

# Reading Children

*Essays on Children's Literature*

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# 1 Introduction

In every society, the notion of children's literature evolves only after the 'child' is understood as a separate category with its own distinct needs, demands and desires. In Europe, it is during the Enlightenment that we first find concerns about the 'child' as a separate entity. Social philosophers like Rousseau brought forth the issue of the child and its need to be nurtured into social awareness, and this notion was quickly transformed in the Romantic poems of Wordsworth, Coleridge and of course Blake. Wordsworth's phrase 'The Child is Father of the Man' from the poem 'My Heart Leaps Up' (written in 1802) is probably one of the most quoted lines of poetry ever written and has been interpreted and used not only by inquirers into all shades of child psychology, but by anyone who wants to emphasise the importance of childhood in the formation of the adult. This stands in contrast with an older Judeo-Christian idea of the child as a being filled with the 'old Adam' and implicated in Original Sin, which had to be removed by baptism, indoctrination, discipline and penance, which the new Romantic conception of the child



'trailing clouds of glory' gradually replaced. Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (1807) is probably one of the best-known examples of the Romantic belief in the innocence of the new-born infant that gradually fades away. The poet's celebratory vision of the child is captured in lines such as:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy...

This notion of the child as naturally good and innocent leads to the idea that particular care should be given to the child's growth in every aspect of his life. We use the male pronoun advisedly as almost all discussions in this period centre around a distinctively male child. As the rate of literacy grew and children began going to school or had tutors at home, the need for suitable reading material for children was addressed in a variety of ways. The first attempts usually consisted of making collections from available material and claiming them to be appropriate for children. In England, chapbooks, ballads and rhymes cheaply printed and circulated were edited and printed as reading material for the 'nursery' from early modern times onwards. Gargi Gangopadhyay's article in this book captures some of the ways in which these processes functioned.

This 'encyclopedic' or encircling of the child with knowledge began commonly with a 'cleanup' or relabelling and repackaging of folk tales in oral circulation as reading material for children. This is an intriguing notion, as most folk tales were full of descriptions of things that we would not today consider fit for children to read, such as gory violence, sex and crime. The original collection by the Brothers Grimm is very different from the collections that we find reprinted and reworked, via Charles Perrault's carefully sanitised late-seventeenth-century retellings, for children today. Yet the idea that folk tales are appropriate reading for children seems to be quite prevalent across cultures. There is in this perhaps an idea similar to 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny'—narratives

from the 'childhood' of the race are regarded as suitable for the 'childhood' of individuals, thus re-enacting in miniature the making of the general in the particular. This is reflected in the book *Children's Literature in India* published by the Children's Book Trust, which in the chapter titled 'A Historical Survey' states unproblematically that:

Every publisher looking for material to publish draws upon this unquestioned resource material so that the Indian epics, ancient lore, classical tales, folk tales, the *Panchatantra* form the bulk of children's literature today. These stories are full of timeless worldly wisdom and play a recurring role in stimulating the imagination.<sup>1</sup>

Gabi R. Kathöfer's article points out the relationship between the need to invent a tradition of folklore and the birth of nationalism. Folk tales were used to create a body of ancient cultural traditions that was central to the project of nationalism, within which there was a need to include the child. The child becomes the focus of the process of creating a new consciousness: that of the citizen of the nation. Thus the collections of folk tales already have an element of nostalgia about them, an air of a past, while simultaneously representing a set of values considered to be essential for the successful establishment of the nation. They are also 'written backwards': they project into that past a sense of *what sort* of past the present ought to have, and how that past should be read by the good citizen.

In the nineteenth century, with the growing interest in psychology in general, and child psychology in particular, the issue of what should constitute children's literature became more vexed. The idea that children can be taught particular kinds of behaviour, which then persist throughout adult life, made society more apprehensive about what was being disseminated to children

<sup>1</sup> *Children's Literature in India*, eds Navin Menon and Bhavana Nair (New Delhi: Children's Book Trust, 1999) p. 24.



through books. Books or advice manuals like *Hints for the Nursery* (1866) caution the mother about the influence of servants who use stories to frighten children into submission, which, they alleged, could adversely affect the child's mental well-being and eventually even lead to insanity.<sup>2</sup>

