: cognition (how we think), emotion and affect (how we feel), and behavior (how we act). All these work together. The main aim of bibliotherpy according to John Pardeck is

(a) to provide information about problems, (b) to provide insight into problems, (c) to stimulate discussion about problems, (d) to communicate new values and attitudes, (e) to create an awareness that others have dealt with similar problems, and (f) to provide solutions about problems (n.p).
This is the mechanism through which, educationists, counselors, teachers can approach the target reader. Marcus M. Mottley provides information related to the benefits of reading stories/books in ‘Bibliotherapy: The Reading Cure!’ he writes an individual has chance to

- relate to the main character and his predicament
- become so emotionally connected to the story that their own feelings are revealed
- realize that his/her problem is solvable or, at the very least, that he/she is not alone
- process possible solutions to his/her problems
- develop hope based on the positive outcomes from the lives of the characters in the book
- bring an added positive dimension to the self-talk that goes on inside (Mottley n.p).

Children’s books did not convey profound topics such as loss, divorce, and bullying conflict, trauma until recently. According to Lowe, “Until recently, children’s books did not address sensitive topics such as death, divorce, and bullying. In the past few decades and due to societal changes, there have been more books published dealing with these non-traditional issues. (1). Young children are enormously inclined towards the environment in which they live. In a world which is increasingly filled with tensions and stress, conflicts have become an inevitable parts of our lives. Tensions and stress of very high levels such as when caused by the deaths of a family member, war, terrorist attacks, disaster caused by physical conditions such as earthquakes, tsunami attacks may reach traumatising stages. So it is essential for children to learn the managing skills needed to successfully handle grief, frustration, and anger that are a part of daily life and to emerge with a sense of self-control, hope, and resilience. According to Schbiebert “when dealing with sensitive issues, such as death, even with very small children it is not helpful to pretend that nothing is wrong. They will sense your anguish.
Your willingness to discuss this with them reassures them that we can talk about anything and that it is okay to share thoughts and emotions” (Lowe 3). Lowe explains how stories can heal the emotional wounds.

On September 12, 2001, three children in my class sobbed, explaining that a parent never came home the night before. As these three first-grade students cried, others discussed how cool the planes looked as they flew into our World Trade Centre. To discontinue the morning chatter immediately I announced that it was “morning carpet time.” One of the children handed me a book and asked me to read it to them, as the rest of the students voiced their approval. During this traumatic time in our history, a book instantly and uniformly bought tranquillity back into classroom. It was at that time I knew the bridge between coping, expressions, and healing for students would be through children’s literature. Individuals of all ages appear to lose themselves in stories. Both groups of students will display disapproval if one discontinues reading in the middle of an interesting book. Story-telling is a timeless teaching tool (Kersey 54).

Children’s literature is an approach or direction of expression and a platform where children can activate prior knowledge and associate to the emotional state of characters in a book. The child is a developing human being; developing physically, mentally, socially and morally. Thus the way a child and adolescent perceives the world is very different from the way an adult does. Carol Berns finds “that children may be more inclined to share in these ways through a third person or the safe distance of a storybook character, cartoon, or animal. Children can then talk about the characters rather than about themselves directly” (325). The catastrophes manufactured by man always
instigate greater injury, both physical and psychological to the whole social fabric. Considering children, the range of suffering is powerful and acute; the psychological wounds are deep and intense sometimes pushing children into the security of silence, withdrawal, and a psyche blemished by internal hatred. Then there are threatening, punishing psycho-social worries – racial and communal barriers, breaking up of families, peer pressures, bullying, discrimination, which shatters the self and lowers self-esteem of the child. Children afflicted by these psychological clashes suffer silently till they drop resilience and become victims of dejection and depression. The phenomenon has become world-wide. Johanna Slivinske and Lee Slivinske writes in *Storytelling and Other Activities for Children in Therapy*

> When children hear stories, they often identify with the characters and events in the stories. This helps them to reflect on their own experiences, which may be similar to the experiences and emotions of the characters. Processing, gaining understanding, and finding resolution of their own emotional issues may then occur. Hopefully they also may learn that it is beneficial to share and experience powerful emotions in a supportive and caring environment (13).

In order to gain an effective mental balance, it is necessary to achieve equilibrium and serenity after any trauma. Appropriate books lend unquestionable path to such conflicts and trauma. These books and stories pull the child from the depths of their ordeal; eventually enabling them to settle in their circumstance. Reena Jabran writes about the metaphorical tales in her paper titled as, ‘NLP—A Therapeutic Tool’

> The children from 6–9 years love to hear stories, so we work on the metaphorical language i.e. tell stories with values. Metaphor in NLP is a vehicle which has life experiences, stories of successful people,
Panchatantra, Mahabarata, Ramayan, Bible stories—through this metaphorical language we can instil suggestions, for children of that age are susceptible to suggestions. It is very important how we use the words, tonality and body physiology to communicate. Physical discomfiture like pain in the body can be removed by these children by playful visualization (n.p).

She further writes, we can use stories for therapeutic techniques

There are NLP techniques which can removes fears, boost confidence, self-esteem, remove irritations and agitations, regrets for past actions, and also learn to celebrate their lives.....Handling peer group pressures, parents’ pressures, school pressures, becomes very easy through these techniques. There are a whole lot of techniques which accelerate learning, make one love a subject they hate, remove unwanted behaviour,.... change the perception of the world which are creating uneasiness, and handle many more challenges with ease and fun. The bottom line is to learn to celebrate life in spite of all the situations and challenges (Jabran n.p).

*Lighthouse in the Storm (AWIC)*

Twenty two short stories from the collection *Lighthouse in the Storm* (2012), by different writers, the victims of tragedy are guided to the shore, the shore where one finds reconciliation with the fact and beyond. Hope is sprinkled within these stories. Twenty four stories cover a range of tragic events inspired by real life experiences like
Tsunami, earthquake, Mumbai riots etc. some stories deal with personal loss, grief, child abuse. All the themes are somehow part and parcel of a child’s or young adult’s life. These stories shared with children and young adults instil resilience and strength to cope.

*The New Boy in Grade Seven (Pratibha Naath)*

The story is about Jasvir Singh Baghela seventh grader, narrated in first person by one of his teachers. “My first glimpse of the new boy came through a blur of bodies, all in the uniform, all locked in frenzied fight. Even in that melee he stood out, for he was a head taller than the rest, and well-built for one so young.” (LS8 7). As the time goes by, he turns to be quite a loner; picking fights at the slightest provocations and beats children smaller to him. The narrator is concerned and wants to unravel the mystery behind such antagonistic behaviour. The picture turns ugly when one of the young teachers is threatened. The narrator and the teacher narrates, “I was deeply troubled. I could, of course, go to the Principal and Jasvir would be hauled up for a serious breach of discipline. At best he would be severely punished. At worst he might be expelled… sent home, bag a baggage. I was against such drastic action. So was young teacher. Somehow, deep down, we were in empathy with Jasvir” (LS 10). There was a sense of curiosity in the teacher as she sympathised with him. “He was like a closed book. How could one reach him?” (10). Once Jasvir approached her in the library and breaks into tears. He has just lost his mother and is very apprehensive and insecure about his father.

