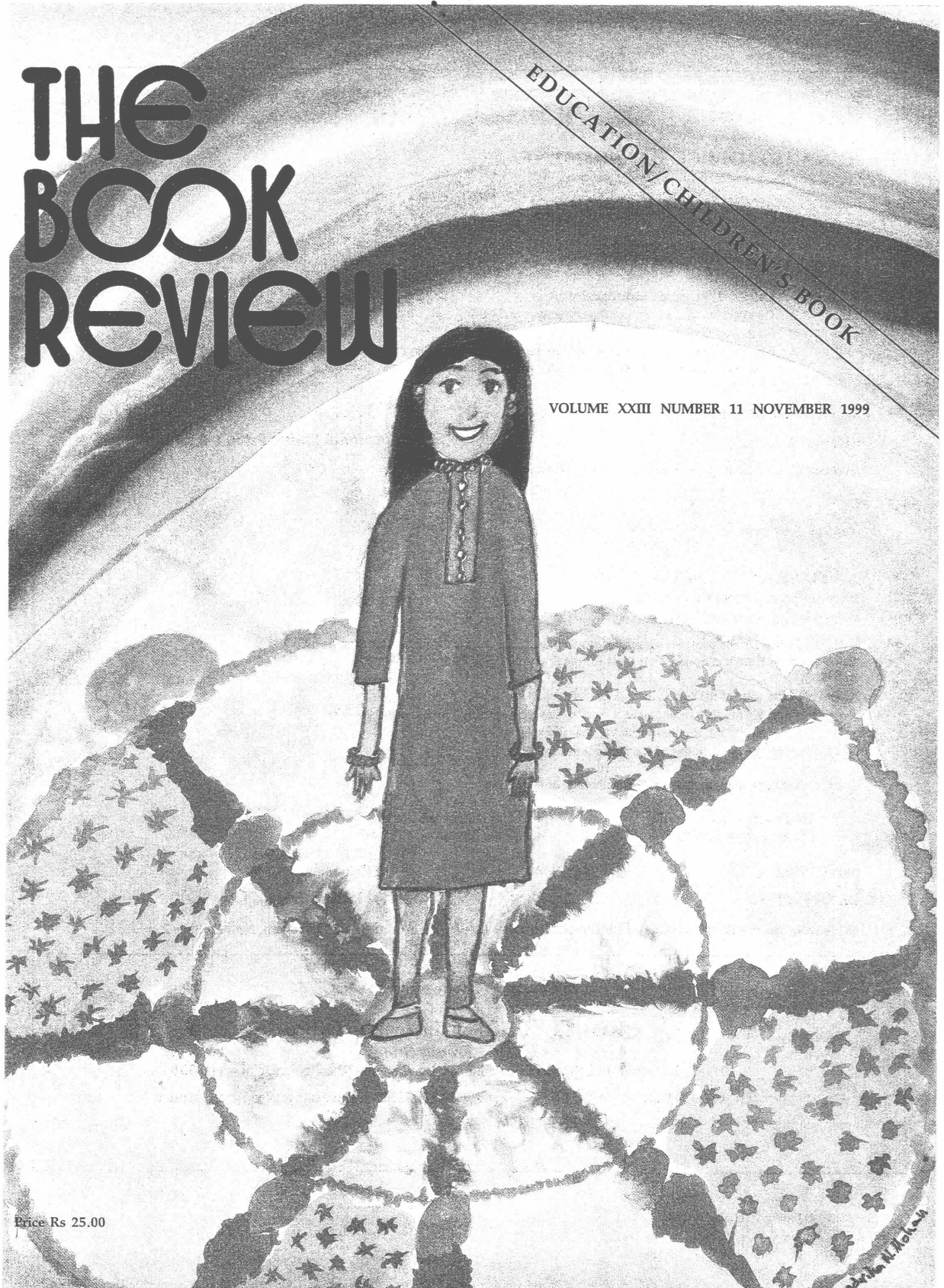


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Man's Inhumanity to the Child

Vasudha Dhagamwar

AGAINST CHILD LABOUR: INDIAN AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS AND STRATEGIES

Edited by Klaus Voll

Berlin Studies in International Politics, Mosaic Publishers, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 376, Rs 600.00

This book is a rich and rewarding collection of articles and interviews by a large number of distinguished contributors, both Indian and foreign. It is the outcome of a workshop that was organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in 1987. Many of the contributors participated in that workshop. But most of the papers have been revised. The interviews were taken in 1998. It is interesting to note that from 1987 to 1999 the issues and the discussions have remained the same. Clearly, in the last twelve years we have not progressed in any noticeable way.

It is not possible to mention all the writers and their views. One may only look at those whose views seem to be more controversial or not so well known. This is not to say that others do not merit the reader's attention. The foreign contributors, who are responsible for about half the articles, appear to have a policy and research level involvement with the subject but mainly on the economic and financial aspect, as many of them represent European funding agencies. It should be said however, that even they have first hand information and experience of child labour other than the authors whom I shall mention separately below. The contributors include Daniel Haas, who is currently in the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation; Christoph Stuckelberger, of the Bread for All; Dietrich Kobschull, Director of Indo German Export Promotion Project, Hildegard Scheu and others.

Amongst the Indian contributors are activist campaigners Swamy Agnivesh and Kailash Satyarthi; Neera Burra, who is known for her long involvement in Child Labour and Meera Dewan who made a sensitive and hard hitting film on children in the glass industry.

The book is divided into three parts; Part one deals with international and structural dimensions, with articles which set the international dimensions. Between them the nine contributions look at the social clauses, their significance and impact on India, their general

AGAINST Child Labour

Indian and International Dimensions and Strategies



editor: Klaus Voll

efficacy, the strategy for using them. Chapter one by Sivaramakrishnan and Voll gives us statistics of child labour (pp.3-10). Thus it is estimated by the ILO that there are about 200-250 million child labourers in the world, and to this a noticeable number is added every day. ILO estimates also show that South and South East Asia account for more than half the child labour in the world (p.4). Child labour in export industries account for less than 5% of the child labour force—a fact of great importance when we examine the social clauses.

Part two examines child labour in India. It consists of a single long article, well researched and broad based, by Voll and Kavita Sivaramakrishnan. In this long chapter they set the legal and economic framework, explode some of the myths about child labour, go into the health hazards incurred in *bidi*-making, rag-picking, child bondage, child prostitution, construction work, glass and bangles, fireworks and match manufacture, and existence as street children. It also has a section called 'Combat against Child Labour' which looks at various efforts to deal with child labour including the alternative of education but with a question mark not on the need for education but the hurdles in the way of getting there.

Part three is called 'Reflections and Practical Steps against Child Labour.' It consists of fourteen chapters. The last and fourth part consists of Appendices, which give us the chronology of various events, including the evolution of India's child labour policy. A welcome inclusion is of the latest ILP Convention "Immediate Abolition of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999."

Given the fact that the book owes its genesis to a seminar organized by a German agency, it should come as no surprise to us that the book is heavily concerned with issues like the ethics, the economics and the efficacy of the social clause in various international instruments, and more particularly of Rugmark, a German innovation.

According to the Government of India (p.5) there are about 17 to 18 million child labourers in India. This figure is hotly disputed by activists who have been known to put it at as high as 44 million. The same variations in figures might well come from other countries in this and other regions. In that case the all world figure may also rise astronomically.

The Indian Labour Ministry further admits that about 2 million children work in hazardous industries, such as match industry, glass and bangle industry, and of course carpet industry. The latter is mainly export oriented. The children in carpet industry are mostly between 9 to 14 years of age, though some children do begin when they are less than six years old and a significant number of children is between 6 to 8 years old.

This is why one has strong doubts about the efficacy of the social clause in eradicating *child labour*. It is quite another thing to debate its capacity to render certain *export items* child labour free. It is significant that actual efforts on the ground to check child labour have been only in carpet. Both *Rugmark* and *Kaleen* mean the 'carpet'. Even here it is now admitted that it is impossible to monitor every stage of production in the carpet industry.

So far as the fate and future of child labour is concerned, the social clause seems to be a non-starter. The social clause gives expression to the ethical duty of every good citizen not to fatten on the exploitation of the less fortunate, and not to exploit the vulnerable for monetary gain. To that extent the social clauses and its manifestation like *Rugmark* have relevance. They are an article of faith, a declaration, if I may echo John Donne, that no man is an island. That symbolic value of these gestures need not be dismissed. At the same time their practical worth should not be overestimated.

I would like to spend some space on a rather unusual view of the situation expressed by E.A. Ramaswamy, in his 'Child Labour in the Larger Context of Industrial Relations' (Ch. 6, pp. 52-61). The author has drawn our attention to the unwitting contribution of organized labour to the continuance and increase in the numbers of unorganized labour, including child labour.

According to him the organized sec-

tor accounts for only 8% of the total labour force in India. Yet organized industry is rapidly reducing even this number. In a study done by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Maniben Kara Institute it has been found that as many as thirty enterprises in greater Bombay alone have a policy of not hiring unionised employees (One wonders how this ban has not been challenged in the Supreme Court as being violative of Article 19 (c) of the Constitution) and that 21 firms have downsized their labour force by as much as 42% in the course of the decade beginning in 1980. According to various government sources the public sector has reduced its workforce by as many as 2.17 million workers. Yet the industry is not in decline. Instead it is adopting a series of strategies to reduce dependence on organized labour. One is to relocate to other sites with less stringent labour laws. The other is of overwhelmingly outsourcing its work. In plain English, it means shifting its production to unorganized labour. The reason for the shift, according to Ramaswamy, lies in—

the labour market inflexibilities that are deeply entrenched in conventional labour relations. Labour cost in the organized sector is certainly high in comparison to other sectors of the economy, but the labour process is so hemmed in by restrictive practices, that it is in practice quite impossible to use this high-cost labour effectively (p.57).

In Ramaswamy's opinion, trade unions must change their age old approach and ideology in order to stop the flight of employment from their ranks. He seems to conclude that as long as the unorganized sector continues to attract industry, child labour, which is very much a part of it, will be difficult to eradicate.

If poverty is one of the causes of child labour, then Professor Ramaswamy's analysis must be taken seriously.

The point that child workers throughout the world are mostly from deprived communities is made by more than one writer. In India they are from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the poor Muslim communities. Sukhadeo K. Thorat devotes his whole paper to it, entitled 'Poverty, Caste and Child Labour in India: The Plight of Dalit and Adivasi Children'.

In the debate on child labour there is hardly anyone who actually comes out in support of child labour although there are some. The two sides consist of outright opponents and apologists. The apologists can only see that the child comes from a poor home and he simply has no option. Unless he works both he and his family will starve. The opponents take a wider position. They look

at the history, the economics, the politics and the sociology of child labour. They look beyond the family to the state and insist that the state and the society have an undeniable duty to stop child labour.

ILO documentation again points out that the majority of child workers go to work at the age of six or seven. They work long hours, even up to 12 to 16 hours a day. They work for little money. The work is repetitive and dull which stunts them physically and mentally. It is often hazardous and even otherwise dangerous to their well being. The children are forced to take too much responsibility too soon. They are intimidated, sexually and otherwise exploited and held in debt bondage. By all accounts it is a grim scenario. These are well documented facts. Yet the apologists of child labour harp on the poverty argument in a way which precludes any action. They do not see that many desperately poor communities do send their children to school because that is their topmost priority. They also do not seem to be looking for a way out. The nimble fingers argument has also been exploded, but only to those who will listen. They are not willing to take seriously activists like Shamshad Khan and his CREDA or MV Foundation which have demonstrated that the poor working child can be liberated. He and she can go to school, with the willing cooperation of its parents.

Shamshad Khan alone seems to make the point that the best way to eradicate child labour or any other social malpractice is to secure community goodwill and participation, reducing the need for penal provisions and policing. Neither of them can be effective if the community sets its face against them and connives at their actions. The further one goes from the source of the trouble, greater the chances of failure.

A dangerous and even more intellectual argument is about the *relevance* of education to the poor children. It is necessary to deal with it, especially as even Manju Gupta and Voll have fallen for it in their otherwise readable case study. This argument is produced even though we are only talking of elementary education, up to the age of 14. Going to school in itself is education, it is an opener of doors. It is a major step in the life of a child who has hitherto dealt with its family. Contentwise I doubt if any of it is relevant to any small child who enters the portals of a school and learns skills that have nothing to do with the biological body clock with which alone it was acquainted till then. Today's elementary education is hardly relevant to any child. For example Indian private schools teach in English from the first day. How many children speak Eng-

lish at home? They learn to prattle "Mary had a little lamb" without having the least idea about either.

Most serious, this argument is tantamount to accepting that poor children are virtually a separate *species* from the rest of us. Reading, writing and arithmetic have no immediate relevance to any child. No one stops to ask whether working for endless hours at repetitive tasks is relevant to the child, the child who also has a very real fear of savage chastisement. Even more worrisome is the emergence of a new section of people who are using the language of Human Rights to not only defend child labour, but to positively justify it.

A most dangerous move now afoot is to challenge the requirement from the state to make education free, universal, and compulsory at the elementary level. The plea taken is of the right of the child to its autonomy, that is the right to choose whether or not to go to school. The fact that the developed countries do not accept this logic; the fact that middle class children are never given the choice in developing countries, does not enter this pseudo human rights argument. All children do not share a level playing field or starting point. It is here that the social composition of child labour is so poignantly relevant.

Lately it has even been heard that discussion about the right of the mother to introduce her minor daughter to 'commercial sex work' has taken place in some fora. As soon as this particular term replaced the old fashioned and value laden derogatory word 'prostitution', the next and natural step was to ask what was wrong with it even if the person concerned was a minor. Thus by inches inroads are made in the basic rights of individuals, all in the name of protecting their rights.

This review would not be complete without a word about Ms Pannicker's interview with the street children, although there is no doubt that they are doing worthwhile work with a very difficult and most vulnerable children. Street children should not be confused with other child workers, even if the latter live away from home. This is because for various reasons street children have no home or family. That tie has been broken. They have either fled or have been rejected. Abuse is a major reason for their flight from home. The solutions that may be relevant to other child workers do not apply to them. If the average child worker is older than his years, they are even more so. In many ways they are rebels who have survived or are struggling to do so.

One result of confusing all child workers with street children is the The Child Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act. It was drafted single-handedly

by the Concerned for Working Children, an NGO which works with street children. This Act is nothing short of a national disgrace and does nothing to alleviate the condition of any working child. In this context Rita Pannicker's explanation about what BUTTERFLIES means by the right of children to unionise is extremely interesting. In her interview she too does not keep to this distinction between street children, with whom her organization works and the other child workers. She says that the child workers union came into existence because it was their way of coming together. To quote: (M)ost people think that the Bal Mazdoor Union is a prototype of an adult union, which it is not. It is more an expression of children coming together, it is a union where children discuss and talk about their fundamental rights... They are not talking about their working conditions, about getting better wages... but most often what they are talking about is their own world, a child's world, for example the denial of education. They talk about why they are on the streets, because the way they were abused at home... about the bullies on the streets, how you can handle the bullies (emphasis added).

One is impressed that these children should have the fairly sophisticated concept of fundamental rights. But my

godness, these activities do not make it a union but an association. If all they want is a forum then there is no need to go in for a union. Their association must choose another name, such as perhaps *mandal* or *society*. Under Article 19(c) they should be able to register their association.

At law, a union is meant to protect the interests of workers from their employers. If a person is not supposed to work at all, being too young, or if the work is against public policy (e.g. stealing) then a union cannot and will not be registered by the authorities. One is more than certain that the lawyer who filed the writ on behalf of BUTTERFLIES, seeking a direction to the Union of India to register the *Bal Mazdoor Union*, was in no doubt about the import of what he was doing. We were quite glad his case was thrown out and told him so. Unfortunately this sort of effort lends support to the lobby that justifies and even glorifies child labour.

For these and other reasons one is left with a question at the end of an excellent and readable book: How does one stop preaching to the converted and get the ear of the others who have made up their minds the other way?

Vasudha Dhagamwar is a social activist and Executive Director of MARG.

AGAINST CHILD LABOUR Indian and International Dimensions

Edited by Klaus Voll

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Human Rights: Who will Educate the Educators?

Kalyani Menon-Sen

EDUCATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Edited by K.J.S. Chatrath

Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla & UNESCO, 1998, pp. 177, Rs 240.00

Many moons ago, in 1995, the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies held a seminar in Shimla to celebrate the commencement of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education. Many moons later, in 1998, the deliberations of the seminar were published in a book! While acknowledging the delay, the editor of the book hastens to add the mitigating factor—"the issues raised remain as relevant today as they were when they were raised." Reviewing this book another long year later, one is sadly forced to acknowledge that, where human rights education is concerned, five years is not a long time after all.

In 1997, when this book was in the process of being readied for publication, the Government of India finally submitted its long-overdue compliance report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to the UN Human Rights Committee. While commending India for some initiatives (like the setting up of a National Human Rights Commission), the committee noted with regret that the report downplayed a number of serious violations. For instance, the government continued its use of special powers of legislation in disturbed areas including laws permitting preventive detention. It was pointed out that although India was a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention, it had admitted to possession of chemical weapons and declined to make public any details. Also, India was one of the most prominent opponents of a global treaty to ban land mines.

During this period, Indian human rights groups documented an increase in reports of rape by the armed forces and security personnel. Although the government claimed to have prosecuted security personnel in a number of human rights cases, it refused to disclose the nature of either the abuses or the punishments. Even though the notorious TADA had lapsed in 1995, more than 3,000 people continued in detention under a special provision of the law. Prominent human rights activists like

Ravi Nair, the Director of the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, faced threats of "special treatment" by the police if they did not restrict their activities. In Assam, Sanjoy Ghose of AVARD was abducted and probably killed by ULFA.

Given the backdrop of the above events, the tone and flavour of the papers collected in this volume are curiously bland. Thus, we have Professor R. Sundararajan ruminating on the "deep philosophical problem" of whether there could be "something essentially and universally true about human beings although unknown and unacknowledged by themselves". He sees the basic project of human rights as the "construction of the recognition of a totality that accords legitimacy to the stranger". Professor Sundararajan goes on to propose that, since "respect for the 'other' is primarily a function of language", education for human rights must "safeguard language against its manifold pollutants". I hope I may be forgiven for failing to see the relevance of this thesis in a situation where both individuals and communities are increasingly asserting their right to define their multiple identities in local and partial, rather than universal terms!

In very much the same vein of pure generalisation uncontaminated by the particular, Dr. Arjun Dev of the NCERT declares that human rights are the "common core" of every subject and at all stages of school education. Rather than citing any specific evidence, his paper claims that this core revolves around Constitutional obligations and other content "essential to nurture national identity". These elements are designed to promote values such as "common cultural heritage, egalitarianism, democracy and secularism, equality of the sexes, protection of the environment, removal of social barriers, observance of the small family norm and inculcation of scientific temper". An impressive list indeed, and one which any human rights activist would be happy to endorse (though some might quibble at the "small family"). If Dr. Dev says these elements are there, we must believe him, even if we have not encountered them in our own (or our children's) encounters with education! To be fair to him, Dr. Dev does mention the "weaknesses"—textbooks brought out by the states are sometimes 'designed to fos-

ter bigotry', content areas lack focus and concrete examples are missing, issues are not seen in their totality, activities to develop sensitivity are missing, teachers are not competent. The near-invisibility of this "core curriculum" in real life is adequately explained.

A similar sense of "through-the-looking-glass" emerges from the paper on human rights in the army, by Colonel S.K. Sharma of the Indian Army. The author starts off with a sharp reminder: "As an educated segment of society, our soldiers are conscious of their own rights and the rights of the public". A mere ten lines down the page comes the admission of "the inherent dichotomy between the use of force and the furtherance of human right." Nevertheless, he says, "allegations of human rights violations/excesses are promptly investigated by senior officers of the Army, even as we cooperate with others in their investigations". The major credit for this excellent human right report card goes to the Army human rights education programme, which is "progressive, dynamic and transparent". What can we say, except that Kashmir and the North East must be on the other side of the looking-glass!

One cannot imagine statements such as those quoted above being allowed to pass without fierce debate. Probably, as in most workshops, the papers were only the excuse for the real business of tearing opinions to pieces and reconstructing a new consensus. The book contains the workshop report (in lieu of an editorial analysis)—an excellent summary of each paper, and a tantalising glimpse of the uproar that probably followed each one. Harsh Sethi confirms that "the overall discussion was broad-ranging and operated on three distinct but interrelated planes." Sethi identifies these dimensions as the theoretical basis, the specific situation in India and concrete educational strategies.

In a mere three pages, Sethi summarises the high points of the debate. Participants, he says, pointed out the gaps between precepts and practice in the context of the claims of the Indian State and the allegations of its critics. They also expressed deep concern about the increasing inability of formal institutions and structures of governance to cope with tensions and demands. The debate apparently broadened to encompass the role of the family and the rights of women and children, as well as the position of the individual within the community. One wishes there was more of this—it is frustrating not to be able to examine the insights that must surely have emerged from these sessions. What, for instance did participants say about the notion of a hierarchy of rights and the ways in which it has been interpreted for and against the interests of



different groups? What was their stand on the idea that, when resources are scarce, rights could be progressively realised? What is the role of non-State actors in ensuring rights? Sethi, in the best tradition of 'unbiased reportage', holds himself back from putting his own perspectives on the table—a pity, since he is known to hold strong views on these subjects.

There are a couple of thought-provoking and combative contributions that make the book worthwhile. A sparkling piece by Vijay Shankardass questions the "absoluteness" of rights, on the grounds that such a notion "inflates moral claims to the point of inducing some protestors to disregard the legitimate claims of their fellow beings". Javeed Alam makes a strong case for a different framework of assumptions to build justifications of what is permissible within the community. As things stand, "communities in India do not give one the right of exit: I cannot say 'please do not treat me as a Jat or a Kurmi or a Muslim.'" He questions the valorisation by communities of "difference", and points out that egalitarianism is not a part of the traditions of any community in India—the status of women is an indication of this.

In retrospect, then, this book—and the workshop that gave it birth—seem to be more evidence of the lip service that is paid to the notion of human rights by both governments and non-governmental institutions. Yet, as Todd Gitlin of Human Rights Watch maintains, "lip service is the tribute vice pays to virtue"—that such lip service is felt to be necessary, is itself proof that a value has achieved a certain degree of legitimacy. There is no doubt that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is taken more seriously today than when it was adopted fifty years ago. However the focus continues to be on civil and political rights, to the almost complete exclusion of economic, social and collec-

tive rights. Sadly, this is the case even when, as in this workshop, UNESCO and the National Commission for Human Rights are involved in defining the agenda.

One interpretation for this skewed focus is that it is easier to impose a rights framework in a situation where there are clear-cut distinctions between "victims" and "perpetrators", but this explanation misses sight of the political imperatives that underlie the articulation of rights. The Tiananmen Square massacre is condemned as a massive violation of the right to life, but the famine in sub-Saharan Africa is never publicly recognized as genocide perpetrated by those who fuelled the destruction of African survival agriculture by pushing the unsustainable cultivation of cash crops. Similarly, it is easy to condemn the torture and abuse of political prisoners in a banana republic, while categorising the sub-survival wages and inhuman working conditions of women workers in export industries in the same country as "a necessary market adjustment". In our own country, the Ministry of Labour refuses to legislate on the issue of minimum wages and job security for home-based contract workers, because this is 'impractical' and would disturb the economics of contract work.

We cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that the politics of human rights involves careful stage-management and a considerable degree of hypocrisy at the global level. The showcasing of civil and political rights by the architects of globalisation not only hides their systematic violation of the economic and social rights of nations, but is also amenable to use as an instrument for shoring up these violations. The Multilateral Agreement on Investment is only the latest in a long list of international agreements brokered by the countries of the North, which uphold the rights of the rich against the poor. For the votaries of free trade, the interests of corporations have always been a higher priority than the interests of people in the countries of the South.

Women's groups have also drawn attention to the fact that all the fine words in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—"equality", "justice", "liberty"—are aimed at protecting the strong against the weak and justifying an unequal world system. Not only does the Declaration subsume women under the term "men", it also fails to mention any abuses peculiar to women, including domestic violence, rape, infanticide, female genital mutilation and dowry deaths. It was not until the UN Conference on Human Rights at Vienna in 1993 that women's rights became officially an "inalienable, integral and individual part" of universal human rights. But

women's rights continue to come second to men's rights—the Vienna Declaration has not prevented mass rapes in Bosnia and Rwanda, ended the stark oppression in Afghanistan or saved the millions of women in India who are quietly falling through the gaps of the social safety net.

It is primarily the advocacy by women's groups that has expanded the boundaries of the debate beyond civil and political rights. Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has gone on record to acknowledge that poverty is a violation of human rights, and that she is committed to giving economic and social rights the same priority as civil and political rights. Yet, how much clout does she have to push these good intentions? Last year, she publicly deplored the fact that the UN saw the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a celebration, and pointed to "failure of implementation on a scale that shames us all". At around the same time, the UN voted for massive economic sanctions against Iraq. The manner in which these sanctions have undermined the human rights of Iraqis, particularly women and children, is visible on TV screens around the world. Mary Robinson, with her roots in the nationalist women's movement in her own country—a country that has itself struggled with a history of famine and dispossession—cannot be unmoved. One wonders what she will say on 10th December 1999, when she will no doubt be faced with another celebration—this time with the millennial tag. What better way to celebrate than another series of seminars and workshops to excavate the philosophical roots of human rights? Far more pleasant and certainly better for public relations than talking about implementation! And all part of a process where, to quote another UN official, "basic aspects of human rights theory . . . are constantly questioned in semi-ideological debates, in which it is not always clear whether the problems raised are genuine or serve as a smokescreen to confuse a discussion about implementation."²

Will the IIAS be willing to provide a platform for a different kind of workshop—one in which such smokescreens can be torn apart to expose the multiple faces of inhumanity and awaken the passion for justice that must lie at the heart of the struggle for human rights?

Notes

1. "Education for Human Rights and Democracy". K.J.S. Chatrath (ed). IIAS and UNESCO, 1998. pp. 177.
2. Thomas Hammarberg, delivering the Dorab Patel Memorial Lecture, LSE, 1999.

Kalyani Menon-Sen is a gender activist and trainer.