The basic paradox that underlies all discussions about children's literature is, after all, the fact that the literature is written by adults, published by adults and bought by adults, while the child-consumers have very little to say about the entire process. Thus, the literature produced for children in any era actually reveals much more about adult preoccupations and fears than it does about the child's. In the Victorian period we find children's literature being used consciously to disseminate desired values and ideologies in the minds of the impressionable young. Like Victorian society itself, children's literature becomes almost obsessed with defining appropriate gender roles for its young citizens and we see the explosion of boy's adventure stories, juvenile magazines and books meant to imprint upon young minds the image of the dashing, intrepid hero, while girls were taught domestic, caring and nurturing roles. Britain's position in the world in the nineteenth century as the most puissant imperial power depended upon the availability of young boys who could uphold and carry forward the imperial project. Abhijit Gupta's study of the publishing history of Victorian children's periodicals gives us a glimpse of the actual role played by market forces as they responded to and determined the choice of reading material for children and young adults at this point in history.

On the other hand, the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-centuries saw a growth of interest in the exploration of the workings of the mind. While Sigmund Freud is perhaps the one

<sup>2</sup> See Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005) for a discussion of the ways in which the child was at the centre of concerns about creating 'healthy' adults in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britain and America.

most important name that recurs in any discussion of how the twentieth century changed its view of the mind, there were several other equally important and influential contributions to the development of psychology. One such development that had a huge impact—both directly and indirectly—in the sphere of children's literature was the role of the behaviourists. One of the most famous, or perhaps infamous, experiments in child psychology was conducted by John B. Watson in 1920. In his attempt to prove that emotions, especially fear, were learnt responses rather than inherent qualities, Watson took an eleven-month-old infant, Albert B., the son of a wet nurse at the hospital where he worked, to demonstrate his theory. This child had lived his entire little life within the confines of the hospital,

a 'good baby' who never cried—at least not until eminent psychologist John B. Watson began experimenting on him. In 1920 Watson and Rosalie Rayner [the child's mother] systematically set out to teach Albert to be deeply afraid of furry animals and objects. In the weeks before their experiments Albert had been presented with a white rat. Each day the rat would be taken from a basket and given to Albert, who would spend long hours playing with it. This routine was abruptly changed when Albert was eleven months old. Henceforth whenever Albert reached out to grab his playmate, Watson would energetically strike a steel bar with a carpenter's hammer immediately behind Albert's head. The first time he did this Albert 'jumped violently and fell forward, burying his face in the mattress.' On the second occasion he began to whimper. Albert was so 'disturbed' that the researchers desisted from further tests for a week.<sup>3</sup>

However, the experiment did continue until Albert began to wail as soon as he saw the rat on the eighth such occasion. Watson was delighted with the success of his experiment, especially as he found that Albert had developed this terror about a range of furry

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81–82.



objects and animals. This provided the basis for the belief that 'conditioning' was responsible for human behaviour, not heredity. Watson claimed that his experiment provided 'an explanatory principle that will account for the enormous complexity in the emotional behaviour of adults [in which] ... we no longer ... have to fall back on heredity.'<sup>4</sup> The influence of this school of thought remains even today and one manifestation of its power is found in the apparently endless debates about what is 'fit' for children to read.

The Victorian era, more than any other time, bought into the idea of the child as 'innocent'. Historically, this was designed to rescue the child from the drudgery of manual labour, poverty, ignorance and neglect, the keynote text here being Kingsley's *The Water Babies*, but the idea lies behind much of Charles Dickens's anger at the state of childhood in his time. An innocent being ought to be shielded from these sordid realities, so that he or she could develop mental faculties in a protected environment, until the young person was ready to take on the world. But this 'innocence', taken to an extreme, locked the child into a barred nursery-world of reading that could (especially for the girl-child again) produce a crippling inability to deal with the world in adolescence, especially as 'innocent' was soon conflated with 'asexual'. Freud destroyed forever this idea of 'innocence' for the West and put sexuality, although disguised and distorted, firmly in the centre of the child's psychic world. After Freud,<sup>5</sup> no one could have 'innocently' written a book like *Peter Pan*. Paradoxically, the loss of the protection of asexual 'innocence' made the child once more liable to sexual exploitation, since this issue is so often seen by psychologists, teachers, parents and

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> J.M. Barrie, [*Peter Pan*], *Peter and Wendy*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911). Interestingly, *Peter Pan* came out in an early form (*The Little White Bird*) in 1902 (*Peter Pan* the stage play was performed in 1904), just a year or two after Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900).

the state as an either/or dilemma: either the child is sexual or it is not, with no degree of partial sexualisation admissible. Today, if we look at children's texts certified 'asexual' by the Victorians, we are sometimes disconcerted by the hidden sexuality that often lurks in them, especially of the same-sex kind, and also across the generations.