He stumbled rather than walked to the seat opposite mine, face bereft of colour, his eyes wide and fearful…. He seemed to have some trouble in speaking. Then, crossing his arms on the table, he put his head down and burst into tears. I let him cry. I let him cry his heart

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8 *Lighthouse in the Storm*
out. His body heaved and sobs caught into throat till I thought he would choke. But in time the storm passed, the shoulders stopped heaving (LS 11).

The writer writes beautifully

Fresh sobs broke out. On the window-sill one lone, home-bound sparrow sang to herself as I reached out and stroked Jasvir’s thatch of hair (LS 13).

The child’s world is traumatised and devastated the reason he brings bellicosity towards others. Ventilating out his feelings assists him to get comfort and relief and at the same time also justifies his actions. The narrator proposes that he should involve himself in his favourite sports. “Even two games of football a week helped knock down the wall that he had raised around himself” (LS 14). He takes notice of it and accordingly he absorbs himself into the game. Soon, he is a football star and a popular, likeable hero of the class that brings home a state trophy- the walls are broken and the frown had vanished. The ordeal has come to an end.

We didn’t even realise when the frown on his face gave away to a steady gaze from a pair of clear, untroubled eyes.... Happily, for all concerned, his father came to watch him play the final game and cheered the loudest (LS 14).

Jasvir finds resolution to his antagonism and aggression in the game of football. Children need stimulation for this purpose and here literature play important role in giving invigoration. As John Dewey comments, “There are certain powers within the child urgent for development, needing to be acted out in order to secure their own efficiency and discipline, we have firm basis upon which to build. Efforts arises normally in the attempt to give full operation, and thus growth and completion, to these
powers. Adequately to act upon these impulses involve seriousness, absorption, definiteness of purpose, it results in formation of steadiness and persistent habit in the service of worthy ends” (14-15).

**Can Anyone Do it? (Deepa Agarwal)**

Literature has role to play in educating children about disability. Jen Scot Curwood writes “Learning about social justice in the world and engaging in literary study can be a powerful way for youth to critically consider disability” (16). Earlier the differently abled characters in literature were portrayed as negative like in *Moby Dick*, Ahab as one legged, obsessed captain, and in *Christmas Carol* Tin Tim as the sentimental and hobbling urchin. In this story by Agarwal we find Shankar a disabled character as vigorous and energetic. The story opens with a thirteen year old Shankar, a lame and weak boy with crutches who aspires of being a star cricketer. On the other hand, Girish is the thick skinned and unsympathetic village bully boy who never spares a chance to admonish and castigate this handicap. Shankar asks many questions to himself

Griish, who always mocked him for the lame… Confused, he examined the bat in his hand… how did it turn onto a crutch? And why he was not playing, but standing at the edge of the field watching the game longingly, as usual…? The euphoria vanished, leaving him as flattened as a pricked balloon. A terrible feeling of helplessness swept over him. Why couldn’t he race through the fields, leap and play like rest? (LS 15).

The story gives hope and strength to disabled children. Shankar does a heroic job. Shankar has a close proximity with Charles Dicken’s Tiny Tim, a disabled character. One night when his father was away at work, Shankar abruptly awakens to the sounds of pain and chaos. To his horror he realises that the river has flooded over and water is
gradually filling into their small residences. Shankar though in anxiety over his impairment to succour his grandmother, younger brother and little baby sister; gathers pluck and wakes them all in good time.

Shankar’s breath came quick, his heart thumped painfully. What was he to do? He cast an anxious eye on Laxman, Dadi and Mamta. The thought of sitting there, waiting for the floods to carry them off, was unbearable. He had to try – try to do something at least. Whatever he could manage. Lame leg and all (LS 17).

Shankar limps along with his family finds a sheltered place, a huge banyan tree. Even in times of distress he is encountered by offensive remarks and sympathy for his ailment. Few fellows make fun of his pace. “Someone laughed ‘The langda’s really afraid’ and ‘it is natural, someone added. ‘How will the poor fellow manage if he has to run?’”(LS 20). Shankar’s will was firm and the remarks and sniggers do him no harm. These category of positive characters may well offer ease to the disabled reader. Shankar was determined to save his loving family. After seeking refuge on the tree, Shankar courageously saves six villagers including Girish with the help of his crutches. The story is touching and depicts the bravery of the differently-abled boy and his grit to succeed against all odds. Tony Seymour suggests, “Disabled characters in children’s books, is that they enable disabled children to identify with such characters. This, in turn offers them a sense of re-assurance, whilst also raising disability awareness amongst able bodied children and educating them about people’s differences” (n.p). Later at the end of the story Shankar’s father says softly, “No son, not everyone…only some like you” (LS 23). As Tony Seymour also comments, “Children’s books, which contain disabled characters may well serve to introduce able bodied children to
disability” (n.p). Children with disability gets encouraged due to these narratives, although there less numbers of books specially written on disabled children.

We can find differently abled characters in western children’s books like Clara in Heidi, there are books written specifically written for differently abled children in west like Fifth Format St. Dominic’s by Talbot Bainnes Reed and Mia and Chalie by Annie Keary. But in India this field needs to be developed.

**Daddy, Please Wake Up (Dipavali Sen)**

This is a beautifully portrayed story with an undertone and suggestions for children. It portrays a child who is the victim of parental pressures. It depicts the deep psychology of a sensitive child, Vineet. A traumatic incident of a father taking an overdose of pills and lead him to face of death, leaves young Vineet with number of unresolved questions.

A question was bothering him. WHY did Daddy try to kill himself? The question stayed fixed in his mind, not letting him think of anything else. Mummy had said that he had losses. But, to kill himself…? What would have happened to mummy and him if Daddy had managed to do what he had tried? Vineet shuddered at the thought. Didn’t he think of that? Was Daddy not really bothered about them? It was only his business- his profits and losses- that he cared about? A fountain of emotions unsettled him and Vineet to pace up and down in the room” (LS 32).

After playing few games his mind was still questioning, “Did Daddy care so little about him that his growing losses in the business drove him to kill himself? Didn’t I matter to him at all’ Vineet reflected soberly” (LS 31). Slowly, Vineet seeks solace in Peppy and the father is back home, well and recovering: but Vineet cannot find himself tackle
his father and exhibiting warmth for him. His father senses something wrong and attempts quite a few times to approach him, but Vineet is gladly happy in his neighbour’s home.

Money gone-so he just wanted to die. I hadn’t gone, had I? Nor did Mummy go. But he think that Mummy and I would do without him?

No, I don’t want to think of him!’ he exploded, tears streaming down his cheeks, breaking into vigorous sobs (LS 35).

The writer tries to go deep into the psyche of the child, child’s apprehensions, fears is evident throughout the story, it tries to bring forth the pressures faced by children due to domestic problems. It also talks about the affectionate bond between parents and children. The story ends on a happy note when Vineet’s father suggests that Uncle Das hand over Peppy to Vineet to rear. Vineet is relieved and happy at the thought and is also moved by his father’s concern and responsibility for him. The bond is recognised, the stillness and silence is broken. All becomes well and Vineet becomes his father’s best friend again. A tale of hope and joy, notwithstanding of the gloomy beginning, the end rests on optimistic and happy note. The next morning dawned with Peppy whining for fresh air. ‘Daddy, please, wake up!’ Vineet called out. Let’s walk Peppy together.’” (LS 38). In the beginning emotional regulation is seen through the child, then child tried to find out the self- efficiency through dog Peppy. And through child readers perspective they sympathise with the child inside the text and at the end there is resilience through optimism.