Educating India

Siddharth Varadarajan

PUBLIC REPORT ON BASIC EDUCATION IN INDIA

The PROBE Team in association with the Centre of Development Economics, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 156, Rs. 150.00

THE MADHYA PRADESH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 1998

Government of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal, 1998, pp. xii+ 318, Rs. 500.00

Of all of India's many failings in the fifty years since it won independence, none has been as damaging to the very fabric of nationhood as the systematic neglect of education. Even though it is common to blame the relative indulgence of the State towards higher education for the parlous situation of primary and secondary education, the malaise that afflicts public education has infected every rung of the learning ladder from government-run village schools to colleges, universities and even premier institutions of higher learning. Far from generating greater support for education—a crucial component of what economists call 'human capital'—economic reforms have led to a resource squeeze that has diluted the State's constitutional commitments to universal education and placed our university system under acute financial strain.

As is to be expected, the fiscal neglect of education goes hand in hand with the new 'market-friendly' economic line which the past few governments have been pushing. The privatisation of higher education is already underway and the private sector has always been a major player in the urban school system at both the primary and secondary levels. Less well known is the trend towards the bifurcation of primary education in rural areas, with private fee-paying schools emerging as an alternative—an expensive and not very effective one at that—to the poorly funded and inadequately supervised government-run schools, especially in north India. Why is this bifurcation occurring and can it provide a solution to the problem of illiteracy? If not, can the government afford to shoulder the burden of sending all children to school and providing them with facilities that will allow them to learn and grow? What are the factors that create a good learning environment? These are some of the questions that the PROBE report addresses with admirable clarity and rigour.

Based on a sample survey of 1376

The fiscal neglect of education goes hand in hand with the new 'market-friendly' economic line which the past few governments have been pushing.

households in 234 randomly-selected villages from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, the PROBE report does three distinct things. First, it explodes some myths about elementary education in India. Then it paints a careful picture of the rural schooling system in the five states, taking care to fill in the important details about the state of physical infrastructure, teacher resources, activity patterns, the role of social discrimination, the pedagogic and absorption processes inside the classroom, the evaluation system and the impact of initiatives such as school meals. Finally, via a discussion of Himachal Pradesh, whose education system performs much better than the other four states, the PROBE team zeroes in on the nature of the systemic crisis that needs urgent remedy. It avoids making specific recommendations other than to emphasise the centrality of political will. Unless education is made a fundamental—i.e. justiciable—right, the report concludes, the majority of Indians will be left with no option but to continue fending for themselves as best they can. Which, for the poorer sections at least, means going through life without ever reading a letter or newspaper, a poem or book.

In a short review, it is impossible to do justice to the richness of the PROBE report. Apologists for the official view may quibble about its methodology and small sample size but the qualitative side of the report cannot be brushed aside so easily. First, the broad strokes. Elementary education in India is characterised by four facts: low achievements, high disparities between regions, social groups and males and females, slow progress and state inertia.

The report then uses the results of its survey to dispel four widely believed myths. The first is that parents are not interested in educating their children. In fact, 98 per cent of parents considered it important for boys to be educated (primarily because it 'improves employment and income opportunities'), 89 per cent considered it important that girls be educated (because it 'helps to write letters and keep accounts' and 'improves employment and marriage prospects') and 80 per cent said that primary education should be made compulsory for all children. As for the second myth—that child labour is the main reason children don't go to school—the PROBE team suggests that the causality might be the other way, i.e., that children work because they do not go to school. Finally, the report argues against two other myths: that elementary education is free, and that schools are available. In fact, the PROBE survey showed that the average cost of sending a child to school was Rs. 318 per annum at the primary level and Rs. 478 at the elementary level, no mean sums for poor and landless families that would typically have several children of school-going age. As for availability, although 92 per cent of surveyed children lived within one kilometre of a primary school, 'social distance'—of caste or gender for example—and the quality of schools continue to act as impediments to attendance.

When parents were asked why their children were out of school, two answers dominated: 'child is needed for other activities' and 'schooling is too expensive'. Many also said that their children did not wish to continue attending school. But why would children want to drop out when the alternative is work? The report cites an example which is worth quoting *in extenso* as it goes to heart of the problem affecting basic education in north India:

"Six-year old Reena is not keen to go to school in the morning and it is not difficult to understand why. When the PROBE investigators visited her school in Salempur (Muzaffarnagar, U.P.), they found the little children of classes-1 and 2 huddled together like a herd of sheep and goats. The other children crowded the three small, dark and dirty rooms which make up the school building. The premises were gloomy and virtually bare, not a great surprise since the building has no lock. The school's four teachers are equally unmotivated. Except for the headmaster, none of them were teaching when the investigators arrived. The class-1 teacher did not look as though he had anything to do with his small charges. Villagers, for their part, have strong charges against the teachers, from neglecting their teaching duties to playing cards during school hours.

"With a population of 3,200 (including about 800 children in the 6-14 age group), Salempur ought to have several lively and well-equipped government schools, with classes up to grade 8 at the very least. Yet Reena's school, with primary classes only, is the only government school in the village. Even this primary school is flagrantly dysfunctional, in spite of 14 different visits by school inspectors during the twelve months preceding the survey.

"And it is not that the people of Salempur are not keen on educating their children. Three private schools have sprung up in the village, and those who can afford it send their children there. But children like Reena come from very poor families. They continue to crowd the government primary school—or drop out."

Even though school facilities in the PROBE states today are better than they were a decade ago—74 per cent of schools now have a usable blackboard compared to 42 per cent in 1986 and only 9 per cent of schools are held in kachha buildings, huts, tents or open spaces compared to 29 per cent a decade back—they still fall far short of acceptable standards. If all children went to school in the states surveyed, the PROBE report argues, there would be an astounding 113 pupils per pucca classroom and 68 pupils per appointed teacher. In any case, 68 per cent of all pucca primary schools need urgent repairs to the floor and 63 per cent need roof repairs. As many as 15 per cent of pucca schools *built after 1986* need repairs to their floor, roof, walls and doors/windows. As for other facilities, the report found only 48 per cent of schools had a usable playground, only 41 per cent had drinking water, 41 per cent had maps and charts and just 11 per cent had toilets.

Apart from this damning physical inventory, the report says most primary schools fail "to create a pleasant and attractive atmosphere ... with the means available." As the more enterprising schools have shown, it is possible to transform the school environment through simple devices such as keeping the premises clean, hanging colourful posters or maps on the walls, and growing flowers in the surrounding area. Initiatives of this type, however, are sorely lacking. Finally, the human dimension also turns out to be wholly inadequate, with teachers simply not performing the task for which they have been hired. When the PROBE investigators arrived at their targeted schools, only 53 per cent of teachers present were teaching; the rest were either simply minding the class, talking with other teachers or engaging in other non-teaching activity.

More often than not, the teaching process was mechanical and uninspiring. Alarming, the PROBE team found evidence of social discrimination in the classroom as well: "We found a few schools, for instance, where Dalit children had to sit separate from other children (e.g. in village Dubarkalan, Mirzapur), or where children of some castes sat on benches while others sat on the floor. ... Far more widespread than these cases of blatant discrimination, however, are subtle forms of unequal treatment in the classroom. One common example ... is the disparaging attitude of upper-caste teachers towards Dalit children. This can take various forms such as telling Dalit children that they are 'stupid', making them feel inferior, using them for menial chores, and giving them liberal physical punishment ... Class-based discrimination follows similar patterns. In one school, the investigator noted that new textbooks had been distributed to children from affluent families while poor children were given old textbooks."

All political parties pay lip-service to the need for universal primary education at election time but fail to deliver when in power. Now HRD minister Murli Manohar Joshi says that the draft 83rd constitutional amendment—which will make education a fundamental right—"is neither practical nor feasible". He forgot to add that it is not desirable either. Were the amendment to be passed, governments would not find it so easy to get away with under funding education. It would be harder to fob children off with such a wonderful substitute for books, blackboards and school meals as the compulsory recitation of prayers. Of course, the present government has only taken the anti-education policies of its predecessors a few steps further. Neither the Congress nor the UF governments could be accused of wanting to provide universal elementary education. Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP today is less than it was in 1991. At 3.2 per cent, it is a far cry from the 6 per cent of GNP promised way back in the 1960s.

Instead of remedying this situation, politicians argue that improving the quality of schools is primarily the responsibility of the "community" and that private schools can make up for the inadequacy of the State. The PROBE report highlights the importance of community participation in determining the quality of a school. But given the heterogeneity of caste and class in most Indian villages, community participation is not always feasible and state commitment continues to hold the key. As for the desirability of private education, the emergence of two tracks in the schooling system in rural areas is one

of the most disturbing findings of the PROBE report. In Himachal Pradesh, where state-run schools are good, there are virtually no private rural schools.

Unlike the PROBE report, the Madhya Pradesh Human Development Report (MPHDR) 1998 provides valuable statistical data for not just education but a variety of indicators relating to the level of human development—life expectancy, child mortality, fertility, labour force participation rates, land ownership and use, and infrastructure—disaggregated to the district level. However, the absence of qualitative descriptions means it is very hard to penetrate the thick forest of numbers and reach through to a clear picture of the way things actually are at the ground level. As one of the PROBE states, Madhya Pradesh's record in maintaining an effective educational system is not particularly good. Indeed, the PROBE team's field work suggests that one should approach the MPHDR's claims of advances on the education front with a certain degree of scepticism. Statistics such as the percentage of the population within one kilometre of a primary school—something the Digvijay Singh government is particularly proud of—have a way of hiding the real picture. As we have seen above, the quality of the school's premises and teaching aids, as well as of its teachers, play as important a role as physical distance in determining whether children attend school or not.

This is not to say that the MPHDR tries to prettify the situation or present an optimistic view of the state's human development record. Far from it. If anything, the state government has shown extraordinary courage in sponsoring for the second time (the first MPHDR was published in 1995) a statistical survey whose results are far from flattering. The idea behind state-level human development reports was to decompose the macroscopic picture to the level at which remedial governmental intervention would be most effective. Since health and education are state subjects, it was felt that state governments could better target their expenditure and administrative attention so as to raise the level of those districts and regions that performed the poorest on the human development front. Of course, it is still too early to say whether the MPHDRs are actually helping to prioritise the state government's policies. Nevertheless, as an exercise in the collection of development data that can have a range of official and non-governmental uses, the MPHDR is an exemplary document and one that deserves to be emulated by other states.

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A Gift From a Teacher

Frances Kumar

THE OPEN CLASSROOM

By K.T. Margaret

Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1999, pp. 203, Rs. 125.00

A book's dedication asks us to think backwards to people and events who stand behind the author, in this case, K.T. Margaret's students, master, teacher, and father. Turning the page, the dedication is set aside and we embark on the 'real' work. As we finish *The Open Classroom* a curious idea crystallizes in our thoughts; the dedication was incomplete. This book is surely dedicated—though not explicitly—to everyone who ventures into the world of young children's education. We realize that this book is our companion. This is the teacher who has always walked along at our side whoever we may be—teachers in a formal or informal setting, teachers of nursery and middle and high school, teachers in the village, slum or a tidy corner of the city; teacher-trainers in large institutions, in NGO centres and regional offices of foreign based aid programmes. It is extraordinary how many audiences K.T. Margaret addresses, and with what authority, succinctness and immediacy.

Margaret's authority is derived from the wide range of experiences in different settings she has had in her teaching career such as a government-aided high school catering to poor and middle-class children, a teacher-training institute for girls qualifying to teach children in primary and upper primary schools, a private nursery catering to children from privileged sections of society, a children's centre for non-school-going children in one of Bangalore's biggest slums; then, training teachers involved in non-formal education for a development project; and, currently, working with a small group of teachers on ways to implement and adapt her ideas in their specific classroom situations. This is an impressive bio-data to be sure, but it is K.T. Margaret's ability to think about each situation, turning abstract theory of child development and education into direct application in those contrasting situations and, above all, her self-awareness and courage to think, to change and to act that give her story such authority and cohesion.

K.T. Margaret discusses her developing, personal definition of education in the context of each of her teaching situations. She agrees with Dewey that we start where the child is, mindful of her

social situation; she echoes Piaget when she mentions that the living organism affects its environment whilst being affected by it; and she uses Freudian theory to deepen her awareness of, and sensitivity to, the child's emotional growth. Not only this, Margaret also situates her career in the wider context of Indian educational experiments in the period under discussion—c. 1970 to the present. Her familiarity with other movements and approaches is refreshing.

Margaret begins the book by discussing theoretical matters such as what education is, what the present system offers, and what the ground realities are in the context of her first placement, in a government high school for girls. From there she moved to a teacher-training institution, teaching part-time at a primary school concomitantly. The social realities she describes of the teacher-training institution are a matter of humiliation, where a large group of trainees, of lower social status, were forbidden to use the toilets, the library, other facilities, or to conduct assemblies!

Margaret next joined an elite school in order to teach the nursery class where she turned her thoughtful observation on the youngest children to understand what children are like, and what they do when left to themselves. She met Nadya C. Panth, an expert in children's education under whose informed, committed and skilful guidance K.T. Margaret gained a freedom and self-confidence which breathe through the pages of the book. An example of this self-confidence married to crisp grasp of theory is found in three consecutive experiments in her so-called 'conversation' class where K.T. Margaret gets closer and closer to her ideal of starting where the children are, following their lead and interests whilst shaping those interests in interactive ways that result in real education.

A quarter of the book focuses vividly on her next experience, working with non-school-going children in Bangalore's largest slum. Here, her inherent respect for children, trust in their growth process and her own, endurance and wisdom come to the fore. Her writing is direct, unsentimental, yet warm. She speaks for herself and lets the children do the same. Her uncanny ability to allow change to happen, and to shape development through compassionate toughness stand out. At the end of this chapter of her life in the book, Margaret pauses to re-articulate her theory of education, focusing on inner development of all concerned, whilst seeing the individual's place in society and in the outer world. Here we are reminded of the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh's articulation of inter-being; and from this discussion we get an inkling of where Margaret derives her unusual strength and vibrant humanity from.

She left the Tilaknagar Children's

Centre to join a development project. Such projects usually focus on economic development and they include an education component. The education component is, typically, characterized by inadequate preparation and inattention to the nitty-gritty of detail on which success in education depends. By chasing impatiently after showy results and disdaining the slow, invisible yet indubitable process of real change, by equating efficiency with constant busyness, by distrusting the human need to pause and refresh, and above all by valuing social work above a real educational component, a scenario is achieved where little real development can happen. Sophisticated advocates of economic development typically lose their sophistication when it comes to understanding the crucial dependence of all their notions on education and this in no better demonstrated than in Margaret's discussion of her work out in the field in north Karnataka. She worked for six years and reached the conclusion—which would be hard to dispute—that very little real educational work can be done through projects undertaken by development organizations.

Margaret makes her points using plenty of illustrative material— anecdotal, descriptive, conversational; anecdotes from classrooms, short sketches, observation records. She constantly evaluates what is happening. Her habit of self-scrutiny and determination to seek "a suitable environment for the development of her powerful potential", to take her part as a teacher in building a positive society are ever-present. She is sharp-eyed. Among the examples, we must include are her observation on trainee-teachers where she discusses their personality characteristics in terms of their situation—in the city, the slum and the village. Anyone who has been a part of teacher development will recognize those trainees; city trainees with their impatience, lack of persever-

ance, desire for quick results and know-all attitude; patient, persevering, passive and bewilderingly submissive village trainees; and slum trainees—spontaneous, communicative, open and fearless yet impetuous and lacking concentration.

Another chapter to mention is called "Understanding the Child" where she illustrates aspects of children's social and emotional development using their art work. One is reminded of the recently released English version of Devi Prasad's important work, *Art: The Basis of Education* (see my review in *Gandhi Marg*, April-June, 1999). Our connection with the outer world (K.T. Margaret's term) involves sensitivity to beauty in nature as well as to social values and aesthetic aspects of life which are, in Prasad's analysis, to be gained through art education. Margaret's discussion in this chapter, coming from a Freudian stance, enriches our understanding of why this is so.

The last chapter of the book is an impressive description of a technique, likely inspired by Sylvia Ashton-Warner's notion of words that are 'key' to the child, of beginning reading instruction in a meaningful way, based on the child's name. The immediacy and thoroughness of Margaret's description have a ring of truth that any experienced teacher will recognize, with gratitude. Gratitude is, after all, what we feel reading *The Open Classroom*. Early in the book two boys in the Tilaknagar Children's Centre sort out a problem using sign language, touching lips, touching chest. Margaret asks them what that meant. Beema answers that he'd asked Shankar whether he had spoken from his lips or from his heart. Margaret has spoken from her heart to ours. We feel she has gifted the insights of her rich life in education to us.

Frances Kumar teaches at Vasant Valley School in New Delhi.

Nurturing Sensivity With Art Education

Bulbul Sharma

ART: THE BASIS OF EDUCATION

By Devi Prasad

National Book Trust, India, 1998, pp. 174, Rs. 85.00

Art education in our schools has always got a step-motherly treatment and most schools do not include any kind of art-related activity in their time-table. Though this outdated thinking pattern is now gradually changing, it is only public schools that give art education any importance and

we still have a long way to go before words written by a great artist almost five decades ago become a reality:

"Although every man and woman cannot become an artist, it is necessary that there should be arrangement for art education for everyone in society, whichever walk of life he or she may belong to" wrote Nadalal Bose as he blessed the first edition of a brilliant book published on this subject in Hindi in 1959. *Art: The Basis of Education* by eminent educationist and artist Devi Prasad, is a pioneering effort which should have been published in English many years ago and one is glad that the National Book Trust of India has made it possible for a new generation of read-

ers to read this excellent book on art education. Based on the author's experience with children and teachers when he was a teacher at the Navee Talim Educational Institute at Sevagram—Mahatma Gandhi's ashram, the book not only deals with art education but also gives the reader an opportunity to participate in a meaningful dialogue with the author. Written with a keen insight and thoughtful analysis of the function of art expression, the book takes a detailed look into important aspects of art education and its role in shaping not only a child's but every individual's thinking process.

The author, who graduated from Santiniketan, shares his vast experience with the readers and takes them on a learning journey which every art teacher will find rewarding. The book, which talks about art education in a non-pedantic manner, gives us a hands-on, practical account of class room situations, how to deal with everyday problems, which crop up during an art activity session. It is a must-read for not just teachers but other people involved with children's education, and especially those who plan our education system. This is probably the only book of its kind which is set in an Indian context with ordinary class room situations given as examples. All other books on art education I have seen, deal only with western patterns which is so vastly different from ours and their theories often confuse the art educator.

Devi Prasad, who has worked with a great master like Nandalal Bose, and has

had the rich experience of being a part of Tagore's and Mahatma Gandhi's world, speaks in a voice which will reach out to even the most humble teacher struggling in a small, way side school. A leader in his field, the author has no grand visions to shake the world, instead offers simple, practical solutions to work out a balanced art education programme. The author begins with an important question which every art teacher has to reckon with: "Why Art Education?" In India art has almost no role to play in primary or senior school level education and only public schools have art teachers and regular art classes. Though art is a 'subject' most children take because it means a few extra, easily earned marks for the dreaded Board exams. The author discusses various key questions concerning the need for art education and why it is so vital to a child's all-around development. How art activities, if planned properly, create a sense of awareness about a child's outside world and enables him or her to have a balanced relationship with other human beings. What is very important in today's world is that it creates a sense of wonder about nature. "Among other things, art education inculcates the kind of sensitivity needed to understand and enjoy nature, to be one with it. It should and does make the artist so sensitive that the destruction of a tree or even a flower hurts his or her feelings. It hurts because the artist is able to see and feel the beauty of the flower, which has become a friend; and to see a friend being hurt is painful"

writes Devi Prasad. He explains how a well planned art education programme should begin at an early age and then only can a proper foundation be laid for a child's development, pointing out that it "becomes too late and difficult, if not impossible, to change in later years. Experience of joy and fulfilment during the earliest days, months and years of the individual ensures healthy development during future years too."

Art education in many schools often means that the teacher draws an image on the black board and the children are told to copy it out. If a child shows his own individuality and steps out of line, then he is often punished or given poor marks for his 'wrong' drawing. This unhappy classroom experience is what leads to most children losing any sense of adventure or joy in drawing and painting later on in life. The author stresses that a child's angle should also be taken into account while planning a good educational programme since he/she is the one at the receiving end. He gives a very interesting insight into the workings of a child's mind and shows how his creative thought process, poised at this very crucial stage, can be further enhanced by correct handling by the art teacher. "Although children do not have the language of words to a degree that would make them express much of what they have stored within themselves, they do have a language which allows them to express their experiences and tell stories fairly effectively. The fact is that their experiences and stories are generally made up with visual forms. For instance,

if there is a hill in a story, it will be made up of a symbolic shape of a hill and not in the form of the word hill. They will feel satisfied only if they are able to express something as it exists in their inner experience and emotions."

A few interesting illustrations of child art along with captions by the author which explain the thought process behind each drawing have been given but this part of the book is disappointing since all the illustrations are in black and white. But one cannot complain since NBT has priced the book at a low Rs. 85 which most school libraries can afford. Besides covering a wide range of relevant topics—theoretical as well as practical, concerning child art, interesting quotes from art historians, there is also a chapter with questions and answers which were asked most often during the author's various workshops with teachers and parents. The answers have certainly helped my art session with special needs children and am sure many other teachers too will find it useful in the classroom. Devi Prasad's is a classic work that must be read by all those who are interested in giving their children a sound art education and a joyful, sane and sensitive understanding of life.

Bulbul Sharma is an artist and writer. She has published three collections of short stories and her first novel is Banana Flower Dreams (Penguin, October 1999). She works as an art teacher for disabled children.

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Chitra Narayanan

THE STORY OF WRITING

By Nita Berry. Illustrated by Arvinder
Children's Book Trust, 1998, pp. 136,
Rs. 55.00



A tree bark, a wall, a lift door; even today these tempting surfaces are irresistible to the human hand. The urge to imprint thoughts onto a surface for others to see is in fact a primitive human instinct. Imagine then in ancient times how early humans evolved a system of recording events from rock paintings to script. As the modern graffiti writer reaches for whatever implement comes to hand, toothpick, hairpin, penknife or can of spraypaint; our ancestors reached for stone axes, twigs dipped in vegetable dyes, and any sharp implement. Ingenuity was the only requirement.

The history of writing is the history of translation of thought into visible forms. Nita Berry's *The Story of Writing* is an interesting attempt at this fascinating subject. It was an entry in the non-fiction/information category in the Competition for Writers of Children's Books organized by the Children's Book Trust.

The author has endeavoured to pack in as much information as possible in a manner interesting to children. The chapter on Egyptian hieroglyphs begins on this charming note:

"Pepi, a young schoolboy, shifted his legs uncomfortably as he sat on the floor of his classroom. He stared reluctantly at the page of writing before him. He had to complete the story given by the teacher. Yet Pepi was thinking of other things. He knew the sun shone brightly outside and the birds called. He shook his head impatiently. His work was full of mistakes and he would be whipped for sure! He crumpled up his page and threw it away. Thousands of years later, this page was found along with those of Pepi's classmates in the ruins of ancient Egypt. All began with the same story and were so full of errors that translators still cannot understand many lines! The teacher's corrections were marked in the margins. Yes, Pepi lived long ago in Egypt; he was a schoolboy very much like you; who drew pictures of animals to amuse himself in class. His notebook was a roll of papyrus!"

This is followed by a description of the evolution of Egyptian hieroglyphs on the walls of tombs till its development into ideograms. Later with the availability of better writing materials, the ideograms became simplified and with the introduction of phonetics the

Egyptians changed to the idea of alphabets and two kinds of writing came into use, the Hieratic script, used by priests and the Demotic script, used for day to day business. The author briefly tells the story of the deciphering of the Rosetta Stone when the puzzles of the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs were solved by Champollion in 1821.

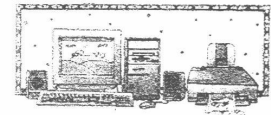
Simultaneously, in Mesopotamia Cuneiform writing existed as a series of wedge-shaped characters with lines and dots impressed on wet clay tablets with a stylus. The Mesopotamians first used about 1200 different pictures representing numbers, names and common objects. Later this picture writing developed into symbols and with phonetics evolved into a semi-alphabetical script with 41 signs. Cuneiform inscriptions were adopted by the Akkadians, Persians, the Elamites, the Hurrians and the Hittites for their languages. However, by the time of Christ it gave way to the Aramaic script. The author then traces the contribution of the Phoenicians from 1800 B.C. to the Aramaic and Greek alphabets. Some traces can still be seen in Hebrew today.

Nita Berry then traces the evolution of the Greek and Roman languages in great detail. This is followed by a detailed history of printing in Europe. The author, however, spends less time on the development of writing in Asia. The history of Chinese and Japanese languages merits only eight pages and the Indus Valley and Brahmi scripts only six pages. Devanagari merits only two paragraphs.

However, the chapter on 'Learning—the Indian Way' almost makes up for this deficiency. The chapter on 'Making of Paper' is fascinating, particularly the history of watermarks. A major portion of the book is devoted to the revolution of printing ending with Desk Top publishing and the wonders of the electronic age.

Nita Berry has accomplished a remarkable feat of covering the history of writing from ancient times till today within 136 pages. There are moments when the reader wonders which age group this book has been written for. Chapters begin for children in the pre-teens but suddenly take on a scholarly turn. Only the generous use of exclamation marks serve as reminder that the audience are children. The monochrome illustrations are precise and utilitarian. No doubt, the aim was to keep the book at the affordable price of Rs. 55.

This book would best be prescribed for recommended reading in schools. As a gift it would please the adult buyer but not necessarily the receiver. Personally I would have given the book greater weightage if the history of writing in India had received the same imaginative treatment as the chapters on early Egypt and Mesopotamia. Children's Book Trust must be given the real credit for producing this unusual book within this price.



Shobhana Bhattacharji

THE CARPENTER'S APPRENTICE AND THE NOSE DOCTOR

Selected and edited by Vijaya Ghosh from stories published in *Target* magazine by Rosalind Wilson

Katha, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 139 & pp. 131, Rs. 49.00 each (paperbacks)

The Carpenter's Apprentice and *The Nose Doctor* are collections of stories, twenty-five in all, that were originally published in *Target*, a glossy children's magazine brought out by the *India Today* people. It used to be India's answer to *Girl's Crystal* and similar magazines from England that were the staple light reading of English-medium convent children in the late 50s and mid-60s. The addictive format of *Target* and its Anglo-Saxon parents was some stories, some comic strips, a little poetry, few puzzles, and a very light sprinkling of useful information, but nothing

to seriously disturb its readers' faith that the world was comfortable and secure. I gather that after Rosalind Wilson passed away, *Target* underwent a radical change. The born again *Target* had its eye on the MTV generation. Like any radical change, this caused a division in the (smallish) ranks. Some supported the change. Others recalled *Target's* golden age when Rosalind Wilson was editor. Many of the latter were those who had written for *Target*, some of them receiving their first exposure, I think, and all certainly achieving a fair degree of fame.