The precise nature of the influence of childhood experiences on the development of the individual, whether in real life or vicariously through literature, remains hotly debated. Studies have never established any direct relationship between, say, violent scenes in literature or television and actual violent behaviour, yet an uneasiness persists about the possible impact of such scenes on children. Similarly, feminists have protested against the gender-stereotypes in children's tales and textbooks, as have many other disadvantaged social groups about similar representation. Today, in the era of 'political correctness', children's literature has been placed under much greater scrutiny than ever before. However, it is perhaps useful to remember that these debates reveal more about the adult world than they do about the world of the child. Sukanta Chaudhuri's paper, on Frederick C. Crews's *The Pooh Perplex*, a 'genially devastating' book that uses the children's stories *Winnie the Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* to make some very adult points about criticism, explores this adult takeover of the storybook world of a 'child' which is in itself the creation of an adult.

Another reason why children's literature is so revealing a field of study for the scholar is that children are not subtle readers, and moreover need (in the opinion of adults) to be socialised. Social and political messages—what we might call 'morals'—are often spelt out for children where they might only be hinted at for adults. Thus children's stories and textbooks often reveal more about their politics and their semiotics than adults' stories might do. Choices as to which child is 'naughty' and for doing what, and what happens to them and why, dramatise more starkly the premises behind the society that approves and disseminates the stories than any amount of adult propaganda.



On the other hand, children's stories have an element of fantasy that most children tumble to quite quickly, so the naughty child's punishment need not be taken as literally as one might think. But in general, allowing for authorial quirks, children's stories tell it straight: these are the values of the society in which the child is growing up. What is more, adaptations of children's stories from other cultures by a new culture can often tell us a lot about how the target culture views the source culture. Examples of this are described in Prodosh Bhattacharya's paper on the Sherlock Holmes canon and its reception in India.

Because the category of writing for children is often so closely connected to the way in which societies see their futures, national prescriptions about it are also historically and ideologically determined. In our own country the trajectory of development of this literature has been different from that found in Europe. The category of 'children's literature' was, like the novel, the newspaper and patent leather shoes, imported into India by the British where it was quickly and enthusiastically taken over by certain factions of Indians. Moreover, since it, like the novel itself, was in the process of being created at the time when India and Britain were most closely connected, it became quite interestingly involved with the idea of India and Indianness in the minds of Britons, while Indians returned the compliment. It is hard to find a British children's book from the nineteenth century that does not touch upon India in some way or the other, even if it is only to use it as a metaphor, while Indian books 'transcreated' British children's stories with wild abandon. Rudyard Kipling's tales for children reflect many complex aspects of the relationship between the imperial powers and the ruled, and, perhaps because they are for children, they are often unintentionally frank about these issues. Susan Walsh's paper on the construction of the 'animal' in Kipling's Mowgli stories and its relation to the colonial project is revealing of the ideas of hierarchy inherent in colonial visions of India and its flora and fauna—including man. In contrast, some

Indians decided to 'read against' these ideas and present their own vision of what India's forest cultures and creatures could teach people—as described in Rimi B. Chatterjee's paper on the animal stories of Dhan Gopal Mukerji.

