Origin and History of Children’s Literature:

Seth Lerer in *History of Children’s Literature* notes that children’s literature is as old as the children themselves. He rightly observes “The history of children’s literature is inseparable from the history of childhood, for the child was made through texts and tales he or she studied, heard, and told back. Learning how to read is a lifetime, and life-defining, experience” (Lerer 1). Stories were narrated to children since ancient times and as early as 500 BCE. Passages from classic Greek, Roman and Medieval Texts like *Iliad* and *Aeneid* were readapted and given to children for learning and reciting in order to teach them the qualities of heroism, skills of citizenship and intricacies of morality. *Aesop’s Fables*, translated and printed by Caxton in 1484, and Fairy Tales translated and adapted from different parts of the world are often considered as the first work of children’s literature. However, actual history of writing for children can be said to begin in 17th century with the Czech educational reformer John Amos Comenius’s *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, written in German in 1658 and translated in English in 1659. *Orbis Pictus* was translated in many European languages and it comprised of wooden carvings of alphabets, and through a combination of words and pictures, it sought to embody everything in the world (orbis), from creatures and plants to abstract concepts as the Holy Trinity. Comenius’ work was intended for very young children, those under six years old.
who were learning to read and write. The age of the intended reader has been a defining feature of Children’s Literature throughout its history since Comenius’ days; however, today childhood as a period of life has expanded gradually to teenage. Many recent works produced by Children’s Publishing Houses are for ‘young adults’ as old as 18 and are known as ‘Young Adult Fiction’ or Crossover Fiction, read and enjoyed equally by children and Adults. Like Orbis Pictus, during the 17th century, most writings for children was inspired by Puritan line of thought. These writings along with teaching children how to read also endeavoured to teach them how to lead holy lives, seek grace and escape the sufferings of hell. A typical example of such writing for children is James Janeway’s *A Token for Children* (1700), often regarded as a milestone work to comprehend the origin and history of children’s literature and get an understanding of how children and childhood were looked upon in early modern England. Kimberley Reynolds notes:

> With its unashamedly didactic content, teacherly style, and assumption that children are born sinful, *A Token for Children* points to the relationship between constructions of childhood at any given period and the history of writing for children; that relationship has today become a key area of interest in the study of Children’s Literature. (*Children’s Literature* 8-9)

French philosopher Philippe Aries did not consider childhood to be a necessary or perpetual part of human life but a category of existence shaped by social norms and historical experiences. In his book, *Centuries of Childhood* (1960) as noted by Seth Lerer, Aries argued that “the periods before the modern age did not have any concept of childhood as we understand it: that the child as an emotional or economic investment is a
modern phenomenon, not in keeping with earlier period’s neglect, abuse or indifference to children as individual beings” (Lerer 2).

Puritans believed that the texts for children should concentrate on instructing its readers how to behave and what to believe rather than entertaining them. The well known Educationalist John Locke in his famous essay ‘Thoughts Concerning Education’ written in 1693 expressed his view that the minds of young children were similar to blank slates (he called them tabula rasa) waiting to be filled up. He believed that every child had equal capabilities to learn and adults had the responsibility to provide proper education. Most of the children’s Literature produced in 16th and 17th century was moralistic and didactic inspired by John Locke and later by Rousseau who expressed his ideas about education in *Emile* (1762), in which he emphasized the importance of moral development that could be best accomplished through living a simple life and educating the children in these lines.

Producing specialized books for children began in 18th century, precisely in 1740, with the handmade materials created by Mrs. Jane Johnson for teaching her children to read. Mrs. Johnsons’ beautifully designed cards, toys and personalized books provide clear evidence of the tradition of creating children’s literature at home. Taking cue from such traditions, printer-publishers such as John Newberry (1713-67), Mary Cooper(1761), John Harris (1756-1846), and William Godwin(1756 -1836) started printing and publishing chapbooks, collection of stories and poems with crude block illustrations and attractive packaging and pictures to entertain as well as instruct children. Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Bunyan’s *The pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) became highly popular due to their attractive repackaging and continued to be loved by young
readers long after they first appeared. However, it seems that these books with their simple language and wood cut illustrations were designed for inexperienced rather than specific young readers and were shared between adults and children, according to reading levels rather than age. John Newberry’s *A Little pretty Pocket Book* published in 1744 can be termed as the first book specifically published for children and it brought with it a new sense of childhood as a special state distinct from adulthood. Newberry also published an anthology of children’s verses which contained such popular poems as ‘Bah, Bah Black sheep,’ ‘Who did Kill Cock Robin’, ‘Boys and Girls Come Out to Play’, and ‘Lady bird, Ladybird’.

Traditionally, the historians of children’s literature have noted that most of the Children’s writing till the first half of the eighteenth century had instruction as its central preoccupation. It was only in the nineteenth century that the entertainment and new ideas of childhood came to the forefront in the hands of such writers and illustrators as Washington Irving((1783-1859) Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64), Edward Lear (1812-88), Charles Kingsley (1819-75), Louisa May Alcott(1832-88), Lewis Carroll (1832-98), Samuel Clemens Beckett (1835-1910), Kate Greenaway(1846-1901), R. L. Stevenson (1850-1894) and Howard Pyle (1853-1911). Many works of high literary and artistic merit appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century and it was heralded as the ‘Golden Age’ of Children’s Literature. Heather Montgomery and Nicola J. Watson rightly note:

Although some eighteenth and early nineteenth century writing for children, mostly rhymes for the young, survives as old favourites to this day, the children’s fiction that has retained classic status for modern readers mostly dates from the
Children’s Literature during this period reached a new maturity and sophistication and left behind a legacy of new ideas of childhood and child readership. In the course of the nineteenth century, the rational but ignorant child as figured in Enlightenment children’s literature gradually gave way to more complex constructions of children – both as characters and readers. Simultaneously the rapid development in printing technology helped the publishers produce, in large numbers, books, periodicals and printed novelties with an eye catching and varied designs for children.

Mid-to-late Victorian England and America witnessed a remarkable shift in ideas about childhood; This new concept which looked upon childhood as a protected space, exemplified by innocence, goodness and purity had its link far back in Rousseau’s thinking. This thought reached its epitome in the Victorian cult of the child, and especially the cult of the girl child most eminently represented in Carroll’s ‘Alice’.

"Although many children in the Victorian Age were still working in the factory or fields and were deprived of education yet the wider social ideal of childhood “emphasized the naturalness of childhood, domesticated in the feminine realm of the house and protected from the male, adult world of work, money and sex”. (Montgomery 4). The end of nineteenth century witnessed an enormous change in the attitude towards children. Children became sentimentally and emotionally ‘priceless’ and economically ‘useless’ and began to be looked upon as a consumer rather than a producer. This new way of seeing children also influenced the literature written for them.
However while making such generalizations, it has to be remembered that they may at times fall flat when put in context of certain historical and literary specifics. We cannot forget that childhoods are not homogenous and children experience them differently according to their age, class, gender, their ethnicity, or disability, which is again reflected in the literature produced for them. In the later part of the Victorian period, all kinds of books - fantasy books, fairy tales, nonsense literature, adventure tales, domestic and family tales, animal and school stories as well as innotive books and periodicals began to be published for children. Many adult writers disapproved of this tradition that children's literature had become a publishing phenomenon and is used to earn huge profits.

The commercialization of the publishing industry resulted in the fine distinction between readers, and specially in the highly stratified area of publishing for children. The readers were deliberately divided into categories according to age, class, income, interests and gender. However the texts that appealed to mixed audience of adults and children, which is termed as cross over fiction today, existed in the past, too. Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies*, both of Lewis Carroll’s Alice Books, Hesba Stretton’s *Jessica’s First Prayer* and works of Mark Twain like *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckelberry Finn* are some of the early examples of ‘crossover’ fiction. Many a great men and women writers and celebrities’ life had been greatly influenced by the stories they had read when they were young boys and girls. Stories such as those by Captain Mayne Reid (1818-83), G.A. Henty (1832-1902), R.L. Stenvenson’s adventure story – *Treasure Island* (1881) and *Coral Island* (1858) by R.M. Ballantyne’s were written especially for school boys with its emphasis on adventure and
exploration (standing in strong contrast to the world of enclosed domestic interior characteristic of stories suitable for girls).

Initially in the 18th century, when commercial publishing for children began, girls and boys generally shared the same books and stories with slightly different para textual trappings. For example, John Newberry’s ‘A Little Pretty Pocket-Book’ (1744) was intended for the instruction and amusement’ of both ‘little master Tommy’ and ‘Pretty Miss Polly’. However, gradually with the stratification of markets in the 19th century, books began to be targeted at young boys or girls. Books set in boys’ school and those set in school for girls became highly popular. Simultaneously adventure stories with exotic settings, exciting plots and imperialistic tone were addressed primarily to boys whereas domestic and family stories were created for girls. Many memorable young, especially girl’s characters were created at this time which has continued to attract enthusiastic followers till today. During these times many North American writers created appealing girls characters foremost among them are Louisa May Alcotts Jo March of *Little Women*, Anne of *Green Gables*, Rebecca of *Sunnybrook Farm* and Pollyanna of *Pollyanna*.

The early 20th century which started with the creation of lively girl characters symptomatic of the cultural romance and the idea of childhood, culminated in the creation of Peter Pan. J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* ushered in the ‘century of the child’, giving rise to a celebration of childhood imagination and creativity. Importance began to be given to childhood and it was evident in the symbolic power rendered to children in the post-war periods. The constructions of the new childhood in the post-war period represented hope for the future. The UNO’s convention on the Rights of the Child in
1989, unanimously agreed upon upholding of children’s basic rights of survival and development.

Most Child characters and the implied child readers of children’s literature in the first half of 20th century were prepubescent, white, middle class, living in families with two heterosexual parents and domestic maids, servants and governesses in a patriarchal culture. Children as portrayed in children’s books of this age come across as highly capable matured and adventurous. In many of the books written between 1900-1950 viz, Kenneth Grahame’s ‘The Wind in the Willows’ (1908) and the ‘Pooh Books’ of A. A. Milne, one can often observe and feel an underpinning sense of nostalgia for childhood.

However the cultural shift in the second half of the 20th century ushered in modernity and severed lines with the past. Nostalgia for childhood no longer remained a predominant trend in the writing for children. One important point to be noted here was that childhood was prolonged and the school leaving age was raised both in UK and US. As a consequence, children had to remain financially dependent on their parents for a longer period. This resulted in the birth of teen culture and Young Adult fiction which started to be written specially for teenager in the US and thereafter in U.K. It featured teenagers and their struggles to become independent well exemplified in novels like S.E. Hinton’s The Outsiders (1967) and Erik Erikson’s Look on Childhood and Society (1950). The childhood period was gradually extended and the childhood that was marked by innocence and lack of experience started to disappear. In the mid 20th century, the white middle-class world of happy heterosexual families found in nineteenth century children’s literature, began to be challenged. Children’s books, comics and magazines
written in second half of 20th century portrayed children and young people of different backgrounds, ethnicities and sexualities.

Along with the depiction of a children of different ethnicities, children’s writers started to use different modes and genres viz realism and fantasy, tragedy, comedy, science fiction, utopias and dystopias addressing a range of topical issues. American novelist Rosa Guy’s novels, *The Friends* (1973) and *Ruby* (1976) deals with the story of a girl whose family shifts from rural Trinidad to Harlem, where her mother dies, her father becomes physically abusive and how she confronts with prejudice and life on the streets of a modern US city. Robert Cormier’s *We All Fall Down* (1991) reflects the tragic consequences of random teenage violence and vandalism. David Levithan’s *Boy meets Boy* (2003) is a gay utopia which addresses the issues of same sex relationships.

Looking back at the long history of children’s literature, one significant aspect which comes across is that the writers, illustrators and publishers had regularly experimented with new ways of producing children’s literature economically and attractively. This has resulted in creation of novelty books such as harlequinades, pop-ups and books with attractive portable parts as well. The advent of new media had impact on the forms, formats, genres and narrative techniques of writing for children. Many films, television serials, electronic and online fictions based on children’s stories became highly popular. The most significant aspect of the 20th century children’s literature was that it broadened its interest to include all formats in which young people encounter narratives, whether on the page, on screens, on the stage, in lyrics, from oral sources, or any other medium or vehicle.
Another important facet which this brief history brings to light is that children’s literature had always been written by adults for children. Children’s literature is defined by its audience rather than by genre, period, approach or who writes it. Till now children have not written what had been published as children’s literature. But in contemporary times—in this age of desktop publishing fan fiction and other forms of online publication, children and young people are discovering new ways of writing for a public beyond their immediate family, friends and peers. With more children’s involvement in writing in the 21st century, need would arise for rethinking of our understanding of children’s literature in future.

However after a brief survey of children’s literature produced till date, it has become feasible to map out certain chief characteristics and dominant tendencies found in narratives for children and young people and how they are associated to images of children, childhood and adolescence.

The analysis of selected classic children’s texts of Victorian age and contemporary age bring to light certain common features related to the style and content of children’s text and the relationship between narrators and readers. Reynolds remarks that Barbara Wall (1991) rightly concludes “…The way adult writers address child readers is analogues to the way adults speak to children, and affects tone of voice, lexis, register, and the amount of detail contained in descriptions and explanations” (Children's Lit A Very 25). Wall identifies three modes typically used in writing for children viz single address, double address and dual address. Single address is targeted towards child readers only, while dual address endeavours to address both child and adult readers simultaneously and equally, giving a satisfactory reading experience to both. In double
address, the narrator moves between addressing child readers and the adult readers who are assumed to be reading the book with the children or monitoring the child’s reading process. The early writings for children most often used double address and very often included specific sections for adults. However in the 20th century in the backdrop of the changing images of childhood and the birth of a modern child reader, single address became more prominent as more and more children started reading the books independently. Nevertheless picture books which are often read to children by an older person have continued using dual or double address. Besides, it is significant to note that dual address is a defining characteristic of crossover writing, which has become prominent in contemporary times.

