Conclusion

The study of Children’s writings of the two most significant epochs of children’s literature and its representative texts across variety of genres in the two ages have opened up new avenues for deeper understanding of the conception of the ‘child’, ‘childhood’, and ‘childhood constructions’ and the changes that have taken place over a period of time. The study of the history and development of children’s literature has revealed that there has never been a monolithic vision of childhood. Hence images and versions of childhood portrayed in children’s texts have always been varied according to the change in time, place, society and cultures. They can be looked upon as social, economical, psychological and cultural constructions which vary with time, place, society, gender, class, culture and the interests of the authors. The researcher here points out that the literary constructions of childhoods often have their origin in adult needs and desires. Readings of Victorian fantasies such as Alice in the Wonderland and Peter Pan throw light on the dialectic of the adult child relationship. The idea, that childhood is different from adulthood and that it is characterized by innocence, goodness and purity and so it should be protected and preserved, came into prominence in the second half of the Victorian period. The celebratory attitude to childhood resulted in the Victorian myth of the child, exemplified in Carroll’s Alice or Barrie’s Peter Pan. This sentimentalized attitude to childhood also led to a rise of nostalgia in the adults for their lost childhood. Authors like Carroll and Barrie attempted to relive and renegotiate their own childhoods through fictional constructions of childhood in their fantasy books. Consequently well known fantasies such as Carroll’s Alice in the Wonderland, Barrie’s Peter Pan, Charles
Kingsley’s *Water Babies*, George Macdonald’s *At the Back of the North Wind*, Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*, Edith Nesbit’s *Five Children and It* were created which marked the beginning of the so called first golden age of children’s literature. These fantasies can be regarded as psychological portrayals of childhood, ‘places from which one is exiled as soon as one grows up’. In the Victorian period, fantasy became a vehicle for adults to revive their lost childhood by constructing an idealized literary childhood and for the child reader it came across as a means to understand the adult life and behaviour. But paradoxically this idealized childhood myth created by the middle class and the upper class remained out of the reach of many working class Victorian children, perhaps majority of children.

The advent of printing technology, the commercialization of the publishing industry and an increased cultural focus on children and childhood had led to a radical expansion in children’s literature in the second half of the nineteenth century especially in the fin de siècle years. Similarly in the second half of the twentieth century the advent of Information technology, commoditization of books, new digital media and renewed focus on the importance of childhood led to a resurgence of interest in children’s literature which had declined during the war years. In the fin de siècle of twentieth century the publication of Philip Pullman’s *Northern Lights* (1995) and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997) heralded a new cultural interest in children’s literature which – as in the Victorian age – is closely connected with fantasy texts. Like Carroll’s Alice books, Rowling’s Harry Potter Fantasy Series with its creation of the magical world of Hogwarts school of Wizardry allow the adults to indulge in fancy and nostalgia, recalling the ‘golden world’ of childhood – a fair and just world with
‘happy endings’. Simultaneously Alice and Harry’s adventures assist the young readers in facing the psychological challenge of making the developmental transition from childhood to adolescence. While Victorian writers such as Carroll and Barrie used Fantasy to explore their own needs and fear of adult responsibilities, the Contemporary writers have used fantasy to deal with the typical problems, children inevitably face during the growing up process: fear of separation, loss, sexuality, death, anger and so on. Another noteworthy feature of the contemporary children’s fantasy is the way in which it has elided the gap between adult and children’s literature and has given rise to the crossover phenomenon and juvenile adult fiction.

At the end of twentieth century the young adult fiction - the books written for readers aged roughly between twelve to twenty years – finally came to be regarded as a branch of ‘children’s’ literature after a continuous debate about whether the fiction for the young should be considered as a specialist category or as a branch of children’s literature. Many well known works of Victorian children’s literature such as Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, or Carroll’s *Alice in the Wonderland* portrayed their central characters’ gradual transit from innocence of childhood to independence and maturity of adulthood. But it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that a distinctive body of work specially addressed to adolescent or teenage readers came into recognition. Economic prosperity and social changes in the later part of twentieth century resulted in the emergence of a new generation of adolescents, ‘teenagers’ who – with more time in higher education, having more money to spend, openness towards sexual activity, technologically advanced - developed a distinctive cultural identity. The Victorian Children’s books were didactic in tone and
celebrated childhood and sought to make their central characters better children, contemporary writers today lay emphasis on writings which help the adolescents to deal with the world in which they live. Contemporary young adult writers depict in their works a world which is complex and difficult and focus on issues and events today’s young children may face: violence, bullying, sexism, betrayal, divorce, sex and sexuality, mental or physical disability, adolescent instability, environmental issues, drugs, crime, rejection, death and diseases, racism, sexual abuse, poverty, war and migration.