As the colonial era advanced, certain groups in India began to wake up to the importance and necessity of publishing for children. This soon became part of the cultural ferment induced by contact with the West which, in most of India and particularly in Bengal, produced radical rethinking and fierce argument over the creation of an appropriate 'Indianness'. The place to start, clearly, was with the hearts and minds of children, but who was the 'child' in nineteenth century India? As in Victorian England, the Indian idea of the child inhabited a paradoxical space, a being both innocent and exploited, to be protected as well as coerced. Luckily in India, the idea of children as being inherently evil, to be sanctified through baptism and strict instruction, was less prevalent. (The young child, especially if he was a boy-child, was never stinted affection or attention; it was only as the years passed that the pleasures of childhood receded into the background.) The child was simultaneously the future of India and the person most thoroughly excluded from the debates about where that future should go. This is perforce true of children everywhere, but especially so in India, where so recently in history the average life expectancy had been so low that most people couldn't afford the luxury of a 'childhood'. The child's first encounter with public life was usually its own wedding, conducted in some cases before the child was even old enough to walk. (For girl-children especially, this made the whole idea of childhood a cruel joke.) As the fierce debates over the various Age of Consent Bills show, no one had any clear idea of the difference between a girl and a woman, or indeed if there was a difference. Commentators seem, however, much more confident that *boyhood* existed, and as the twentieth century dawned this category of human experience acquired its own literary repertoire of peer-group politics, idle time-wasting,

Age of Consent



rural games and pastimes, and 'mischief', depicted for example in the many vivid works by Bengali children's writers who began to publish at that time. Barnita Bagchi and Gargi Gangopadhyay have touched upon these treasures and their paradoxes in their papers on much-loved writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The male child, if he belonged to a high caste, might undergo an initiation ceremony that marked his acceptance into the world beyond the *andarmahal* or women's world, from which as a growing boy he would be progressively excluded. But the lack of childhood spoiling would be compensated for by wider adult exposure and interests. Not so in the case of the high caste girl-child, who would move from one stifling *andarmahal* to another. Even in the richest households she would be expected to work as soon as she could speak and carry out simple tasks, a servitude that lasted until death. The taboo against reading and writing for women in orthodox households was maintained by superstitions, such as the belief that a literate woman's husband would die leaving her a widow, in other words practically a slave, denied all but the most basic nourishment and all pleasures. That some girl-children—or women—nevertheless learned to read and did read was one of the triumphs of the new liberalism, as well as of their individual struggles. In social groups of less status, the moral prohibition against women's reading was less effective than the material scarcity of resources, all of which were invested in young males who were regarded as future breadwinners and saviours of the family.

As most of the Indian scholars contributing to this book are based in the eastern region of India, the collection perforce concentrates on the very varied and delightful children's works in the eastern languages, particularly Bengali. Perhaps it was because the interaction of Bengalis with Britishers and Britishness was particularly close and personal that the idea of children's literature took root very early in Bengal. But the Bengali version, as with

much else that was successfully naturalised, soon departed strongly from its European models.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's primer—intended to teach children the alphabet and the basics of reading and writing—has exercised a huge influence over generations of the Bengali educated class. Like all such texts, it reflects the effort to propagate, in its exercises a normative vision of good and bad. *Barnaparichay*, though published over 150 years ago, is still used in households and schools across Bengal and is still very often the child's first introduction to the world of reading and writing. Understandably, the child's first introduction to the printed word (and sometimes its only familiarity with texts of any kind) came through school books. The significance of school books, especially Readers, on a child's reading tastes and development cannot be underestimated, and Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman's paper on textbooks in Bangladesh provides an insightful inquiry into this aspect of children's books. The rise of the role of the state in providing school education for all children has made it only natural for school textbooks to be identified as a major area of intervention for psychologists, sociologists and educationists.

The realm of the child's reading became quickly a heavily contested space between the various factions arguing about how and where India should change in the nineteenth century. In this the liberals had an advantage because they were more widely exposed to Western culture and could use it freely as a template for their creative efforts, as well as draw on Indian legends and tales. Heavily influenced by Romantic ideas, the writers of the Tagore circle, including Rabindranath and Abanindranath themselves, took the issue of writing for children extremely seriously. In their works written for children a strong emphasis on 'Indianness' appeared in a revivalist tendency to retell classics (*Shankuntala*), legends (*Rajkahini* or 'Royal Tales') and tales of heroism, often from history (*Katha o Kahini* or 'Legends and Stories'). These stories and poems written in a heroic style valourise qualities of honesty,



chivalry and bravery embodied in heroes of legend and history. However, Abanindranath Tagore also wrote *Buro Angla* ('High as My Thumb'), a story based on *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, by the Swedish writer Selma Lagerlöf. Rabindranath even wrote a dance drama meant to be performed by children, (*Balmiki Pratibha* or 'Clever Balmiki') along with several plays (*Bisharjon* or 'Immersion') and stories. His own series of primers, *Sahaj Path* ('Easy Readers'), uses poetry and beautiful descriptions of idyllic scenes from rural Bengal and endeavours to stimulate the imagination while teaching children the basics of reading and writing.

