

**Children's Literature: Shaping Identities****Dr. Anshika****Asst. Prof. in English****NBGS College****Sohna****(Received:10November2022/Revised:20November2022/Accepted:30November2022/Published:31December2022)****Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the stereotype creation of gender roles in the text of children's stories, which instils socially evolved gender distinctions in children's primitive minds. This research examines how teachers and students in a prekindergarten classroom engage with picture books. The study comprises selected children's stories that were examined to determine their importance as major thought-forming materials in the development of young learners' identities. This study might be useful in attracting the writers of children's books to the importance of redefining roles to reduce disparities. Research that describes the daily face-to-face interactions of young children and teachers as they engage in reading and storytelling practices is essential to understand how reading pedagogy affects children's learning.

**Keywords: Children's Stories, Gender, Religious Distinctions, Effects On Children's Learning, Literary Theory.**

As humans, we are storytellers and knowledge seekers. We utilize words and language to make sense of our surroundings. Today's storytelling is vastly different from even ten years ago. Our technology enables children to read and narrate stories in incredible ways, not only with individuals in their immediate vicinity but also with people all across the world. Stories are powerful and spontaneous, capturing moments of creativity, meaning, and identity creation.

Children's picture books have long been used as useful teaching and learning tools by both parents and teachers. Picture book reading has been linked to outcomes like language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement, according to research. It also improves children's ability to relate and form sounds with words and is often associated with outcome measures like language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement.

While the good learning effects of reading children's books are highly regarded, research has revealed detrimental consequences that may have an impact on children's social perspectives.

Stereotyping and unequal gender representation in popular picture books are two of the most prominent research subjects. Gender identities are shaped mostly through children's literature, which develops a typical set of contrasts between males and females. The purpose of this study is to examine stereotype creation of gender roles, racism, sexism, and culturally intensive text of children's stories that instill socially formed gender distinctions in the children's brains.

The portrayal of aging in children's literature is another, less well-known area of study. The level of stereotyping towards elder characters in terms of roles, behaviors, and physical portrayals was investigated in children's first books. Older adults were portrayed as uninteresting, inarticulate, bland, insignificant, unoriginal, noncreative, and boring in character depictions. The terms "sad," and "poor" were often used to describe the qualities of older people. The portrayal of older characters in lesser parts is common. An older individual who serves as a background or undetermined character, not identified by name, has no connection to the primary character and may be disregarded by many readers. The need for sensitivity in this circumstance is critical, as most youngsters will grow up to be like the characters in these picture books.

The link between grandparent and gender is seen when females were shown to be much more likely than males to play the position of grandmother/parent, while males were found to be significantly less likely to play the role of grandparent. Males were also shown to be substantially more likely than females to be in the role of worker and/or boss, whereas females were found to be least likely to be in the worker/boss role. As a result of these issues, it is clear that many of today's popular children's picture books contain some gender stereotyping among older males and females.

The foundation for most young children's learning to read is picture books. The graphics in these books encourage youngsters to engage with the tale and relate the images to the words they're hearing or reading, making learning to read easier. By exposing young and impressionable youngsters to their visuals, picture books have a unique influence in teaching cultural values, customs, and beliefs. According to studies, young children are building their own racial identities as well as racial attitudes when reading picture books. As a result, children's racial views toward others are likely to be shaped by the storylines and artwork in picture books that show varied race communities.

To possibly understand the impact of racial representations in children's picture books, one must first comprehend the development and growth of racial attitudes and prejudices among

children. By the age of three, people show symptoms of being influenced by social prejudices and should express 'prejudice' against others on the idea of gender, color, or handicap, according to the study. Furthermore, the age group of three to seven is considered a critical development period during which children can distinguish between skin colors, learn labels associated with different skin colors, and develop emotional responses to those labels, making these years critical for instilling positive racial attitudes in children. This knowledge of when children begin to form racial views and identities shed light on why it is critical to portray races and race relations in a positive light for young children.

In children's literature, a lack of diversity is hazardous, a major factor for lack of variety in children's books is economics: Parents and grandparents buy children's books, and they tend to gravitate toward old favorites, which means that new children's books struggle to get traction in the market. Parents and grandparents are part of the problem because they pass on their culture and traditions to their children and grandchildren verbally. They limit the creativity of young readers by placing white youngsters at the center of the story, confining mothers in the kitchen and fathers in the wing chairs.

The wittiness of children's novels is influenced by black stories. The concept that children are valued, vulnerable, and in need of protection has largely been denied to black children in the United States, both in literature and in actuality. Black children quickly learn that their childhoods have very rigid bounds and that any tiny slip or misstep might put their lives in jeopardy, frequently at the hands of police or other state agents. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, depictions of black characters tended to reinforce negative preconceptions. Childhood favourites are openly propagandistic pictures of Western and white supremacy, which create a mental and conscious separation.

Every child deserves to grow up in a healthy, educated, and safe environment, with equal opportunities to achieve their full potential. Save the Children is dedicated to creating a society in which girls, boys, and kids of all gender identities are heard, appreciated, and have equal access to opportunity. children learn conventional views about what it means to be a girl and a boy from an early age. To break down rigid, inequitable gender norms and encourage a wide range of positive gender expressions parents and teachers must contribute to their learning process.

A huge percentage of children's books have gender prejudice in their content, language, and pictures. Numerous examinations of children's literature have discovered that male characters dominate the bulk of the stories. In children's literature, girls are typically shown as passive

rather than active. Boys are often portrayed as strong, adventurous, independent, and capable, whereas girls are typically described as sweet, innocent, conforming, and dependent. Boys are more likely to play the roles of fighters, explorers, and rescues, whereas girls are more likely to play the roles of caregivers, mothers, princesses in need of rescue, and figures who support the male figure.

For example, in Rabindranath Tagore's Story: 'Once There Was a King' (1916), The storyline is set in a primarily domestic setting, which has assigned traditional and stereotypical duties to the mother and Granny, as well as the tasks they are expected to perform. Most of the time, the mother is portrayed as a humble, meek, and subservient guide for the children, while the father has grandeur and authority. As a result, children are afflicted with the difference in power roles between males and females from an early age through characters in their stories. King in the story leaves the premises whereas the Queen has to work in the kitchen and is constantly anxious about her daughter's upcoming wedding. While the king is unconcerned about all of this. However, the king's final decision is always imposed on his family. It clearly distinguishes between men and women.

Male characters in children's picture books are twice as likely to play starring roles and have considerably more speaking parts than female characters. The only time women are given more masculine attributes like self-reliance or power is when they are depicted as negative characters like witches. Good and evil are major themes in the fairy-tale world of dreams. The purpose, according to the myth, is to instil in children the conviction that good always triumphs over evil in the end. Whether we're talking about Western fairy tales or their Indian adaptations, there's always a villain to overcome and punish. That's pretty much how social justice action works, too: a conviction that justice must eventually triumph. Also, evil does occur in the real world, and children should be aware of this.

Mary Eliza Isabella Frere (1845-1911), In her short story 'Punchkin' depicted that Because of the protagonist's brilliance, the youngest of the king's daughters is constantly in trouble and is eventually saved by her son. To put it another way, a woman who can think for herself invites difficulties and requires the intervention of a male character. A parent, particularly a mother, is usually the most influential person in a child's life. Through such storybooks, it is told to children how horrible stepmothers are.

All of these preconceptions originate from stories set in a patriarchal society where a woman in a position of leadership is considered as bad. These stories encourage society, and especially children, to view poverty as evil, to have gender bias, and to believe that those who

don't fit beauty standards are ugly. In these stories, the heroines are frequently silent and powerless, fighting these 'bad' women while being guided or saved by a masculine figure.

Pink and blue colors have been specified as gender signifiers since the early 19th century, particularly for infants and young children. The gender disparity is driven by the "blue versus pink stereotype". In the short story 'Pink for girls and blue for boys' written by an unknown author, a young boy asks himself why should boys and girls be given different toys to play with and different clothes to wear. He was perplexed as to why his belongings were so dissimilar to those of his sister. What was the color of his room? Why couldn't he play with the gorgeous dolls as his sister did? Why did his father smirk every time he tried to play with his sister's large dollhouse? With his sister, he enjoyed pretending to be a chef. Why did he have to use the car-shaped toothbrush or the rocket-shaped water bottle all the time when he preferred the one that looked like a fairy? Why didn't they give him the option to choose? Was it all because he was a boy?

Children's literature may be viewed as a powerful instrument for adults to pass on their preferred ideals to future generations. The goal is to mold children into promoters of society's accepted views. Social issues and principles are frequently addressed in children's literature. Mary Ernest Ames's book, *An ABC for Baby Patriots* (1899), demonstrates how literature is used to mold youngsters in conformity with the prevailing ideology. It was published during the colonial period, and it is apparent that the book is influenced by imperialist ideology. *An ABC for Baby Patriots*, a children's book written and drawn by the British author, aims to educate toddlers on the alphabet. The patriotic author of *British Children's Adventure Novels in the Web of Colonialism* teaches each letter by linking it with imperial themes via lines and even provides a cartoonish artwork for each letter to support its lines.

In this way, she appears to provide a useful learning tool for youngsters, allowing them easily remember the letters in their minds and that they stick to the colonial philosophy.

One of the most well-known characters in children's literature is 'Babar the elephant. Many sequels to Jean de Brunhoff's 1931 story are published in 17 languages, making it accessible to youngsters all around the world. The storyline compares "evil" resource-extraction colonialists with "good" French colonialists. These French colonialists were particularly interested in the assimilationist strategy of nurturing specific native aristocrats, which was symbolized by Babar's story.

This implies that only European and civilized people should be allowed to rule over the jungle's weaker and less intelligent animals. The Africans were depicted with inflated lips

and lengthened limbs, and they were carrying spears. When Babar arrives in the city, the Old Lady in the Babar narrative takes it upon herself to clothe and civilize him. She plays the role of a white savior to the orphaned African child. When the Old Lady moves to the woods, she saves Babar and the other elephants, much like a colonial-era missionary.

The messages seem to be everywhere for kids, in communities, and on social media, in reality, in chalk, on cardboard, and everywhere else. The origins of nursery rhymes in children's literature can be traced back to British history. Rhymes were created for a variety of causes. Some rhymes were made to commemorate a long-forgotten local event, while others were written to express feelings of love. Rhymes were frequently employed to conceal true meanings, such as when someone wanted to express disapproval with the government or the sovereign without facing criminal charges. Another advantage of rhymes is that they are easy to recall and hence may be passed on by word of mouth, which is crucial for a huge number of individuals who cannot read or write.

Underneath the surface of the poem, as in many popular children's stories, there are some deeper undertones. 'There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe', a well-known nursery rhyme penned by Mother Goose, tells the story of an elderly woman who lives with her children in a shoe. She has a hard time dealing with them. This brief poem expresses a lot about the aging mother's duties. It also emphasizes her ability to persist in the face of misfortune. The mother is frustrated in the first stanza of the rhyme. In the second, however, despite their poverty, the mother is patient and optimistic. This short poem reflects the lady's unhappy fate as she tries her hardest to overcome her life's challenges. She cares about her children's well-being and does her best, even if it makes her lose her patience.

Baa, Baa, Black Sheep is one of the most famous nursery rhymes by Mother Goose that carries a hidden meaning. The terms such as master and black are disrespectful to readers. These are being interpreted as racially offensive comparisons. 'And none for the young child who cries down the lane,' was the original last phrase, implying that the impoverished shepherd boys were left with no profits due to the high tax. According to folklore, the song is not about black sheep or a little child, but rather about the Great Custom, which was a charge on wool that sheep farmers had to pay their king in 1275. While a portion of the wool was given to the King, a part to the Church, and a part to the farmer, the shepherd kid was left with nothing. "Baa Baa Black Sheep," on the other hand, has a more contemporary resonance in modern times. The "black sheep" rhyme's apparent racial tone had been questioned.

Many nursery rhymes appear pleasant and include moral messages, and Kamla Bhasin's rhymes are no exception. Bhasin's rhymes depicted working mothers and young girls who participated in sports much like the boys. Changing diapers, cooking, and even cleaning were all portrayed as father figures. These rhymes were created to help children internalize more positive gender roles. After reading her rhymes, children questioned their fathers' lack of involvement in domestic chores. "I was sad to see that sexism was rampant in books for little children," She noticed that the majority of books were about men and their brave achievements, adventures, hopes, and women who did find a place in these books, on the other hand, were always housekeepers. This prompted her to write "Housework is Everyone's Work" – Rhymes for Just and Happy Families, which she published in 2014.

In her rhymes 'Mama Dearest Mama', 'Washing Clothes' and 'It's Sunday', Kamla Bhasin establishes the idea that domestic chores are not just the responsibility of women. Both parents are seen sharing the chores typically reserved for the ladies of the household in 'Washing Clothes' and several additional rhymes.

Postmodernism has influenced architecture, visual art, literature, and music, among other fields of the arts. This, however, did not happen overnight. With one foot on either side, the early 20th century witnessed a crossroads of "adult" children's stories. The postmodern age, characterized by irony, moral subjectivism, emerged in the aftermath of the two world wars. There have also been changes in the content of children's books relating to women, diversity, and social class.

Personalized children's books appear to be a perfect fit for the values of modern literature, with books featuring actual images and events. 'Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan' is a perfect example that features real-life events. The story takes place in modern-day Afghanistan, during the Taliban regime when girls were not allowed to attend school. Nasreen's Secret School shows that some people will risk their lives to go to school because they value education. Nasreen's grandmother brings her to a secret school because girls are not allowed to go to school, as described in the book. It also explains how they rushed to school because women and girls were not allowed to go outside alone, and how lucky they were that no soldiers noticed them.

"The Village Leader", is another great example of children's literature that shows real-life situations and promotes great values in the mind of young children. Then Kyi was one of Kayah State's only female village leaders and She was one of the few Myanmar women in positions of village and ward leadership. She had always wanted to serve her town and took

the opportunity even though she knew it would be difficult. She demonstrates that serving family and town is not only a man's responsibility but that women can do it as well.

Supervisors can consider ways children are exposed to and engage with language by understanding theory. This method is based on a broader set of behaviors, abilities, and concepts that explain why and how children learn and flourish. Theories assist in organizing information and making predictions about what might happen in the future.

"Constructivism" is used to describe Jean Piaget's theory. Children construct their own learning through interactions and experiences in the environment, according to cognitive-developmental theory. It is divided into four stages: The first stage is the sensorimotor period, which lasts from infancy to about two years old; the second phase is the preoperative phase, which lasts from two to seven years; the third phase is the period of concrete operations, which lasts from seven to eleven years old; and the fourth stage is the post-operational stage, which lasts from eleven to fourteen years old. The phase of formal operations is the final step, between the ages of 11 and 15, this period occurs. Understanding Piaget's ages and stages allow understanding of the significance of sensory experiences for infants and young children.

Erik Erikson was a psychologist who created one of the most well-known and important developmental theories. While psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's work influenced Erikson's concept, Erikson's approach focused on psychosocial development rather than psychosexual development. It provides a comprehensive framework for considering growth over the course of a person's life. It also allows underlining human beings' social nature and the critical role those social relationships play in their development.

Erik Erikson identified five stages of psychosocial development in childhood. From birth to eighteen months, the first stage, trust against mistrust, takes place. The second stage occurs between the ages of eighteen months and three years, and it is characterized by autonomy versus doubt. In Erikson's concept, the third stage is initiative vs. guilt. Between the ages of three and six. At the age of seven to eleven, the next stage is industry versus inferiority. When a child approaches puberty, the ultimate stage is identity versus role confusion.

The study of child development sheds light on the developmental phase. This process can be reflected in children's literature. Characters who fit into the categories of a youngster of a certain age can be found in well-written stories. These characters are lifelike, and children will be able to identify with them. These models can also be used by authors to figure out what children are going through at a certain age and what concepts and events will appeal to



them in a story. Understanding the process of child development and using that learning to produce and provide excellent stories for children to read would assist individuals who write for children and those who provide books for children to read.

The purpose of children's books is to urge the young generation to read more, putting them in the role of a real person is a great method to keep them engaged. Children are not merely passive consumers of what they read. They should be viewed as active subjects who create and recreate themselves in response to the images that surround them.

As one book cannot adequately reflect the collective experiences of a racial group or culture, children must be exposed to a diverse range of literature. Kids are more likely to deconstruct stereotypes and begin developing more positive racial attitudes and identities when they are exposed to multiple voices and representations of the same racial or cultural group if more than one text about such racial or cultural group is provided. Exposing children to books that promote racism, sexism and other forms of hatred can sow seeds of bias that may mature into indifference or prejudice, so these classics need a second look before being shared with Children to prevent them from growing up to be adults who engage in oppressive structures and traditions.

### **Conclusion**

Children require literature in terms of developing their linguistic skills and also to aid in their education. A child's awareness of rhythmic and bodily sensitivity is stimulated by the melodies of lullabies as well as the rhythm of poetry. Children's stories, rhymes, stories, and easy-to-read books are essential to a child, especially those with disabilities. Leisure time becomes much more meaningful as a result of reading. They must be introduced to reading from a young age. However, a number of common picture books and rhyme sets are also appropriate for handicapped youngsters. The issue is many kids, educators, and staffers are unaware of its presence: teaching for librarians must include knowledge of underprivileged youth and their literacy needs.

Children must always be exposed to a varied range of literature since one book cannot fully depict the experiences and knowledge of the race group or culture. When children are exposed to numerous voices and pictures of the same ethnic or cultural group, and if more than 1 literature about that cultural or ethnic group is supplied, they are more likely to demolish preconceptions and work on developing more positive views on race and identities. Children's exposure to books that encourage violence, sexism, and some other forms of hostility can plant seeds of bias that can grow into disinterest or bias, so these classics should

be re-examined before being shared of children to avoid them growing up to just be adults who participate in oppressive constructions and cultures.

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