Critic Myles Mc Dowell while comparing the writing for children and writing for adults, observes:

“Children’s books are usually shorter, they tend to favour an active rather than a passive treatment with dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection: child protagonists are the rule; conventions are much used, the story develops within a clear cut moral schematism…” (Mc Dowell 142) .

Mc Dowell further notes that the children’s books are more optimistic, the language is child oriented; plots are of a distinctive order; and it endlessly talks of magic, fantasy, simplicity and adventure (58). Danish scholar Torben Weinreich observes in his book *Children’s Literature-Art or Pedagogy?* that the process of adapting adult texts for children involves making them shorter, simpler and often adding illustrations.
Until the mid 20th century, it was believed that as writings for children play a vital role in shaping their ideas about culture and society, it should strive to set good examples and help the child readers in inculcating approved ways and codes of behavior, which in turn would help them lead a successful and meaningful life. Therefore inclusion of sex, bad language or gratuitous violence was a taboo in children’s books. Pessimistic and Depressive endings were also avoided because the young needed to be invested with confidence about the future and a belief in their ability to encounter obstacles of life. However in contemporary times with the change in the ideas about childhood, the unwritten agreement over these attributes has broken down. Due to the rise of juvenile adult fiction, crossover fiction and increase in the age range of the catered audience, many long-held assumptions about children’s literature are being challenged today. Many stylistically complex children’s books include sex, swearing, violence and gay characters and often have bleak endings.

Thus it becomes difficult to describe children’s literature as to what it is about and how its text is written. However according to Perry Nodelman it is more opt to define children’s literature based on relationship and construction of childhood and children. Perry Nodelman observes that children and adults are different, and their needs are also different. Just as Doctors, psychologists, teacher, architects and fashion designers take into account children’s needs while dealing with them, similarly books for children should also provide something special and different to children and should also cater to their needs. However it is ironic that the requirements of children are determined and analyzed by adults on the basis of recollections of their childhood, as well as by
observations, interactions and a pre-existing body of information, received opinions and images about children and childhood.

The terms ‘child’, ‘childhood’, ‘children’ and adolescence are regularly used in relation to children’s literature but there had never been a single version of any of these terms or one specific vision of childhood behind children’s literature. Under the influence of Romanticism, in most of the narratives or stories for children, children were portrayed as innocent, civilized and lovable especially in seventeenth and early eighteenth century children’s literature. For instance, Alice is depicted as a very innocent, disciplined, educable girl in ‘Alice in the Wonderland’. However, there are also instances of child characters who have been portrayed as evil, brutish, cunning and savage. William Brown, the protagonist of Richmal Crompton’s popular series – Just William, is not an innocent child character. His character has been invested with traits of cunningness, naughtiness and rebellion. Thus multiple sets of children and adolescents are depicted or (implicated) in every aspect of children’s literature, from the child characters in the texts to the implied (but imaginary) child readers to actual child readers.

The term children’s literature can be considered to encompass any writing directed at children roughly aged between 0 to 18. Thus children’s writing addresses and constructs multiple versions and images of childhood and in the process they influence how children and childhood are understood.

However what is of central importance is the fact that it is adults who create children’s literature and in doing so they invest it with their experiences and expectations of childhood. Maria Nikolajeva observes that there is at least one constant factor in
children’s literature i.e.-the adult norms have always governed the patterns of children’s literature from ancient to present times. Nikolajeva has termed this power relationship between adults and children’s literature as ‘aetonormativity’.

**Different Approaches and Theories of Children’s Literature:**

Children’s literature revises, reiterates and widens the range of narratives of adults’ writings. Therefore mostly, the children’s writing is studied in the same ways as any other texts and is evaluated by employing the same critical theories or approaches. However unlike adult’s writings, children’s writing is categorized based on the age rather than period, genre or producers. Nevertheless while doing review of criticism on different children’s texts, it can be observed that there are certain approaches and theories of adults literature that have proved particularly useful for the study of children’s literature. There are, for instance, approaches like Reader Response Theory and Childist Criticism that focus on the intended audience, whereas psychoanalytical, cultural and historical approaches analyze different childhoods and varied constructions of childhood.

**Psychological and Psychoanalytical Approaches:**

Children’s Literature is faced with a unique dichotomy that most of the books for children are penned by adults and are critically discussed by adults. Although intended or ideal readerships of these texts are children, children rarely write them or critically evaluate them. This poses a perennial challenge to analyze how children understand books, the world around them and themselves. Psychology and Psychoanalysis provide
some ways of approaching these questions and also offer insights into what motivates writers to create children’s texts.

Relationship between Psychology and Children’s literature goes back to the ancient times when stories were used to help children understand themselves and the people around them. The history of Children’s Literature is replete with stories which reflect upon children’s fears, anxieties, angry retorts, mischievous behaviours and the ways to control and manage them. Sarah Fielding’s novel *Governess* deals with the life of young girls living in Mrs. Teachum’s Little Female Academy. The book reveals and explores the inner recesses of the mind of the little girls, their weaknesses, their passions and the hidden aspects of their inner self. Although Fielding's work focuses more on Christian duty, religion and discipline, it gives a feel of psychological investigation. Mary Louisa Molesworth's children's stories such as *The Cuckoo Clock* (1877) examines the effects of grief, loneliness and boredom on the life of young Griselda, whereas *Sheila's Mystery* (1895) focus on sibling rivalry. Many children's writings by the middle of the twentieth century began to focus on the psychological understanding of its characters' inner worlds taking cue from the child psychologists and their theories.

In the first half of the twentieth century child psychologist Jean Piaget conducted a series of classic experiments and discovered that children pass through four distinct stages in their cognitive development: the sensori-motor (ages 0-2), the pre-operational (2-7), the concrete operational (7-11) and the formal operational (11-plus). Piaget’s observations on how children of different ages manage their mental worlds have been constantly used by child and education psychologists and have been assiduously applied to children’s writings by Children’s literature critics. Education psychologist Nicholas
Tucker has exploited this idea in his book *The Child and the Book: A psychological Exploration* (1981), where he divides the chapters of his book as per the Piagetian stages. ‘Early Fiction (ages 7 -11 )’ corresponds to Piaget’s concrete operational stage, when children are able to think logically about objects and events; while ‘Literature for Older Children (ages11-14), corresponds to the formal operational stage when children start getting interested in ideological and abstract thoughts. 21ST Century witnessed proliferating of critical analysis of children’s writings based on a combination of psychological and psychoanalytic methods. A noteworthy contribution in the form of critical study was psychotherapist, Margaret and Michael Rustin’s *Narratives of Love and Loss* (1987, revised 2001), literature specialists - Jacqueline Rose’s *The Case of Peter Pan, or, the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (1984) and Karen Coat’s *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* (2004), which applied the theories of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to a range of children’s books. Another work which had been influential on both, those who study and those who create children’s literature, was Bruno Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and importance of Fairy Tales* (1978) based on Freud’s psychoanalytical theory.

**Freud and Psychoanalysis:**

Sigmund Freud often resorted to literature and myth to exemplify and name many of his theories of psychoanalysis such as Oedipus complex. Similarly literary critics have equally exploited the psychoanalytic techniques of Freud and others to elucidate their theories and points of view.
Freud’s emphasis on the importance of childhood sexuality establishes a significant connection between psychoanalysis and children’s literature texts. Bruno Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and importance of Fairy Tales* (1978) concentrates on symbolism and the crucial role of Oedipus Complex in children’s psychosexual development. According to Charles Butler, Bettelheim analyzes well known fairy tales in terms of their capacity to address children’s unconscious anxieties and facilitate psychological development. Charles Butler observes:

Fairy tales in particular, with their frequent emphasis on transformation, entrapment and the threat of being eaten, their quests for magical or unattainable prizes, their revelations of ‘true identity’, and their conventional resolutions in adult heterosexual unison, offer a type of narrative that provides numerous points of contact with Freud’s account of childhood sexuality and ego formation. (‘Psychological Approaches” 173)

Another important area where Freud and literary criticism traverse is the concept of repression. According to Freud our conscious mind often represses those thoughts and feelings which are tabooed or not acceptable in the society. However these repressed thoughts and unconscious desires tend to resurface in the form of dreams, slips of tongue, obsessive habits or even in literary writings but mostly they are camouflaged and need critical analysis. Thus literary criticism and Freudian analysis crisscross at this juncture as both require unraveling of the ‘surface’ appearance of a text or a dream and its ‘underlying’ meaning. The interdependence of psychoanalytic and literary criticism is well exemplified in the readings by David Rudd (2008) of Neil Gaiman’s fantasy *Coraline* (2002) wherein he discusses how the fantasy adapts the use of abjection and
Oedipus like concentration on the vulnerability of the eyes from Freud’s essay on ‘The Uncanny’.

**Jungian Criticism:**

Freud’s one-time friend and colleague, Carl Jung’s psychoanalytic theories like ‘Collective Unconscious’ have been frequently explored by Children’s Literature writers and critics. According to Jung certain symbols have similar significance for people from varied personal and cultural backgrounds. Jung believed that infants are born with a sense of wholeness that is lost as the child grows up and acquires language, bodily control, gender identity and subjectivity. But in spite of personal individuality, human beings share a ‘collective unconscious’ inhabited by certain universal archetypes and often life and literature is interpreted in terms of these archetypes. We come across many examples of Jungian archetypes in myth and literature, for instance Gandalf in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*(1937), Merlin in King Arthur and Dumbledore in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Series, can be looked upon as Jung’s archetype of the Wise Old Man, a guide and father figure to the protagonist. Other examples of Jungian archetypes include the Anima, Animus, Hero, Great Mother, Trickster and the Shadow (Jung, 1959). Thus many writers of Juvenile fantasy have been largely influenced by Jung’s system of archetypes and his observation that conscious and unconscious communicate through these symbols and his notion that a healthy psyche creates a balance between the masculine and feminine facets of an individual.
Lacan:

Another key figure whose psychoanalytic theory is widely adopted by critics of children’s literature is French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. Lacan connects Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis with structuralist and post-structuralist ideas about language. Lacan believes that prelinguistic child is prehuman and human beings can be defined and distinguished only by the system of language that they acquire during their lifetime. According to Lacan it is a process which occurs mostly during childhood wherein a relationship is established with the Imaginary and the Symbolic Orders. When a child enters the imaginary world, it is involved in a narcissistic recognition of itself as a distinct being and acquiring a subjective identity of its own as exemplified in the visual image of the self reflected in a mirror. A child is, in the course of time, introduced to the symbolic order – a system of prevalent thoughts and ideologies, social structure and languages which had been hitherto unknown to him. However, often the recognition of the self entails some degree of loss as the reflected image is different from the actual body the child inhabits. The critic Karen Coats, supporting the primacy of language in Lacan’s Developmental theory, stresses on the importance of children’s literature because we usually come across it at a formative period of life when the sense of self is still ‘porous’ and relatively unformed. (Looking Glasses 4).

The Psychological discourse on children’s literature is incomplete without mentioning Jacqueline Rose’s The Case of Peter Pan, or, the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction (1984). Rose’s work, again, is highly influenced by Lacan’s re-reading of Freud’s work. According to Rose children’s literature plays a significant role in the construction
of self identity. She endorses Lacan’s view that ‘Self’ is usually the product of language, language is the medium of fiction and so when a child reads he is simultaneously engaged in learning and experimenting with language and creating its own identity. Rose’s reflection on Lacan, language, and subjectivity has been carried forward by Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (1994) and Karen Coats (2004). Another significant and highly contested aspect of Rose’s work is her argument that fictional constructions of childhood cannot take place without being influenced by adults’ needs and desires. Rose believes that images of childhoods in many children books, fictionalized and romanticized by adults, become a place to resolve their own unresolved psychological conflicts. According to Reynolds the aspect of her (Karen Coats’) work,

that has had the greatest impact is her contention that fictional constructions of childhood have their origins in adult needs and desires. This results in an image of childhood that stands in for a cluster of adult desires – for innocence, coherence, and psychic balance – that bear little relation to actual children and childhoods.”(*Children’s Literature* 45)

As a result the image of childhood that is created by the adult writer often bears little resemblance to actual children and childhoods. Rose has examined various versions of J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* in his work *The Case of Peter Pan* in order to analyze Barrie’s interest in, and depiction of perpetual childhood.
Childist Criticism:

Childist Criticism is a critical approach which is used specifically by researchers working with Children’s Literature. Childist Criticism is also an attempt to address the charge, often put on Children’s literature criticism, of using theories from other disciplines rather than generating its own original approach.

Prominent Children’s Literature Critic, Peter Hunt argues that Children’s literature criticism should refrain from making judgments on behalf of children and include the voices of children. Hunt’s child oriented theory which he refers to as ‘childist criticism’ has affinity with Reader Response Theory but it focuses specifically on children as readers of texts and picture books. Hunt, emphasizing on the significance of children’s voices in criticism, says:

…those of us who are concerned with children’s literature need to beware of the trap laid for us by the very concept of ‘literature’, and [adult] literary standards that claim to be (or aspire to be) authoritative….if we value [children as readers who make meaning] at all…we have to see them making it within their own culture. (‘How Not’ 239)

Childist Criticism can be finely compared with the branch of feminist criticism known as ‘écriture feminine’. Écriture feminine theorists believe that language was ‘man-made’, because it had been more than often created by men who usually compiled dictionaries, grammars, set down the rules of rhetoric, influenced all public forms of writing and expression. The syntax and semantics of language were also built and managed by male minds and bodies. The female promoters of this theory attempted to
assuage the ‘man-made’ nature of language by developing alternative and distinctively female ways of using language, specifically in writing which could express their inner thought processes and their biological and physical cadences. Similarly childist critics endeavour to recognize and examine specific characteristics of children as readers of both text and pictures. However the correlation cannot be considered as perfect because children do not either write children’s literature or its critical studies. According to Kimberly Reynolds Childist Criticism has constantly been perturbed by the fact that an adult mediator is relentlessly needed to bring forth, organize and represent children’s behaviours and responses.

Although it was Peter Hunt who coined the term ‘childist criticism’, it was the British writer and critic Aidan Chambers who first emphasized the need for developing a critical method to analyze the child-as-reader. Chambers encouraged creation of reading communities of children wherein they could discuss about various aspects of books and establish connections between books in their own amateur ways. Chambers analyzed the responses of children and demonstrated that although children read in a different manner than adults and have lesser experience and knowledge, their responses to texts can be equally perceptive, astute and unbiased compared to adults. Although research using childist criticism started by focusing on reactions of children as readers, many a researchers have endeavoured to comprehend how to read like a child, to write for children, and re encounter children’s literature as an adult. Maria Tatar’s Enchanted Hunters (2009) is one such work which discusses the experiences of ‘former children’ who recall their childhood experiences of reading and how they were enchanted by books in those years. Maria Tatar interrogates the relationship between past and present selves
and examines how the texts of childhood affect adult readers. Her research focuses on the adult readers’ reminiscences and reflections on their childhood reading experiences. While Tatar extols the imaginative power of children’s literature, she also brings to our notice the vulnerability of the child readers who are enchanted by books and what they gradually lose as they become mature. Maria Tater observes:

As we grow older, we begin to draw boundaries and develop the sense of critical detachment that makes it harder to inhabit a fictional world. Make-believe stands up to proper adult decorum and is sent out to detention. Children are… absorbed, entranced, and spellbound, they feel goose bumps as they experience the eerie silence of the Dementors in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* or thrill to the chance of entering Villa Villekulla to have breakfast with Pippi Longstocking. Whether these reported feelings are nostalgic myth or lived reality, [what is more important is that ] the very real feeling of the fictional world makes it just as critical to the formation of identity as what is encountered in life. (22).

Another noteworthy study which takes forward the discourse on adult - child relationship in children’s literature is Peter Hollindale’s *Signs of Childness in Children’s Books* (1997). According to Hollindale children and adults both have access to ‘childness’- ‘ the quality of being a child ’ and therefore they share a common terrain. However, the experience of ‘childness ‘ differs in both the cases because the children are presently passing through the stage of ‘being a child’ where as adults are recalling and reliving their own childhoods and responding to texts in the manner of children. Thus children’s books create a rendezvous where the childhood and the adulthood come together to interact and share the common experience of ‘childness’. While reading
children’s literature, adults reactivate their childhood aspects – specifically the flexibility and potentiality of childhood – where as children gain exposure to what it is like to be adult. Children’s writer and illustrator C. Walter Hodges rightly sums up this correlation as cited by David Rudd, “If in every child there is an adult trying to get out, equally in every adult there is a child trying to get back. On the overlapping of those two, there is the common ground.” (“Theorizing and” 34 ). Hollindale bestows substantial value to reading and research of children’s literature and considers ‘childness’ as its defining quality. However, how childness is understood and interpreted changes over time and is different in different cultures. Besides, with the increase in the visual components of children’s text and the advent of e books, fan fiction, multimedia, films and computer games, the research on children’s literature has become all the more complex and has opened up many philosophical and ethical debates about adult child relationship when approached from the perspective of a child reader.

**Children’s Literature and the Power Motif:**

Roberta Trites’s in her admirable work, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* looks upon power as a significant trait and motif intrinsic in young adult fiction. However, power motif can be considered to be present in all children’s literature in one or the other way which makes it akin to literatures dealing with other suppressed social groups viz women’s literature, indigenous literature or transgender literature. In all these literatures the main emphasis is on the study of power equations, the questioning or assertion of the prevalent order of power. The ‘recognition’ of each of these marginalized and powerless groups has resulted in the emergence of a
critical theory: feminist theory, post colonial theory, and queer theory. Maria Nikolajeva observes in the introduction to her book *Aesthetic Approaches to Children’s Literature*:

Specific as they are, these theories have much in common as they interrogate the power position and what especially queer theory calls “norm” and “normativity”. There is a term that successfully encompasses all these theories and that can also be applied to children’s literature research: heterology, the inquiry into imbalance, inequality, and asymmetry between different social groups. In the case of children’s literature, we are dealing with the imbalance, inequality, and asymmetry between children and adults... (xvi).

Alison Lurie asserts that all children’s literature is subversive by nature in her book *Don’t Tell the Grownups*, especially when considered against adult normativity. The adults have more power in our society in comparison to children, which can be looked upon as a norm in real life as well as literature. Post world war children’s writings can truly be regarded as subversive because they describe situations in which dominant power structures are interrogated. In many fantasies and science fictions like Philip Pullman’s *Northern lights* or Rowling’s Harry Potter Series we come across situations where there is disguised interrogation of authorities. Most children in our society are oppressed and powerless with no economic, social or political power and subject to adult rules and regulations, but paradoxically in children’s writings especially in fantasy and science fiction created by adults, children are allowed a temporary sojourn into the world of freedom, authority and independence on certain conditions. They are portrayed as strong, brave, rich, powerful and independent and are put in some extraordinary situations such as war or adventurous journey on some far away land like
the *Treasure island* or *Coral Island* or in the fantasy world like *Alice in the Wonderland*, *Peter Pan’s* Neverland or the magical realm of the Hogwarts school in *Harry Potter*. Away from the parental or adult control, the fictional child is empowered through the possession of heroic attributes or magical power and creates a subverted order by reversing the existing power equation. However at the end of the story the protagonist is brought back to the security of home and the parental control confirming to the prevalent order of affairs.

**Sex and Gender Based Approaches :**

Amartya Sen points out that it is difficult to describe the complexity of human beings because all human beings have a plurality of identities and a plurality of commitments like sex, gender, religion, racial heritage, culture, occupation, class, appearance, interests or family relationships (89). Sex, at a most fundamental level, is a biological classification attributed to biological and physical characteristics of human beings whereas gender is the social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviours. Gender can also be termed as a cultural phenomenon and is relational because each of the gender binaries is defined primarily by its relation to the other. The first words uttered when a baby is born viz ‘It’s a girl!’ or ‘It’s a boy!’ refer to biological characteristics but they are vigorously implicated in social and cultural identity and subsequent stereotyping that relates to ideas of gender and gender roles. According to Judith Butler gender and gender expectations are culturally encoded and represent meanings attributed through words to a baby at the time of birth. Butler rightly observes that thus the process of ‘girling’ and ‘boying’ is implicated from birth through
pink or blue ideas about socialization, values, behaviours, career prospects, friendship, social relationships, and sexual and gender roles. (23).

The issue of gender is all pervasive in children’s literature. M. O. Grenby rightly inquires, ‘Is there such a thing as children’s literature, in any case? Might it be more accurate to speak of a boys’ literature and a girls’ literature?’ (Grenby 8). It cannot be refuted that from the commencement of commercial children’s literature in the Victorian Age to its commoditization in the contemporary age, gender has played a key role in the sales of children’s books and in confirming and asserting the social norms. Perry Nodelman observes:

The reinforcement of traditional gender assumptions is one particular and particularly important aspect of the colonizing work of children’s literature – so much so that a defining characteristic of children’s literature is that it intends to teach what it means for girls to be girls and boys to be boys. (The Hidden 173)

The study of gender stereotypes and gender roles in children’s books and juvenile adult fiction is of much significance because children’s literature is regarded as ‘bearer of culture’. The interest in gender studies in children’s literature began in 1960 and 1970 and the major areas of contemporary gender studies which have influenced the gender images in children’s literature and film are – feminism, gender performativity, masculinity studies, queer theory and transgender studies. Many critics in the contemporary times are working to deconstruct the patriarchal gender stereotypes and expose the gender roles not as naturally created but as socially constructed in children’s writings. According to John Stephens,
Gender is not simply an attribute of content or reflection of a cultural formation to be identified within texts. Rather, it exists in more complex ways…there is a tendency for major genres in children’s literature to be endemically gendered in their character functions, events and outcomes’ ("Gender, Genre" 17).

The early studies of children’s books threw light on gender roles, on the representation of boys and girls, men and women in children’s works and how these portrayals replicated the real situation in society. The imperialist, adventure stories generally had male protagonists invested with heroic traits and independent, aggressive spirit where as the family stories had female protagonists having the attributes of beauty, domesticity, vulnerability with emotional bent of mind. The feminine ideal presented in these books disadvantaged the female gender, implying girls were less clever, dynamic, and competent than boys. As a result, writers, publishers and critics began a campaign to counter such gender stereotyping which gave rise to a set of texts that put forth many ways for being successful and female. The rise of feminism also led to the re evaluation of the female representations in the past texts especially the classics like Alcott’s *Little Women*, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and the *Anne of Green Gables*, ‘all of which combined domestic detail with tomboyish girls striving to overcome their natural indiscipline to find a place in society and a husband without compromising their own personalities” (Montgomery 15).

Feminist critics referred to the belief of the patriarchal society in the power and superiority of the males as ‘phallocentricism. Tomboyish characters of Jo March and Anne Shirley make efforts to break away from the female stereotypes and display traits of subversion through their independent and unfeminine bents of mind, but they are
frequently forced back to the confines of female roles. On applying the scheme to Anne, it comes across that Anne matches most of the mail traits in the beginning of the novel and most of the female traits in the end. That is, Nikolajeva states “rather than showing the character’s development toward strength and independence as would be the case with a male character, the novel instead demonstrates how women were compelled by the patriarchal society to adjust to the female stereotype (in the end)” (Aesthetic Approaches 150). Nikolajeva further notes that in children’s fiction girls face dual or double oppression: as women and as children. As girls’ fiction is a comparatively recent genre, masculine codes as in many other fields, ‘hold a default value in children’s fiction’ (Aesthetic Approaches, 151).

Feminism :

Feminism can be looked upon as one of the most significant social movement of twentieth century which stimulated the interest in gender and gender theory. It’s remarkable growth in the later part of twentieth century led towards a rise of different feminisms instead of one broad movement and it also aroused the interest in gender and gender theory. The new wave of feminist writers and women liberationists came to the forefront in 1960s who opposed the patriarchal culture as a key for exertion of political and social authority. A rich body of ‘feminist’ writings by Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter, Toril Moi and Judith Butler to name a few rendered new perspectives to feminism and feminist literary criticism. Feminism has had a substantial impact on children’s literature since the 1970s. As Victoria Flanagan notes,
[It is] indicated by the broad range of children’s texts that reflect feminist agenda in their desire to expose the social structures through which patriarchal practices have sought to regulate women’s bodies and behaviours. From retellings of popular fairy tales that redress the conventional marginalization and passivity of feminine characters by portraying active, self-determining heroines, to works of historical fiction for younger readers that re-imagine various historical periods from a feminine viewpoint…(27)

The feminists writer for children took up the most remarkable task of retelling or revision of traditional fairy tales. The traditional fairy tales with their strictly defined gender stereotypes came across as an idyllic terrain to challenge the dominant patriarchal structure of gender and power. Jack Zipes rightly notes in the introduction to Don’t Bet on the Prince (1986), a collection of retellings by prominent writers namely Margaret Atwood, Jane Yolen, Angela Carter and Tanith Lee, that the revisions of traditional fairy tales texts spring “from a basic impulse for change within society” (14). According to Zipes, authors of these stories seek to question the socialization patterns and “have been stimulated by feminist criticism to rethink both fairy tales as aesthetic compositions and the role they play in conditioning themselves and children (14). Unlike the traditional fairy tales, the heroines in these stories come across as independent and self-assured and challenge the submissiveness of the conventional female characters. Babette Cole’s picture books Smartypants (1986) and Prince Cinders (1987) also follow the feminist agenda contained in Zipes’ collection by revising the traditional gender stereotyping of the original fairy tales.
The second wave feminists like Roberta Seelinger Trites in her survey of feminists children’s writings in her book *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminists Voices in Children's Novels* observed that:

No organized social movement has affected children’s literature as significantly as feminism […] The majority of novels about girls no longer focus so pointedly on socializing girls into traditional femininity as books like *Charlotte’s Web* (1952) did. (ix)

Trites goes on to analyse number of feminist children’s works by authors like Mildred Taylor and Patricia MacLachlan. Gene Kemp’s *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler* (1977), Louis Sachar’s *Marvin Redpost: Is He a girl?* (1993) and Anne Fine’s *Bill’s New Frock* (1989) also address feminine concerns and seek to rework and modify masculine and feminine roles and stereotypes. American fantasy writer Ursula Le Guin in a strong discussion on feminism wrote in her book *Earthsea Revisioned*:

The deepest foundation of the order of oppression is gendering, which names the male normal, dominant, active, and the female other, subject, passive. To begin to imagine freedom, the myths of gender, like the myths of race, have to be exploded and discarded. (Guin 24)

Besides second wave feminism, ecriture feminine has also had some impact on children’s literature criticism. It deals with “the inscription of the feminine body and female difference in language and text” (Showalter 249). Deborah Thacker considers it as “a feminine approach to discourse”(4). According to Victoria Flanagan “Stylistically,
such discourse prioritizes feelings and experience, the use of non-linear narrative structures and unconventional syntax, with an emphasis on fluidity and ambiguity.” (Flanagan 29). Victoria Flanagan observes, Ecriture feminine sought to alleviate the ‘man-made’ nature of language by creating distinct female ways of using language, especially in writing. (Flanagan 29)

In the recent times, Children’s writings have begun to connect with third wave feminism, which “recognizes identity as plural (rejecting essential notions of feminine identity) and conceptualizes masculinity and femininity as relational rather than oppositional.”(Flanagan 30). This is well exemplified in The Rose and the Beast (2000), a collection of revised fairy tales by Francesca Lia Block which comprises of retold version of ‘Snow White’ (‘Snow’). In this story the heroine is affectionately brought up by seven deformed brothers, who give her lessons in caring and respecting the world of nature. The story depicts eco-feminist concerns by stressing the symbiotic association between human beings and nature. The story also implies a harmonious gender relationship between the heroine and her brothers through the female protagonist’s choice to favour a peaceful, altruistic life with her brothers against a romantic union.

Gender Performativity:

The concept of gender performativity or performative gender as opposed to biological gender is associated with the work of Judith Butler. According to Judith Butler, gender rather than being innate or natural is in fact a series of stylized acts and behaviours that are repeated until they give the illusion of authencity. Maria Nikolajeva elaborating on Gender Performativity notes:
If the character is depicted as female but behaves like a male, we may say that she is performing according to the prewritten male gender script, or matrix. It is fully possible to put a female character in an adventure plot, but this will be a simple gender permutation, creating, “hero in drag” (*Aesthetic Approaches* 153).

Many contemporary fantasy novels such as Philip Pullman’s *Northern Lights* (1995) depict strong, masculine heroines (Lyra in *Northern Lights*) slaying dragons and combating with male opponents. As Nikolajeva states it can be argued that “these seemingly female characters are tokens, a female body set in a male role” (*Aesthetic Approaches* 153).

**Masculinity Studies:**

The application of gender studies to children’s texts have largely concentrated on issues of female representation in children’s writings. However recently in his groundbreaking work of criticism, *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children’s Literature and Films* (2002), John Stephens discusses how patriarchal culture controls male bodies and behavior. Stephens has based his arguments on sociologist R. W. Connell’s concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ which Connell defines as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell 7).

In nineteenth century the notion of masculinity depicted in stories for boys was built on the constructions of manhood in adventure stories like Stevenson’s *Treasure island* or Ballantyne’s *Coral island*. As Kimberley Reynolds notes, "attributes of
masculinity which were perfectly acceptable in 1858 - such things as crying, hugging, expressing love rather than comradeship - had by the fin de siècle been banished to the realm of the feminine" (Children's Lit. in the 1890s 31)

According to the nineteenth century concept of masculinity, the British boys were supposed to be brave, courageous, chivalrous, protective towards weak, honest, loyal and good mannered which was spread through boys’ fiction and boys’ magazine. These conventional ideas of masculinity continued to dominate children’s writings well into the twentieth century.

At the end of 20th century children’s writings and film took up issues related to patriarchal discourses of masculinity by portraying ‘new’ masculinities which emerged in resistance to hegemonic masculinity, characterized by male stereotype behaviour. Libby Gleeson’s Where’s Mum? (1992) renders a picture of sensitive and domesticated masculinity, whereas the humorous and ironically titled Tough Boris (Mem Fox, 1994) inverts the typecast image of male pirates as ‘tough’ by incorporating new and conventionally feminine values to the schema such as open expression of one’s emotion (when Boris laments the death of his parrot by crying openly). Many contemporary young adult fiction depict ‘new’ masculinity which Stephens calls a ‘sensitive new man schema’. The ‘sensitive boy’ Stephen notes “reads for pleasure and may aspire to become a writer himself, … he tends to lack physical prowess and physical courage, though his moral courage and other-regardingness will prompt him to act courageously.”(Stephens 44).
Queer Theory and Transgender Studies:

Queer Theory which emerged in the 1990s sought to question “the very notion of previously stable categories of identity, such as man/woman or gay/straight, marking a fundamental shift towards more fluid concepts of sexuality and subjectivity.” (Flanagan 33). The foundation of queer theory has been laid by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) who describes, ‘queer’ as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality are not made (or cannot be made) to signify monolithically” (Sedgwick 8). According to Jagose, queer theory resists classification; ‘it is less an identity than a critique of identity’, and is therefore always a category in a state of becoming (Jagose 1996). Representation of queer subjectivities is confined to contemporary works of young adult fiction such as Funny Boy (1994) by Shyam Selvadurai or Boy Overboard (1997) by Peter Wells.

Transgender is regarded as an “umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross-over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries.” (Stryker n.p.). Susan Stryker, throwing light on the political aspect of the term, notes:

perhaps the most significant aspect of the recent and rapid development of transgender is the role the term has played in giving voice to a wide range of people whose experiences and understandings of gender, embodiment, and
sexuality previously had not entered into broader discussions and decision-making processes. (Stryker n.p.)


**Gender, Commodification and Criticism in the Twenty First century:**

There has undoubtedly been an increase in the number and kind of children’s texts that defy gender stereotyping in the second half of twentieth century. But it is a matter of major concern as kim Reynolds notes, “21st century has witnessed a revival of literature that is targeted at gendered readership and which seems to be reviving earlier ideas about the nature and potential of males and females” ("Children’s Literature: A Very" 47). The commodification of the children’s publishing industry can be regarded as one of the causes for regression to conventional ideas of gender representation in children’s texts. Thus, though many significant inroads have been carved over the years to resist gender stereotyping and social constructions of gender in children’s texts, there still remains much to be done to promote harmonious gender relationship.
Post Colonial and Multicultural Approaches:

Postcolonialism can be explained as a study of the influence of colonization on cultures and societies. According to Bill Ashcroft et al the term “postcolonial covers all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.” (The Empire 2). Ashcroft further notes that as a field of theory and critical practice, postcolonial studies emerged as “a way of addressing the cultural production of those societies affected by the historical phenomenon of colonialism (Post Colonial Transformation 7). Post colonial studies can be divided into two different modes of thought and analysis. Homi Bhabha and Mary Louise Pratt present an optimistic and celebratory view of post colonial societies, highlighting the transformative effects of hybridity and transculturation. The other path adopted by the post colonial studies is the cynical and agonistic view well exemplified by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s well-known essay, ‘Can the subaltern Speak?’ The essay very poignantly points out that the “voices of subaltern people are lost in the noise of Western theorists as they talk about the colonized” (Rudd, 230). Edward Said’s discourse about 'otherness' is also pertinent to the study of Postcolonialism. ‘Otherness' can be explained as that which is different from or opposite to the person whose perspective determines a text’s point of view. David Rudd notes that “the identification of someone as ‘Other’ implies an unequal power relationship, where the one being ‘Othered’ is perceived as inferior, or at best strangely exotic” (Rudd 221). Post colonial study also interrogate how texts represent colonialism in the past and its effects in the present and offers a range of concepts and critical strategies to analyze individual texts and compare it across national literatures.
Post colonial theory when applied to children’s literature raises contradictions because children can be regarded as subalterns or as being marginalized and colonized by the adult world. Jacqueline Rose raises a similar point while evaluating J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, and argues that literature written for children is “a way of colonizing (or wrecking) the child” (27). Perry Nodelman makes similar observation while applying ideas from Edward Said’s book *Orientalism*, to the paradoxical adult child relationship found in children’s texts and asserts that children’s literature is a literature of colonization where in adults colonize children. Thus, both writing for children and the adult criticism of that literature can be regarded as colonizing activities. In consideration of the above statement and the assumption that the term ‘post colonial’ refers to a time after imperial powers have departed and that the post colonial voice is a voice of its own, one has to conclude that post colonial children’s literature and post colonial criticism cannot exist because children cannot speak for themselves. However the contradiction mentioned above takes a twist here: children and their literature can be regarded as post colonial if by post colonial we mean something which resists tradition and power. Children’s literature poses a challenge to the traditions of the main stream culture and literature and therefore it can come under the umbrella of postcolonialism.

Post colonial has become a widely contested term in contemporary times because of its wide connotation. According to Shaobo Xie there does not exist any “‘uncontaminated’ or ‘indigenous’ postcolonial theory” (Xie 7). Simon During observes that “post-colonialism is regarded as the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images” (During 125). Xie remarks that “postcolonialism
represents an urgent need and determination to dismantle imperial structures in the realm of culture” (Xie 15). Roderick Mc Gills argues that:

the tension here resides in the inability of these descriptions of postcolonialism to account for children who are a group well practiced in colonial attitudes, and who hope to grow out of their colonial positions through accommodation to their colonial “elders”. Children are always marked by (contaminated by) the attitudes of an older generation… this older generation might encourage children to speak, but it does so expecting them to speak its words, to pass on its wisdom, to perpetuate its vision of the world (Mc Gills 9-10).

Mc Gills, Xie and During in the above quotes indicate towards the notion of cultural multiplicity. Mc Gills advocates that the children of the contemporary times should be introduced “to works of literature that represent the range of cultural experiences and histories that make up the national and international communities… (Gills 10)”. One aspect of post colonial studies is to encourage Multiculturalism by breaking the authority of the great traditions that have governed the study of English Literature since the rise of English Studies and British Imperialism. Many contemporary works of children’s literature portraying multiculturalism and ethnicity such as Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* (1994) set in Sri Lanka, Althea Trotman’s *How the East pond got its Flowers* (1991) – a picture book set in Antigua, Beverley Naidoo’s *The Other Side of Truth* (2000) set in Lagos and London, Mildred Taylor’s *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976) and Australian indigenous literature have gained recognition as noteworthy works of postcolonial and multicultural children’s literature. Clare Bradford is most actively involved in applying post colonial theory to children’s texts especially to indigenous Australian
texts. The concept of multiculturalism first emerged in Western Societies having colonial or imperial histories or a settler society with a continuing history of migration (United States of America, Canada, Australia). Although these societies overtly welcome different cultural groups, they are compelled to assimilate into the single national culture. David Rudd observes:

Multiculturalism comes into being when it is acknowledged that non-assimilating groups have a right to define their own cultural identity on their own terms...multiculturalism embraces all issues of cultural diversity: nationality, ethnicity, regionalism, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability and all other identity-related differences (Rudd 212).

Another aspect of post colonialism is focused on a revised reading of canonical texts that illustrate how these texts construct worlds. Children’s canonical texts such as *The Secret Garden*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Charlotte’s Web* or adventure tales - *Treasure Island* and *Coral Island* when viewed through post colonial theory display, imperialist and racist undertones, which had been taken as natural and accepted without any resistance in the past.

**Genres of Children's Literature:**

**Fable:**

Fable is a literary genre: a concise fictional story, in prose or verse, that depicts animals, legendary creatures, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature that are anthromorphized, which means they are given human qualities like ability to speak.
Fable offers and teaches a particular moral lesson (a "moral"), which is often put explicitly as a brief axiom at the end of the story. A fable is different from a parable. In parables do not include animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as actors and are not endowed with speech or other powers of humankind.

Fables can be regarded as first children's literature. The fables are one of the most significant forms of folk literature spread across the world. Fables have perpetuated less by literary anthologies than by oral transmission. A rich tradition of Fables are found in the literature of almost every country. They have found to have been written in Iraq, Iran and India as early as two thousand years BCE. Fables were used for education in India from a very early period. *Panchatantra*, a well known work of fable from India was composed as early as the sixth century BCE. Later certain fables were extracted and made into a separate collection for children popularly known as the *Fables of Bidpai (or Pilpay)*. In West the tradition of fables seems to have started with Aesop's Fables, composed during Roman period in around first century CE. *Aesop's Fables* were collected by the poet Phaedrus, which like *Panchatantra* played a central role in the education of children all over the world.

**Fantasy:**

Fantasy can be regarded as the core of children's literature. In a fantasy events occur outside the ordinary laws that operate within the universe. Magic is central to the fantasy genre and it often involves journeys and quests. The fantasy story differs from Science fiction though both stories usually operate outside the normal boundaries of the
real world. Science fiction is usually set in the future world and involves the wonders of technology.

The fantasy writers set up their worlds in three different ways. Some novels commence and end in a fantasy world (for example *The Hobbit* or *A Wizard of Earthsea*, or Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*). Some fantasies start in the real world and move into a fantasy world and at the end move back to the real world. (for example *Alice in Wonderland* or *Peter Pan* or *Harry Potter*.) A third type of fantasy is set in the real world but elements of magic intrude upon it, for example *Mary Poppins* or David Almond’s *Skellig*, or Edith Nesbit's *Five Children and It*. Realistic settings are often called primary worlds; fantasy settings, secondary worlds. In most fantasies the protagonists usually cross some kind of opening or “portal” between the two worlds as a wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* or platform between 9 and 10 in *Harry Potter* books.

**Animal Stories:**

Animal Stories consist of one or more animals as the central focus of the story. Animal stories are very appealing to children as children feel very close to animals because pet animals often allow children to feel important, clever, protective and nurturing. They help them to compensate for their ironically powerless position. Some of the most well-known picturebooks have animals as protagonists – for example, *Babar*, *Curious George*, *Peter Rabbit*, and *Paddington Bear, Winnie the Pooh* to name a few. Animal characters are used because they have greater impact on children and they can convey ideas by analogy and often serve the purpose of instruction. In some animal
stories like *Peter Rabbit* or *Winnie the Pooh* animals are anthropomorphized where as in some others like *Black Beauty* and *The Call of the Wild* have real animals as protagonists and the story is narrated from animal's perspectives.

**The Adventure Story or the Boys' Story:**

Adventure story is usually considered to be the 'boys genre; it is dominated by action, danger, risk, and excitement. The action is fast-paced in these stories and they have exotic or distant settings as in Kipling’s *Kim* (India), Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (Africa), or Ballantyne’s *Coral Island* (the south Pacific). Many of the adventure stories written during Victorian period had imperialistic undertones. These stories were usually built on the 'masculine images' of adventure, courage and chivalry and they perpetuated the myths of 'boyhood' or 'manhood'. If the action is presented humorously, as in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* or Lofting’s *Doctor Dolittle* series, the risk and danger is subdued.

The adventure can be divided into different types - predominantly into Magic adventures, Robinsonade and Sea Stories. The Magic adventure takes place in a magic realm and are characterized by more extraordinary events than classic adventure tales since the story is not confined to reality. In a Robinsonade protagonist is usually shipwrecked and placed alone on a desert island, where in he must learn to survive. The protagonist has a limited number of resources and begins his life on the island and creates a world of his own. When the protagonist is finally able to leave the island, he or she is ambivalent about returning to society. The sea adventure story usually resembles the Robinsonade tale but the setting is not an island. The protagonist sails to a strange or
unknown place and this type of adventure is usually associated with pirates, shipwrecks, storms at sea, and treasure hunting.

The discussion of fantasy and gender specific genres for boys and girls has not been done in detail in this chapter as they have been extensively dealt with in chapters III and IV of this thesis.