**Hanuman Baby (Indira Ananthakrishnan)**

‘Hanuman Baby’ is a moving story about a young girl Gauri, and the ruination that takes place when she heard that she is adopted child. The story is also an attempt to bring in children awareness about the parent child relationships. The attention-grabbing
title keeps one predicting, but the clever interpretation of the plot is well-ordered and simple. The term ‘tummy mummy’ was coined by Gauri, as she thinks that,

‘All babies come from mummies’ tummies’. ‘My mother has told me about mummy tummy babies and Hanuman babies. I’m a Hanuman baby, you know’… ‘Hanuman gave me to my mother and therefore I’m a special child’ (LS 41).

To clear the muddle, her girls rush to Gauri’s mother who patiently elucidates that on fervently praying Hanuman, her supplications get responded and she was blessed with girl child. She stepped outside her home to find one in their yard. That is how she said Gauri became the Hanuman baby. The justifications elevates doubts in the child mind. She went out with her friend Janki to find her tummy mummy in a swarming fair in adjacent village. After an ineffective attempt, lost in the crowd of so many unacquainted faces, the girls fell asleep under the shade of a tree, only to be woken up by the high-pitched siren of a police vehicle. Gauri’s mother cuddles her girl with tears rolling down her cheeks and tells her how she spent the entire afternoon searching for her.

While Gauri gazed into her mother’s beautifully soft eyes, Janki whispered in her ears, ‘Do you still want to find your tummy mummy?’

Gauri shook her head. She squeezed Janki’s hand and said with a smile, ‘I like being a Hanuman baby, and I like my parents for making me very special’ (LS 48).

Gauri comprehends that this is the mother she needs and pledges under no circumstances to go astray again. A warm and emotional story that makes one think
twice about relationships of love in their countless forms. Most of the children feel fear in losing their parents, such kind of stories may give some relief to children.

*Two Halves of a Smiling Sun* (Sulekha Kumar)

It is a serious and sad story with the Bhopal gas tragedy as its setting. A young boy Taabish leads a normal life- scurrying to school in the morning making meaningless chatter with friends and helping his mother back home. He feels closest to his mother who makes marvellous patchwork quilts from random and seemingly useless bits of colourful cloth. It is as she puts a touch of life on the pieces and when stitched together they complete the picture as if by magic. Stitching together peace and bits into one is metaphoric. One night, when all are asleep, they are ruthlessly awoken by hazes of toxic gases impending all around.

No one knew, anyhow, which way to go. In the melee, the most of the families ran closer to the source of the piousness gas. One by one they collapsed, some dead, some struggling to regain their breath (LS 51).

In the panic that follows, Taabish is orphaned, and thousands are sick due to the harmful gases. The world is devastated for Taabish, who loses his whole family including his much-loved mother.

He did not cry at their burial or at any point of time. He just went about wordlessly, as though he had no voice. He walked around aimlessly, as though he had no voice. He walked around aimlessly the whole day, and sometimes even at night. He ate and slept and answered questions mechanically, mostly by shaking his head. The dazed look became fixed onto his face (LS 52).
He is being advised to re-join school but devotes time dreaming about his mother Ammi Hamida. During the course of time one day Taabish comes across his old neighbour Moin and his daughter Fehmida. Femida too has lost her children to the gaseous monsters. Taabish discovers that Famida too sews on the machine just like his mother. That breaks the barriers in his heart and he sees his mother in him. An exceptionally well narrated story of how two imperfect and incomplete halves can join together to form one complete whole. Tabish gives her a patchwork quilt left undone by his mother and over some days, she completes it just as her mother would have. Together they stitch the final centrepiece of a smiling face of the sun. Heartbroken Tabish finds the purpose to his life when he becomes hope of a childless mother.

All the way back, Taabish was jumping with joy. His newly found mother was waiting for him at home. Bringing random cut pieces together had changed his life. He knew now when you cut two halves, they do not make any sense. When you join them together, they do. Then they form themselves into sun-complete, round, bright and smiling (LS 60).

Shalley Chaturvedi and Suniti Jaitley writes in a paper titled, ‘Bhopal gas Tragedy and Third Generation Children’

Activists in Bhopal like Sardana, Abdul Jabbar, Sadhna Karnik, Satinath Sarangi, Rasheeda Bee, Champa Devi Shukla, Tarun Thomas, etc. are still working for the cause and trying to get support from all parts of the world to heal physical or psychological problems of the victims of this disaster. They all have welcomed the step taken by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) for including the chapter of the Bhopal gas tragedy into the...
syllabus. Sadhna Karnik has been working continuously for children of the uncontrolled area who have been severely affected by the gas. She is more worried about the education of the children of these families as because of poor economic conditions, these children have to earn their livelihood and they are not able to go to school even for primary education (16).

They further write

An evidence-informed study on the effect of book therapy has been developed to facilitate the recovery of children affected by this man-made disaster. In addition to the medical and formal mental health treatment, book therapy is an intermediate, secondary prevention model designed to teach children basic skills to alleviate distress as effectively as is needed which can be easily implemented in schools (17).

The Lyrical Battle (Ira Saxena)

It is a wonderful story – subtle, sensitive and healing. Set in the backdrop of school life, it describes the camaraderie as well as rivalry in an evocative and sensitive manner. Amit and Sameer are classmates and the rivalry between them is bitter. Amit, a cheerful and artistic boy is struck with a life threatening illness and suffers attacks of pain. It was traumatic to deal with the condition. He misses his friends in school and is very worried about a play ‘The Golden Guitar’ that he has been playwriting, which was left unfinished.

I landed back in hospital the very next day, writhing in agony, throbbing stinging every call of my body. Each attack sapped my energy, draining all power resources, glucose levels and proteins.
Each minute in the hospital was a burden, dragging me away from the precious practice session (LS 65-66).

Amit was hopeful and assures his friends that he will complete the song of ‘the Golden Guitar’ a dream classification in the finale. While scripting the final paragraphs amidst pain and suffering of another shocking attack, Amit shows great bravery and willpower.

My thoughts wandered to the dream sequence…clouds of yellow and orange smoke on the purple velvet passage…the lotus flowers turning into smiling, playful children at the touch of the golden magician strumming on his golden guitar… (LS 69).

Amit’s body is overcome with pain but his mind is alive with thoughts.

I scribbled the first lines; a fiery missile ripping my insides shook the notepad from my grip. I held it desperately, clutching it to my heart fir life support (LS 70).

Amit pens down a beautiful sequence of lyrics, done in time just as his body slumps into cool vapours of tranquillity.

Line after line linking the poem kept streaming in like the ripples of a brook, bouncy and constant. I tightened my grip on my pen. The music of my lyrics was overpowering. ‘Onwards and forwards…’ it carried me uphill into the cool vapours, casting a dreamy haze around me (LS 71-72).

This short story makes one in curiosity how children and grownups alike deal with such unpleasant sickness imposed on them by fate and how strong one has to be to overcome it. This story gives message to young readers that the sorrow is not long lasting; there is always a bright shine of morning that follows the shady dreamy night. The process of healing starts both from without as well as within.
The Bubble of Shared Knowing (Ken Spillman)

This story is an abstract version or representation of the very predominant yet delicate issues of sexual molestation of young adults. It is all more pertinent to address this in current times, when abuse has become so extensive. Child sexual abuse is “so horrible a concept and so terrifying to parents that form of unconscious denial takes place with the resulting perception: ‘Not my child!’ This perception has become prevalent in today’s families” (qtd. in 206 McDaniel). Rohini is a normal girl who leads a normal life, comfortable in the confines of her bubble, until one day the bubble bursts.

Rohini lived in a bubble. Inside that bubble, things were normal. She had a normal family. She lived in Normal Enclave and slept in a normal bedroom. At Normal Government School, she was a normal student who just managed to avoid an abnormal amount of trouble (LS 73).

An uncle who claims to be a childhood friend of her Baba picks her up from the school, treats her to ice cream and offers her to piggy back like he would in childhood. Rohini finds him trivial and dramatic and obeys and the uncle forces her to please him, and she is trapped with an evil man in a desolate wasteland and who is assaulted. Cynthia McDaniel writes, “Perpetrators often frighten children into silence and secrecy by threatening to harm them, another family member, or a favorite pet, and/or they use their position of authority to convince their victims that the situation is “normal,” and the victim has a duty to obey the adult…” (205).

The wasteland marked out for development sprouted evil. A person was drowning in a pool but floated to the surface with part of her still alive, saved by a bubble that had burst that moment and would never exist again (LS 78).
Nothing returns to normal after the incident which she keeps locked in her heart and Rohini is traumatized with nightmares. But she doesn’t stop and unlocks the locks, “but when something unexpected happens, things can change, and change can be good.” (LS 79). She decides to tell it all, and it is the day of liberation. McDaniel writes children need to provide information related to abuse with sufficient information, “without sufficient information, children are not only unable to protect themselves effectively, in some instances they may not realise they have been abused” (206). A new bubble wrapped Rohini, a bubble of shared knowledge. The sharing keeps her warm and safe and ends the ordeal inside her.

In Rohini’s new normal, the tiniest thing appeared. It was a bubble of shared knowledge, small but magic. She breathed a little easier inside it (LS 80).

To confront and deal with such issues, it is more important to address them rather than consider them a taboo or shy away from them. This is the message that the story portrays. These types of stories support to help children improve understanding into their problems and find appropriate solutions.

_Halo of Love (E Shailaja Nair)_

It is a story of young Shireen and her brother Avi. Unanticipated incidents happen in their lives and Shireen meets with a crippling accident that leaves her in a wheel chair. The children lose their father. Even though the children are being gripped by these hard circumstances, they move on. The accident has changed all their lives forever. It is one more story of hope and redemption. The story provides child reader a sense of courage that life must go on. Dr. Renu Malaviya comments “these stories provides a feeling of ‘I am not alone’, ‘I need to move on’, etc. and reconstructs one’s self. Above all, it
provides a base for the child reader to grow back one’s control on self and develop again the power to exist and thrive” (27).

The Outsider (Nilima Sinha)

Ashis, an eleven years old is an outsider, a new boy in the school, and feels absolutely out of place after his parents move to India from Boston. Everyone in the family is joyful that they are back home but Ashis is gloomy and wretched. Children in school refuse to include him in their groups and make mockery and ridicule of his American accent.

‘Ca...aa...an, ca...aa...an!’ chanted all the boys together with exaggerated accent. Rohan winked at the boys and said in a mocking voice, ‘He means Amea...aa...reican cricket, of course, it made everyone laugh uproariously (LS 89).

He recounts all his time spent with his friends, his home Cherry Street, American food and the game of football. Ashis starts to make all kinds of excuses to miss school. One fine day at home, he spends time in his garden and notices to his astonishment how attractive, different and distinctive the flora and fauna are in contrast to the sights and noises in the US.

A golden yellow butterfly flew past the boy’s cheek. He opened his eyes wide, wondering. What a beautiful creature. He had never seen one like before…. It was so green, shady and pleasant in the garden… a chorus of birds-shrill, sweet and chaotic-filled his ears… he wished he could describe them to his friends and the geography teacher (LS 95).

In a gush of exhilaration, Ashis fetches his camera and starts to capture frames that leave him mesmerised. He is later cherished and appreciated by the school teacher, Mr
Gopinath and the whole class directs him to send them for a competition entry. Ashis is swelling with pride and is filled with realisation that it is easier to mingle and be accepted, if one readily accepts. The natural environments may have physical boundaries, but in the end everyone is the same. The story is relevant in today’s time of globalisation and misplaced Indians who return to find their roots.

The new school was not that bad, after all, and neither were his new classmates. And come to think of it, his parents’ new home in their old country was fine too, he thought. He felt lighter, happier as all his resentment against the move to India melted away (LS 100).

**Monsters in Paradise (Paro Anand)**

Paro Anand writer of this story ‘Monsters in Paradise’ is a writer for children and young adults. She has written a novel, *No Guns at My Son’s Funeral* translated into German and Spanish which was on the *IBBY Honour List*. She has worked with children in difficult circumstances, including those impacted by conflict and violence in Kashmir and nomadic children of wildlife poachers. She writes

I know my stories work. They always have. When I tell stories, kids listen. They laugh, they wipe away an unbidden tear; they nod in recognition of something from their own lives. My stories always work. Always? No, not always. There was one time when they did not. This happened in Kashmir, very close to the border, near the volatile LOC (Line of Control) in Kupwara. I performed a story. The children listened in silence. They did not laugh when they were supposed to. They looked at me with strange silent eyes – as though I was an alien from Mars. And I may well have been, so different was I in my dress, my behaviour, my very life (Anand 22).
Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy writes,

Paro Anand’s sensitive stories focus on the adverse effects of terrorism, religious prejudice, suspicion, hatred and stereotyping during the crucial formative stage in the lives of the citizens of tomorrow. She suggests amity, empathy born of mutual suffering and forgiveness as antidotes to the poison of religious intolerance that threatens our nation (43).

Many realistic stories are woven around conflict and violence that take place in different parts of our country. Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy writes, in “Accepting the Other: Overcoming Communal Barriers in Paro Anand’s The Wild Child and Other Stories”

The children, both Hindu and Muslim, have suffered personal losses and have been, as a result, psychologically affected. They find it difficult to communicate with children belonging to the other community, whom they have been taught to regard as enemies (39).

Beautifully written story in flashbacks and the writer has portrayed inner thoughts of the victim boy artistically. The story ‘Monsters in Paradise’ takes place in Kashmir. Shabir Karam, is a boy who has been orphaned along with many others in the irrational obliteration of peace. Shabir’s mind hang in the dreams of his family and his much-loved Abbu who vends cloth in the marketplace. He dreams of the past.