In a nice commemorative gesture, not just toward Ms Wilson but also toward the genuinely good calibre of stories she published, Katha has brought out these two books in its Rosalind Wilson series. It is interesting to once again follow Dee Kay and Faster Fenay, boy detectives, as they use their wits to catch conmen and thieves, and to catch up with worried or jealous school children and their wise friends. The protagonists of these stories are always children of about thirteen, they are mostly boys although there is an occasional

anthropomorphic animal (Paro Anand, 'Bhabloo!'). Their dreams, fears, and lives are the meat of the stories. A boy's parents are divorced and he thinks he may be laughed at (Swapna Dutta, 'The Journey'); another is uncertain if his part in building the Taj Mahal is very important (Monisha Mukundan, 'The Carpenter's Apprentice'); a shepherd is taken on a tour of a black hole (Manu Mahadevan, 'Black Hole'). The worst story is pointlessly wordy and a travesty of poetic prose as it delivers its ecological message, but on the whole these are not preachy stories.

The most fun is to read a decade and more of stories all together and discover that some outstrip the rest because of their delightful fantasy, close observation, and tremendous detail. Satyajit Ray's 'The Little World of Sadanand' is an excellent example. So is M.R. Kapoor's 'The Nose Doctor.' Short sentences, stripped of clichés, packed with

action, bursting with wry amusement, especially evident in Margaret Bhaty's 'The Genie of the Yantra', add to one's delight.

Illustrations by Tapas Guha, Rustam Vania, Suddhasattava Basu, and Mala Marwah dot the books. *The Nose Doctor* even has little motifs at the top corner of each page. The legend at the bottom of the colour covers, designed by Geetha Dharmarajan and illustrated by Jagadish Aich Roy, seems to owe a debt to Enid Blyton's Noddy books, a little compliment to that prolific creator of children's books. (She's not one of my favourites, but her Magic Faraway Tree series must have ensured her a seat in some special paradise for those who do at least one good deed in their lives). The best of illustrations is the snoring nurse at the bottom of the page of contents in *The Carpenter's Apprentice*. This unacknowledged and unsigned picture is probably by Sujata Singh who has il-



illustrated 'The Little World of Sadanand' in which there is a sleeping nurse. Potted biographies of the writers with their photographs is a mode of illustration not included often enough in children's books. As is right and proper for books that remember her, Rosalind Wilson has a bigger write-up than the others although the period she edited

Target for is not mentioned.

A greater pity is that there is nothing about *Target* itself. Collections like the Rosalind Wilson Series usually appear when a writer or journal has passed out of currency but continues to have a small yet devoted band of readers. One may even call them cultists. But surely, the publishers hope to expand that read-

ership. These books are quality products—in fact, probably because they are quality products—children will read every word in them, contents, publication details, biodata, and the price. And children, unless they have changed into some other species in the last decade or so, do not like to have names of things (*Target*, in this case) thrown at them with-

out being instantly explained. It makes them feel stupid. They assume that lots of people must know what the names mean and that is why they have not been explained.

But that is a small matter. At Rs. 49 each, these nicely bound books will make pleasant additions to a very young middle-class teenager's library.

Kasturi Kanthian

ORDINARY MR. PAI: TWO URBAN FAIRY TALES

By Kalpana Swaminathan

Tulika Publishers, Chennai, pp. 43, Rs. 70.00

Writing for children has never been an easy task. While the *Panchatantra* and *Aesop's Fables* entertained even as they taught a moral, the fairy tales—Grimm's or Andersen's took the children on a flight of fantasy, and plunged them deep into adventures, where young heroic men sought opportunities to pit themselves against wizards, ogres, or dragons to win not just fame and fortune but also the damsel. We also had lovely young women who had to set their wits against wicked stepmothers, witches or nasty fairies. Ostensibly, they were stories of Good against Evil, where Virtue was rewarded and Vice was punished. I still remember reading out Cinderella to my precocious daughter. As the story came to its end, my large, wellbuilt, tomboy of a daughter asked me a little plaintively, "But Amma, I have large ungainly feet like the poor stepsisters—so what happens to me? Don't I get my Prince Charming?" Slowly and surely I began to discern biases and prejudices in the tales—why is small and fragile always beautiful? Why should a stepmother be wicked? Why should we believe that wickedness would reveal itself in all its ugliness—this left us inadequately prepared when confronted with a beautiful but nasty individual. We looked at big gentle hunchbacks or one-eyed people with fear and suspicion instead of gentle compassion and sympathy. We found it agitating when frogs never turned into handsome princes, or beasts remained beasts even after the kind ministrations and patient handling by beautiful young women. We were disappointed when the knight in shining armour did not turn up on his white steed at the right times in our gullible lives.

It therefore became imperative for adults to decipher and decode the messages they received from these fairy tales and to make sure that they did not rein-



force beliefs that needed to be rejected or re-examined. *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* and *Feminist Fables* are very interesting and exciting but young children would get a little bewildered and confused by the ideas and attitudes presented therein. In fact they make better reading for adults than children. So when Kalpana Swaminathan's *Ordinary Mr. Pai* was sent to me, I was more than eager to read it—for two reasons. One was to see how she treated this very important genre and the other was that I had earlier reviewed her *Cryptic Death* and had found her a very promising writer.

Of the two urban fairy tales, 'Ordinary Mr. Pai' as the title suggests, celebrates very quietly the idea of ordinariness. Basically, with almost uncanny force, the fairy tale is meant to elicit dramatic and universal human reactions. They are meant to image a kind of reality to which readers give perennial response. We decode the archetypal patterns that vibrate deep within the tale that starts a deep, sympathetic response in the reader. 'Ordinary Mr. Pai' immediately touches a chord in the child of Bombay—the humdrum, drab routine life is encased within the sense of urgency and circular motion. The clock might stand still but the child in the city knows that time moves inexorably on. They understand very well when they are told that the stove had a temper for they have seen their equipment spew smoke and spit fire, while papers and files have a habit of simply getting lost.

Mr. Pai is like any ordinary person, he goes to office, struggles to make both ends meet and any little time he has, he shares his lonely moments with his mynah—he tells the mynah stories of myth and magic—he also dreams of slaying the dragon, winning the damsel and ruling over "half a kingdom happily ever after" while he carries on with the dull

monotony of everyday life, even though each day seems to be coloured differently. White Monday foregrounds not an inevitable cosmic mystery but rather a blunting of the dull, insipid repetitive reality. The Yellow of Tuesday reinforces the ageing, crumbling and the sickeningly slow motion of Old Father Time. Olive Green Wednesday becomes exhausting in its military aggressiveness and pushy assertions of routine-ness. Sky Blue Thursday emphasize the security of the unchanging and the continuity of the familiar which becomes easy to handle. The Bright Pink of Friday is exciting as it is laced with the clear hopeful Green of Saturday and culminates in the magical, dynamic Red of Sunday. As life moves on its boring groove—the yesterdays merging into the tomorrows as they erase themselves into the todays, Mr. Pai is shocked by one mean Green Wednesday. Just about everything goes wrong in the morning (I'm sure all of us remember with a shudder the day when the alarm does not go off in the morning) but he bravely surmounts every single problem. Then he encounters the talking crow with the broken wing. His gentleness and kind concern is met with a sullen and grumpy retort ("like an aunt who had done much to darken the days of eight-year old Mr. Pai"). Finally, the crow concedes that Mr. Pai's good deed would be compensated by one wish to be made at the end of the day.

This Wednesday then goes on to become an extraordinary day—not only does he manage to catch the 8:30 a.m. train, he is also given a seat and his fellow passengers seem to be showering him with papers instead of taking his away. In the office, the clock is at five to nine, the boss commends Mr. Pai's work and even announces a reward for his efficiency and also instead of the usual bun, he gets a wedge of cake. But simple Mr. Pai does not revel in the good fortune, he does not know what to do with the papers, he cannot bring himself to sign in early (in fact he signs as usual in red in the late register), he cannot comprehend what his reward entails and it is Miss Dinshaw and not Mr. Pai who

gets to eat the cake. His surprises don't end here—on reaching home he is inundated with biscuits, his ordinary mynah is replaced by an exotic and gorgeous Bird of Paradise and just as Mr. Pai is revelling in the fact that he would be getting roast potatoes for dinner instead of the usual hated brinjals, he is interrupted by the entry of the Silken Princess and a dragon. The dragon is not a fire-breathing monster but a tearful and hungry one. Mr. Pai does not have to fight the dragon (in fact he is more worried about the flood the dragon's tears are causing in his room). The dragon is overjoyed with the vanilla biscuits, he turns into a Prince and he leaves with the Princess soon, to rule over his half a kingdom. Poor Mr. Pai is left with burnt potatoes and the arrogant Bird of Paradise. He wishes for his familiar and drab mynah back again and poof!—that is his wish at the end of this extraordinary day—to get back to his early, easy, familiar life—the safety of his usual routine.

What then could the moral be? That one can be content and happy in one's ordinary environment? That happiness comes from within—no extraneous frivolities can add to it? Whatever the moral—any child who reads this story would have a sigh of relief for the ordinary ending—the ordinariness spells safety and security for most children. It is a release from the uncertainty of the dramatic happenings and their quality of excitement. Novelty can be scary. In fact there is a greater happiness in the security that repetitiveness brings, the continuity that habit gives, the lulling sense that reassures in its rhythmic warmth.

This paean to ordinariness is close to the heart of urban kids who go through the rigid regimen of routines in their young lives—a life blurred in the rush of being woken up in the morning, going systematically through with the morning's ablutions, gobbling a sandwich, maybe washing it down with a glass of milk, rushing to catch the school bus, classes, the bus ride back home, then tuitions, music/dance/computer classes, homework, a drowsy dinner, some TV and an exhausted sleep—and it is another bleary-eyed morning again. These children would surely identify with Mr. Pai.

The second fairy tale 'Bangles for

Bansode' has more of the fantasy, fairy tale element. Bansode is the Scrooge-like landlord, in whom the milk of human kindness has dried up as evidenced by his bent posture and the fact that something hard and heavy was growing inside him, which like a bar of iron pressed down on his tummy. His only joy lay in tormenting his tenants, extorting money from them in return for filthy surroundings, damp walls, leaking roofs, and dry taps. He charged them for repairs that were never done. Then arrives the new tenant, alone—a girl in a wheelchair armed with a typewriter (one wonders whether she is a journalist wielding the power of the written word). Defaulting on the rent the young girl is forced to give up all her personal belongings and when Bansode insists on something more, the girl says that she has nothing left except her dreams. Bansode demands that she part with her dreams and he finds colourful bangles on his hands. He is plagued by the jeers of some people around him. Kind Hutoxi then advises him to pay young Megha to get rid of the bangles. He finally realizes that the only payment here is not money but to show concern for his fellowmen. He has to repair the stairs, the roof, and the bathrooms—he has to spread some happiness to the people living in his house. As he unbends and uncurls from his selfish posture, and reaches out both physically and

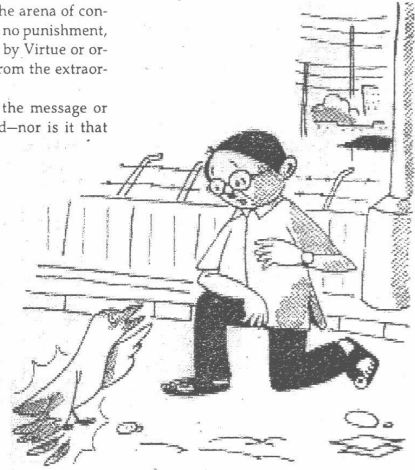
metaphorically, he feels the heaviness receding, he feels happy and warm. His heart now melts when he sees the misery and deprivation around him. Bansode is now so involved in the predicament of his tenants and their children that he does not even realize when the bangles fall off one by one and a rainbow is seen in the sky. Megha, we understand now, is the nurturing and nourishing rain-bearing cloud, daughter of the South West Monsoon. The story is both Dickensian and Chekovian in its comic, satiric mode.

Both these stories cherish and explore subtle possibilities of the average and the unremarkable. If Mr. Pai is ordinary, then Megha is physically confined to a wheelchair (one often tends to believe that greater power lies in mobility and dynamism and Megha proves the opposite). The stories are essentially urban—life in the fast-paced city, the chawl-like tenements, the sense of isolation even in a crowd,—it is a triumphant expose of the harried middle and lower middle class life in a metropolis, authentically and convincingly portrayed without any hysterics, melodrama, idealisation or glorification. True to urban living we are confronted with a multi-dimensional space and time where the ideas and attitudes are drawn from many centres of culture. It brings to life the paradigm of the alienated man, the melancholy isolation of human beings. Normally, in a

fairy tale, the hero or the princess go out into the world, they seek adventures. Here, there is no Superman or hero, we have simple people like us, maybe physically, or intellectually, or financially challenged—characters who are human only by virtue of their flawed nature. Both the stories affirm the joy and value of the simply human. Also both the pursuer, (the dragon or the Silken Princess) or the deliverer (Megha) all come into the arena of conflict or struggle. There is no punishment, even if Vice is replaced by Virtue or ordinariness is restored from the extraordinary.

In both the stories, the message or moral is not articulated—nor is it that only a single person is involved. The idea floats above, somewhere in the narration, the events and the fantasies. There is no philosophical complexity or psychoanalytical exploration. What engages our attention is the richness of texture that is highlighted entirely by understatement and implication. Here then are fairy tales not set in the past (there is no "Once upon a time") but rather

in the here and now. They do not deal with Kings and Queens but ordinary people like you and me. The focus is on the average, the centre is everywhere and everyone. The events are not spectacular but are startlingly real and achingly familiar. Three cheers for Kaplana Swaminathan—she has fulfilled her earlier promise in good measure. Kudos to her for not just meeting but excelling our expectations of her.



Swapna Dutta

22 SHORT STORIES (GOLDEN SET)

Edited by Bhavana Nair. Illustrated by Tapas Guha

Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 150, Rs 55.00

The stories in this collection consist of entries in one of the competitions for Writers of Children's Books organized regularly by the Children's Book Trust. A mixed bagful, they cover a wide range of subjects such as humour in everyday life, varied aspects of friendship, teacher-student relationships, family encounters, social problems as well as fantasy with varying degrees of competence and finesse. A few among these are anecdotes rather than stories with morals laid down with a trowel. But generally speaking, the stories are well-written and likely to delight young readers, affording them several hours of happy reading.

The first author to grab my atten-

tion instantly was Tithi Savora—the only author who has more than one story in this collection. Tithi's 'The Magic Carpet' is a charming and sensitively told fantasy about a carpet that has managed to carry with it the dream of its little weaver Aziz. As the dream unfolds, Divya and Vicky, whose parents have bought the carpet, get to know about Aziz and the other little boys engaged illegally in the carpet factory and finally succeed in rescuing the lot from child labour. Tithi's second story 'A Different Diwali' also centres round child labour. This one is about Chinama's little girl who works in a cracker factory and gets her hands badly burnt just before Diwali. Chinama who works as a maid has no money to pay for the expensive operation necessary. So the children of the neighbourhood led by Alok decide to forego fireworks this time and give the money for the operation instead. That is how they have a different but a far more meaningful Diwali. The third story by Tithi 'Odd One In' is about snobbish Rina and Malti, a country bumpkin with brains

and a heart of gold and how the barrier between the two is broken at last.

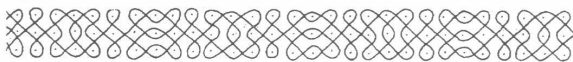
Arati Luthra Pinto's 'Land of the Lost' and Sonali Bhatia's 'Upside Down Magic' are two more delightful fantasies. So is Girija Rani Asthana's spook story 'The Runaway Engine'. There are several stories about grandfathers, grandmothers, pets and sibling problems such as 'Grandad's Happy Hour', 'Aji's temporary Amnesia', 'His highness' and 'The Shawl' by Neela Subramaniam, Madhavi Mahadevan, Homagni Choudhuri and Lata Kaku respectively. Agila Girija Kumar's 'Twin trouble' is an unusual story about twins dwelling not on the fun aspect of looking identical but on what happens when one twin is brighter, sharper and more intelligent than the other and the parents focus all their love and attention on the weaker one, taking the brighter one for granted.

There are several interesting stories about friendship, school and the teacher-student relationship and student rivalry. These include Devika Rangachari's hilarious 'Our Next Door Neighbour', Dipavali Deproy's 'A Game of Tennis' and Vandana Kumari Jena's 'Battle of the Brains!' The first is a delightful account of how

the maths teacher who turns out to be Ravi's unexpected neighbour becomes a friend. In the second story Ranesh comes to an unusual understanding with the hated 'Sir H'. Jena's story is about brainy Ravish who meets his match in Varun and how rivalry and resentment turns to a sporting challenge for both boys. Another story that deserves special mention is Cheryl Rao's 'One Step at a Time'—a poignant account of Nileshe confined to his wheelchair and Rohan who stands by him as he undergoes a long period of treatment and finally takes his first step.

Among the others, Deepa Agarwal's 'My Father's Wife' deals with the agonies of a young motherless girl whose father is about to take a second wife. Sarojini Chopra's 'The House That Walked' is the fascinating story of Thakur Ram Hari Singh who loses his ancestral haveli because all his life he had been too busy elsewhere to come and visit it while it was being robbed brick by brick.

As always, Tapas Guha's illustrations are charming and bring the stories alive. What is particularly nice is the affordable price of the book and its slick, well-produced look. A really good buy!



Rohini Purang

MYSTERY OF THE ANCIENT PLATTER

By Dipavali Debroy

Minerva Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 54,
Rs. 70.00

A good children's book is primarily a good piece of writing and production. Though aimed at a child, it should touch an adult too—evoking some delight and/or interest. *The Mystery of the Ancient Platter* by Dipavali Debroy is fairly well produced, good cover, paper and printing. The writing and editing, however, could do with improvement.

The idea of taking an incident from another time and/or place and linking it to the present is full of interesting possibilities. Here an incident in the *Mahabharat* is referred to. "O lord and master of food, bless me with food." Bright as gold the Sun God appeared before Yudhishthira in person. "Take this brass platter. It will never be empty until Draupadi herself has eaten from it.

Her kitchen will always be fully stocked." It is this ancient platter which is now discovered by an impoverished old woman, and the trouble starts.

The book begins with a family going on a vacation. After an accident the children get separated from their parents. The children find their way to the old woman's hut. Here they discover the magic platter. Soon they meet the unsavory characters who are after the platter.

The author has shown different modern-day reactions to the existence and possible uses of this magic platter rather well. She has included the rationalist's reaction, Uncle Vikas's urge for instant fame and Annapoorna-ji's desire to live up to her name.

Many Hindi words are used, thali, khichri etc. Their meanings are given in brackets just after the word. They should have been given as footnotes on the relevant page. It would have been less jarring than the brackets and easier to refer to than the glossary at the end. A mention of the target age group on the cover and a few drawings would have also been welcome.

In a story, things happen or are said to help the plot along. These should always seem plausible. Here, however,

some events and conversations seem unnatural and inconsistent. For example, the children's reaction to the possible death of their parents has been glossed over too lightly. "It's our fault," moaned Pooja. "It is all our fault." They were silent for a while and then Abhi said what Pooja had been about to say herself, "I am hungry." They were hungry and lost and it was all their fault. And that is all! Since this reaction takes place on the third page of the story, one feels uncomfortable right from the beginning.

Many words and phrases seem forced, unnecessary or just wrongly chosen. For e.g., in the very first line: "Don't jostle each other at the back," said Daddy. The word 'jostle' is hardly one which would be naturally used here. Again, words like a jaded cut, lad, scoot off etc. seem a little inappropriate.

The text is crowded with clichés—bodies bathed in sweat, impose additional pressures, give me a break, did not tarry, delight won the day etc. A more original use of language would have made the book more immediate, spontaneous and lively.

Towards the end of the book one feels stuck in an action-packed Hindi movie—the main culprit rushing to catch a plane,

the accomplice anxious for his payment, the briefcase, the lunge for the revolver, the chase through the deserted office building, the waiting auto, the chase on the road, the auto-driver being shot at, the children being captured and the thieves escaping with the thali.

This is supposed to be a thriller according to the text on the backcover. A thriller is fast-paced (which this book is), thrilling (which it hardly is) and includes violence. However, the violence here is excessive, almost in bad taste—the cold-blooded killing of the old woman, how Pooja is given water to drink, how the children are shot at and the way the 'baddies' burn up at the end. This last scene, especially, seems a bit too gruesome. One wonders if so much violence is really required or desirable.

The thali originated from the Sun God and is finally destroyed through his intervention—that is definitely a neat idea. At the end everyone realizes that their motives had not been selfless enough—which is why the thali did not stay with them.

It is a fast but bumpy ride from cover to cover—full of sudden, if sometimes jerky events. One is left with the feeling that a good idea did not get the working-out it deserved.

Deepa Agarwal

SUMMER JOB

By Maya Chandrasekaran. Illustrated by Victor

Scholastic India, 1998, pp. 64, Rs. 50.00

At last—a book for teenagers, by (I presume) a teenager, about genuine teenage experience. Books for young adults have been almost non-existent among the limited number of original children's books that are published in our country and one sincerely hopes that more will be brought out for this sadly neglected section of readers.

Summer Job is just that—an account of the experiences of three teenagers, Nina, Shaila and Anand, who take up a summer job at *Roshni*, a magazine for teenagers. In the process they learn a lot about how a magazine is put together and ultimately even manage to teach their elders a thing or two when they help to revamp the magazine through their fresh and original ideas and make it more successful. More importantly, it explores an issue that many youngsters are faced with today, the transition between school and college and work, acquiring experience and expertise in what could be their future career,

through the medium of a summer job.

The book plunges right away into a typical teenage predicament. Any teenager could empathise with Nina in the opening sentence of the book—"Nina stood in front of her mirror, and wished once more that she hadn't decided to cut her hair short..." The problem of what to wear on her first day of work is so much a part of the uncertainties of growing up and entering the adult world—as she is about to—eventually in jeans, T-shirt and high heels, carrying her mother's old handbag! Of course, Nina quickly learns that the high heels won't do, when you're expected to run around all the time. But this is just one of those touches that make this book an authentic account of teenage experience. At the same time, *Summer Job* is not so much about the agonies and ecstasies of growing up. It focuses more on the fun element of being a novice in the professional world and learning the ropes through trial and error, being full of comic situations and providing plenty of laughs.

Nina and Shaila as assertive young girls, who hold their own, particularly against the obnoxious Mrs. Patil, come across as realistic portrayals of contemporary urban teenagers. Anand, one of the few male characters in the book, is sportingly co-operative while working in a magazine for girls and provides worthwhile inputs too. In keeping per-

haps with Indian values, no attempt is made to introduce any note of sexual tension. The adults too are treated kindly, as understanding mentors (apart from Mrs. Patil, who makes a very brief appearance). No question of the generation gap here, perhaps because the women working in the magazine are fairly young themselves. At the end the girls are left with the satisfying feeling that all the hectic running about has been well worth it and they would like to come back and work at *Roshni* again.

The book works well as a day to day account of a particular kind of experience. Here one comes to the issue of what parameters should be applied while reviewing a book written by a talented youngster, particularly as more and more books of this kind are being published. Should one assess such a book by the same standards one would apply to an adult writer? Maya herself has had four books published, we are told. And not too long ago I was requested to write a preface to what was an extremely well written and almost perfectly plotted thriller by a thirteen-year old boy. Maya seems to possess a natural talent for writing—her language is easy and flowing, the conversations natural and the book is an extremely pleasant read.

However, it is hard to tell if the publisher specified the word length, but one gets the feeling if certain situations had

been plumbed in greater depth and some more introspection and conflict had been introduced it would have worked better as a story of initiation. At the same time if it has been conceived as what it is, a light-hearted read for teenagers, it works perfectly well.

The cover design is very attractive and the illustrations by Victor are quite delightful, adding immensely to the fun element. I particularly liked the one on page 35. The price for a book of this length is slightly steep but no doubt if Scholastic offer it to school children at a discount it'll work out all right.

Attention Subscribers

The Jan./Feb. 2000 issue of *The Book Review* is being published as a special bumper issue in time for the New Delhi World Book Fair. Please check that your subscription for the years 1999 (Rs. 250.00 & Rs. 300.00) and 2000 (Rs. 300.00 Individuals and Rs. 400.00 Institutions) has been paid to ensure that your copy of the special issue is mailed to you.

Shohini Ghosh

ANDAMAN'S BOY

By Zai Whittaker. Illustrated by Ashok Rajgopalan
Line Drawings by Indraneil Das
Tulika, 1998, pp. 148. Rs. 100.00



Ten-year old Arif has been living with his Chacha and Chachi since his parents died. Mercenary and abusive, Chacha and Chachi are more interested in jangling their hands on the money that the boy will inherit on turning eighteen. Virtually imprisoned by the couple, Arif plans to escape. One night, he runs away and with the help of a warm and friendly family takes a train down to Chennai. The escape is not easy. Chacha and Chachi inform the police and post large advertisements announcing a handsome reward for anyone who is able to locate the boy. Arif's journey becomes even more difficult as he learns to dodge the police and curious members of the public who are eager to nab the runaway child. Clever and agile, Arif outwits his potential captors and manages to smuggle himself onto a ship headed for the Andamans. Once there, Arif encounters various people and situations and has finally to escape even further as the police hunt begins to catch up with him. With the help of a fisherman from Myanmar, Arif shores up on an island where he begins to live in splendid isolation. One day, he is discovered by a Jarawa boy and eventually adopted by the tribe. The story climaxes with Arif 'saving' the Jarawas from exploitative officers of the Government of India who attempt to 'civilize' the Jarawas through various coercive, materialistic and unethical means.

There is little doubt that Zai Whittaker is one of our best story writers for children. She has an inventive way with words and graphic powers of description. However despite Whittaker's obvious skills as a writer *Andaman's Boy* fails to tell a gripping tale. While Arif's adventurous journey is rich with racy and vivid descriptions, a certain predictability casts its shadow over the story. For this, the Foreword may be entirely to blame. It is clear from the Foreword that Whittaker's story is driven by her perfectly legitimate scepticism about top-down developmentalist attempts to 'civilize' so-called uncivilized cultures. Whittaker rightly challenges normative understandings of 'civilization'; and cautions against unthinking and disastrous

interventions in the lives of peoples and cultures.

Introducing the native tribes of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, Whittaker writes, "They are all hunter-gatherers. Unlike us they have a deep knowledge of their environment, and they use it wisely and well. Their food, clothes, medicines, ornaments, toys and objects come from plants and animals around them. Unlike us they are careful not to overuse resources or harm the environment. The idea of global warming, deforestation and hunting animals for pleasure would give the Jarawa a heart attack. These are tricks which only "we" civilized people get up to... [We] brand them "junglees" and feel they are inferior to us. Are they? To me, it seems they are infinitely superior." This inaugural piece of didacticism takes the pleasure of discovery away by laying the theses thick on the table! I would presume that it is more fun to discover these ideas through an engagement with the story than by having them baldly stated even before the story has begun.

The fun of reading children's literature as an adult has also to do with being able to subject the work under scrutiny in a way that few children would actually care to. I remember being horrified to learn that all the comics that I read avidly as a child—like Phantom, Mandrake, Tarzan and even Tintin—had run into trouble for their racist depiction of blacks and other ethnic groups. As an adult I realize the truth of these allegations but the realization has not been able to diminish the pleasure that I continue to derive from these works. Similarly, my feminist politics has failed to dampen my enthusiasm for Satyajit Ray's Pheluda detective stories despite their complete and utter lack of even quasi-significant women characters. The pleasures of reading and identification with characters are never proscribed strictly by physical and material identities. It is shaped by a complex process of dialogue and negotiation involving both our conscious and subconscious selves. Therefore, while political 'correctness' is a desirable quality, it does not guarantee the most riveting of narratives. In short, politics must mesh skillfully with the craft of powerful storytelling.

Moreover, how correct is Whittaker's correctness? In the Foreword, Whittaker writes: "I looked deep into that green jungle, trying to imagine the Jarawa going about their business.... I tried to send them telepathic messages: stay away, don't become like us. Survive." The story of Arif's adventure concludes as he successfully staves off 'outsiders' from invading and colonizing the Jarawas. Arif had heard about the Onge tribe of Little Andaman and the disas-

trous story of their becoming 'civilized': "they began wearing clothes, using modern medicines...and dying. They had no immunity to the germs of the outside world and died like flies." While forced developmentalist measures are to be strictly condemned, we must ask whether or not it is equally problematic to romanticize the tribal 'other' and demonize those very privileges that have made our lives comfortable?

Moreover, a thin line demarcates loving romanticism from say, racist depictions. There is a situation in the story where Arif attempts to explain the lure of money to the Jarawas. "Money", he says, "is something for which most people will do anything." To this, his Jarawa friend asks, "It tastes so good?" Arif wonders how he could possibly "explain the money madness to people who had never felt its power?" Arif's predicament reminded me of an incident in *TinTin and The Red Sea Sharks* by Herge. TinTin and his friend Captain Haddock save a shipload of Black Muslims who are headed towards Mecca where they are to be sold as slaves. Captain Haddock stands on the deck and explains the intricacies of the conspiracy to the pilgrims. Having heard the entire story, the Black pilgrims keep repeating "Me no want to be slave, Me good Muslim want to go to Mecca." Over two full pages and several intricate illustrations, Captain Haddock shouts, "Billions of blue blistering barnacles, don't you realize, you will be made into slaves in Mecca?" The unfazed pilgrims continue blandly, "Me good Muslim want to go to Mecca". The representation of the Jarawa in *Andaman's Boy* is little different from Herge's problematic—albeit funny—representation of the Black Muslims.

Were we to shift to this preservationist discourse onto a larger canvas—contemporary India, for instance—the allegory would be terrifying. The Hindutva obsession with the preservation of true 'Indian Culture and Tradition' to the exclusion of all things 'foreign' presents a nightmarish spectre for those who value dialogue, exchange, plurality and diversity. Whittaker's prescription for preserving 'native cultures' comes precariously close to the Swadeshi Jagran Manch's exclusion and marginality are dangerous substitutes for colonization just as coercive intervention and consensual exchange are vastly different processes.

While reading the story of Arif, I could not help but think of another Jarawa ten year old who escaped Whittaker's narrative. A girl, who like Arif, is unhappy with her lot in the Jarawa island. She looks at the horizon and wonders what lies beyond. One day she plans to escape and embark on a voyage of discovery. Now, there lies another story.

Vijaya Ghose

WHO WILL BE NINGTHOU? A STORY FROM MANIPUR

By Indira Mukherjee. Illustrated by A.V. Ilango

Tulika, Chennai, 1999, Rs. 120.00

For several years now, I've had a bee in my bonnet that has simply not been handled. The bee worried me in more ways than one and sporadically, I would say to myself, "This week, I must get down to researching and writing up the folk tale scenario." But as with many resolutions, it kept getting postponed and eventually, like all resolutions, it was promptly forgotten. That is, till I read Indira Mukherjee's lovely story.

So what was it that bothered me? Readers may not agree with me but I had felt for long that our folk tales (even the much-touted *Panchatantra*) and fairy tales were extremely cruel and gender insensitive. And these stories were meant for the very young, the 3-year-olds to 6+. An age when the mind is like a blotting paper and the emotions are easily stirred.

In these tales, very often the punishment meted out was totally disproportionate to the crime. I remember one about an elephant that inadvertently stamps on an ant and the entire animal kingdom denounces the elephant even though he apologized profusely. He ends up with the humming bird gouging out his eyes, the bee buzzing endlessly in his ears and other animals perpetrating even more horrendous acts on the hapless elephant.

Where then are your values? Here is the show of compassion, forgiveness, caring, loving, giving? I only picked out this story because of its extreme cruelty but the others are no less so. And



when it comes to stereotypes, no one can beat our folk tales.

That is why *Who will be Ningthou* makes such a refreshing change.

A folk tale from Manipur, the story is about a just and kind ruler and his equally kind wife, the Ningthou and the Leima of Kangleipak. They had their philosophy (or agenda as present-day politicians would say) which was "Our meeyam (people) should be happy. There should be peace in the land of Kangleipak."

The story goes on to tell us that the "people were not the only ones who loved their Ningthou and Leima. The birds and animals loved them too."

The only drawback or the only unhappiness the royal couple felt was their lack of children. But the entire populace of the kingdom prayed for a son and their prayers were granted when the King and Queen were blessed with a wonderful son or a mochanipa. Good fortune comes in threes and the Ningthou and Leima were blessed with two more sons in the following years. The boys were called Sanajaoba, Sanayaima and Sanatomba.

Many years later, twelve to be exact, the Leima gave birth to a beautiful daughter and they named her Sanatombi.

She was a gentle, loving little child, a friend of the birds and animals.

After many years, the King wanted to hand over the throne to one of his sons. The people were sad that their Ningthou felt he had to pass on the mantle of the ruler but they knew it had to be done one day.

But whom do they choose?

It was decided that there should be a competition to decide who was most suited.

When the boys were told about it, they were willing to show their prowess. Sanajaoba saw in the distance a huge khongnang or tree that must have been hundreds of years old. It had a majestic trunk and its crown of branches and leaves was home to lots of birds, animals and insects.

The Prince kicked his horse and as it galloped towards the tree, he flung his spear at the tree. Straight through the heart the spear went and split the tree. The boy rode right through the tree!

Sanayaima also looked to the tree for his test. He rode his horse faster and faster and when he was some distance away, he coaxed his horse into jumping over the tree. Higher, higher, till he cleared it and came sailing down to earth. The people cried, "Oh what com-

mand! What courage!"

Finally, the youngest Prince, Sanatomba, completed the work his brothers started. He simply yanked the huge tree from the ground, pulling up the roots that must have reached into the deep dark recesses of the earth. . . . Then he carried the tree to his mother and father and laid it at their feet.

While the people were debating who the next King should be, the Ningthou was looking at his youngest child, Sanatombi, who was all of five years then. "She looked sad and lonely. She stared at the khongnang which lay dead by the throne. Birds flapped worriedly around, searching for their home in the tree. Sanatombi walked up to the khongnang and whispered, "The khongnang is dead. It was hurt by the spear and now it is dead."

The Ningthou and Leima were answered. The Leima said, "A Ningthou is one who doesn't hurt anybody in the kingdom."

And they decreed that Sanatombi would be the future Leima of the kingdom.

All in all, a simple story but in this day of female foeticide and infanticide, it is a story that should be told in every school. It should be made into a lovely

short film. Without condescension and cynicism the story makes a point. True values of kindness, compassion, empathy come from within and these need to be nurtured. And, most importantly, it is gender-sensitive.

Indira Mukherjee's narration is simple and direct. There is no fluffiness and no sense of indoctrination. She says, as does Sanatombi, Live and let live.

Illustrations by A.V. Ilango add to the style of narration. Stark and simple lines and the judicious use of two colours reinforces the message of the story.

Tulika has been bringing out a series of cross-cultural and cross-lingual stories in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi and English, sourced from rich oral traditions and folklore of India. We also get a glimpse into various regional languages when words of the original languages have been used to make the story more realistic. You can therefore access the Hindi, Kannada or Tamil version of this story.

All in all, a lovely book for 4-7 year-olds. The only complaint is the price which at Rs. 125 seems out of reach for many people. Perhaps a soft cover, cheaper edition needs to be brought out for it to reach many more people. A not-to-be-missed book.

G.J.V. Prasad

TELLING TALES FROM ASIA

By Cathy Spagnoli

PRIMA'S DAY

By Cathy Spagnoli

MALU BHALU

By Kamala Bhasin. Illustrated by Bindu Thapar

Tulika, Chennai, 1999, pp. 79, 36 & 28, Rs. 85.00, Rs. 92.00 & Rs. 80.00

Has telling tales gone out of fashion? I guess it depends on the family and its material circumstances but I myself find it difficult to imagine a family where children are not brought up on tales. Perhaps people no longer have the inclination for retelling the great Indian epics or Puranas because our lives have changed so much that not many people may want to endorse some of the ideological stances innate to them. Retelling them, changing or interrogating their ideologies is an option that may seem frivolous or even blasphemous to many. So a particular kind of tale may not be told but all anecdotes told to entertain as well as instil a certain view of life, codes to

live by, even if they are purportedly about family members and friends qualify as tales. These tales construct our families. We live in and live by the tales we tell.

Cathy Spagnoli begins her book, *Telling Tales from Asia*, with a section on the telling of tales and the introduction begins at the beginning with attempting to answer the question "Why Tell?" which appropriately is its heading. She identifies many aims but the first she mentions is cross-cultural understanding. She says that stories make great tools for teaching and can be used to enhance the understanding of many subjects like history and mathematics. Social values can be reinforced through stories and children can be made to exercise and strengthen their imagination, visualisation, and concentration. While she too believes that we tell tales all the time, she is interested in addressing the classroom situation, in emphasising and enhancing the pedagogical impact of storytelling. This allows the telling of tales (and listening to them) to come out into the open and become not only interesting but also a socially important activity.

In the first half of the book Spagnoli addresses the tellers and gives us an introduction to the range of tools for story telling, the sources for different kinds of stories, ways of telling tales, props that could contribute to the telling, practice and actual performance, and ways to extend the telling through fol-

low-up exercises. This is an extremely interesting section and she draws lessons and examples from many storytelling traditions in Asia as well as many individual storytellers. She points our attention to our own individual resources—our memory, observation, imagination, visualisation, breathing voice modulation, and gestures. She brings in examples to show the usefulness and impact of vivid images repetition and music. She lists the following characteristics of tellable tales—limited and clearly drawn characters, a plot that moves steadily on, pleasing language and possibilities for sound effects or music, vivid images, and elements of suspense, humour, drama, surprise or pathos.

The first source she names for stories is the family. She lists about forty-five possible themes and settings for family stories! Other sources are history, folk tales, legends, epics, myths, and long romances. She classifies the folk material into different types of stories including stories about tricksters like Birbal and Tenali Rama, Judge Rabbit and A-Chey of Cambodia, Sieng Mieng of Laos, Kanchil of Malaysia and Indonesia, and Andare of Sri Lanka. I list the names here because I am familiar only with the first two Indian names. Our schools should look at other Asian countries rather than just Europe or America.

The chapter on learning and shaping

tales like the rest of this section is full of practical suggestions including how to use gestures and pauses. In another chapter Spagnoli lists various kinds of props used in different traditions of storytelling. These include sets of pictures, scrolls like the Indian patas and parh, story cloths, fans, and toys. She tells us how to make these props. Her ideas for extending the scope of storytelling including in the subject classrooms are interesting and practicable. Spagnoli ends this section with questions and answers about practical aspects of storytelling, like children who only want to listen to stories about TV characters.

The second part of the book is a resource base for stories. These are collected under the following categories—Word Play, Jokes, Shaping Stories, How and Why, Tricksters and Fools, Problem Tales, Tales of Nature, Heroes, Teaching Tales, Original Story, and Strange Creatures. These stories are from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Japan, Nepal, Korea, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. The "Original Story" is from the USA, written by a sixth grader. It is a drawing tale, a story during the telling of which the teller draws various lines to suit the words and finally ends up with a picture.

Spagnoli ends this fascinating book with two pages on the various storytelling styles in Asia. I am not too sure if

many people are aware of the variety of storytelling styles in India (I wasn't) leave alone the rest of Asia. There are also two pages of bibliography and resources, which should be most useful to readers who want to practise what Spagnoli preaches. The book is clearly written, and wonderfully illustrated by many young children. Tulika deserves our appreciation.

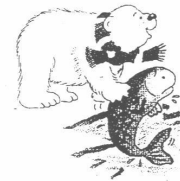
The next book (actually the next four books) under review is also by Cathy Spagnoli and is aimed at tellers and young listeners or readers in English, Hindi, Malayalam, Kannada, and Tamil. Each of the four other languages appears in a bilingual version along with the English. The story, *Priya's Day*, is obviously written in English originally and the English version appears alongside each of the translations. The story about the events of a day in the life of a Tamil girl is strung together to actually prompt

some other activity. This is the making and use of objects/props from waste (news)paper. Children who read these books are given instructions to cut or tear paper into various shapes and paste them into the book itself. They become active participants in the making of the book itself. As Spagnoli says in the appendix to each book (incidentally this appendix is not translated, I wonder why) the story was created to be told. The teller plays around with a scrap of paper and this creates a certain magical effect in the way in which this piece of scrap paper turns into so many different objects (fourteen different kinds of objects when I counted though there are sixteen activities that you perform with them in the telling of this tale). I cannot vouch for all the translations but the Tamil and Hindi versions have the language and pace and rhythm for telling a tale. The translators are Jeeva Raghunath

(Tamil), Kala Sashikumar (Malayalam), Jayashree Diwakar (Kannada), Sushma Ahuja (Hindi). These books are good starting points for people interested in extending the telling of tales to include other activities for young children. This particular story is aimed at children aged four and above.

Malu Bhalu by Kamla Bhasin has been published by the same house in the original Hindi, English, Tamil, and Malayalam. A story told in verse about the adventures of a young polar bear (a young female polar bear) and her mother, it is beautifully illustrated by Bindia Thapar. Bhasin explains in the blurb why she chose to write on a land so far away from India. Children should enjoy the tale as well as the vistas of visual imagination that the snow clad land and ice it will open for most of them. I must appreciate this initiative to make these books available to chil-

dren who speak/read different languages. Thanks should go to the translators whose names I can read—Sandhya Rao (English), and Padmini Rajagopal (Tamil)—as well as the Malayalam translator whose name I cannot read due to my own linguistic inadequacy. But hey, the books are meant for speakers of different languages and the Malayalam readers will know whom to thank apart from the original writer, illustrator and the publisher. As they still write in report cards, keep it up Tulika.



Niharika Gupta

STORIES FROM THE MAHABHARATA & TALES FROM THE PANCHATANTRA

Both by Meera Uberoi. Illustrations by Neeta Gangopadhyay

Ratna Sagar, Delhi 1999, 2000, pp. 95 & 104, Rs. 49.50 each

An imaginative selection makes the retelling of stories grouped variously as *Legends of Ancient India*, *Myths and Legends from the Mahabharata*, *Heroes and Saints from South India*, stand out for a child who is likely to have encountered at least some of the stories earlier. When the National Book Trust, for instance publishes a collection of stories about Nanda of Chidambaram, Kannappa and Karaikal Ammaiyar, it may be because of a notion that the very reiteration of the theme of charity or devotion proving more powerful than priestly sanction make for the stories being retained longer by the child—till she is old enough to re-value them as empowering.

In the case of the *Mahabharata* one runs some risks, because material worked over and over by TV serials, comic-strips and calendars is difficult to recreate in stories that may stand valuably on their own. Meera Uberoi's collection is unusual, for she has included stories from the various subplots, which children are unlikely to have acquired from most standard versions. Humanising details have been added, such as the story about the sage who retires to the bottom of the ocean to meditate and whose beard, resembling seaweed, makes the fish feel "completely at home". When caught by fish-

ermen, he declares that he will either be sold with the fish or die with them. One of the most rewarding stories is relatively unfamiliar, about a worm who, asked by a sage why such a lowly creature clings to life, suggests that there might be things that it enjoys that the sage cannot know of.

However, in retelling stories that one knows to have been made available many times over, one tends to assume a level of knowledge on the part of the reader which may not exist, and may lead to omissions through which the stories lose their internal coherence. The account of Drona's first meeting with the Pandavas follows immediately on the story of Bhishma's vow, with the intervening years left out (characters like Kunti and Dhritarashtra, therefore, are not introduced formally, and their histories not given). One of the more interesting figures, Karna, is left out altogether, and the reader wonders what prompted the exclusion of stories from the great war itself. It is surely dislocating, having left the Pandavas in exile, to be told briefly that after ruling their empire for many years the Pandavas decided that it was time to leave this world. The *Mahabharata* is, after all, an epic, not a collection of disparate tales, so each episode is less interesting in itself than as part of an overall design, which is lost in this selection.

A related problem, and more crucial in terms of how the stories read, is the handling of this particular mode of representing the epic as distinct from TV or comics. The narrative invariably opens abruptly ("Shantanu...married a forest maiden, Ganga (sic) but on a condition. The king was never to utter a harsh or unkind word to her, and he was never to question her actions. If he did, she would leave him.") The sequence of

events leading to the centre of any story—the swayamvara of Draupadi, poisoning of Bhima—are gone over hurriedly, and events like the conspiracy to burn the Pandavas at Varanavarta are conflated into a breathless paragraph. As against the patient worrying at impulses to envy which writers like Kamala Subramanian can spend whole chapters on, this narrative achieves a certain normalizing of brotherly hate. Such a rendering of an epic avowedly full of bizarre incidents can leave one with one compressed sentence in the middle of a paragraph dense with internal and external drama. "The king saw her kill the children, but, though horrified and shocked, said nothing fearing that she would leave him". A little further on, the following sentence stands out in its isolation as a separate paragraph "Shantanu took his son to Hastinapura and in a magnificent ceremony named him the heir-apparent...." This pattern of focusing on ceremony and the visual occurs throughout.

The details of Draupadi's humiliation are elided, presumably to soften the story for the young reader. As a consequence, so is the power of her anger muted, something brought to mind again, disturbingly, in the graphic account of Rukmini being whipped as she drags Durvasa's chariot. "...though his Rukmini was being treated like a beast of burden", it is Krishna's ability not to give way to anger that is to earn him the lasting devotion of mankind. Bald statements such as "Once Menaka, the beautiful apsara, bore a daughter, but heartlessly left it on the riverbank near the Rishi's hermitage and flew off to heaven" are characteristic of a tendency to limit analysis to verb-adverb combinations such as "gleamed wickedly" / "added craftily". Given the sparse nature of the

narrator voicing over thoughts, a child might be forgiven for wondering why, after Shakuntala has introduced herself as the sage's daughter, Dushyanta confronts her with "What are you doing in these forests?" Had he not been paying attention, or were forests forbidden to women, or was there something improbable about finding beautiful women there?

In the *Panchatantra*, even if read as twice told tales, it is the satisfying logic of a beginning, middle and end that work on the child as well as the pleasures of the familiar, rather than the morals that veer bewilderingly between idealism and pragmatism. One therefore disagrees with the author in her Afterword when she says that stories about vengeance are not suitable for children. Fortunately, this has not led her to exclude more 'different' stories about the necessity/impossibility of forgiveness. There is also the wonderful account of how the Persian scholar, Burzoe, discovered the stories for the Middle East and asked that his story too be made part of the book.

These stories are told with an immediacy that is attractive and the filling in of detail and imagined conversations work well, for unlike the *Mahabharata*, it is the interest of the single incident that counts here, rather than character unfolding over time.

The books are well produced in terms of the quality of paper and the binding. Since illustrations are such an important part of children's books, it is a pity that, though there are evocative illustrations in both books, the reproduction of colours in (as well as the lavish space given to) the watercolours by Pulak Biswas could not have been possible in the illustrations for the *Mahabharata* by Neeta Gangopadhyaya.

Anita Maitra

PUZZLE YOUR WAY THROUGH INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

By Lalita Ramakrishna. Illustrated by Girija Singh.

Madhuban, Vikas Publishing House, 1999, pp. 140, Rs. 50.00

In the age of computer games it is indeed refreshing to come across a book that hopes to rekindle a little of the lost interest in Indian mythology. *Puzzle Your Way Through Indian Mythology* by Lalita Ramakrishna promises to do just that. The book is divided into four main sections, *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, *Bhagvata* and the Hindu Pantheon with the intention of covering most of what is known as Indian mythology.

The extensive research that has gone into the making of this book is extremely commendable, but one has to question the applicability of such an endeavour. The book is mainly factual

with little or no link between the puzzles. For example, the author lists all the rivers mentioned in the *Ramayana* but fails to tell us the significance of each river. As a result, the only thing the child learns is a list of names that have no connection to each other. Names of the monkeys in the *Ramayana* or the couples in the *Mahabharata*, what finally is the whole purpose of such a catalogue of proper nouns? These are easily forgotten and make no lasting impact. The author must place the facts into a certain context in order that the significance of these characters can be assimilated into the reader's mind.

It would be unfair to reject the book as wholly irrelevant. There are segments in the book that are interesting and well done. These include puzzles based on deities and their vehicles, gods and their weapons and the several incarnations and names of gods and goddesses. The book is well illustrated and certainly very eye-catching. The snippets from the legends on each page make for interest-

ing reading.

The book presumes a prior knowledge of the epics and for someone with no thorough understanding of the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, the names and places don't ring a bell. It is essential for the author to add a synopsis of the legends and then provide puzzles based on them so that the reader may actually learn something. It is an engaging book and would keep one occupied on a rainy day but on the whole it remains very general with little or no continuity and serves more as a means of recollection for a scholar rather than an instrument of education for a novice. In all, the idea behind the book is innovative and praiseworthy. One hopes that the book will interest our youngsters enough into further exploring the legends and mythology that India is so rich in and as Lalita Ramakrishna hopes, bring the readers closer to their grandparents and other elders in an effort to discover and learn about their heritage.



Shubha Kamala - Prasad

MIDNIGHT TRAIN & OTHER GHOST STORIES

By Reeta Dutta Gupta

Gulmohar, Orient Longman, 1999, pp.108, Rs. 60.00

This storybook, *Midnight Train & Other Ghost Stories* by Reeta Dutta Gupta, consists of ten ghost stories. The author was inspired by Ruskin Bond's encouraging words to write this collection. Ruskin Bond himself has written an introduction for the book and coincidentally one of his favourites is my favourite too.

The story's name is 'An Old Acquaintance'. It is about a man, Madhav, who returns to his village after years of living in the city. When he returns to his village his childhood memories come tumbling back. Especially the memory about the old banyan tree. The women of the village prayed to a spirit, which they believed lived in the tree. When Madhav was young his mother had told him not to venture too near the tree and play there because that would displease the spirit. Madhav on returning to the banyan tree, now not believing in spirits, encounters the old village honey-seller with whom he has a long chat on the way back to the village (the banyan

tree is slightly away from the main village). On reaching the village, the honey-seller, Bhola, hurriedly says goodbye, promising to visit Madhav and his wife Madhu sometime later. Madhav puzzled by Bhola's sudden hurry, asks his aunt about Bhola. His aunt shaking with fear tells him that Bhola had died years ago.

That night, a puzzled Madhav goes to bed lying awake and wondering about Bhola's laugh when he had asked him if he believed in spirits. A minute later a cold wind, as cold as Bhola's hand that Madhav had touched while saying farewell, enters the room. Madhav silently thinks that Bhola has kept his promise when he had said he would visit Madhav and his wife some time later.

What I liked about this story is that the mystery is built up gradually. You don't get so tensed or anxious about the truth about someone or something that you have to flip through the pages and get to the end before you can read the rest of the story. You can read the story calmly, without too much tension. Therefore you can enjoy it and remember the story well.

In some other stories such as 'The English Lover' and even 'An Old Acquaintance', the ghosts are gentle and affectionate. The ghost in 'Two Brave Men' doesn't allow two police officers to live in the magnificent bungalow, which he had built when alive but could not enjoy the luxury of because of his death. In 'Nagaraja Nadar's Fault' the ghost craves for a daughter and in 'The

Doll' the spirit wants to play. In 'Uncanny Contest' a car mysteriously stops in the middle of a bridge and in the same spot where a young lady had died a few months earlier. In 'The Backyard' a man learns the tragic truth of the life of a young girl with whom he had made friends. The question which puzzles you in the story 'Dream' is whether Shanti, a young woman who comes to help Bhavani Shanker, an old man nearing his death, and his family was actually Bhavani Shanker's late wife. And finally the story, which gives the title to the book 'The Midnight Train', is the most mysterious of all. A man who waits at a lonely station in the dark on his way to meet his father in the village, starts fearing the unknown and death. And he himself doesn't know whether a man whom he saw on the station, whose face was decayed and nearly gone was a ghost or not.

Children in classes 7 and 8 would enjoy this book. The language is slightly high and therefore students of classes 5 and 6 may not understand it very well. And to conclude, this book is a very good book in the category of good ghost stories because the unexpected takes place in ordinary lives. Therefore the stories don't seem artificial unlike other ghost stories I've read, in which from the beginning we know something out of the ordinary is going to take place.

Shubha Kamala - Prasad, 11, is a student of Class VI, The Shri Ram School, New Delhi.

Chandrika Narayanan Mohan

HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE, HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS & HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN

By J.K. Rowling

Bloomsbury, 1997, 1997 & 1999, pp. 223, 341 & 317, £ 4.99, £ 10.99 & £ 4.99

In the first book of the Harry Potter series, Baby Harry is left with his horrible non-wizard aunt and uncle after his wizard parents were murdered by the most evil wizard of all time, Lord Voldemort. His aunt and uncle, who look down upon witchcraft and such, keep his secret until Harry's 10th birthday, when he starts receiving mysterious letters. That is when he discovers that he is a wizard, and that he is to attend the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry! He makes friends with his fellow students, especially a girl, Hermione Granger and a boy, Ron Weasley. Then they realize that Lord Voldemort, barely alive but regaining his power, has come to destroy Harry. What happens to Harry Potter? Read this book and find out!

In the second book of the series, Harry Potter returns to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and is reunited with his best friends Hermione and Ron. But this year there is a strange new teacher, Professor Gilderoy Lockheart. Also, Harry and his friends suddenly discover people and animals seemingly 'frozen', otherwise known as 'petrified'. After much research, they learn the terrifying truth. Hogwarts is the home of a Basilisk, a terrifying

Asked why she liked the Harry Potter books Chandrika's enthusiastic response would gladden an author's heart. "They are excellent. They are very exciting and there is a lot of suspense. They are very good plots. The way they are written, the descriptions and the details, they make the stories very mysterious. It can also be a little bit scary but it is a mystery at the same time", she said.

"These books have wizards and witches. The other mystery stories I have read are to do with reality and these stories do not have to do with reality and have to do with magic which makes it more exciting."

mythical serpent that petrifies anything with one glance. Harry also finds a strange diary of a boy who was in the school long ago. Who was he? Will Harry defeat the serpent? Is this the work of Voldemort once again? Find out by reading this thrilling and exhilarating book.

In the third book in the Harry Potter series, Harry's other aunt Marge has come to stay. After losing his temper and almost blowing her up, Harry runs away from home in fear of being arrested by the Ministry of Magic, for using magic outside school for the second time. He meets up with his friends at Diagon Alley, a wizard village hidden in London. He learns about a wanted wizard murderer called Sirius Black. He overhears Ron's father, who works in the Ministry of Magic, discussing with Ron's mother about Sirius Black, and the fact that he is after Harry! At school, Azkaban (wiz-

ard prison) guards have been set up around the school. Not being able to visit the wizard village Hogsmaede, he discovers a strange map, which reveals a secret passage to Hogsmaede. He finds out how he and the crazed murderer Sirius Black are related, and the other crimes he committed, which shock Harry no end. Share the scares and surprises with Harry as you join him through the twisted tales of Hogwarts.

Chandrika Narayanan Mohan is a class VII student at the British School, New Delhi.



Sharad Raghavan

THE HILL TOP MYSTERY

By Deepa Agrawal. Illustrated by Tapas Guha

Madhuban Educational Books, 1999, pp. 120, Rs. 35.00

Shilpi and Jayant, two children from the city have come to meet their grandmother in the hills. Here they meet their cousin Meghna who has come to meet them while her parents looked for a place to settle down. Meghna has a camera which she uses to catch the most awkward things that happen on her visit.

After washing up they come down and Shilpi notices a painting which she had not seen before. On asking she finds out that Pranav, one of her grandmother's friends, also an artist had given it to her.

When they hear from Granny that Pranav had disappeared they are shocked. Meghna takes a picture of them at the dining table and one next to the painting. Unluckily for Meghna she is not allowed to eat any raw fruits or vegetables. No food outside the house. No milk or dairy products and many others.

After a few days they get a few visitors who are their new neighbours. These people are rude to Granny and want to buy her house but she politely but firmly turns them out of the house.

The children want to find Pranav so they go to his hut but find it locked. They

Mystery and excitement in an Indian hill town! A book that both entertains youngsters and makes them aware of our fragile environment and the protection it requires. Our young reviewer voted it a 'Very good book'. 'I have read worse books where you can guess everything right from the beginning. I have read better books like Henry Potter's where the suspense is really thrilling. But I have not read anything equal to this' is what Sharad had to say.

look for a way in and find the back door open. When they enter they are flabbergasted at the state the house is in. All Pranav's paintings have been stolen. Meghna find a stack of old magazines so she borrows a few.

A few days later a forest fire starts. The children are used to fires so they help to put it out. Meghna had never seen a fire so she gets scared and runs and hides. When the fire is put out the children notice that Meghna is missing. They find her hiding near the trees. When they return they find that Granny's painting is missing.

Will they find Pranav and his paintings? What does the strange painting indicate? Why was it painted? You will have to find the answers to these questions by reading the book.

Sharad Raghavan studies in Class VII in Shri Ram College, New Delhi.

N. Kamala

4 HEROES AND A HAUNTED HOUSE

By Narayan Gangopadhyay. Translated by Swati Bhattacharjee

Tara Publishing, 1998, pp. 114, Rs. 80.00 (pb)

Here is the answer to all those niche marketed American made children's books that have flooded the market over the last few years. Ever wondered why your child is reluctant to pick up a book authored with an Indian setting, written by an Indian? Ever despaired after a while that the reason seems to be that most of them are so patronising and so moralising that even you are not so keen to peruse them? Ever wondered why our publishers don't do something about it? Well, Tara Publishing has just heard your call and has responded with this delightful book by Narayan Bandhopadhyay, translated from Bengali, a language that has a rich tradition of children's literature since the nineteenth century. The choice of this book as the first of their series in translation is precisely because it is non-didactic in nature and aims to amuse, and not to instruct.

4 Heroes is a hilarious tale of four young friends who have just completed their school leaving exams and go to Jhanto Hills for their vacations where they encounter ghosts who cackle horribly at night, a bearded Sadhu who snores loudly and has a companion resembling the mighty Ghatotkach, not to forget the pot-bellied Sheth. Our heroes are Teni the Terrible, Habul the Hungry, Kyabla the Clever and the narrator himself Pyalaram the Puny. These are not your average teen detectives full of fire and bursting with ideas, grey cells working over time. Oh no, there is Teni, who "sat in the tenth standard like a monument, year after year. No one could move him even an inch from his seat there." Then there is Pyalaram of Patoldanga, the narrative voice, who had "been stumped twice in maths...[and] might just get a third division." The other two are considered clever but they are not figures of envy in any way. If at all the narrator feels ashamed, it is at having secured thirty-six marks in maths, thus proving to be an inept disciple to Teni da, their leader, who "answers all the questions in all the papers yet no examiner can make [him] pass. That is real credit." If that wasn't surprising enough, the characters are also too fat like Teni, or too thin like Pyala, the chronic malaria patient. None of them fits the image of a stylish hero. Neither are they super hero material in their bravery or

heroic deeds; they scuttle under the beds at the first sound of ghostly laughter, or faint half a dozen times, like the narrator, the only exception being Kyabla the clever guy who solves the mystery of their haunted house. All the four heroes are palpably real characters coming to life in the irreverent description of them and the non-stop tumbling narrative of their fumbling adventures stuffing themselves with mouth-watering rosogollas, fruits from non footnoted trees like *boinchi* and *kanranga*, not to forget plates and plates of meat and fish delicacies...

If there is one thing in common with other children's stories from other parts of the world it is the all pervading presence of food, the children don't only long to eat, they eat and suffer for it and unrelentingly go on an eating binge again! People's faces are compared to *upma* and the villains threaten to make *shammi kebab* or *mughlai paratha* out of the children. What is amazing is the wide array of non-vegetarian dishes relished by the protagonists and presented for our delectation!

As if this was not enough to entice the young reader to turn the pages, the book is a laugh-a-minute narrative, humour interlaced at every stumble and every bump of the four heroes. It is not only just farcical but also nuanced, that you can't help but hold your sides with laughter as you read, "If I die, my mother and aunts will cry. The Secondary Board will also cry. Who else will give them exam fees year after year?" Or when this fixation on the exams comes through in the end as the narrator faces his doom, he compares his sudden calm to that at an exam when you don't know the answer to any sum and "Then suddenly, you find yourself calming down. You start drawing a coconut tree in your copy. ... That is, you give up all hope and become an artist." And not to forget the villainous Gajeshwar quizzing him on English and Geography only to hear that a cataclysm was some kind of kitten and that The Vesuvius was in America!

The language flows without restriction, along with the ebb and tide of the four heroes' actions. It is an English completely Indian in its structure and proud to be so. One may quibble at sentences like "We have vanished Habul Sen" (p.63) and "There was no sign of him since he gone in the morning" (p. 47) but they only add to the charm and do not detract from the eminently readable 'ghost story'. If there is one major drawback it is the total absence of female characters in the entire story! The mother and aunts are mentioned but even they do not find a place in the narrative progress of the story line. Having said that it must be mentioned that my daughter laughed her way through the entire book in one sitting. Which just shows

how good the translation by Swati Bhattacharjee is and how much we look forward in great anticipation to her next translation of Narayan Gangopadhyay's Teni series. Which incidentally could include the date of publication of the original story especially as the author died in 1970 itself and it took almost

thirty years for a translation of his work to come out! Shabash Tara Publishing, the lay out of the book is very attractive and the irregular numbering of the chapter titles and page numbers add to its quirky charm. All in all a book not to be missed by ten to twelve year olds of whatever age!

Shama Futehally

GANIT DESH AUR ANYA NATAK

By Rekha Jain

Ratna Sagar, 1998, pp. 80, Rs. 24.90

It will soon be time for Annual days and Parents' days in all schools, and the hunt for plays to perform, songs to sing and dances to dance has probably begun. From personal experience I know the difficulty of unearthing school plays which are immediate to our locale, and which are recognizably plays, not made-over stories which actually belong between the covers of a book.

This little collection will be a great gift for those in such difficulties. It contains five Hindi playlets suitable for children between six and twelve. One is based on a Chinese folk-tale, one illustrates a story from the *Ramayana*, and a third is a skit on tree-planting. The fourth, the title play, is a fantasy in aid of children who dislike Maths, and the fifth is a pageant of the Freedom movement. If I remember correctly, this last was performed in Delhi as part of the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations. It was directed by Rekha Jain herself, and was received with delight.

In fact it is the presence of the hands-on director which gives its book much of its value. This is not surprising, since these scripts have emerged from practical workshops, and since Rekha Jain, who belongs to a prominent theatre family, has dedicated many years to children's theatre. Thus the drama teacher or group leader who chooses to have these performed will find, within the stage directions, advice on all potential difficulties—(how do you represent a

stormy sea?) as well as on questions of choreography, costumes and lighting.

Then there are the inherent advantages of scripts that have emerged in performance. Each play allows a large, and flexible, number of children on the stage. Many of the characters are racy individuals and will allow for some thundering acting. There is much variety in speech-pattern and movement. A nice measure of magic and fantasy is included, not to mention singing and dancing. Finally, no teacher need fear that anything here will be politically incorrect. In the Chinese folk-tale, a nasty zamindar meets a properly nasty end, and in the title play parents allow a child to learn on her own that numbers can be fun. It is a happy thing that all this is available within Rs. 25/- and that therefore the book can expect to be widely used.

There is only one thing, perhaps, that I would wish to see changed. It seems to me that occasionally there could be more events taking the place of straight narration. For instance, in 'Swadheenta Sangram' (on the freedom movement) the Nehru-Gandhi period is presented through direct speech by a narrator. If this were replaced, or even supplemented, by a happening or two, it would add a great deal to an already strong script. Similarly, the title play has a dream-sequence of numbers appearing in a dance-formation before the little girl who has no use for them. This sequence, too, would be invigorated by some form of happening—what about a game of Hide and Seek between the girl and the numbers, which the girl is determined to complete when the dream is over?

These are bold suggestions, but then a book which is so reader-friendly must expect to be taken over by its readers as though they had written it themselves.

Shobit Mahajan

LEAF LIFE

By Sirish Rao

Tara Publishing, 1998, pp. 36, Rs. 80.00

TRASH: ON RAGPICKER CHILDREN AND RECYCLING

By Gita Wolf, Anushka Ravishankar & Orijit Sen

Tara Publishing and Books for Change, 1999, pp. 112, Rs. 150.00



A friend of mine is very fond of relating the following story. Once she went as a parent volunteer to her child's class in one of the best known progressive schools in Delhi. This friend being a linguist was very curious to know about language learning in children in the primary classes. She started telling them a story in Hindi about a "kisan" in a village. After some time, she sensed that something was amiss and the children were getting lost. So she asked the children if they knew what a kisan did. To her surprise, a vast majority of the kids thought that kisan was the person who made a popular brand of sauces and jams!

This story is obviously an indicator of the astonishing ignorance of the Hindi language among today's (or in this case tomorrow's) MTV generation. But it also hints at how much we have become disconnected from life outside of our cocoons in the metropolis. This tendency is all the more apparent in children whose exposure to the world outside of their television sets and video games is minimal. Sadly, the curriculum in schools in no way promotes going out and observing and experiencing nature. Though nominally each school has environmental studies built into its curricula, the teaching is never really connected with the real lives of children. Thus children may parrot homilies on the greenhouse effect or conservation of resources, but never connect it to their own wasteful lives. Of course, the children are not to blame for all of this. The fault lies in the way we teach, in our books and indeed in our own lifestyles.

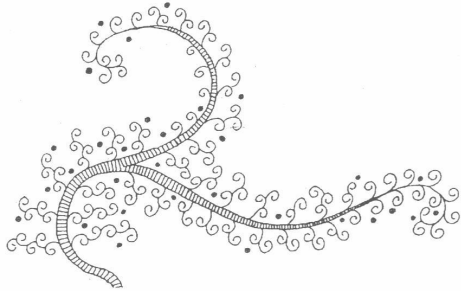
The two books under review are an attempt to correct these anomalies. *Leaf Life*, by Sirish Rao is the first book in a proposed series "Relating to Nature". The world of leaves is a fascinating one. The variety of colours, shapes and sizes that leaves come in. How many times have we stopped and wondered about these amazing food producing factories for all of life on planet earth? The central idea behind the book is to encourage children to explore the world of leaves by observation and experience.

The design of the book is appealing; line drawings and sepia tinted photographs make it beautiful. The main text is in a font attractive enough for children while a lot of supplementary information is given in small type. At the end, there are suggestions for how educators and parents can use this book. This includes individual and group projects.

Having said this, there is however a problem with the supplementary information in the book. At one place, the author talks about how leaves produce tannin, a bitter substance that acts as a deterrent for monkeys and other predators. The monkey chews on a leaf, finds it bitter and leaves the plant alone. This much is of course correct. However, the author goes on to say that this tannin in the air is then sensed by trees downwind which start producing tannin in advance. This is just plain wrong. There is simply no mechanism by which trees can sense tannin in the air. Authors especially those writing for children must be extra careful about their facts. For a child, the final authority on any topic is the teacher and the written word.

From the favelas of Sao Paulo to the rubbish dumps of Mexico City and the slums of Mumbai, every metropolis in a developing country has its shanty towns. These so called "eye-sores" house millions of migrants in inhuman conditions. The migrants have come from villages in hope of employment and a better life for themselves. Once here, they form the large pool of informal labour force that is essential for life in the city. The small child who cleans utensils in the roadside tea-stall, the maid working in middle class houses and the daily wagger who works in the car garage are all from these slums. They live without any civic amenities or job security, constantly being hounded by either the slumlords or the authorities. Yet, they provide cheap labour for the metropolis, their poverty subsidizing our lives in a way.

The book, *Trash: On Ragpicker Children and Recycling* is the story of Velu, an eleven year old who has run away from his village and come to Chennai. Here he meets a street-smart ragpicker



Jaya who escorts him through the travails of living on the street. Through the story we are introduced to the underbelly of a metropolis, complete with a devious slumlord, a sinister money-lender etc. The precarious existence of those living on the margins of society, their joys and struggle and of course the nature of their work is brought out well in this book. The emphasis is on ragpickers and the service they provide

to us. Throughout the book, there are boxes that provide information on relevant topics like recycling, the waste disposal systems and even the constitutional rights of children. The book is well written and has good colour illustrations, most of them superimpositions of photographs and paintings. It also has some suggestions on what the reader can do for ragpicker children as well as for becoming more conscious

of our wasteful lifestyles.

Both the books are tremendously overpriced, at Rs. 80 and 150 respectively. National Book Trust also has several books on similar topics that are far cheaper and perhaps equally good. Arvind Gupta's book on creative uses of household trash or Suresh Rajan's book on making pumps from trash are just two examples. Understandably, book production is expensive. But the

publishers have to explore ways and means of making books affordable. Books like this are very essential if we want our children to be sensitive to their environment as well as world around them. The hard part is now for educators and parents to use these and similar books creatively to "educate" the children and expose them to a world so different from the unreal world of Cartoon Network and MTV.

Usha Chengappa

TIGERS FOREVER: POEMS AND STORIES

A BOND WITH THE MOUNTAINS

Both by Ruskin Bond. Illustration by Tapas Guha
Ratna Sagar, 1996 & 1998, pp. 72 & 79, Rs. 34.90 each

As dwellers of concrete jungles, CD players, Television, Computer games, bowling alleys, movies and popcorn have replaced many of the simple joys of life for our children.

Leafing through these books by Ruskin Bond I realize just how far away we are from nature. The books are a whiff of fresh mountain air, wholesome and rejuvenating.

Tigers Forever is a collection of poems and stories. One feels the unique touch of this author as he treats mystery and adventure with a difference. Other popular series like the Goosebumps or Fear street and other mystery books which are immensely popular with children evoke unnatural

worlds of fear and horror and even allow children to develop a degree of insensitivity to the subtleties of the real world.

When Ruskin Bond tells us a ghost story 'The Overcoat', he takes us ever so gently through many landscapes to his meeting with Julie, a sixteen year old girl in a "flummox sequinned dress, pink and lavender" to whom he lends his overcoat. On investigating the next day he discovers that she had died many years ago and retrieves his neatly folded overcoat from the cemetery.

'The Night the Roof Blew off' is an adventure with a difference. The events are not some artificial happenings in the mind or some mystery to be solved. Surviving through a storm in the mountains one is transported to a world where nature is merciless. The author and his companions take all the destruction of this storm in their stride, as they watch snowflakes glide through the roof settle on various household ornaments. A wonderful spirit of surrender allows them to look upon the event with humour even: "The clock on the wall had stopped and with its covering of snow reminded me of a painting by Salvador Dali. And my shaving brush looked

ready for use." This story reminded me of a Chinese poem which said

"Last night my house burnt down
And today I have a better view of the moon."

A healthy love for one's environment and the animals that inhabit it is unmistakably the theme of every story. This aspect is interwoven in the stories and poems. One has to agree with the author that when it comes to making room for God's lesser creatures—

"But if it makes a difference, Lord,
I'll gladly share my room and board".

A Bond with the Mountains explores the beautiful Deodar tree. There are silver blossoms or to watch a train—'A Dragon in the Tunnel'—or to listen to the music of water with childlike wonder.

'My Tall Green Friends' talks about the silver red monkeys, barking deer, pygmy owlets, panthers nestling in the leafy cover.

Under the guise of subtle story lines this book is about the author's love of mountains. His sensitivity to the slightest nuances of this other world never cease to bathe you in the warmth of his loving gaze. Wherever he looks nature is abundant and glorious.

"Lord give me a quiet mind that I might listen" he prays and right through the book one is aware of the various sounds of silence that come alive in his descriptions. One poem talks of listening to the summer grass singing, to the pebbles humming and the silence calling.

'A Bouquet of Love' a story about how an old British spinster Miss Mackenzie deals with death so quietly that it seems a natural and integral part of life itself. Death can be so simple and undramatic in the hands of this author. This story ends: "She had gone to the mountains where the blue gentian and the purple columbine grew."

Many of the stories have simple village folk for whom the author has immense respect. In his eyes these folk are loving, intuitively intelligent and far more in tune with nature.

Ruskin Bond has the same warm sunlit quality I have perceived in books by James Herriot or Gerald Durrell. The same gentle humour, love of animals and a reverence for simple village folk is shared by these authors.

Anytime I feel too caught up in the world I can curl up with these books and enter a wondrous sanctuary.

Neelima Lutfra

SEEPYAN: AN ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT STORIES (HINDI)

Edited by Subhadra Malavi and Sulekha Kumar

Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 239, Rs. 60.00



Seepyan conjures an Indianized Blakean world as it depicts innocent children on the threshold of experience. Though the stories address themselves to young adults (10-14 years) there aren't any magical islands, mythical palaces, goblins, chocolate houses, naughty rabbits or notorious wolves. The children are placed in realistic situations, whether at home or school, discovering new facets of being.

Seepyan (written for the children's creative writing competition) is about human relationships between adults and children. It is also about inner journeys from unbridled gaiety to maturity. *Seepyan* reveals no dark spots (diseases/deceptions/delusions) rather a predicable serenity with benevolent elders acting as friends rather than as teachers/preachers. In this Utopia no dark shadows lurk on the periphery. Suggestions of negativity are quickly rounded off into positivity and poetic justice prevails.

Written in Hindi, *Seepyan* has a cultural kinship with the tradition of *Panchatantra* and *Hithopadesa* though the moralistic overtones regarding issues like honesty, friendship, discipline, universal love etc are closer to the tradition upheld by Enid Blyton. The pattern is rather a story for the sake of a moral.

The stories' backdrop of well-knit family structure resembles Victorian Children's Literature especially Beatrix Potter. Cultivation of community spirit

to foster universal harmony is a recurrent motif. How to get along with oneself and others is the central question. *Seepyan* is true-blue Indian in its handling of parent-child, teacher-child, child-child relationship/s and by divorcing it from body awareness or deeper stirrings of emotion. Consequently, a milky-idealistic, luminescent halo surrounds these stories.

Seepyan doesn't reveal an in depth study of child psychology because the authorial voice (which creates boundaries/categories) sits heavy and hinders the independent growth of the individual child. The world depicted is not one seen through the child's eyes but one filtered through the consciousness of grown-ups.

The linear narrative structure has a simple pattern: introduction to the main character. Surfacing of the problem (psychological, moral) and finally its resolution (largely brought about by the child's own understanding or through the adult world's intervention). *Seepyan*

deals with diverse themes like benevolence of the adult world, rare courage in children, strong bonds of friendship, children realizing truths through adult's intervention or their own wisdom, animal-human relationships etc.

'Rangeen Coat' is about a tailor whose selfless service makes him a darling of the colony children. Unlike the stereotypical old-busybuddy-besepectacled tailor whose only aim in life is to sew, this tailor sews only for children. The story is reminiscent of a famous Beatrix Potter story about good mice who help an ailing tailor by sewing and embroidering fancy clothes for him. The underlying theme of both stories is unconditional love for peaceful coexistence.

The stories about courageous children have female protagonists and are both moving and inspiring. 'Bahadur Tanju' explodes the myth about boys being adventurous or heroic. Tanju lives on the hilly regions of Almora and is spurred into action when she realizes

that her goats are going to starve due to non-availability of fresh grass in the vicinity (her grandmother being too old to climb uphill and father away from home).

'Dosti' is about true friendship between two boys living in an orphanage. Their intense love bothers the hapless adults. The boys find it hard to separate from one another even as the real father of one discovers and wishes to adopt him. 'Jeevan ki Muskaan' is about friendship blossoming between two girls. Though their relationship commences on a note of bitterness, rivalry and insecurity it is cemented into a true bond during times of crisis in each one's life.

In stories where children realize moral precepts through the intervention of adults, the child is not created as the 'other' but someone who is only an inexperienced adult. Moreover, learning is incidental to the totality of human relationship. Discovering truths about oneself and the world is part of the process of growing up. Most of the stories focus on inner learning experiences which are more enriching than outer superficial bookish learning. In 'Nanhi Chati pe Jara Medal' puffed up with conceit because of his father's high rank in the police, bullies classmates and abuses his 'imagined' sense of power. The knowledge about his father's integrity and honesty cuts asunder his delusions as he realizes his blindness and decides to reform himself.

In 'Ujale ke Aur' Avin, a young boy who was once on the wrong path tries to start a new life. But his classmates in the new school continue to remind him of his former habits and spoof his efforts at self-improvement. Avin's positive attitude of disregarding sarcasm, and helping them when they are in need make his friends realize their folly and repent. Other stories of children who are lazy, selfish, naughty etc. has a similar pattern of failure of understanding, followed by a heavy blow and repentance coupled with realization.

The stories about child-animal relationship are equally moving, be it 'Munoo the Monkey' who rescues his master from kidnappers, or pet lions who don't forget their master despite turning man-eater due to human apathy, or the faithful cow who rescues a young child from a fierce bull. 'Bholi aur Safed Mor' is a poignant tale about an ugly man shunned by humans and his noble sacrifice for pet animals and drowning villagers. He becomes Bholi's mentor for she can perceive his soul's beauty despite his ugly exterior.

The stories in *Seepiyon* touch upon a wide range of human emotions, there are no flights of fantasy as the world depicted through these stories is a familiar world people by ordinary humanity.

Geeta Arya

YASHASWINI RANI DURGAVATI

By K.S. Shyamla

HAMARE YUVA BALIDANI

By Umakant Malviya

Both from Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, 1998 & 1999, pp. 70 & 54, Rs. 18.00 & 23.00

The quasi-historical *Yashaswini Rani Durgavati* and *Hamare Yuva Balidani*, consider the theme of 'heroism' and 'patriotism' from different perceptions and these texts cover different historical periods. These relatively slim volumes by K.S. Shyamla and Umakant Malviya are well-processed additions to children's literature.

In both these texts the characters are used by the authors as prototypes of social roles and social attitudes. K.S. Shyamla's fine book has a great deal to say to children interested in the lives of 'heroic women', but her aim is to go beyond this rather narrow conception of allusion to a broader conception of the role that a woman plays in history in general. It covers the life-story of a 16th century queen of Gondwana region, Rani Durgavati.

The text portrays Durgavati as an ideal woman who plays a significant role in the shaping of history, who fights to protect her own liberty, rights and also tries to circumvent the restrictions imposed upon her by the patriarchal society of the 16th century.

Yashaswini Rani Durgavati also focuses on *jati* or the caste system (p.11) which had created tensions and conflicts in the society, and here the chief protagonist Rani Durgavati opposes such chasms and calls for the assimilation of the different *jis*. The author highlights certain important historical incidents—conflict between the kingdom of Malwa and Gujarat (p.44) and the battles between the Afghans and the Rajputs (p. 16).

Hamare Yuva Balidani deals primarily with the lives of young martyrs who participated in the freedom struggle of India. In particular, the author traces the lives of the martyrs of the period between 1857 and 1947—Chapekar brothers, Khudiram Bose, Prafulla Chaki, Madan Lal Dhingra,—that displays his understanding of 'patriotism' in concrete terms of 'national consciousness'.

The author gives space to the young women martyrs as well. Importantly, he stresses on 'Hindu-Muslim unity', as seen in the story entitled, 'Balipath Ka Rahi'. Some of the stories about the lives of the martyrs appear to be incomplete. In some chapters only a fragment of



their lives is touched as for example, in the story of the Chapekar brothers. Some stories are also in need of elaboration like—'Deshdrohi Ka Kal', 'Bali Ke Bandanvar', 'Faulad Ki Murat' and 'Pratishod Ka Angar'. The contest itself is treated in an episodic fashion with little effort to tie the highlighted events together within the book's framework.

In this text the chapters are not placed in a chronological package and some stories are historically true, while some are apparently fictional, as they do not carry any historical connotations with them.

In spite of their different storylines, both the authors share a number of important assumptions. Their texts appear to be didactic in nature, and these seem intended to influence behaviour to con-

form to the cultural norms and also tells us what the norms are. They set forth good examples before the reader, and highlight noble deeds and heroic acts of the martyrs of the freedom struggle, distinction between human virtues and vices.

The reading of such texts of 'valour' involves a psychological sense of participation as well. The story of these heroic men and women helps in coaxing the reader into the story, and it is not only a matter of making the characters live, but of also persuading the reader who lives with them—of making them proud to inhabit their world. These young martyrs' lives describe and record, primarily proclaim and perpetuate their own reputations—which the readers are called on to admire and share.

Shubha Saxena

INSAN KA BETA by Alaka Pathak, 1998, pp. 28, Rs. 20.00

MASTER SAHEB by Mrinalini Srivastava, 1999, pp. 40, Rs. 19.00

Both from Children's Book Trust

Insan Ka Beta is the story of a small, seven-year old Babu. Babu is young in years but he is filled with curiosity and ambition—he wants to know how things work, he hopes to become someone, to achieve great things. And so he sets out on his quest. One moment Babu is an actor, an author, a director, and yet again, a scientist. He dreams of turning himself into a robot; of devising a remote to control others; and in all this fantasising Babu finds himself learning something new. One day Babu turns himself into a bonsai, as small as the finger nail of his small finger, and goes out into the town in search of adventure . . . which comes in the guise of an old man. Who is he? What does Babu find in the wonderful castle that he is led into? What does he advise Raja Birbal to tell Emperor Akbar when he finds him cooking kitchari? Why do the beautiful fairy floating in the sky and the Sun

try to hide from Babu in fear?

Alaka Pathak has woven a charming tale in *Insan Ka Beta* using simple poetic language. She creates a world of fantasy sure to enchant the young listener and reader of this tale. Alaka won the First Prize in the competition for Writing for Children organized by the Children's Book Trust.

Master Saheb by Mrinalini Srivastava is guaranteed to touch a chord in most children's hearts, especially of those young ones who are for one reason or another fed up with their teachers and keep troubling them. The story is set in rural India where most schools are upto the primary level and boast of perhaps just one teacher who teaches the children of class one to five all the subjects. The story goes back to the time when TV and radio were not known in the villages. Bands of children roam the village in search of amusement and indulge in all kinds of pranks. This is the story of a strict teacher who teaches wonderfully, but does not believe in sparing the rod. One day a new student arrives and all hell breaks loose. This is the tale of how the teacher skillfully turns the child's destructive tendencies into creative energy. The author conveys the flavour of the Indian village very successfully.

Chandra Chari

IKKISVIN SADI KA RAKSHAS PLASTIC, POLIO KI PARAJAY, AIDS KA JAAL

By Shubha Saxena

Prakhar Prakashan, 1998, 1998 & 1997, pp. 24 each & Rs. 15.00 each

Do you know that you could be the unwitting cause of the death of a cow, buffalo or goat? Do you know how you can keep your infant safe from polio and lifelong physical disability? Do you know how AIDS is transmitted? Shubha Saxena in three little pamphlets tries to provide, through three one-act plays, answers to some questions that we are not even thinking of asking ourselves. Strongly reminiscent of plays staged in the fifties by social welfare boards all over the country to reach the message of family planning, eradication of diseases like small-pox and malaria against drunkenness—in short for social uplift in rural India, Shubha Saxena's little plays are interesting to read and potentially socially useful.

Shiladitya Ghosh



REMEMBERING OUR LEADERS

Children's Book Trust, 199, pp. 152, Rs. 35.00

"Patriotic", "Sacrifice", "Patience", "able to persevere", "very talented since childhood", "intelligent" etc, are some of the phrases that link the various chapters of the book brought out by CBT on famous personalities. [9th Volume]. The objective behind bringing out a book of this kind, as one can think of, could be to highlight a few role-models for the children of today and enthuse them with "values". Nobody questions the integrity or commitment of these personalities but the problem lies with the presentation of the facts and what these facts

represent. Especially when the audience is of an impressionable age. Long narratives usually entails the beliefs of the narrator about the issue or the event she narrates. It tends to suppress questions or inquisitiveness. It becomes a monologue. It becomes usually an experience outside the life of the listener. Learning in that case becomes minimum, reactions rather judgmental.

The personalities have been picked up from a time period crucial in Indian history when massive transformation was taking place in the social, economic and political context. Even though it has been dealt with in the individual chapters it is important to build up a background, after all, "change" is what one should understand and how these personalities contributed should be the focal point and not an eulogy. It tends to be rigid rather than open and critical. Therefore there is a need to dwell upon

this issue of presenting the past to the current generations, how, what, when, where, and to what objectives?

It is a larger question that one has to deal with. If these biographies are considered to represent a part of history. (since all the personalities discussed in the book were involved with the resurgence and the national movement) then one is pushed into the realm of historiography and its varied debates. The question of the matter is, is it possible to write History specifically for children? What would it look like? Definitely not a "Muslim" history or Hindu History. At one point Anita Mahajan mentions in the chapter titled Sayyid Ahmed Khan, 'the Hindus had embraced western education and the government encouraged them, it was indeed a critical phase in "Muslim" History, as the non-Muslims faced misery.' The nationalist leaders were fighting to remove

outdated customs to usher in democratic nationalist ideals, but in the process could not keep up with the growth of communalism. It is because modern politics in based on the people, on popular participation and mobilisation. If it was not possible to create democratic citizenship identities, one easily harped on communal as in caste, religion, regional identities to capture political power. So is this 9th volume from CBT far away from that process?

The book will be much appreciated by children because it will be useful to complete projects in school on historical personalities. But the flip side of a book like this is that it is left to the imagination of the child to unravel what was best in Hindu culture.

Thus the book through a very simplistic handling of biographies of eminent personalities of India from the past throws up many questions.

Surabhi Ranganathan

OUT OF THE DUST

By Karen Hesse

Scholastic, 1999, pp. 227, \$ 4.99



One fine day, as I was sitting studying for my exams, and trying to decipher the mysteries of Organic Chemistry, the phone rang. I picked it up, and barked out a "yes", expecting it would be one of my co-sufferers. It wasn't. It was Chandra Bua at the other end, who wanted to know whether I would like to review a book. She said it was called *Out of the Dust*, written by Karen Hesse, published by Scholastic, and the winner of a long list of awards, including the 'Newberry Medal', the 'Scott O'Dell Award', 'Publisher's Weekly Best Book of the Year', etc.

Karen Hesse I knew was a famous author of children's books, having written ten of them, including *The Music of the Dolphins*, again a winner of numerous awards.

The Newberry Award, I knew, was always given to books that were really amazing, including *Walk Two Moons*, by Sharon Creech, *Goggle Eyes* by Anne Fine, and of course, the ever popular *What Katy Did*, by Susan Coolidge. And, Scholastic, I knew published books that were good to read, again and again.

The combination sounded good, and I said I'd do it. At the first look, the book seemed strange, the chapters were one page long, the sentences divided, and of unequal length. My cousins came up with wisecracks like 'it doesn't even rhyme!'

Then I realized it was free verse, and

I took the plunge.

Out of the Dust deals with the life of young Billie Jo Kelby, thirteen years old, and living with her parents in 'a little Panhandle shack' in the dust bowl of the country, Oklahoma. Life is hard, what with scarcity, poverty, biting winds, the dust which 'never took a rest' and the wind taking an extended one. Soil erosion has left the land infertile, and the landscape bleak, but the people are content enough with what they have. Billie Jo for all her privations and discontent is not unhappy, what with the promise of a baby brother, her fondness for apples, and her love for the piano. And then—tragedy. One day she loses her mother, along with her unborn baby brother in a terrible accident. Left alone without his wife, the relationship between the father and his daughter deteriorates. The accident leaves Billie Jo scarred both physically and mentally. Her hands are burnt and bruised in the accident, and playing the piano—her one source of comfort—becomes as easy as jumping over the moon. Left alone with mountains of dust for company Billie Jo learns the greatest lessons in life—of courage, truth and sorrow—that 'dust storms, the drought and Depression cannot destroy what grows in the heart' and that 'hard times aren't only about money or drought or dust. Hard times are about losing one's spirit and hope and what happens when dreams dry up,' and that till there's hope there's life.

The book vividly describes the struggles which encompass the life of a poor Oklahoman girl, her hopes, aspirations and desires. Written in free verse, and in first person, with little Billie Jo herself as the narrator. The book gives an adroit insight into Billie Jo's life, with Billie Jo herself mentioning her troubles in a very detached way but for the one

sentence now and then, which provides an insight into what she is actually feeling. In between the mountains of dust one can catch an occasional glimpse of the other side as well, the upside—the joy of a calm day, the first rain, of being able to breathe, and the discovery of the one important fact of life that no matter how bleak, how unpromising or how stifling it may seem home is home, and nothing outside can make up for it and that even in the middle of all sorts of sorrow, if you sat down to count, you would have a zillion things to be thankful for.

The abrupt, understated and at times metaphorical language of the book strips

away all the melodrama and leaves behind the simple story of the hard life of a young, barely fourteen year old girl, her sorrows, and how she comes to terms with them.

The book is well paced, to the point, doesn't waste any space, and as you read it the initial feeling you had about the tragedy being slightly overdone gradually fades away.

It's a well written, well thought out book, and is definitely worth a read, if for nothing else, then just to enjoy the graphic free verse of Hesse's weaving.

Surabhi Ranganathan, 16, is in Class XII at Gyan Bharati School, New Delhi.

Aarti Nagaraj



FREE FROM SCHOOL

By Rahul Alvares. Illustrated by Alexyz Fernandes

Other India Bookstore, Goa, Rs. 100.00

An extremely interesting book that reflects the experiences of a sixteen-year old who takes a year off from school.

The author, Rahul Alvares, is of the opinion that a break from formal schooling is good, and he emphatically points out the need for 'alternative' and practical education. 'Enjoy while you Learn' is a good concept. Here, Rahul's parents' involvement and guidance in their son's experiences is apparent.

Rahul comes across as a teenager with an adventurous and enthusiastic zeal—not every boy his age would want to handle lizards and snakes. Rahul does face a lot of hardships, but it is his de-

termination that sees him through them all. Each experience that he encounters is one of learning and great value.

The book is educative as it gives field notes on how to grow cactus and mushrooms; how to rear spiders; how to handle snakes and crocodiles. Rahul takes us back to nature, and reading the book enhances our understanding of life's little pleasures; something we so often overlook.

The black and white sketches are simple. The photographs would have been more appealing had they been in colour.

The innovative style adopted by the author is refreshing, and reading the book may motivate other students to experience a break from school, provided that they have the support and understanding of their parents as in Rahul's case.

Free From school would make an excellent library copy, and is recommended for schools. The price ought not to deter you from buying a copy for yourself.

Mahua Venkatesh

ADVENTURES TWO

By Cheryl Rao

THE VIRUS TRAP

By Ira Saxena

Both published by Children's Book Trust, 1998, pp. 152 & 144, Rs. 30.00 & Rs. 33.00. Both are illustrated by Prithvishwar Gayen.

Adventures Two consists of two stories. Cheryl Rao, the author, keeps in mind the young readers and has written it in simple language, making it easy for children to understand the whole event.

The first, 'The Crest of the Snake's Head' is about a hidden treasure in Fariah Bagh, Ahmednagar. Arjun and Nitin, two brothers and Madhavi and



Shikha, Nitin's classmates, set out to find a hidden treasure. Nitin, while on a picnic to Fariah Bagh, discovers a beautiful box which finally gives them a clue to a huge treasure. While on the hunt, they come across thieves who want the treasure. But the children outwit them at the final stage and hand over the treasure to the rightful authorities.

The 'Missing Necklace', the second story, has a somewhat unique plot. Karan, who goes to Kalibangan with other children of his class falls down while trying to pick up an ancient pot. Suddenly, he finds himself transported to the past, where he, as Kano, tries to get a present for his mother's birthday. He sees himself making pots and his sister, Shanan, milking the goat Kiki. His father gifts a necklace to his mother and that brings unhappiness to the family. The neighbours suspect that his father has stolen it from the Chief's Palace. Kano hides the necklace inside the pot. Eventually, the rains come and flood the small town. They all perish.

At this point, Karan comes back to the present. He returns home with an ancient pot for his mother's birthday. While washing it, she finds a necklace. The doubt remains; was it a dream or not?

There is always a law against stealing but what if any intellectual property gets stolen? Ira Saxena, in her book *The Virus Trap* describes a hacker, who is after a unique computer programme. Written in an idiom for children, Saxena gives a vivid account of computers, its programs and viruses in general. Interestingly, she draws a comparison between fine arts and pure science in the book. The story is about a dangerous hacker who looks to be a very friendly man otherwise. Saxena takes a peep into history also, while trying to explain a "virus" in the computer program.

"Deepak Uncle", a computer buff, makes a unique program called "Parikshat" to help the school students and authorities, which revolutionises the examination system. However, he

is unaware of how other people eye his program. In the process, Anshuman, a student of Class XII, along with his friends, Saurabh and Manas of Modern Vidyalaya, also get involved because of their proximity to Deepak Kumar. The boy gets kidnapped by his own teacher and his aides who want to steal the program. He is forced to give the passport to his tutor. However, his presence of mind and intelligence saves Deepak Kumar. He builds a Trojan Horse in the program and protects it. Deepati, Deepak's younger sister, is a fine arts student and has no interest in modern technology. She tries to prove in her own way that traditional art still has its own place.

Saxena also takes the readers through a corridor of history, giving the description of the famous Trojan Horse that the Greeks had planted at the Gate of the City of Troy. At the same time, it reminds one of computer ethics. A book with computer as the theme should appeal to school children.

Bharat Kidambi

REAL MEN DON'T PICK PEONIES (ON AN ALPINE-STYLE ASCENT)

By Sirish Rao

Tara Publishing House, 1999, pp. Rs. 185.00

When my mother first expressed her desire to go on the trek to Mansarovar, none of us in the family took her seriously. We believed that it was one of those "phases" that people past the age of 45 tend to go through. However she did defy our collective wisdom and kept her tryst with the mountains.

Once back from the trek to Mansarovar—her bag of experiences seemed inexhaustible, each more fascinating than the other. But I remember one statement very vividly. I asked her whether the trip had taught her anything. Her reply was, "Never fool around with nature, always respect her. For at the end of the day no matter how much man tries to control her, nature will have her way." Those words kept coming back to me, when exactly a year after her trip—the tragedy at Malpa occurred—killing an entire group (which included Protima Bedi) that was returning from Mansarovar.

Sirish Rao's story underlines the significance of respecting nature and being sensitive to its needs. This is not one of those run of the mill adventure stories where people are out to conquer peaks and establish their supremacy

over nature. As he mentions, "... it's not just about climbing. It's also about the way I saw people and situations, the things I recorded, things I puzzled over, and the choices I wanted to think about."

The plot deals with the experiences that the seven member (including the author) team has on their Jong - li expedition. The interesting feature about the team is the sheer diversity in their backgrounds. The team leader, Pasang is a man of the mountains, a professional mountaineer. The other members include, Satyender Singh and Prakash Lal (from the army), Vikram Karanth (a specialist in ice climbing) Harish Bhagwat (adventure tour operator) and Sen (from the I.T. Dept!).

The other distinctive feature of the book is that even the "fringe characters", like the porters in the mountains, have got more than the customary token mention in the narrative. Barring the minor issue of pace of the narrative this is a thoroughly enjoyable book.

The book also contains a number of sketches and photographs on a variety of climbing techniques and the accoutrements that are used in such expeditions.

Strange things are these mountains, can never really tell when it will be your "call" next....



Bulbul Sharma

CHILD ART WITH EVERYDAY MATERIALS

By Tarit Bhattacharya

TOYS AND TALES WITH EVERYDAY MATERIALS

By Sudarshan Khanna, Gita Wolf and Anushka Ravishankar

PUPPETS UNLIMITED

By Gita Wolf and Anushka Ravishankar
All from Tara Publishing, 1998, Rs. 200.00, Rs. 225.00 & Rs. 225.00

In the limited world of children's books, these three new workbooks from Tara Publishing come as a pleasant surprise. *Child Art with Everyday Materials* by Tarit Bhattacharya is a playful and unusual activity book which will help not just children in the classroom but art teachers too. Using simple materials which are easily available in every home and classroom like paper, glue, string, clay, waste paper and old newspapers, children can create wonderful works of art and at the same time develop a sensitivity to colour and form. The workbook which is written in an easy, reader friendly manner, is divided into chapters which take the child into a fun-filled world of art activities step by step. Starting with Lines and Designs, Colours, Shapes and Spaces and then going on to Textures and Impressions and finally Forms, the child learns these important aspects of basic art education in an effortless and non-academic way which enables him to retain the information. He enjoys cutting out shapes in

black paper and by placing them on white paper, he learns about two dimensional shapes.

I have often seen that sometime it is hard for a child to start art work and he will stare blankly at the white sheet, chewing on his pencil. The author gives a helpful exercise to overcome this artist's block and it works very well. "Sometimes it is hard to start art work. Random shapes evoke associations. Lines can transform these associations into art," he writes as we learn how to tear newspaper into random shapes, something every child loves to do, and then these shapes are glued to a sheet of white paper. What do these shapes suggest? What can they be turned into?

The child is asked and an exciting and unusual image always emerges which is outlined with black paint. This innovative art workbook with simple instructions and every day materials can be used by children on their own and will help them to bring out the creative potential that is inherent in all children.

The other two workbooks, one which teaches children how to make puppets and the other toys—are equally fun-filled and packed with a lot of useful and practical information. *Toys and Tales* by Sudarshan Khanna, Gita Wolf and Anushka Ravishankar is a book which will give endless joy to many children and the same time introduce them to abstract physical principles. Making a simple toy on his own with just two pieces of cardboard and a rubber band gives a great sense of satisfaction to a child, much more than any high tech battery-powered toy can. Many adults

too will find the art of making toys, both traditional, long lost kinds and modern ones, fascinating and I for one finally found out what kinetic energy and centrifugal force was as I made some of the toys with my students. "We saw that the struggle to make his toy work allowed the child an insight into abstract physical principles. The understanding came through play. Such insights are frequently arrived at in a tangential way, and almost always open up wider areas of experience", write the authors who have produced a much needed book on toy making for children. The price is a little steep at Rs 225 since the book has limited colour illustrations.

Puppets Unlimited has innovative methods on how to create a whole new world of characters with waste materials like bamboo sticks, old tennis balls, matchsticks, newspaper, icecream spoons and thermocol packing. A brief history on various kinds of puppets used all over the world makes the book more interesting and the sample script too is helpful for children who want to produce their own puppet show. What makes these three workbooks from Tara Publishing different is their easy and joyful approach to teaching children, making them think independently so that they can take off on a wonderful journey of discovery.

Nandini Srivastava

INTERACTING IN ENGLISH—BOOKS 1 TO 5

By Nina Sehgal and Uma Raman. Illustrated by Neeta Gangopadhyaya.

Ratna Sagar, 1999, pp, 96, 100, 100, 100 & 100, Rs. 57.90, 57.90, 58.90, 58.90 & 59.90.

"What is a book without pictures" said Alice. Well now we have a series of text books which have broken away from the drab black and white mode. Ratna Sagar has published a set of five books—*Interacting in English* for grades 1 to 5. Profusely illustrated, we have pictures leaping out at us from every page. Written by Nina Sehgal and Uma Raman the books are aimed at developing the listening, speaking and reading skills of children in elementary schools. The illustrations have been beautifully executed by Vicky Arya, Taposhi Ghoshal, Tapas Guha and Neeta Gangopadhyaya.

The selection of stories and poems in this series is wide and varied. Multicultural in their outlook, some stories are by the authors themselves, while others are extracts from longer stories by Ruskin Bond, Roald Dahl, and Nelson Mandela to name a few. Enid Blyton too has finally found her way into the pages of a text book.

Interacting in English follows a workbook format. There is place for the students to write out their answers. Different styles of presentation have been used—comic strips, crosswords, puzzles and map work. The pictures are sure to keep the child absorbed in the text. The authors have provided sufficient guidelines for the teacher on how to use the text. It seems that the authors have deliberately kept the language simple. Having worked with children at the elementary level I feel that these books



would do well as comprehension workbooks or supplementary texts. The students can tackle the lessons with relative ease and can write out the answers without much help. Some of the stories have been left open-ended, with scope for discussion and enhancement of verbal skills.

As a main text, this series leaves me with a feeling of inadequacy. The stories are short and at times a trifle too simple. The vocabulary used poses no challenge for the reader especially in Books 4 and 5. There is little left to the imagination of the child. It does not encourage him/her to read between and beyond the lines. The student is not exposed to the nuances of the English Language. Hardly any similes and metaphors have been used.

The selection of poems could have been better. We must help our children discover the magic of the printed word. As reading levels go down alarmingly, the text-book should be used as a tool to develop language skills. They must be exciting enough to wean children away from the audio-visual media. The English text-book should expose children to the best of children's literature, Indian and foreign.

Levels 1, 2 and 3 of the text-books are more satisfying to go through than 4 and 5. These do not seem to be meaty enough. Stories of elves and fairies are passe. My experience with young children has shown me that they enjoy science-fiction, real-life drama, extra-terrestrial adventure, the wonders of nature, jurrasic journeys. Such stories in text-books are safe to keep the children rivetted, making English learning and teaching fun.

Meeta Bali



MY FIRST BOOK OF HOW THINGS ARE MADE

By George Jones

Scholastic, in the Series of Cartwheel Books Shelf Learning, 1995, pp. 64, Rs. 250.00

FACTS & FUN ABOUT ANIMALS AND SCIENCE

Scholastic, pp. 64, Rs. 200.00

My First Book of How Things Are Made introduces children to the way their favorite things like crayons, jeans, books, etc., are made. It unfolds the manufacturing processes and tells about the importance of the people who run the machines.

In the absence of the opportunity to visit a factory, the book provides insight into the process as if an individual is visiting the factory and seeing the complex mechanical process and plant. The book describes individual processes in about twelve steps, each with clear perceptive method and demonstrative photographs, which raise the curiosity and sustains the interest of the child reader. An introduction to some of the technical terms is of great help and would increase the vocabulary of the child.

The manufacturing processes restrict the profile of readers in case of eight items. Some children would need greater parental support; otherwise, the book is ideal for 8-10 years olds.

The price seems to be on the high side to attract a wide cross section of Indian community to subscribe to the titles in the series on a regular basis.

The presentation and quality of the hard cover book is attractive and inviting.

In the first part *My First Book in Facts And Fun* covers animal world, social and filial aspects of the animals and their capacity to cope with different environs in which they are forced to live. As we go along, there is a continuous flow of quiz-questions and handy answers. Cleverly, the questions rely on general knowledge or there is reference some where in the book.

Part two of the book is an introduction to scientific ideas. Here the book deals with what different things are made up of and how they work—from plants and animals to racing cars and video cameras. The natural forces and effects, such as gravity electricity, sound, and light are also covered in simple and lucid language. It makes good sense to begin teaching of principles of physics, in this manner.

The book would sustain the curiosity of the child because of rich illustrations and add to the child's knowledge through the quizzes. While the first part of the book would be enjoyed by ten-years-olds because of its presentation, the second part being heavier and informative would be suitable for an older age group.

The quiz is illustrated wherever needed, and is interactive in its approach. The illustrative example of latex turning into rubber, the difference between a mammal bone and that of a bird providing the capacity to fly, are educative.

The megaquiz at the end of each part, consisting of a set of ten questions evaluates the level of absorption. The illustrative, interesting and comprehensive approach adopted in the book is unlike the normal disenchanting look and content of modern day school books.

Recommended for parents and teachers, to enhance the learning process of their wards in the process of acquiring knowledge.

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

By Anup Kumar Dutta

Scholastic, 1999, pp. 127, Rs. 70.00



Adventure and Mystery is the main plot in this book. Though this book is seemingly interesting it does not have the one quality of "Breathtaking attention" which is usually present in most mystery books. But I think the main reason why I did not enjoy the book was because compared to the type of mysteries I read, it was for a slightly younger age group. Let me tell you a few things I liked about this book.

I found the language and vocabulary wonderful. One paragraph that shows off its vocabulary is—"They had met no one, seen nothing out of the ordinary except footprints. Yet the solitary villa had filled her with an irrational fear, a queer premonition of a disaster. . ."

Overall this is a good book for a child who likes to read bit by bit of the book at different times.

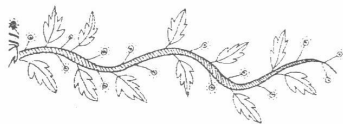
Aditi Chengappa, 12, is in Class VII at Vasant Valley School, New Delhi.

Dipavali Debroy

AJANTA APARTMENTS: MADAN AND SAIF; JYOTI AND THE MAN NEXT DOOR; THE OLD RABBIT; THE BIRTHDAY PICTURE; NAUGHTY JYOTI; GANESH AND SAIF GO TRACKING; HASMINA'S KITE; THE BEST OF FRIENDS.

Written and illustrated by Eleanor Watts

Orient Longman, Chennai, 1998, a set of 8 books, pp. 30 each, Rs. 28.00 each.



At last, books for three to eight year olds that delight, but also deal with realities. At last, books that are fun and yet tackle serious issues, especially for the very young. At last, books that are a true composite of words and pictures.

Each of the eight books in the series tells a story about children who live in an apartment block named Ajanta Apartments. The front and back covers show—in backgrounds of different colours—the seven children: Saif, Ganesh, Hasmina, Jyoti, Mandeep Madan and Amit.

The inside front cover of each book shows an apartment block with blanks

above the flats against names of children in the respective flats. Almost the same picture is to be found on page one of each book, with a few details specific to story of the book, and names of children figuring in that story filled appropriately in, e.g., those of Saif and Ganesh in *Ganesh and Saif Go Tracking*. Once a child has gone through all the books (and only then), can he fill in the blanks in the picture on the inside cover. This exercises the child's comprehension skills, besides being an incentive for him to persevere with the series.

The book I liked best is *Madan and Saif*. The two of them lived in the same

apartment block, but Madan's family is more affluent and that affects Madan's behaviour with Saif. It requires courage to say so, but small children do happen to be conscious of economic disparities. But they have their own ways of sorting out such situations. Saif develops a technique of keeping Madan in check. He does more—and develops a friendship with the spoilt, but insecure, Madan.

Naughty Jyoti portrays the subtle discrimination the girl child suffers, even in a relatively well-off and well-adjusted family.

Hasmina's Kite is about bullying of a different kind, that of an older child over younger ones. Here an elderly inmate of the apartment block comes to the aid of Hasmina. This not only stops the bullying, but brings the old closer to the young.

There is a similar strain in *The Best of Friends*, where frisky Ganesh and Saif make friends with an infirm Aunt Julie and in *The Birthday Picture*, where a shy mother and daughter duo gets to know the neighbours.

People living in the same apartment block sometimes live at great distances from one another, divided by age, economic status, regional affiliation, cultural conditioning and psychological

constructs. Urban life brings them within the same structure of brick and mortar, but they remain alienated. The *Ajanta Apartments* series reveals a delicate awareness of this phenomenon.

The series treats other themes as well, the special attachment of a small child to a dilapidated toy (*The Old Rabbit*), the questioning attitude in children (*Jyoti and the Man Next Door*), and the exercise of imagination by them (*Ganesh and Saif Go Tracking*).



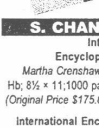
These themes or issues raise the *Ajanta Apartment* series far above 'picture books'—which could have been one way of describing them. And even then, the rating would have been high. The illustrations are all line-drawings, but with such life in them! They have details like the tiny *rangoli* on the threshold of Anandji's flat (*Jyoti and the Man Next Door*, p. 15). And because they are line-drawings, the small child can fill them in with his own colours. But these books are more than either the stories or the illustrations in them. They are a blend of both, and author-illustrators rarely make a good blend like Eleanor Watts.

It would have been lovely to write a book review without a single critical line. But that is impossible. These books are too highly priced.

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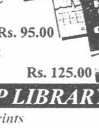
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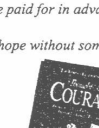
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Anupama Kapse

A TRACTOR RIDE

By Leila Ekanayake. Illustrated by Debashish Deb.
Vikas, Madhuban Educational Books. New Delhi,
My Little Library Series, pp. 24, Rs. 30.00

HUNGAMA: SHIV'S NATURE PARTY

By Kamlesh Malhotra. Illustrated by Dipanwita Donde.
Vikas, Madhuban Educational Books. New Delhi,
My Little Library Series, pp. 24, Rs. 30.00

THE RUNAWAY WHEEL

By Asha Nehemiah. Illustrated by Subir Roy.
Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, pp. 16, Rs. 15.00

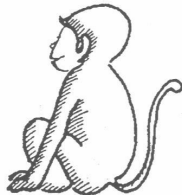
MY ROBOT ROBBY

By Dilip M. Salwi. Illustrated by C.M. Salwi.
National Book Trust, New Delhi, Nehru Bal Pustakalay, pp. 40, Rs. 10.00

Children's fiction is hardly ever reviewed by most journals and newspapers. For potential consumers like me and others, this edition of *The Book Review* (the November issue is published every year as a special issue of children's books) is a blessing. On the other hand, these four books also force us to look more carefully at the fast-growing area of children's book publishing and its subjects in a post-liberalisation world of easy-access information. Far from being inimical, these two forces seem to complement each other.

Ken, the young hero of Leila Ekanayake's story hears a new dhug-

dhug sound on his small farm and wonders with excitement what it could be. It turns out to be not a motorcycle but a brand new dragon-fly of a tractor, bright red in colour, with outspread handles and large head-lights. The smoke rings of its exhaust pipes, its brand new brakes cast a spell on young Ken. Even more interestingly, his small, string-drawn car which is in the foreground when he awaits the tractor is relegated into a corner. The huge bright red tractor is offset by verdant green fields and rabbits, chicken and the smaller animals of the farm. The temptation to sit in the driver's seat is overwhelming, and this is where Ken's day-dream of driving the



tractor begins. The tractor leaps into the air at full speed, runs over a bridge, falls into a stream, and sinks. A pretty girl guides him to a service station where Ken is carried aloft on a hydraulic jack, sprayed by oil and water, cleaned by vacuum machines, soap pads, and roller towels. Next, the tractor takes him to a wonderland where stockings turn into chocolate cake and colourful fountains ply him with orange and blackcurrant juice. An attendant vanishes while filling air into the tyres. They grow big and burst, the tractor flies, and Ken wakes up. Ken's pet dog, the chicken, the squirrel are back, and so are Mother and Father, and the real ride begins.

Ken's mundane, everyday world is thus used effectively to create a boyish fantasy about control and access to an adult world. Although its backdrop is rural, it describes from the point of view of the urban only child unused to siblings or company, who looks exclusively at his/her world. The girls in the story are either pretty or shown to be drying clothes or offering food and reinforce traditional gender-biases. Debashish Deb's illustrations are framed beautifully on each page, and the colour red is used strikingly. One even gets a sense of the author's Sri Lankan background—palm trees abound, Mother and Father dress differently from the typical Indian farmer although in the whole the locale is unobtrusively Indian.

Hungama: Shiv's Nature Party is the story of a city-bred child, Shiv, who wants a "nature" party for his birthday. The venue is the garden, with its green

grass, the cake is tree shaped, the food is served on leaves and the drinks in coconut shells. Shiv's classmates, who conveniently number twenty-six, and have names and dresses beginning with each letter of the alphabet, arrive in different costumes worn according to the nature theme—as jungles, rhinos, vegetables, as waterfalls and even the river Yamuna. They are the "abc" people; Arun looks like an apple, Bela like a banana, Candy like a carrot and so on. Grandma merely says, "Oh dear, I think..." for the length of three pages. All the dresses clamour for attention. Suddenly, a real monkey appears on the scene and the "Hungama" begins. What could have been the trigger for a meaningful interaction between the human and the animal, between the cosmetic and the natural turns into a site for an aggressive battleground. In its eagerness to oppose the tropes of traditional tales, whether it is the Grandmother or the monkey *Hungama* produces a gaudy, crowded ensemble of ravenous, impatient children. Sadly, in this it only reproduces the competitive, consumeristic tendencies of urban society that it seems to be repudiating. Noise is passed off as excitement and as a source of tension in the narrative. Nature is reduced to a series of set-pieces. At the end, the real monkey is pushed to a corner and forced to watch as the children gain control over it. "Nature" in a make-believe form is far more comforting than a menacing monkey. The illustrations too contribute to a disturbingly violent atmosphere.

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The Runaway Wheel is another story with a tractor. This time, the brand new tractor becomes a means of going to the circus. On the way, they have a flat tyre. Father removes the wheel to get it repaired. He asks the children to hold it for him. An eagle swoops down. The children let go of the tyre. Being on top of a hill, it starts rolling immediately. What follows is the eventful journey of the runaway wheel as it hammers down the hill, knocking down melons, milk and bundles of freshly washed clothes before it wobbles to a halt in front of the mechanic's shop. The mechanic repairs the wheel, and all angry faces break into a smile as they head for the circus.

Asha Nehemiah's story won a prize in the Read-aloud/Picture Books category organized by the Children's Book Trust for Writers of Children's Books. This is not surprising. Apart from using sound creatively in expressions, it also takes the child through a varied range of emotions such as fear, surprise, pleasure and excitement. Subir Roy's illustrations are visually stimulating and sensitive. For example, Mother is shown near a purple sari drying outside in the courtyard at first. She hears that they are going to the circus. On the next page, she appears in this purple sari. A visual narrative complements the oral, generating a fresh source of pleasure. Realistic detail, such as green chillies and a lemon hanging in the mechanic's shop to ward off the evil eye, and well-picturised slopes add to the drama and movement which fill the pages.

My Robot Robbi is a book children of age seven upwards might enjoy. The eponymous Robbi-999XHA is not merely a robot but also a friend and phi-

losopher to Sunny, the young boy who owns him.

While urban children used to computers and internet connections might find nothing exceptional in this story, others might find that Robbi would serve as a good substitute for a computer; it talks, it tells stories, sings songs, it never quarrels, it answers questions and even takes the dog out for a walk. Although its identity as a sophisticated, smart home appliance is constantly emphasised, it is soon humanised as a more imaginative sensibility takes over. This is the biggest strength of this account of a robot's life. Not only does it smoothly combine fact and fiction, it balances elements of a traditional story, a science fiction tale, and an information booklet perfectly, glancing at history and mythology as well.

We learn that the word "robot" is derived from the Czech "robot", which means 'slave', that it was used for the first time by the Czech writer Karel Capek in his play *Rossum's Universal Robots* in 1921 and that the play itself revolves around the rebellion of mechanical slaves or robots against their master. Numerous descriptions of the household chores Robbi performs precede this piece of information so that the irony is not lost upon the reader.

What follows now is a history of mechanical, robot-like gadgets from all over the world.

This is a well-researched, intelligently constructed account which could have been tighter; but it really suffers on account of poor, unimaginative illustrations.

All in all, an uneven though interesting quartet.

Manisha Malhotra

FIRST AID FOR ANIMALS

By Gautam Grover with Maneka Gandhi

Sterling Publishers, 1999, pp. 121, Rs. 60.00

The book is a handy guide and a "must" for all animals lovers and pet owners. The first thing that appealed was the Foreword by Maneka Gandhi, especially the words, "Don't first administer first aid and walk away and expect the animal to get better by itself. See the matter through." Many of us have done it now and then and had it on our conscience, because we were not clear on the "How and What" of it. This book in clear and lucid and gives you stepwise instructions on the How and the What!! It even gives you vaccination schedule/handy tips for common problems that your pet may face. Simple techniques of first aid like tying a tourniquet, bandaging have been well illustrated with diagrams. Identification of disorders by symptoms and first line of treatment/ which can be taken by the owner have been elucidated. Precautions like wearing a glove or not approaching the animal till he is quiet are very helpful tips. I feel a section on agencies that can be approached for strays, their phone numbers and addresses would have made it complete.

A well written book and a practical guide for day to day care and maintenance of your pet!



Veena Devasher

THE ZOO DUCK. By Harini Gopalswamy. Edited by Navin Menon. Illustrations by Neeta Gangopadhy. 1998, pp. 16 Rs. 15.00

THE WALKING TREE. By Deepa Agarwal. Edited by Geeta Menon. Illustrations by Ajanta Guhathakurta. 1999, pp 16, Rs. 15.00

WE HAVE NEW FRIENDS: A FLOWER FOR LILA. By Alaka Shankar. Edited by Geeta Menon. Illustrations by Ajanta Guhathakurta. 1998, pp. 32, Rs. 20.00

GRANNY'S SARI

By Asha Nehemiah. Edited by Bhavana Nair. Illustrations by Subir Roy. 1998, pp. 16, Rs. 15.00

All from Children's Book Trust, New Delhi.



ADVENTURES IN THE DESERT. By Cheryl Rao. Illustrations by Ashish Sengupta, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 72, Rs. 10.00

CHEERFUL SPIRITS. By Geetha Iyengar. Illustrated by Pulak Biswas, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 40, Rs. 12.00

BIRJU AND THE FLYING HORSE. By Deepa Aggarwal. Illustrations Subir Roy, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 16, Rs. 8.00

A BABY LION LEARNS TO ROAR. By Indu Rana. Illustrations Gurmeet Singh, New Delhi 1999, pp. 24, Rs. 10.00

MY LIFE: THE TALE OF A BUTTERFLY, By Anjan Sarkar. New Delhi 1998, pp. 16, Rs. 32.00

FROM BONE TO STONE. By Karen Haydock. New Delhi, 1999 pp. 28, Rs. 15.00

All from National Book Trust, India.

The *Zoo Duck* is the story of a Mandarin duck that migrates to a zoo and though welcomed by the other animals and birds, is regarded as the unwanted outsider by keepers. A naturalist recognising its rarity, helps to establish it as an important addition to the zoo population and the duck lives happily ever after in his new environs. This is a tale simply and directly told, greatly enhanced by the quality of the illustrations which are bright, colourful, and emotive enough to tell a story of their own. Children are sure to like it. *The Zoo Duck* won a prize in the category Read-aloud books. The Picture Books in the Competition for Writers of Children's Books organized by the Children's Book Trust.

The Walking Tree is a delightful read and altogether a wonderful little book. The story, narration and illustrations complement each other admirably. This charming tale is about a small, disgruntled tree who thinks the grass is greener on the other side. However, his adventures into the real world prove to be daunting and it ends with his return to the forest, where he was "happy being a tree to whom the breeze talked, where birds could build their nests and the monkeys could sleep at night." The illustrations by Ajanta Guhathakurta are

lively and imaginative and the use of colour very pleasing. Children would love this book which won second prize in the category Read-aloud Books/Picture Books in the Competition for Writers of Children's Books organized by the Children's book Trust.

In *We have New Friends* and *A Flower for Lila*, the author has taken everyday events of childhood, such as the discovery of new kittens that Arati and Maya want to adopt and the nurturing of a plant by Lila, and turned them into successful little stories with meaning. They tell us about love and caring and the little things that matter most. In parts, the style of writing tends to be a bit staccato and textbook-like, which takes away from an ease of comfortable reading. Though profusely illustrated by Ajanta Guhathakurta, the pictures lack spontaneity and look too posed. The water-colour renderings lack the sprightliness of comparable pictures in *The Walking Tree*.

Granny's Sari by Asha Nehemiah is all about an itinerant sari that belongs to Anu's Granny. We are told it is special, and patterned with animals—deer, lions, bears and monkeys. One day it flies off the clothesline and in the course of its adventures, helps a policeman catch a robber, Mrs. Rao pluck

mangoes from branches too high to reach, eventually surfacing in a poor fisherwoman's home, where the sari has been converted into clothes for her three children. Granny is pleased her sari has proved so useful to so many and that evening, she, Anu and Grandpa sup on the fish they had bought from the fisherwoman and mangoes Mrs. Rao had given them.

The pictures by Subir Roy are wonderfully painted and capture the essence of the story. *Granny's Sari* won a prize in the category Read-aloud Books/ Picture Books in the Competition for Writers of children's books organized by the Children's Book Trust. It is original in concept, yet the subject is familiar—the idea of a magical sari most certainly captures the imagination! A fine book indeed.

Shweta and Sami are twins—Bombay bred and spoiled by city comfort. Their mother decides to take them for a year to Suratgarh, where their father, an army officer, is posted. The initial exposure to life in a small town, devoid of ice cream parlours and city conveniences comes as a rude shock to the children. Adjusting to a new school, new friends and altogether new environs is difficult and strange. Soon, however, Shweta and Samir make friends with Arjun—a once obstreperous classmate—and gradually begin to adjust to the wonderful experiences of new places and people. Their journey through several Rajasthani villages, learn about the history of towns and places, see a total solar eclipse, go camping in the desert, visit prehistoric settlements in Kalibangan and almost discover a new one!

The merit of this book lies in its ability to create a sense of adventure and wonderment about the history and geography of a place, without being pedantic and boring. There is relief in the children's friendly banter and playfulness, and perhaps a message to be learned that new experiences should always be welcomed. If this book could be used as a text, with suitable additions to the historical aspects (more details for example), its success in classrooms would certainly be assured. (In fact educators should try such children-friendly approaches to teaching). It provides a refreshing look at history in a simple, uncomplicated manner.

The pictures are well drawn and fit in nicely with the text. The density of the printing, especially of the text is unfortunately very uneven, but overall, this is an interesting and informative book.

Cheerful Spirits, is a story of pictures in a family album that come alive and provide much entertainment to two curious children—Priya and Hari—who chance upon Hari's family album whilst

rooting around in a storeroom. It happens to be great grandma's birthday and she astonishes the children by speaking to them from her picture! What follows is an amusing spilling of family secrets and goings on that involve a host of relatives—aunts and uncles and cousins and father and mother! The cheerful spirits don't speak anymore, but leave Priya and Hari blessed with a sense of wonder and delight at what they have experienced.

A lively and imaginative story, even though pictures coming to life is not an original idea. The writing is reasonably fluid and easy. The index at the end is thoughtful. Pulak Biswas is a fine illustrator but one wishes the colours had matched the 'spirit' of the story.

Birju and the Flying Horse is targeted for 5-8 years olds. Birju is handicapped and cannot walk properly. His father finds him an old rocking horse and riding it one day, the horse assumes magical powers and off they go flying through the air on an adventure. This fairytale like story has an old woman of the east, one of the west, one of the south, all sisters. A bit reminiscent of the witches in the wizard of Oz—only these are benevolent. Each grants him a boon for the helpful boy he is, which he unselfishly uses to assist his poor and hardworking parents. The ending is happy. Birju gets rewarded for his kindness when the old man of the north restores his mobility and he can walk once more. The illustrations complement the narrative.

A Baby Lion Learns to Roar has a terribly familiar ring to it, not merely the title, but every single line! I recall reading aloud, many years ago, to my young daughters, a story of startling similarity. So similar that the title read *A Lion Learns to roar*. It was a small format book, cheerfully illustrated, in perhaps the Ladybird or Puddlelane series of Read Aloud books. Unfortunately I do not have it in my possession but a little research will surely prove me right. The only difference in the stories is towards the end, when contrary to Ms. Rana's version, where the baby lion finds his roar when chased by a hunter, in the original, the baby lion loses his way in the dark woods, spends a terrifying night (literally) out on a limb, and discovers his roar when scared out of his wits by an owl's hooting. It would be futile to comment on a story that has been told before and more effectively. The illustrations are not up to the mark either. This is quite a disappointment.

My Life: The Tale of a Butterfly is a sound educational concept. I like the idea of using actual colour photographs very much, though the book loses much of its quality through poor printing. In some pictures, the registration is com-

pletely off which should have been avoided. I hope such books are being used as classroom texts as they would appeal to children because of the clear visuals and friendly text. But care *must* be taken to ensure superior print quality or the efforts of the writer/photographer are wasted.

From Bone to Stone by Karen Haydock is yet another picture book for small children (4-7 years) which talks about Triceratops in a 'Chicken-Licken' story format. It is quite innovative as the repetition would help a child commit facts

Taposhi Ghoshal

PICTURING WORDS & READING PICTURES
ILLUSTRATION AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

By Gita Wolf

Tara Publishing, Chennai, 1997, pp. 52,
Rs. 150.00

Mostly the first thing which attracts a child to a book is the pictures, which further engage the child to read the book. Pictures sometimes don't need words at all, it can communicate with its own special power. We adults sometimes are not aware of how and to what extent the pictures or visuals have an impact on our children. Sometimes children read and see something which remains with them, it need not always have an impact immediately but affect them later. In our country children's literature is never taken with much seriousness with few exceptions. Stereotype visuals and text limit the wide thought process of children. So creating children's literature is not a child's play. It is the responsibility of parents, educators—publishers, authors and illustrators to acquaint the child not only with what has been known to be popular but also with some new daring visuals as well as literatures. Children need exposure to different kinds of illustrations to develop visual literacy and aesthetic perceptions and also challenge them, to think, reflect and interpret more creatively.

Picturing Words and Reading Pictures as the title says, is about how to handle pictures in a children's book. This is the first critical exploration of children book's illustration and literature from an Indian perspective. The author, Gita Wolf of Tara Publishing (Chennai based publishing house) has a genuine and excellent purpose behind publishing this book. Though it is a very small publishing house the books they have produced are very creative and innovative. Innovative books can only emerge from dialogue between committed publishing and concerned professionals and

to memory with ease. An example:

"This is the lava that covered the mud that hid the sand that blew over the bones of the big triceratops in a fight one Saturday night"

The 'Questions to think about' and 'Things to do' at the end of the book are useful add ons. The illustrations look amateurish and one wishes more care would be taken over one of the most important aspects of publishing children's books. In this respect, CBT certainly has a more professional and quality conscious approach.

that is the way Gita strongly comes through with all of her books.

Tara conceived this book during an illustrator's workshop conducted by Tara Publishing and the Max Mueller Bhavan, Chennai in February 1995. Some basic questions, some dilemmas and opinions about making of children's book arose, discussed very openly between professionals. Their views are framed in this book in their own words.

- Questions like
- "Do we really know what kind of books children like?"
- What is more important, the word or the pictures?"
- How do popular illustration styles limit the imagination?"
- Can different visual cultures survive in a rapidly homogenising world?"
- In what ways can a children's book deal with stereotype, sex and violence?" were discussed.

This book will definitely stimulate parents, educate authors, illustrators, publishers and anyone concerned with original, creative and valuable children's literature.

The book really focuses on some areas which require new vistas. India has a rich traditional and cultural background but we do not produce creative and innovative contemporary children's literatures. Constantly copying of western thoughts and visuals in our children's literature, we fail to incorporate our own rich traditional and cultural values in our children's contemporary literature.

In an increasing literary market where we cannot cover up the gap unless we work hard the book points out new directions to our children's book industry which is still in the process of evolving.

Gita says in her book, 'We can no longer go back to a world of grandmother's tales, oral traditions are rapidly disappearing and we replace them with secondhand imitations of western books. We still need to find new and meaningful idioms which are truly contemporary. Without losing our historical identity.'



Vijayalakshmi Nagaraj

THE PRINCESS OF LIGHT AND OTHER STORIES

By Hema Pande. 1999, pp. 56, Rs. 40.00

THE HUNGRY EMPEROR AND THE CLEVER BARBER

By Champa Tikoo. 1999, pp. 30, Rs. 25.00

VINEGAR KING AND HOT SOUP

By Champa Tikoo. 1999, pp. 30, Rs. 25.00

THE MESSAGE OF THUNDER AND OTHER PLAYS

By Debjani Chatterjee. 1999, pp. 85, Rs. 40.00

All under Gul Mohar Series, Orient Longman

A collection of five Japanese folktales have been translated for children by Hema Pande. These folk tales from the Lord of the Rising Sun all go back to "a long time ago". These are just the kind of stories grandmother would have narrated.

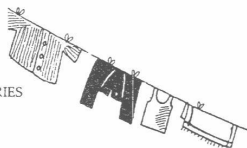
The Princess of Light is the story of a poor man Miyako Maru and his wife. They have no children but find a beautiful baby girl whom they bring up as their daughter. They name her Kaguya Hime—the Princess of Light. She brings them wealth and joy but soon she has to leave them. She has to go back to the moon from where she was banished for doing wrong. The old couple are very upset. She gives them the nectar of immortality, which they do not drink. They place it on top of Mount Fujiyama which from that day becomes a sacred mountain.

For a person who thinks he is the bravest and strongest it is a come down when he meets his match in a girl called Naru me who proves that she is stronger.

This is how 'Greatest Mountain' a famous wrestler feels and then agrees to take help from Naru me. She and her grandmother make him really strong so that he can participate at the Emperor's wrestling match. Thus, when Greatest Mountain puts his pillar like legs down the ground shakes. The people think it is an earthquake. Greatest Mountain wins the prize money at the wrestling match and then decides never again to wrestle in public because the Emperor never really liked this sport.

'The Chatterbox Jelly Fish' seems to be a story straight from our very own *Panchatantra*. It is very similar to the *Monkey and the Crocodile*. This proves how far the stories from the *Panchatantra* have travelled, been modified and rewritten. The title of this story is quite deceptive but as one reads on it unfolds the story of the Dragon King's daughter stricken by a strange fever. The only cure recommended is the monkey's liver.

The clever jelly fish volunteers to get it but loses out to the monkey because



he talked too much. The king is angry, the jelly fish is beaten up by sharks and swordfish—the king's soldiers. Thus, the jelly fish becomes a boneless soft, slimy creature.

The illustration on p. 26 is rather unclear. In such stories children really look for good pictures too.

'The Grateful Snow-Crane' as the name suggests is about how a bird returns the good deed done to it. On being saved from a trap by an old man, it changes into a beautiful girl who weaves exquisite silks and brocades. The old man sells them and becomes rich and he and his wife then lead a comfortable, happy life. This story would appeal to a smaller age group as they enjoy animal or bird stories.

'The Foolish Man and his Beautiful Clever Wife' shows how the wife outwits the feudal lord and makes her own husband Jiro the Lord of the castle.

All the stories in this book have a typical happy ending. The poor become rich and the girls are beautiful. Dipto Narayan Chattopadhyay's illustrations are in black and white. Colourful illustrations in the inner pages would have highlighted the stories better and would justify the price of Rs 40.

Champa Tikoo has compiled and translated four stories from China. There are two stories each in two books, the covers are bright and designed by Deepa Kamath.

The Hungry Emperor is all about the emperor who loved food except that he was overly fussy. It takes a wise man called Yen to teach the king a lesson using a simple tactic called "hunger".

The Clever Barber is really the story of a wise Prime Minister and his intelligent wife Shoulin. They solve the problem of doing the emperor's hair without hurting the painful bump on his head. The illustrations by Samina Baig add colour to the text and are good.

Vinegar king and Hot Soup sound like a Chinese meal. The quaint story about how a young boy 'Yo Wa' who acciden-

tally makes vinegar and also saves the king from choking on a fish bone, is interesting.

'Hot Soup' as the name suggests is about how Ah Ming makes good hot soup and sells it to earn money to book after his mother. He serves soup to a stranger who does not pay him initially but rewards him later. Ah Ming and his mother live well after that.

Debjani Chatterjee has delved into the stories from five different world religions from around the world and based her five plays on them. There is variety and the themes are value based and educative.

The Message of Thunder taken from the Upanishads, the Hindu scriptures, is the story of a wise teacher who narrates the story of how the gods, demons and human beings go to the Creator and learn the qualities of respect for elders, discipline, self-control, sharing and compassion. The sound of Thunder reminds them about this.

'Nowhere to Go' is based on an incident from the life of Qasim El Junaid who was a great Sufi teacher. A student called Fool proves his wisdom to the other students who always make fun of him. They realize that they themselves were not the best.

'The New Rabbi' is based on a Jewish story from Eastern Europe. Hard working Levi Hirsch, an orphan works sincerely for Rabbi Mendel, the religious leader of the Jewish community in Rimanov. Levi Hirsch becomes a great teacher himself and takes on the mantle of Rabbi Mendel on his death. The Rabbi's sons are undecided and unable to take a decision. Levi proves that he was greater than his teachers.

'The Shadow of Buddha' is based on an episode from the travels of Hieun Tsang, one of the best known Chinese Buddhist monks to make a pilgrimage to India. In this story the bandits turn over a new leaf. From killing and robbing they learn to do good to others and live the life Hieun Tsang showed them through his teachings of the Buddha.

'The Honest Robber' taken from an incident from the life of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. This anecdote tells the story of a man Bhumia who is the only rich man in the village, his wealth amassed by robbing the people of his village. He gives up his wicked life after he meets Guru Nanak and follows his advice.

The plays are written in simple language. The author has even suggested costumes and special effects for the stage. This should motivate teachers to adapt it for various extra curricular activities, where one always looks for plays.



Anju Virmani

KUNNU THE CUB

By Savita Shetty

A MYTHOLOGICAL MOSAIC

By Thangam Krishnan

JUST A SECOND AND OTHER STORIES

By Ramendra Kumar

All three from Madhuban series of Vikas, pp. 134, pp. 117 & pp. 96, Rs. 35.00, Rs. 30.00 & Rs. 30.00

TALES OF LORD KRISHNA

By Ramlal Verma

TALES OF LORD BRAHMA

By R.K. Murthi

TALES OF GODDESS DURGA

By RK Murthi

STORIES OF GURU NANAK

By Surjit Singh Kalra

All four from Pitamber Publishing Company, pp. 40, pp. 48, pp. 51 & pp. 63, Rs. 22.50, Rs. 25.00, Rs. 30.00 & Rs. 35.00

Grandmother are irreplaceable, but in the era of the advertisement, where all of life's experiences and emotions must be compressed into twenty second slots, grandmothers and the leisurely unwinding of fables are increasingly hard to find. So parents, sundry relatives and friends, and later the children themselves must create the magic for themselves, often at short notice (tell me a bedtime story now!) and in a short period (all right, but it's late, so it will have to be a short story!). Children's books are therefore always welcome, and when they are well written, absolutely a gift of God!

I came across a varied collection recently. To begin with are three from the Madhuban series of Vikas: *Kunnu the Cub* by Savita Shetty, *A Mythological Mosaic* by Thangam Krishnan, and *Just A Second and Other Stories* by Ramendra Kumar. *Kunnu* is an absolute find. The back cover has this description: "will be loved by seven to ten year olds", but I feel they should add "may disturb older persons". On the surface an endearing tale of the trials and tribulations of a tiger cub who strays away from his mother and gets caught up in human society, it also shows us how mindlessly cruel we can be to animals. A

child growing up with this book will probably be a lot more sensitive to animals. Thangam has a wonderful style of writing, with imagination, understanding and gentle humour, and the *Mosaic* can be enjoyed by the children as well as the narrator. Most of our old tales, whether of the epics, the *Panchatantra* or simpler folklore, carried one or more morals, but they were palatably wrapped in the exciting stories. In this 'Pantheon of Tales from Indian Scripture', the writer has captured this spirit, where several lessons can be learnt from the stories, but ever so unobtrusively. The line drawings by Jagdish Joshi complement the book perfectly. Ramendra Kumar's stories are interesting and good fun. I particularly enjoyed *Democracy—Jungle Style* and *Was it a Dream?* (about environmental degradation), which made their point about adult foolishness very crisply, but I found my young brats actually enjoyed the more predictable ones more. Priced low (all three put together cost less than Rs 100), these books are a must for one's own shelves, and for presenting to other children.

The others were from Pitamber Publishing Company: *Tales of Lord Krishna* by Dr Ramlal Verma, *Tales of Lord Brahma* and *Tales of Goddess Durga* by R.K. Murthi, and *Stories of Guru Nanak* by Surjit Singh Kalra. These slim books have colorful covers and sketches inside, large type for the young child to enjoy, and an interesting collection of fables from mythology, interestingly and simply written. They are best suited for the narrator to translate them into Hindi for the very young child. This is because the choice of words, particularly by Murthi, is sometimes rather peculiar: for example Sati "whined" to Lord Shiva to marry her, or Shiva "screamed" at Kamadeva. Murthi has tried to illustrate the use of English phrases in these stories, which I found a bit tedious. We were brought up on episodes from Guru Nanak's life, but the current generation of children have much less exposure to them (no major TV serial yet for example), so I expected a lot from the last book. It has been written with deep fervour, but that itself is a bit daunting: the child is referred to as Guru even in the early stories, and the devastating but gentle humor Nanak used to make his point is completely lost in the piety.



Shobha Gopalakrishnan

THE BIRTHDAY PRESENT

By Nergis Dalal

NASREEN'S PARK

By Priya Vasudevan

SEETHU

By Shantha Rameshwar Rao

PRINCESS PROMILA

By Krishna Kumar

ADVENTURES IN THE SNOW

By Manmohan Singh Bawa

CHIKKA

By Hira Nirodi Chandran

LINI

By Hira Nirodi Chandran

Gulmohar, Orient Longman.



Gulmohar an imprint of Orient Longman has recently published seven short stories for children in the age group of ten to fourteen years. Predictably all the stories are woven round children in order to arrest the mind of the young reader.

The Birthday Present (Rs. 40.00) by Nergis Dalal is an absorbing tale. Dev is ten years old and has been promised a dog of his own. He is sensitive and loving. He chooses Rajah, a wounded dog rather than take a cute, cuddly, two month old pup. Under his care, Rajah gets well soon and sheds his aggressiveness, but not before a few mishaps!

How mean man can be to animals is shown by the Zamindar's gruesomeness; on the flip side is the young child's concern and care.

The illustrations by Shahnaz Arni could've been better. However, the cover picture is good.

As the title suggests, *Nasreen's Park* (Rs. 55.00) by Priya Vasudevan is the story of a young girl's fight to save a children's park.

Nasreen's story begins at a slow pace. It has elements of the supernatural woven into it by way of "Bangaru", the magical cat. The latter part of the story is gripping. Nasreen's initiative, her pluck and tenacity are all admirable. Her legal travails as she fights to stop the park being taken up for a hotel, are well written, as they are familiar

grounds to the author, herself a qualified lawyer.

Shantha Rameshwar Rao's *Seethu* (Rs. 55.00) deals with Ravi, an orphan, who was branded a "bad luck child". Brought up by her grandfather, she befriends Anand of "Suvarna Villa", the rag doll meets with disapproval at home. He is in the care of his aunt and uncle, as his parents are away. Anand's longing for company and his forays into a world so different from his, make interesting reading.

This book has all the colour, action and elements of a good children's story. It subtly conveys the attitudes and prejudices in the minds of many elders. "Don't you realise that these people can bring in dirt and disease?" thunders Aunt Asha to Anand in obvious disapproval of the boys mixing with Ravi and company. In another incident, the aunt and uncle attempt to make Anand buy something "a boy would choose" from a toy shop, instead of the doll's cradle that he asks for. They are appalled at his choice little realizing that he really wants it for his friends who would never be able to afford to buy it. This is a telling scene on the lack of understanding often displayed by adults when dealing with children. Anand comes off as a sensitive child with no kind of bias in mind. "Seethu" plays a pivotal role in the story linking Anand of the mansion house with Ravi, the gardener's granddaughter. An enjoyable book well written and well illustrated.

Based in Manna, a small kingdom in Central India, *Princess Promila* (Rs. 55.00) by Krishna Kumar, transports you in time to the British Raj. Warring kings strive to defend their kingdoms from foreign rule. Against this background, the author traces the progress of little Promila from the cradle to the throne. But if Promila is a strong and bold girl, much of the credit must go to her long-suffering mother, the Queen of Manna. The Queen had been caught in a marriage against her wishes. As the king was away "constantly busy in battles and on hunting trips", the Queen leads a life of solitude in the palace. Her sole focus is now Princess Promila. Together mother and child are taught the letters of the alphabet secretly. With this opens up a whole new world for Promila. She learns quickly and gains in confidence. Her flight from Manna and her subsequent return form the climax of the story.

A short, racy story well presented but for an overlook on p. 64 where the last paragraph has been repeated at the top of p. 65. The illustrations by Nachiket Patwardhan have an old-world charm about them particularly the one with birds in the trees.

Adventure In the Snows by Manmohan Singh Bawa (Rs. 55.00) does

not live up to its name. None of the excitement, the thrill of adventure comes through. Instead, the writer has adopted a rather monotonous narrative style that robs the story of the zest it could have had. All the same, it is informative especially for young readers interested in adventure sports like trekking and mountain climbing. The author writes with authority on the Dhaula Dhar Range and Kangra Valley regions. Pavan and Naveen with Uncle Manjit cross the mountains through the Thamsar Pass to Bir. They are fortunate to have Dhumer Singh as their guide with them, as he is both knowledgeable and honest.

Many errors have crept in that should have been corrected. For example on p.9—"Just yesterday tore it off a man's face". On p. 13 the last but one line should read: "The latter, in turn, sells these things". A similar error occurs on p. 100: "The felt hot inside heavy clothes".

These errors seem so simple, but to the young reader they will cause much confusion and greater detailed reading must be done by the publishers.

Hira Nirodi Chandran's two stories *Chikka* and *Lini* (Rs. 55.00 & Rs. 60.00) are both very well written. The adventures of eleven year old Chikka, who leaves his village to work in Bangalore, rings so true of so many little boys in search of a better life. Chikka's simple joys such as in eating 'idlis and chutney' as he had only eaten "cooked ragi on a leaf with spicy read pepper", is touching. His simplicity and curiosity is typical. His adventures are a good learning experience. His hard work, loyalty and honesty endear him to the reader. An immensely enjoyable book.

In *Lini* Hira N. Chandran again masterfully traces the feelings of a young girl who has been separated from her parents. The book spans the period of two years and we witness Lini's adjustment to her new family, with 'ajji' and her mother's sister, Auntie Sita. Her friendship with Thimmi is brought out well.

A word of warning to the author—the usage of words such as "interstices" (pp. 27) and "injunction" (pp. 44) is to be avoided. They will cause anxiety in the young reader's mind and detract their attention from the story line.

Readers Please Note

Due to space constraint, we are not publishing our regular column, *Letter from London* by Stephen Moss, *Book News* and the *TBR Book Club* pages. Those wishing to order books may get the offers from the October or December issues.

Psychology of Adoption

Vinita Bhargava

CHILDREN'S ADJUSTMENT TO ADOPTION: DEVELOPMENTAL AND CLINICAL ISSUES

By D.M. Brodzinsky, D.W. Smith and A.B. Vrozdinsky

Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 1998, pp. X+142, \$44.50 (hb), \$21.00 (pb)

This book examines the psychology of adoption both from research and clinical perspectives. The authors wish to generate through this book greater interest among developmental and clinical psychologists with regard to the serious study of adoption. Their feeling of isolation from mainstream psychologists who have been indifferent to the study of this area is understandable. Perhaps adoptees represent such a small percentage of the population of children that only a handful of psychologists round the world are actively pursuing research on developmental and clinical issues in adoption. As a result relatively few research articles on adoption appear in psychological journals each year. The number of books published in the area is even fewer, so when a book is published it becomes a 'must read' for experts and workers in the field of child development, child psychiatry, clinical and developmental psychology. The authors have made major research contributions over the years in understanding the effects of adoption. This book stands as yet another significant contribution.

The book begins with a historical and contemporary perspective on adoption in America. It traces the ways in which adoption practice has undergone change in this century from a somewhat informal practice to a formalized social service, regulated by state law, and geared towards meeting the "best interest of the child". In addition the secrecy, anonymity and confidentiality is giving way to greater openness in policy and practice. The group of parents adopting children is heterogeneous. In addition, diversity in the characteristics of children being adopted make broad generalizations with respect to adoption difficult. What is evident from the research reviewed is that adopted children fare significantly better than those youngsters who are reared in institutional environments, in foster care or in neglected or abusive families. Proving beyond doubt that adoption is a highly successful societal solution for children whose biological parents cannot or will not provide for them.

The authors do state categorically that as a group adopted children are at greater risk than their non-adopted peers for a variety of academic or psychological problems. This is their stand even though several studies have not substantiated this difference. In explaining variability in adoption outcome, they tread cautiously reiterating several times that whether adopted children are at risk psychologically depends on the body of research that is examined. Although epidemiological studies clearly point to an overrepresentation of adopted individuals in outpatient and inpatient mental health settings clearly supporting the position that adoption is associated with psychological risk. Research on presenting symptomatology on the other hand suggests that adoptees may be more prone to externalizing behaviours and academic difficulties than non-adoptees. They manifest a wide range of behaviours and are probably more similar than different from their non-adopted counterparts. Research focusing on community based samples suggests that difficulties for children placed during infancy begin to emerge in middle childhood and early adolescence as opposed to other developmental periods. The detailed analysis of methodological difficulties in adoption outcome research is extremely beneficial to researchers planning investigative strategies in the area. The critique of adoption researches are well substantiated with a wide coverage of studies that have been undertaken in the West.

They have argued for making adoption research more theory driven. Numerous theories have been delineated to explain the problems of adjustment of adopted children and their parents. They review of current research using complex multidimensional models of adoption adjustment are useful for developing empirical studies within the context of well-articulated theoretical models. A review of empirical literature on adjustment outcomes in various kinds of adoptions is covered in chapters 4-7. Beginning with the more traditional infant-placed, same race

closed adoption, an attempt is made to cover the more unconventional contemporary categories. These include adoption of special needs children, transracial and intercountry adoptions and open adoptions.

For all of us who work in the area of adoption in India it is hard to understand why and how adoption of special needs children is on the rise in the West. With the frequency of these adoption placements increasing there has been an increased interest in outcomes for children and families involved. An overview of the characteristics of children who require "special needs" adoption services is undertaken in chapter 5. Evidence suggests that many children awaiting adoptive families can be classified as "special needs" according to a variety of criteria and often multiple problems including stressful pre-adoption histories and concurrent physical and emotional problems. Such characteristics strongly suggest that families who adopt these children have to overcome many obstacles and deal with extraordinary stressors in an effort to establish mutually rewarding relationship. Not all families are able to manage this difficult transition. Therefore with an increase in the placement of the number of multi-problem children the rates of adoption disruption and dissolution have gone up. Research describing the strengths and healthy adaptation of special needs family has only just begun. A detailed discussion of two such recent studies (Groze, 1996; Pinderhughes, 1996) within the context of articulated models of family functioning provides other investigators with heuristic information on which to base future work.

Transracial adoptions that began as a means of providing orphans from war ravaged countries with stable families grew to include minority group children from within the United States of America. As a result rhetoric concerning transracial adoption has been emotionally charged and controversial, spurring changes in adoption policies. Although less rhetoric has been generated about inter-country adoption some of the questions about values and ethics can be raised about these types of adoptions as well. Chapter 6 tracing the history of transracial and inter-country adoption reviews the argument for and against such placements and examines research evaluating the outcome of these placements.

An approach to adoption practice that reflects an appreciation of the importance of developmental, contextual and systemic influences on the adoption triad members is much required. This approach moves us away from simplistic notions that any one type of adop-

tion—whether confidential or fully disclosed—necessarily works best for everyone. There is little doubt that adoption as a social welfare service is moving decidedly towards increased openness. This move towards greater openness has not been free of controversy. Much has been written about the possible benefits and drawbacks of open adoption. Those individuals writing in this area have been guided more by clinical and casework experience as well as by personal beliefs and biases than by empirical data. Chapter 7 delineates the various notions of open adoption, examines the expectations and concerns about the influence of open adoption on children and the adoptive families and reviews the few empirical studies that have been conducted in this area. A critical appraisal of a significant study in the area by Grotevant and McRoy (1998) designed to evaluate open versus closed adoption is useful in validating a more balanced view of not having one or the other but a range of options. Rather than seeking to determine which type of adoption plan—open or closed—is best for most people it would appear more sensible to examine the benefits and drawbacks of various types of placement options, especially at different developmental and family life cycle phases.

The chapter on clinical issues and treatment strategies focuses on three general issues: (1) areas of clinical assessment specific to adopted children and their parents; (2) common adoption themes that often are embedded in the symptom pattern of adopted children; and (3) clinical intervention strategies that specifically target adoption issues. This section is particularly useful for therapists working with adoptive families. Techniques for assessing the adopted child and parents have been detailed together with the broad areas to be covered. Although adopted children seen in clinical settings present a wide array of symptoms a number of adoption themes are likely to emerge over the course of treatment. Many of these adoption issues are subtle and not readily expressed by children in therapy, regardless of the clinicians' theoretical orientation. It is therefore crucial to become familiar with the unique clinical themes represented in the intrapsychic and interpersonal lives of adopted individuals.

This brings us to a final comment on the book. While it is a systematic and exhaustive volume on adoption theory, research and clinical orientation what is noticeably lacking is the absence of any acknowledgement of variation in adoption issues in different cultural contexts. Cross-cultural research is conspicuous by its total absence. Reasons may be simply a lack of such em-

irical investigation. Nonetheless the need for such studies must be emphasized in such a volume. This is crucial specifically due to (a) the relationship between the 'sending countries' and the 'receiving countries' in inter-country adoption, (b) adoption issues vary within different cultural contexts and (c) cultural validation is imperative for clinical therapeutic outcome.

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Understanding Adolescence

Anita Ghai

EXPLORING ADOLESCENT HAPPINESS: COMMITMENT, PURPOSE AND FULFILLMENT

By Zipora Magen

Sage Publishers, London, pp. 228, \$ 46.50, 21.95(Pb)

This book is about the results of a decade of extensive studies with over 2500 adolescents. The author strives to present a comprehensive picture of adolescent happiness and commitment. The book starts off on a very promising note of responding to queries that are extremely relevant and significant. Almost the entire world in perpetually enveloped in seeking an understanding of an adolescent's inner life. What makes adolescents happy? What makes them feel good about themselves and the world? What makes them feel uplifted? Do they really have the ability to transcend the self? The theoretical foundation of the research presented in the book is based primarily on the humanistic notions of Rogers, Maslow, Coan, Landsman and Csikszentmihalyi. (Ch. 1) While the author explores their notions regarding happiness, peak experiences and optimal personality very competently, her own perspective seems to shift back and forth between different positions. Consequently her own location does not come clearly to the reader. What is indicated is that on the basis of various viewpoints the following holds true, "Examining positive experiences (in the classroom, in therapy, or at home can thus encourage more self-awareness of values, role models, and life goals (p. 12). Further she states that, "The positive experiences of adolescence provide a crucial insight into various aspects of their personalities." She assumes that, "For counselling the integration of positive experiences may be a valuable device to buttress the hopeful aspects of adolescent's inner world and to facilitate self-awareness and growth towards personal potential. Moreover adolescent happiness can be viewed as a developmental predecessor of adult happiness. Eluci-

dation of the former can serve as the avenue to help us better understand happiness in adult life and even across the life span" (p. 12)

Although the faith that the author places in the adolescent's ability to sustain the impact of the memory of positive experiences in their personal life is definitely touching it does appear highly optimistic. Given the present context of turmoil all over the world it is indeed difficult to imagine the possibility of understanding the complexity of adolescent's inner world in such a oversimplified fashion. The need to recognise many ambiguities that define human psyche is imperative. Any discourse on this issue has to assimilate the multiple cultural hues that characterise adolescent lives.

Another significant issue that the book raises is with respect to the implications of findings from a standpoint of cultural universality (Ch. 7). Three cultures namely American Christians, Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews are studied to understand the similarities and differences between the joyful experiences of the adolescents. The author initially inserts a note of caution in interpreting the cultural differences by pointing out that "wide applicability of conclusions about universality must be checked in other cultures" (p. 93). However, she changes her position later by suggesting that, "Because the dimensions of adolescent's experiences transcend major cultural differences, psychologists can re-evaluate the role of culture in their search to define and encourage the healthy personality" (p. 164). To my mind this is indeed a very sweeping generalisation especially in the wake of a host of innumerable research findings pointing to cultural diversity. For such a conclusion comparisons would need

a more thorough study of different cultures. The three cultural profiles presented in the research cannot account for the voices that may come from adolescents living in developing countries. Moreover the experience and meaning of joy and commitment to society, that contribute positive experiences are determined by the cultural values attached to them. In this sense any given culture always constructs these concepts in a specific way. The generalities that are drawn would, therefore, need a far more penetrating analysis than the one presented in chapter seven. The author herself finds an exception in the construction of interpersonal category and differences in culture (p. 94). As per the results, the Jewish adolescents were the most happy in experiences with the opposite sex, and least happy with their families. The Arab youth in contrast, reported the lowest percentage of happy experiences with the opposite sex and the highest percentage of joyful experiences with their families. The American adolescents were closer to Arab youths in finding joy with their families and similar to Jewish youth in finding their happiness with the opposite sex. In the absence of detailed background data (such as Kibbutz association in the case of Jewish youth) of the adolescents, one can only conclude that experiences of happiness are most affected by cultural norms. The possibility of different cultural nuances of happiness, therefore, cannot be negated.

With respect to gender, the author concludes that, "Perhaps, American adolescents as they test out new roles and behaviours and define self-identity, are reacting against political, academic and media efforts to blur out gender differences. Thus, they may adhere more closely to almost traditional gender roles, at least in their private worlds, than do their contemporaries in conservative and sexually frightening milieu. We may conjecture that a culture that does not raise the flag of equality and even sameness between sexes evokes less of counter-reaction." Such an interpretation of differences for a psychologist with feminist leanings and feminists in their own right is very provocative. Time and again research has demonstrated that gender differences need to be understood as constructed by social and cultural factors. To conclude that advocating for equality has a disruptive influence on the lives of adolescents can give a wrong signal to efforts made to question the patriarchal values.

A major contentious issue of course is with reference to her blend of two distinctly different methodologies (Part II). The reader misses the focus on reporting patterns in the narratives that

might enrich our understanding of the content that might coincide with happiness status. For epistemological reasons I am troubled by this blend of methodologies. Even when the author is utilising open-ended questionnaires like the positive experience questionnaire (p. 14) and life aspiration questionnaire (p. 40), the response categories are predefined. In both, the labels have been generated to which data is forced to fit in. Are the terms useful and meaningful? How does one determine this? What determines which responses belong in each category? And without answers to these questions, what meaning can be attributed to the results of the study.

The most poignant parts of the book are the voices captured with sensitivity and understanding. However once again one cannot overlook the fact the content has been organized "along the three ways of being in the world derived from Heidegger and used in Landsman (1967) factor analysis of responses to a research question of a large adult sample" (p. 72). Despite stating that, "Beyond and across these categories, however, we also observe a variety of recurrent themes that add to our understanding of what moves adolescents to feel good and what makes them happy", no attempt is made to highlight them apart from the three categories of experience with the self, external world and others. Further, it seems that instead of narratives speaking for themselves, the author chooses to select and quote as and when her own understanding stands to be strengthened from the data. The conclusion that, "the personal attributes of the experienter transcend cultural and demographic boundaries even in a political context where one might have expected those boundaries to be impenetrable" (p. 162) highlights the assumption of a grand narrative. It thus fails to notice the inability of adolescents, specially in difficult circumstances, who might not be in a position to voice their concerns is not given enough substance. For example, adolescents with disabilities are represented by one group viz., the hearing impaired. The specific issues of other groups with disabilities do not find representation. Voices of other adolescents such as addicts, delinquents and other marginalised groups once again are fewer and not very prominent. Another issue that would need clarification is the relationship between remembered positive experiences of joy, the commitment to self, personality types and sense of coherence. The suggestion that the personality is a much stronger determinant of the content and intensity of teenager's positive experience of joy and happiness, (p. 112) with culture playing a marginal role might be problematic for

those who see both as inextricably interconnected.

Finally the author undoubtedly deserves credit for highlighting the value of positive life experiences. In part III, she outlines the interventions for dealing with classroom situation, adolescents at risk, and for those facing social rejection.

An important reason for creating conditions that promote intense and meaningful positive experiences, is the finding that the adolescents who report intense positive experiences expressed greater readiness for commitment beyond self. According to the author meaningful positive experiences not only cause subjective personal satisfaction,

but seem to make adolescents better persons at least in terms of their willingness to contribute to others and to get involved in the causes beyond oneself. This according to her is sufficiently strong to suggest a "marriage of therapeutic intervention with social engineering" (p. 188) However, a note of caution has to be sounded in view of the fact

that the human psyche is an extremely complex entity. Moreover, the emphasis on human subjectivity has to contend with the realisation that context plays a very significant role in determining the experiences of happiness and joy.

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A Holistic Perspective

Namita Ranganathan

MENTAL HEALTH IN INDIAN SCHOOLS

By Malvika Kapur

Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp. 168, Rs. 275.00

The primary associations with the term 'Mental Health' are clinical in nature. The images conjured up popularly consist of mental patients, bizarre behaviour, psychiatrists, mental hospitals, shock treatment, hallucinations, delusions, etc. The general expectation is that a book on mental health in all probability will deal with accounts of patients suffering from depression, anxiety and stress, or doctors citing different techniques and therapies which they have used with success in dealing with the mentally ill. In this context Malvika Kapur's book entitled *Mental Health in Indian Schools* comes as a refreshing change for it successfully explodes the myth that the subject matter of mental health is confined to only mental disorders, their aetiology, prognosis and treatment. Kapur infact deserves special credit for being able to transform the entire vision, perception and understanding of the term. From its gloomy clinical perspective where the emphasis is on 'cure' she is able to bring out its preventive, promotional and conservative functions as well. These have been contextualized in the lives of children and their experiences in school. