
INCLUSIVITY AND ‘CHILDREN’S LITERATURE’:A DISABILITY STUDY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Children’s Literature is a rich and vastly growing body of literature. Although it emerged as a distinct form of literature in the 19th century, Children’s Literature is as old as the human civilization. Its origin can be traced in the old oral tradition. Children’s Literature now comprises of a large number of texts ranging from fact books to digital texts like games. However, the representation of disability appears to be stereotypical and less frequent in Children’s Literature. The present paper is a modest attempt to show that the literature having disabled characters or narrators who are children, can also be considered Children’s Literature

Keywords: Disability, Children’s Literature, Child ,Childhood ,Perspective

Introduction: Children’s Literature is a rich and vastly growing body of literature. Although it emerged as a distinct form of literature in 19th century, it is as old as human civilization. Its origins can be traced in the old oral tradition of literature like folklores ,songs, ballads and epics. The stories from Odyssey and Iliad used to be orally told to children for their enjoyment similarly, in the Indian tradition the stories from The Ramayana and Mahabharata served the purpose of both enjoyment and instructions .Aesop’s fables and *Panchtantra* tales both entertain and instruct at the same time. Thus it can be concluded that Children’s Literature is meant for both enjoyment and learning. In this case the text which are only meant for the instruction purpose can also be labeled as Children’s Literature. The more recent digital text like the computer games fulfill the criteria of enjoyment and instructions. Therefore, that also included in Children’s literature. So Children’s literature now comprises of a large number of texts ranging from fact books to the digital texts like games

It is now clear what comes under the rubric of Children’s Literature. But the how does one define Children’s Literature? From above description ,The Children’s literature is the literature enjoyed by and which provides education to the children. But the problem lies in defining the term ‘Child’. Grenby and Immel(2009)point out that ‘Child’ and ‘Childhood’ are difficult to define because of the cultural differences and changing values. The present notion of ‘Child’ defers remarkably from that of the 19th century. Besides, there is a problem of the readership. The books which are meant for children are also read by grown ups.For instance , the books like *Harry Potter* has fan following

not only of the young people but also the adults. Also *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Alice In Wonderland* are considered to be serious books and read and analyzed by adults. So the comprehensive definition of Children's Literature appears to be an impossible task both because of its diverse readership and also the changing idea of 'Child' and 'Childhood'. Plus the field is constantly growing. Therefore, one has to settle the matter by defining the 'Children's Literature' as, the literature having small children and which chiefly deals with children's issues.

Disability Studies is an emerging area which is concerned with the idea of disability and its implications. It maintains that disability does not lie in an individual but it is created by social and cultural barriers. Thus it focuses upon the societal reforms. Goodley (2011) opines that being able bodied is a myth, because a person can become impaired at any point of time. Therefore, having a disability is not a personal fault.

The field of Disability Studies recognizes 3 different approaches to analyze the issues related to disability and its implications.

The Medical approach/model: According to this model, impairment is a personal tragedy and it must be cured by medical help. However, it does not account for the maladies that can not be cured even by the medical intervention. Moreover, personal will is also not taken into account.

The Indusial model/approach: This approach states that disability is indusial and it does not have to do anything with the society. Further, it is the result of sins in the past. Or, it could be because of divine blessings. That results in to the isolation of the people with disability.

The social model/approach: The Social approach recognizes that social and cultural by uses. These barriers make it impossible for the people having impairments to function properly. And hence they remain marginalized. It works towards removing these obstacles so that the disabled can lead a normal life. Thus it emphasizes on the fact that the person is not disabled, but rather the society is disabling.

Literature also does not reflect the disability in a realistic way. The Characters having impairments are either represented as ugly evil, malicious, demonic or having special powers, or innocent, pure and so on. Both these stereotypical attitudes further marginalize the indusial. This practice persists from old Greek Roman times till date. e.g. Tiresias in the plays of Euripides has a special power of prophecy or Oedipus becomes blind as the outcome of his sin. In the 19th century texts, the disability seems to be all the while negatively represented. e.g. in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* reflects Bertha Mason's madness is horrible or, Rochester being blind he eventually shown to be depending Jane Eyre towards the end. It has been observed that despite the laws the stereotypicalization hasn't change H.G wells in his short story *The Country of*

The Blind tries to portray the disability differently, but the close analysis reveals that even if he i.e Wells depicts the blind people as normal and leading a normal life, there dislike and hatred for the seeing stranger makes them malicious. However, these types of text are sporadic and it can be said that whenever there are characters with disability, they are always less important or minor characters.

The same is observed in case of Children's Literature; Blaska(2004) points out that the children's books having characters form a very small body of literature. And when they are included they are invariably negatively stereotyped. Further, she states that the children's books should be more inclusive in order to make the children aware of diversity of experiences. (www.dsqsds.org)

A study by Santiago Solis further states that these books have to be used with skills by the teachers. Sharon Draper's book *Out Of My Mind* can be called the best example of inclusive children's book. It gives voice to a disabled character Melody who is suffering from cerebral palsy. Autobiographical in nature, the book describes the life of Melody who is grappling with her disability and the society who is not ready to accept her despite her intelligence and a photographic memory. The doctors and teachers think that she is incapable of understanding and ignore her. Some for the school kids treat her rudely. But when these kids leave her behind just because they feel that she will take time in getting ready for the quiz, she is completely devastated.

Conclusion : Going by the definition of the Children's Literature, it can be concluded that this book should also be considered as Children's Literature, because it is about children and coping with forming their attitudes towards each others.

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