Another remarkable point which comes to forefront at the end of this study is that from the beginning of commercial children’s literature in the Victorian age to the highly developed commoditization of the twenty-first century, gender has been fundamental to sales of children’s texts and in underpinning and reflecting social mores through them. Perry Nodelman rightly observes that the reinforcement of traditional gender roles is an important aspect of the colonizing activity of children’s literature and one of its defining features is to teach what it means for girls to be girls and boys to be boys (The Hidden 173). It reiterates the assumption that children’s writing is an adult construction and that for over 150 years, publishers have produced and writers have created stories addressed to boys such as – desert islands, sea stories, war and empire, public schools, flying adventures and secret agents and for girls – orphan novels, fairy stories, family stories, pony books, girls school stories, high school romance or princess fantasies. In the Victorian period, the popular boys’ stories such as R. L. Stevenson’s Treasure Island or R. M. Ballantyne’s Coral Island with its emphasis on adventure and exploration promoted the vision of boyhood and masculinity capable of running the British Empire.
The Victorian girls’ stories such as *Little Women*, standing in strong contrast to the stories for boys, depicted the world of enclosed domestic interiors and presented an idealized image of femininity, predicated on marriage.

After about hundred years, in the later part of twentieth century many children literature writers and critics engaged themselves in deconstructing such patriarchal gender stereotypes and disclosed gender categories as socially created. However with rise of second wave feminism in the 1970s, and 1980s the gender studies, apart from demanding equal rights and opportunities for women, shifted towards the study of representations of masculinity, alternative sexualities and transgressive gender. Apart from second-wave feminism, ‘écriture feminine’ has also had some impact on children’s literature criticism in the contemporary times. It is concerned with the study of the feminine body and female difference in language and text. More recently, however, writing for children has engaged itself with ‘third-wave feminism’, ‘which recognizes identity as plural (rejecting essentialists notion of female identity) and conceptualizes masculinity and femininity as relational rather than oppositional’ ("Gender Studies" 30).

Another remarkable point which the researcher brings to light is the increase in the sales of gender-marked series for girls and boys at the turn of the millennium which suggests a regression to Victorian gender stereotyping –( driven by commodification and marketing strategies) - towards portrayal of traditional gender biased roles in the books for children. The researcher here concludes that the old notions of gender in new attires coexist with the contemporary pluralistic ideas about gender in the contemporary children’s books and though significant inroads have been made in relation to feminism,
there is still much to be done in order to achieve and promote harmonious gender relations. Victoria Flanagan rightly notes in her article "Gender Studies":

If we are to encourage our children to see masculinity and femininity not as oppositional but as relational and fluid, then writers, readers and critics need to be aware of how particular genres are gendered, of how narrative discourse can be used to privilege particular models of gender and how texts endorse or interrogate dominant cultural constructions of gender" ("Gender Studies" 37).

The thesis also elucidates how children’s texts both reflect and promote cultural values and practices and disclose conceptions of and attitudes to race, colonialism, post colonialism and multiculturalism, responding to the discourses and mores of the societies where they are produced. Children’s literature has always been regarded as transmitter of cultural values and in nineteenth-century England imperialistic themes pervaded all Children’s literature. One can implicitly trace the depiction of racial and male superiority in the Victorian period in the British imperialistic texts such as Robinson Crusoe, Coral Island, and Treasure Island and American texts such as Huckleberry Finn which carried imperialism across the world. In the twentieth century in spite of the decline of the British Empire its influence has remained both in adult and children’s literature till today. Marjorie Hourihan rightly observes “In the postcolonial world the assumption of Western cultural superiority endures as is evident from the widespread acceptance of the role of the West…” (Hourihan, 75). The implications of colonial heritage and racism can be deciphered even in twentieth century children’s literature - in fantasies like Watership Down, science fictions such as Star Wars cycle or neo political novels such as Beverley Naidoo’s The Other Side of Truth. The rise of post colonial and multi cultural children's
literature and theory in the twentieth century brought with it a change in the perceptions and attitude to race, class, colour, creed, nationality, and ethnicity in the minds of children. A twenty first century child today may harbour a multi-culture ideology which he has acquired from the readings of multicultural children's book. Though efforts have been made in contemporary children’s literature at social engineering (inclusion of all ethnic minorities), there is still a long way to go.

The present study also discusses and questions the paradoxical nature of children’s literature. Though children’s writing has always been addressed to children it has invariably remained an adult construction since its inception. Mc Gills labels children as the subalterns and remarks, "I hasten to add that children remain the most colonized persons on the globe. This is apparent even in the literature we label for them" ("Postcolonialism, Children" 7). Mc Gills discusses Rose's and Peter Hunt's observations and concludes that both writing for children and its criticism are colonizing activities(7). Thus it is true when Nodelman says that none of us can escape the role of colonizer. Therefore he suggests a benevolently helpful colonizing attitude towards children ("The Other" 34). Peter Hunt recommends a "childist" reading of children's literature (Criticism, Theory 192-94) and Peter Hollindale proposes that children and adults both possess "Childness" or the quality of being a child. According to Peter Hollindale as pointed out by Kim Reynolds "children's books create a space where adulthood and childhood can meet and mingle, with adults reactivating aspects of what it was like to be a child - particularly the mutability and potentiality of childhood - while children gain insights into what it is like to be adult" (Children's Lit. A Very 55).
Till the beginning of 20th century the principal gatekeepers of children’s literature or any literature as such, were invariably, members of the dominant culture in any country be it creators, publishers, educators, librarians or parents. But with the emergence of Internet and Information technology in the 20th century, the suppressed and marginalized groups as well as children have found a new way past many such gatekeepers to register their voice. The Internet and new media have opened up new avenues and new ways of telling stories and expressing themselves for many a children and young people today. Looking back at the long history of children’s literature, one significant aspect which comes across is that the writers, illustrators and publishers of children’s literature both in the Victorian age and Contemporary age have experimented with new ways of producing children’s literature economically and attractively. The nineteenth century came up with novelty features such as harlequinades, pop-ups and books with attractive portable parts whereas twentieth century has resorted to new media and information technologies and has adopted all forms, formats, genres and narrative techniques of writing for children such as films, television serials, electronic and online fictions and games.

At the closure it would not be wrong to conclude that the range and diversity of children’s writing had never been greater than in present times. In spite of the threat from the internet that it will regress the progress of children’s writings, it seems to be flourishing and its profitability for writers and publishers and its growing success in universities as a serious subject of academic study are signs of its continuing vitality. This thesis is a small contribution to this fast emerging branch of literature and an attempt to emphasize its importance in acculturation of the future generations. This thesis also
seeks modestly to investigate, elucidate and appreciate the enchanting and enthralling power of children’s literature at the interface of the rich mosaic of the Victorian and the Contemporary Children’s Literature.

The scope of this research can be further extended by carrying out an in depth study of the radical change in children’s literature due to the rise of ‘media childhoods’ and ‘convergence culture’ at the turn of the millenium. One could also look on the effect of new media on the ways in which readers construct narratives and make meanings from texts and also how the form of the children’s book has adapted itself to compete with the electronic media. One could also carry out an in depth study of the picture books and graphic novels as well as on commercialization and commodification of children’s writings over the years.

Alternatively, a detailed analysis could be conducted by deliberating on only one vertical such as multicultural children’s writings or science fiction, historical fiction, dystopian fiction for children in the light of theories such as Post Colonial, Multicultural Discourse, New Historicism or Dystopian Theory. An in depth study could also be conducted on the revival of the tradition of the Girls story and the Boys story or the rise of transgender narratives for children in the contemporary age through the lens of gender theory. A study of all these different aspects of children’s writings would truly yield a rich dividend in understanding this ever expanding branch of children’s literature and would further consolidate its status as a serious and significant branch of literary study.