The flourishing publishing industry in Bengal was soon treating the genre of children's literature as an identifiable trade category (it must be remembered that the Rays were printers and publishers as well as writers) starting with the Reverend Lal Behari Day's *Folk Tales of Bengal*, first published in 1874 by Macmillan, and continuing with Dakshina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar's *Thakumar Jhuli* (1901) and Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri's *Tuntunir Boi* and *Ramayana for Children* in the early twentieth century. These works were the foundations for the flood of Bengali children's literature including Premendra Mitra's Ghanada stories and Munshi Gangaadhyay's *Temida* tales. But the richly comic and entertaining world of these Bengali children's authors achieved that which all at a price: unsurprisingly, none of these stories depicted any kind of women. This is significant since the nineteenth century, everyone of the elite had become a woman at least to primary school. So there was no indication that girls were to read at all? Is this book for boys only? Or was it for both? Or was it for the social elite?

of anyone like them from these cozy circles of friends? Or were there other texts, as yet undiscovered, intended for them? Barnita Bagchi's paper, analysing the works of Leela Majumdar, provides us an example of what they might have read and raises some of the problems that the researcher, wishing to discover the lost world of women's reading in the colonial era, must face.

Moving away from Bengal, we find that in almost all Indian languages, the first books produced for children during the colonial era were either translations of the *Panchatantra* or retellings of *Aesop's Fables*. In Tamil, for example, a translation of *Aesop's Fables*, *Balabodhamuktavali*, by Sakkapandit, published in 1806, is claimed to be the first book meant for children. By the mid-nineteenth century other books were being published, the majority of which were translations—either of Western works, such as *Balamitra*, a translation of a book originally written in French by Berquin—or from other Indian languages, such as *Bodhakatha*, a translation by Vishnu Shastri Bapat of a book of Bengali tales by Tarachand Datta. Interestingly, the various Christian missions played significant roles in producing books for children in the nineteenth century. For example, the Christian Society of Nagercoil began a quarterly magazine for children in 1840 in Tamil called *Bala Deepihai*. The success of this enterprise encouraged other Christian Societies to begin similar magazines. Textbooks in Tamil too were first created by Christian Tamil scholars in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

This pattern seems to be the norm across languages in India. Until relatively recently, the bulk of writings for children consisted of retellings of folk tales, classical texts and stories based on the lives and exploits of famous persons in history. Writing about the history of Marathi literature for children, Leelawati Bhagat tells us that:

<sup>6</sup> K.A. Jamuna, *Children's Literature in India* (New Delhi: Government of India, Publications Division, 1982).



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*Subodh Kathamala*, *Mulankarita Goshti*, *Mulamulinsathi Khau* and *Chimulaya Goshti* were some books on mythology published between 1886 and 1909. The writers were R.R. Naik, R.R. Gupte, M. Rishi, T.V. Pitre, V.V. Gosavi and J.R. Aajgaonkar. This may rightly be called the pioneering stage of the juvenile story. The credit for bringing about a decisive change in the format of children's stories goes to W.G. Apte and P.N. Misal. They could read the child's mind and could be one with it. For two decades (1910–1930) they rendered yeoman service to the juvenile world. They presented select stories from old lore in a simplified and engrossing manner. *Bal Ramayan*, *Bal Bharata* and *Bal Bhagavata* by W.G. Apte and *Bodh-Kusuma*, *Neeti-Manjusha* and *Divalichi Denagi* by P.N. Misal provided a good treat for children of that generation. Among others on this path were B.M. Vaidya and G.M. Vaidya, J.R. Aajgaonkar, P.P. Thorat and others.

Besides myths and legends, the Chitrashala publishers took the lead in bringing out new and attractively printed editions of the *Isap-neeti*, *Hitopadesa* and *Panchatantra* by Bapuji M. Ambekar.<sup>7</sup>

An attempt to repackage this content for a modern audience was made in post-Independence India, when stories were regarded as urgently needed to be the glue holding the new and rather variegated nation together. One such vehicle was the iconic and vast *Amar Chitra Katha* series, which Aryak Guha describes and analyses in his paper. The series was started and achieved its greatest popularity in the 1970s, a period when India was struggling to redefine itself in almost all spheres. Children were, to the dismay of Anant Pai—the creator of the *Amar Chitra Katha* series—still reading comics and stories written and produced in the West. Pai was consciously trying to create a body of reading material for the new citizens of India when he published *Krishna*, the first

<sup>7</sup> Leelawati Bhagwat, 'Marathi' in *Children's Literature in India*, eds Menon and Nair, p. 399.

indigenously produced comic book. Perhaps this remains the most successful example of an *Indian* children's literature, as opposed to regional bodies of work for children.

It is arguable that the slow development in children's literature at the hands of modern writers in Indian languages is a result both of neglect by regional publishing industries which regard adult literature (except for textbooks) as more profitable, and of public perception which sees textbooks as fit reading for children and storybooks as 'distractions'. The reading child, in the Indian context, is thus more likely to be the middle- or upper-class child, who need not work, who goes to school, who has reaped many of the benefits of Westernisation, who is moderately secure about his or her future and will probably not have to support entirely his or her parents in adulthood. Such a child will even read books that are more 'English' than the English, like the works of Enid Blyton, which you will be hard put to find in any children's library in the UK, barring the popular Noddy series. Thus for many children in India, the bulk of good writing is in English and school libraries often still have books published almost half a century ago. While children's publishing in the West has moved on (and has cleaned up its act with respect to political correctness, such that even C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* books have been criticised by some authors, notably Philip Pullman), reading material for Indian children seems to be stuck in a Victorian time warp.

This may be changing in the globalised market. Pottermania has in a small way touched Indian households, but only as a pale shadow of the West. While most publishers claim that the best market prospects are for educational or education-related books, Tara, Ladybird and Puffin and others have been defining the market by publishing retold tales as well as original works by Indian writers. Virgin Comics operated briefly in India and produced graphic novels for the young adult audience. Liberalisation has opened the market again to a close interaction between the world and the home, just as it used to happen in the nineteenth



century when Sherlock Holmes, transcreated, would stalk the streets of Calcutta.

Elsewhere, in Western academia, there has been a revisiting of the category of the child as a reader, and even mainstream cinema has rediscovered many literary classics of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries such as the Narnia series<sup>8</sup> and *Lord of the Rings* and repackaged them for a contemporary audience. Perhaps behind this stands the phenomenal success of the Harry Potter series, which has revitalised both reading and publishing for children, and has blurred the lines between adult and children's literature, just as the lines have been blurred in recent psychological approaches to the mind and its workings.

The media explosion on the Internet, online and stand-alone gaming, movies available on discs and through sharing sites for home viewing, television channels dedicated to children's programmes, music, events and content aimed at 'young adults' supported by technology like the iPod and the plummeting prices of digital systems are changing the landscape of the child's world. The popularity of Japanese animation on TV channels like Animax is growing enormously, providing a counterweight to Marvel and DC-type animated content. Indian animators have produced movies like the *Adventures of Hanuman* and we can look forward to more in the next few years.

At the same time, the real condition of children in India remains largely dismal. The child in India has yet to leave behind the state of being a drudge or plaything of adults—parents regard children as their 'property', child marriage still happens in spite of all the laws, and child labour is all around us. The realities of

<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), *The Last Battle* (1956), all published by Geoffrey Bles.

child abuse are mostly swept under the mattresses of large and unwieldy families where the authority of age and gender remains very much in force, while the children of the poor are without any kind of security or shelter from exploiters both in their homes and outside. Education too remains a luxury, so that reading matter for children is accessible mostly to the rich, and the middle class is still deeply prejudiced against encouraging children to read for pleasure as opposed to 'studies'. Indeed, in most Indian languages the term 'reading' is synonymous with 'studying'. There are a few small indicators that things will improve, but change in mindset is, as always, the hardest to achieve.

The centrality of children's literature to a history of literature in general should need no further emphasis. Yet in spite of this, there has been very little writing on children's literature in India. Partly this may be because children's literature seldom makes it into university syllabi, and is thus rarely 'canonised'. We believe this is changing, both here in India and elsewhere. This book, and the conference which gave birth to it, was an attempt to redress that omission, and to show that children's literature is not a 'mini' literature, but a genre worthy of study in its own right.