[Emphasized in Text] He sees his father standing at the stall, holding up a bright green length of cloth. A customer stands before him, fingering it. Could it be? Has the child made it in time today to see one of the monsters his father talks about?.... and then he hears his mother-wailing, wailing, wailing, wailing. Hiding behind her, peeping out, he searches for his father.... He wants to tell him to stop
His thoughts of the past troubles him continuously. After remains in hallucinations he returns to reality. Shabir finds himself in care of an NGO who is trying to gather the homeless children-both Hindu and Muslin. Shabir dislikes the daily monotonous routine at the NGO office exchanging names to get acquainted with each other and thinks Hindu names are odd and unpleasant while Hindu children think the same. Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy writes,

Misconceptions and mutual suspicion between Hindus and Muslims have seeped down from adults to children. It is at this stage that children’s literature, which has an undoubted influence on young minds, needs to jump into the fray to cleanse the evil influence of communalism and to restore the innocence of happy childhood friendships which would act as the pillars of a harmonious state in the future (38).

The story brings forth the religious divide in society due to political turmoil, the political conflict has devastating effect on the lives of the people and children particularly irrespective of religion and caste. Shabir finds a good friend a Hindu girl who remember and pronounce his (muslim) name and ease and her responsive and pleasant behaviour comforts some of his pain. This narrative is all about finding love and consolation beyond borders.

She smiles at him and says –Shabir. He likes the sound of his name on her tongue….He lands back into the present with a smile at her. He pleased that she remembered his name without help. She smiles back at him. A secret smile. Just between the two of them (LS 107).
The story ends on a note of understanding and hope for the healing of wounds and the forging of friendships. It stimulates the young readers making them aware and optimistic that there is hope to reunite. Paro Anand writer of this story writes about Shabir in ‘Creating Books that Heal’

Shabir came up to me as I was leaving at the end of the workshop. He put his hand in mine and said that he felt a connection with me. And he said, “Don’t forget us, and don’t forget our stories. We cannot reach the outside world. But you can. Go and tell our stories to all who will listen. And maybe there can be a change.” And so I do. I have written the story of Shabir Karam, (whom I have since adopted as my son) in the AWIC’s new book of healing stories titled *Lighthouse in the Storm*. Shabir is proud that his story is now told to all of you who will listen. He is a young man now, working in Srinagar, supporting his sisters and mother. His life is still hard, but his head is held high and his voice is clear and strong. I believe that words did help him heal (24).

*The Loose Brick in the wall* (*Sangeeta Das Dutta*)

Children are naïve, and do not comprehend the language of prejudice, bias and discrimination. This story is all about family separation. The quarrel that the elders have, transcends down to the children of the family and the children fail to understand. It is the children who break down the walls made by adults. An enjoyable pleasant story for children verifying once again that when adults go awry, it is the children and the elderly who can bring them together again. Children play the role of catalysts in such situations, in mending cracks in relationships and hearts.

*Nanhi! My Nanhi!* (*Girija Rani Asthana*)
This story is of young Amit who is the victim of an earthquake and the nightmares are fresh still in his mind. He is sheltered in Apna Ghar under the supervision of Mohan Bhai, the director of Apna Ghar and Sarala Bhen. They are pleasantly amazed to see recovery in Amit, who has taken eight long years to come out of his ordeal and trauma. Life has returned to some amount of normalcy and Amit is now enjoying and doing well at school. On the Republic day celebrations, the moment Amit starts to speak, tremors shake the stage. This time the earthquake has hit Bhuj and Anjar. Mohan Bhai decides to go instantaneously to these places for rescue operations and would like to help the needy. Mohan Bhai says,

I know we won’t be of much help in actual relief work- but at least you will be able to provide the much needed emotional succour and psychological support from your own experiences, to those little victims who have lost everyone (LS 122).

Amit is reluctant to go, and shrieks that he wants nothing to do with earthquakes. Amit withdraws and recounts his throbbing memories where his family and his beloved sister Nanhi was stuck under the fury of nature. He says, “That is what an earthquake does to you. Takes away your loved ones and leaves you alone in the world” (LS 122).

Mohan and others have find a little girl whom they found wander on the ruined streets. She reminds Amit of his own sister Nanhi. Amit finds the little girl, desolate and crying. Amit showed sympathy towards her and comforts her saying he is right there for her.

Oh, Nani, my Nanhi! Don’t cry! Ma and Baba are not here not here- but I am here, your brother. I will take care of you. He sat down on the ground near her, stroking her hair lovingly. The sobbing ceased. He pulled the small girl into his lap. He started patting her head softly,
singing the lullaby his mother used to make his sister Nanhi sleep (LS 125).

Later Amit decides to be the next saviour and redeemer and leaves for Bhuj and let go of his terrors of nuisance. The Apna Ghar family knows that finally Amit has found consolation and way to heal. A vivid and heart-warming story of Philanthropy, based on real stories of calamity and loss.

*The Art of silence (Ramendra Kumar)*

The story of Sunil a young boy who is orphaned is given shelter by the villagers in turns as his father was held in high esteem by all. Sunil’s life is filled with darkness and his father’s memory plague him; nothing can cheer him up or make him smile.

Sunil would sit brooding the whole day. Someone or other would send food for him and he would eat with a lot of difficulty. He would stop going school, and spent the entire day staring at the walls or looking at the only photograph of his father holding a hockey stick and grinning at the camera (LS 132).

During the same time, a young man called Jayant, comes to the village for voluntary development work for children. He is very popular amongst children and engross them in funny tales and drama. Sunil is untouched. This intrigues Jayant, and after a while he decides with the permission of the village elders to take him along. Sunil follows mechanically, and his world is transformed when he sees an ocean of paintings piled up at Jayant’s place. In the night when Jayant returns from work, Sunil’s eyes are twinkling with excitement as he shows him hand drawn lifelike sketches of the culprit who shot down his father.

On the sheet was was the portrait of a man with close set eyes, a large nose, buck teeth and thick, bushy eyebrows. The drawing, a pencil
sketch, was so very lifelike that Jayant could only gape in admiration (LS 136).

The hidden nightmares came out

It was almost as if a dam had been broken. The torrent of emotions which Sunil had been hiding in his heart burst forth. Sunil told Jayant everything about his life—his childhood, the love and affection he received from his Baba, the memories of his myriad moments they had spent together, and finally his Baba’s murder… (LS 137).

Johanna Slivinske and Lee Slivinske writes

In addition, therapeutic use of art creates a tangible means of expression allowing for a nonverbal comfort zone between the therapist and the child…. Children’s emotional states are often expressed within their drawings and paintings. This may increase feelings of freedom and allow them to express emotions in individualized manner (15).

The Newcomer (Vinita Krishna)

The story is a combination of tragedy, relationships and their subtle threads of closeness. Neera is a young teenage girl who has lost her mother, and she is sickened and distressed at the thought of her father’s plans of remarriage. Nightmares afflict her and in anguish she wakes to find her bed wet each night. Sullu has been preferred by granny a suitable to be her stepmother. Neera cannot tolerate to be part of her father’s wedding that takes place over the weekend and decided to go over to friend’s house. After her arrival things are not improved, and each night she wakes in cold stained sheets, but when she comes back from the rest room, her bed is newly placed with unsoiled sheets. She is offended, assumed that Sallu, her stepmother would scorn of
their “secret”. On her birthday Neera unlocks the gift from Sallu after the day is done and expects a set of bed sheets. To her disbelief, her gift is a collection of striking pictures with her father. Neera says, “Tears of happiness filled my eyes. I put the boared against the wall and lay down on the bed. That night, there was no nightmare. I got up dry and fresh the next morning, after a long time” (LS 145).

Neera is also amazed that her normal and regular life with her father has not become different at all, in spite of the ‘Newcomer’, and gradually her approach changes towards her stepmother. Neera says, “The dark shadows in the house seemed a little less menacing to me after that day” (LS 145). On the commemoration of her mother’s demise, Neera melancholic but finds music in rhythms and rhymes of sitar

As I looked at Sallu. I could almost physically feel the hard walls around my heart soften and start to melt away.

Time moved on. It was now exactly one year since Sallu had come to our house…I also felt the big turnaround she had managed inside me (LS 146).

Feeling thrilled and excited, Neera is grateful to her stepmother Sallu, and the sitar reminds her of mother, Neera opens a bangle box that she had bought for her mother and gifts it to Sallu mother, who without any delay wears her new gift. A hug is exchanged and Neera says ‘Thank you Sallu Ma’. The beginning of new life has started and Sallu’s endurance has rewarded. A mother is given her rightful place. Dr. Renu Malaviya writes

In extreme traumas or even in the case of consistent unresolved often ignored or ‘invisible-to-the-society’ traumas, the child/adolescent tends to lose the drive to continue to shape oneself and take advantages of new emerging circumstances. They tend to lose the
‘power-within’ to fight the difficult circumstances. Books for healing ‘carry’ the child readers and often help him reignite the ‘power-within’ (27).

The tale encourages readers the good figure of the mother, and rejects the ambivalent feelings of children towards stepmothers. Earlier step mother was regarded as other, as Ann Alson writes in *The Family in English Children’s Literature*, “The imposter mother in literature constitutes a threat to the family. Children’s literature constantly warns children about these dark figures” (23). But here the writer glorifies the character of the step mother in order to relieve the children from these kind of images.

**Feeling Good (Meera Bhatnagar)**

This is a story of Kanita Bali, the best all-rounder of the academic year, who returns home and meets with a horrifying accident that leaves her without a leg. Her world comes to a stop as she thoughts of volcanoes exploding and gulping her in it. Her parents try to keep her calm. A professional story teller is appointed to revitalise her sprits and each day they have a session of stories. Kavita though listen these stories doesn’t respond to them. Prerna Lal, the story teller tells her a story of a tiny frog that accidently injures his leg. The story was pertinent and appropriate and it inspires Kavita, and suddenly she tell her parents to help her walk again.

The story struck her thoughts like a pillar of strength….For a change when the story ended, Kavita had a broad smile on her face. She lifted her hand for the first time in many days, and holding Prerna’s hand said, ‘Thank you for coming’ (LS 155).

Johanna Slivinske and Lee Slivinske writes in *Storytelling and Other Activities for Children in Therapy*
If a traumatic event has occurred, experiencing the trauma again through reading, interpreting, and retelling of the stories allows the child to reprocess the traumatic event in a protective setting, which aids in resolving issues and emotions surrounding the trauma. Healing can occur as children learn identifying with characters in stories that enable them to recover from traumatic experiences (12).

Slowly and gradually with practice, she recovers and learns to walk again. This is how stories work in the life of children. Life becomes something to look forward to again, and she feels good. This is a simple story that brings hope or at least fix anything awful that can happen in one’s life.

*The Waves* (Indira Baghchi)

An exciting narration, a well knitted story that takes one by wonder, about how one escapes from a sudden adversity. It describes a family adventure. The two children Rachit and Mini enjoy in the steamer sailing from Kolkata to the Andaman Islands for a vacation. They are happy under the blue sky and the vast oceans. The last evening of their adventure results in grief and suffering on the island, and the sea and the skies look menacing and threatening. The family retires to bed only to wake up to the babbling of waters and uproar of the sea. A tsunami has struck and all are asked to rush to the adjoining airport to leave straightaway. Within no time they leave the lethal waters they find that the earth is spread with human and cattle debris floating everywhere. Rachit is frightened and the images of destruction do not diminish away. The school teacher intervenes to bring out his old self again and tells tales of gallantry and heroism so that he loses his inner fears. At the end of the story Rachit chooses to go with Aunt Benu back to the islands to provide support to the homeless. He is stunned
at the degree of damage that the children are surviving with and it reliefs him to be of help.

All made a circle and sang, ‘we shall overcome’. At the moment, Aunt Benu realised that Rachit had overcome the fear of the killer waves (LS 168).

Mission Affection (Nupur Awasthi)

One more narrative of tragedy, grief and affection, Aranyadeve is shaken at his father’s death. Life turns to as usual but for Dev it is never the similar again. He roams here and there, and one day he is drawn towards a house, with a board ‘Aashraya’ outside it, and at the entry of the house was a cradle with a bell. Dev comes to through in charge of the house how all the little babies there have been orphaned by one vicious turn of fate or other.

Dev is dazed and decides to help out. Every week, he makes it a routine to go and support in the orphanage and that prominently boosts his sprits. He feels privileged to have received father’s love and the reliability and safety of family.

In comparison to those he felt lucky to have enjoyed the luxury of his father’s and mother’s love-and to have someone to call his own. All of a sudden, a resolve arose in his mind, unfolding layers of calm in his heart and spreading a warm affection all over him. Dev had made up his mind (LS 176).

Dev involves his friends in contribution to the organisation and in return Dev heals in his ‘Mission Affection’

Suresh’s Springtime Blossoms (Debashish Majumdar)

A striking story, talks about Suresh, who has lost his mother to cancer at the young age of ten. After three years, with all good intentions, his father remarries Mala who has a
twelve year old son named Prakash. Suresh and Prakash relish and adore each other’s
company and are brothers in sprit, but when their father leaves the country for work,
the true colours of stepmother Mala emerge. Mala takes attention of every need of her
son spending on Suresh presence irritates her. Prakash is aggrieved at this conduct.
Suresh has become introverted the pain of being loathed is agonizing. He recollects
how generous his mother was and he misses her presence. He finally discloses his
sorrow to Prakash who realises and commiserates with him. Suresh speaks to his
mother, “How would you feel if I were to lose you… and be treated in the same way
like …had I lived with Suresh and his mum?” (LS 182). Suresh looks at his mother’s
collection of books he picks up a book from library titled ‘Some Mothers are Born Late’
“Suresh could easily identify with Roger, in this story- his feelings, misery and
yearnings” (184), he happily passes it on to Mala and in good characteristic she read it.
The book make such an imprint on Mala that she welcomes Suresh as her son with
enthusiasm and happiness. She felt sad not being responsive to the child’s sentiments
and needs. Mala affirms herself fortunate and blessed to be the proud mother of two
beautiful sons. Mala says

“this little picture story has taught me a wonderful lesson. We must
love those who have no place to go to, no one to turn to…even for a
sprinkling of love… ‘Some Mothers are Born Late… Mala’s eyes
were moist as she spoke May b I am one such mother… don’t you
agree?’ Suresh felt grateful. He was sure that he could see lucidity
through his mind’s eye-his spring time love blossoms” (LS 185).

The story brings to light a traumatic situation and offers a solution which is natural
logical and convincing. Children often have to face truths which can be devastating.
Stories such as these teach you to look for solutions which are extrinsic as well intrinsic.
**On a Summer’s Day (Mira Garg)**

The story talks about time being the chief healer of anguish, grief and personal loss. The story is a third person narrative of a little girl, who observes her mother falls into gloom and pain of ordeal, only to be rescued by the loving comfort of family. The narrative is all about significance of family. Later after realisation the mother tells them that God makes life beautiful with small compassions. And the children too comprehend that their mother’s essential being is regenerated again.

**A Bigger Win (Kiran Kasturia)**

Divorce and separation is another life changing event for individuals and this issue is being dealt in children’s stories. Children of divorce have less self-confidence, misbehave, and can be academically challenged. Sweety’s world is devastated and crushed the day she returns home to discover that her father has fight with her mother and he is no more staying with the family. She is about to disclose her selection for the Inter School Badminton Championship news that especially her ex-national champion father would have been delighted to hear. But things went otherwise. She grieves and suffers silently, finally gives up going to school, uncomfortable and humiliated to face scornful crowd. She disclosed everything to her close friend Medha. She emphasizes Sweety to absorb in school and play and continue her normal routine again. Sweety works hard for the matches, but she feels disappointed and performs poorly on absence of her mother in the spectators. Just then her mother’s voice from the spectators gave her new strength to play. “The cool wave of satisfaction swept through her tense nerves, relaxing her. Ma and Pa might have their differences – but they both loved her, didn’t they? Sweety smiled to herself contentedly” (LS 204). To her amazement, the familiar voice of her father was also audible there. Sweety is pleased and joyful she realised the
love of her parents in spite of the differences. The story, though simple in plot, reflects the effect of divorce and separation of parents upon children.

**Barkha’s Diary (Divya Jain)**

Contemporary society has many issues which has to be addressed, insecurity has increased for children and young adults. Children fell prey of juvenile prostitution, child abuse, child pornography and child trafficking. Growing awareness of these issues has extended and writers for children has also bring forth these issue in children’s stories in order to create awareness among children. *Barkha’s Diary* is a very appropriate and significant story of sexual molestation that has become a domestic and everyday issue. Frances b Cacha writes in, ‘Book Therapy for Abused Children’

> Girls in the middle grades may be sexually abused by their fathers or other male relatives. They are told frequently to keep it "their little secret." As the girls are taught to obey and respect the adult family members they are caught in a dilemma; they seem to have no avenue of escape…..Re-gardless, these children are in desperate need of psychological assistance. At the present time, just as with physical abuse, there is no way of identifying all the children who are subjected to sexual abuse (200).

The story is a portrayal of a young girl Barkha who has lost her mother. After losing her father too she became helpless and extremely petrified. She falls prey to her tutor Khanna Sir’s ‘Feel Good’ game. He asks her not to reveal their ‘game’ to anybody else.

An excerpt from a hidden diary mentions

> [Emphasized in Text]This game is very important for you,’ he said. That’s why God took your mother away. If you play this game regularly, things will be alright. You will become good again. But the
rule of the game is you cannot talk about it anyone. If you do,
something can happen to your father too. This is a secret game
between us to make things right with you. Swear over your mother
you won’t tell anyone’ (LS 214).

Barkha hates his tutor’s tactics and feels sick with his advances. She is tormented and
fearful. Her adored cousin Anu and her mother rush to help her. Barkha’s conduct has
changed she feels strangely at every hug and pat from Anu. “Barkha jumped out of bed,
swirled around and shouted, ‘DON’T YOU DARE TOUCH ME!’” (LS 208). Barkha
discloses the reasons and had written, “[Emphasized in Text] but as she put her arms
around me, I was reminded of the ‘Feel Good’ game. I didn’t like that’” (214). The real
story reveals when Anu read a Barkha’s private diary. Anu provokes and addresses
Barkha and shared with her experiences where she had been fostered by her mother to
fight back. She encourages Barkha and every girl child,

‘You can and you will. I know you are afraid, but I want you to face
what you are afraid of. And you can do it. Headlong collision with
fear is what I believe in’ (LS 216).

Supported and with a new determination, Barkha screams for help, both the girls throw
the teacher out of the house. The writer emphasises that children who feel such kind of
incidents should speak out.

No, not at all! But she did say that I should remain more alert, alert,
and next time, God forbid, if a situation like this were ever to arise, I
should raise an alarm. I came out wiser and stronger after that
incident. Then a few months ago, I did a two week ‘self-defence’
course. Just let anyone touch me now, I’ll set him right!’ (LS 215).
Such kind of stories provide information and at the same time provide inner strength to speak about to children who are victims of evil.

*The Blaze (Swapna Dutta)*

*The Blaze* is a story based on the ever customary Hindu Muslim differences it and focuses between two friends who are for removed from such distinctions. But they have been unwillingly directed towards a breach. Sam a Hindu and Sammy a Muslim have similar opinions and ideologies even their names are same. Sam is knocked down ruthlessly, both the boys are victim of the huge and raging mob. “Sammy had been knocked down….. he had read about violence and riots but had never seen them happen before his eyes” (LS 243). At the end, safe and energised, the two friends make their way back home as the turmoil appears to have ended. These boys where inquisitive they questioned, “It was so unnecessary – this entire riot and fire! Why couldn’t people settle their differences quietly and try to see each other’s point of view” (LS 248). They promise each other to remain firm against such irrational violence and play their part in preventing any type of event communalism. For children know better, they do not breed any bias or differences. They do what their hearts tell them is right.

The two friends looked at each other intently. Children have an innate sense of what is right. Love and friendship comes to them as easily as breathing. It is outsiders who plant seeds of hatred in later life. And these seeds take root-and here was the result! Destruction, death and misery! (LS 249).

The story is a ride of pain and pleasure, a ride that in spite of the turbulences leaves one feeling light and heady. The writer of the story tried to show children should be aware of this issue and should not indulge in such menace
Those who have seen communal rites from up close, can recreate the unpleasant pictures a small spark can flame.

According to Roberts and Crawford (2008) “reading a book in which the characters deal with stress can be timely and helpful, providing a number of literature alternatives allows children to choose what they want to read. Through exposure to non-traditional books, children can produce a positive change in self-concept, reading readiness, and achievement” (18).

Stories have a quality that can touch our souls, hearts, they can reach us, move, and heal, at many stages. Children mostly can be benefited significantly from hearing and reading therapeutic stories newly produced for our contemporary time and place. These stories written for specific challenging behaviours in young children, help to calm an over aggressive child; to helping groups of children develop awareness; to helping to heal the pain and fear caused by sexual abuse. In every example the ‘power of story’ makes a significant difference, a significant healing. There is an amount of hope that is splattered generously in all these stories.

World over, attempts by children’s writers and therapists towards developing a wealth of reading material for children is underway. In India, writers such as Premchand may not have heard the term ‘book therapy’, yet had churned out excellent reading material in Hindi, not only for adults but for children, which helped and increasing the positive self-esteem and mental health for readers (Malaviya 23).

Thus book therapy and book reading help children to paraphrase their thoughts and evolve a better conceptualisation of their world. Dr. Renu Malaviya writes in ‘Reading to Recover: Reaching out to the Child in Traumatic and other Difficulties Psycho-Social Situations’
The traumatised person has to induce to move out of the impermeable cocoon the personal is weaving around oneself. When a child’s physical and psycho-social environment has major conflicting situations which could be family based (death, child abuse, child neglects, bullying, etc.); society based (terrorism, violence, discrimination), environmental based, manmade or natural (floods, tsunami, earthquake, piousness gases from factories, etc.), the child has to learn to re-adjust not only to oneself but to the changing environment. Book which facilitate this, provide underline strategies for understanding others in new context (27).

These stories are well crafted by these writers and can offer a voice for those children who may feel alone, children who feel they are not understood, children who feel isolated in grief, and children who feel that they have no source of support. Roberts and Crawford in ‘Real Life Calls for Real Books: Literature to Help Children Cope with Family Stressors’ says, “Most children enjoy and engage more fully with authentic literature that is crafted well and addresses challenging issues within the framework of a well-constructed story line” (16). These are crafted straight around stressful situations, and all the stories mentioned above address real-life situations, addressing a wide range of age levels, and evoke real feelings. They allow children to see painful changes or losses, disappointments, and other emotional stresses and to consider possible ways to solve problems. In Using Trauma-Focused Metaphor and Stories Pernicano states,

The impact of therapy stories is both cognitive and emotional, some metaphors hypnotically going in the back door to tap into right-brain emotional and sensory processes. It is often during the reading of a story or in the weeks following this that a family, child, or caregiver
experiences a breakthrough, gains and acts on new insight, or experiences emotional growth. Attachment (sensed safety, love, and felt security) develops in the right-brain limbic areas, particular in the amygdala, and therapy stories seem to have the power to emotionally trigger interpersonal awareness and relational change (20).

These stories address children to find and achieve a basic human need to discover the truth, to understand, to find an explanation for painful experiences, and even to challenge injustice or lack of meaning. Through connecting with the story and identifying with the character, the young reader is able to visualise the tactics used to help the character, master his/her problems and overcome obstacles. The child then applies these strategies to overcome his/her own stumbling blocks in life. As we have seen in the above stories. Roxanne Carlson and Nancy Arthur writes in their paper ‘Play Therapy and the Therapeutic use of Story’

The fictional characters in books are therapeutically offered as models of positive, adaptive behaviour with which the child can identify….This provides children with a corrective experience and gives them the opportunity to apply what they have learned from the stories to their own real-life situations (216).

In all the stories above we find the course of action silently stresses upon inculcating trustworthiness, honesty, tolerance, respect, sense of fair play, responsibility and empathy through conflict resolution and release of emotional burden with the progression of the plot. Hope and optimism absorbed through the plots reflect in positive thinking. The characters and the situations in the plot lead to emotional catharsis or unblocking of the emotions amounting to attitudinal change.
The literature for children or the stories above paraphrased and analyzed may be used for developmental issues such as safety issues, school-related issues such as bullying, self-esteem, new sibling at home, bedtime fears and so on and it can be used to cover other issues such as adoption, AIDS and HIV, child abuse, conflict resolution, death, disability, floods, riots, tsunami, aftermath of divorce, sexual abuse, suicide and so on.

Stories also may make children feel less alone in the world. This may be especially true in instances of child abuse, substances abuse, or domestic violence. In these instances, children are likely to believe that they are not only ones that suffer from these particular problems. They may be relieved to find that other people experience the same issues. This may allow them to divulge or share more information about their own situations....books and stories may also be used to educate children regarding appropriate behavior. These may be utilized to address various issues such as “abuse, violence, social skills, anger management, sex education, separation, divorce and death” (qtd in Slivinske 13).

Bibliotherapy is very productive in children, a grief-stricken child who reads a story about another child who has lost a parent will obviously observe him/herself less alone in the world. Ira Saxena in a key note address in an international conference on, “Book Therapy, Reading is Healing” notes

AWIC reached out to the distraught children with gift of books and setting up small libraries during Gujarat Earthquake in 2001 and the Tsunami affected children of Nagapattinam and Andamans in the Indian Ocean for ‘Reading to Recovery’ initiated by IBBY in Southeast Asia. The entire motivation of reading promotion activities
underwent modification with the launch of AWIC Book Therapy Project after terrorist violence of 26/11 in 2008. A series of Workshops for Book Therapy sought pragmatic solutions to sensitise the creators’ of literature on one hand and facilitate a simple procedure in reading with the use of selected books, on the other, for structuring hope and healthy mental development of children (6).

These stories we can say are influential tools to heal trauma and make a positive difference to human lives. During natural or man-made disasters, literature for children offer relief from shock and trauma. In all these stories we find that almost all the protagonists or the main characters suffer and at the end they find solace. Ramendra Kumar writes,

Stories can help in making the child realise that he/she is not alone in facing trauma in the world. There are many others caught in circumstances similar to his/hers or trapped in situations worse than those he/she is experiencing. The child is thus able to empathise with the protagonists who are in a similar predicament and draw solace, succour and strength. Such tales also help him/her in getting out of the ‘why me’ and ‘poor me’ syndrome and look at things in the proper perspective (30).

These stories will have positive results for the target readers, Pat Pernicano in Using Trauma-Focused Therapy Stories: Interventions for Therapists, Children, and their Caregivers writes

Stories seed possibilities and new ways of looking at things, and the emotional identification with story characters triggers memories of past relationships with abusive others. Stories address barriers to
change and suggest solutions, some of which are processed non-consciously and others that relate more directly to thinking and behaviour. At times therapy story may serve as the guide for a goal-directed task such as trauma narrative work (19).

We can employ *bibliotherapy* as an expression to offer guidance and resources required by children to firmly find a way to coping and healing. Our survival rests within the lives of our children. We need to offer them problem-solving skills, as well as unlimited possibilities. *Bibiotherapy* is a means we can use to build confidence and hope into the lives of children. These tales are interlaced with a delicate fabric of love, joy and hope creating a literature that is lasting, endearing and eternal. Today when child is passing through far threatening times, when the relationships are becoming ever so flimsy and delicate, when love and connect between hearts and minds is being sacrificed at the altar of success, it is time for us storytellers to reach out and make a difference. It is time for us to create a literature which is contemporary in theme but eternal in time, which heals hearts and above all resurrects hope. Wendy M. Smith and D’ Arezzo writes,

Selecting literature that depicts children from many social classes, cultures and races allows children to see themselves in the stories they are reading. Understanding the nature of violence and abuse is important in helping children realize that it happens in all families, all places in the world, and we are all impacted by it in one way or another. Issues of violence can be difficult to talk and think about, but when we open up discussions about readings that are powerful, children recognize they have a safe place in which to discuss their thoughts, experiences and feelings, and develop an understanding of
advocacy for others. If carefully and thoughtfully done by the teacher or other adults, children will be provided with a sense of control and hope (17-18).

There are stories in abundance written by Indian writers which may heal children. Writers currently have target readers and focus on a particular aspect which need to be addressed. Earlier Indian writers did not focus purposefully on children but we can say we find a touch of excellence for children when we read Children’s Literature.
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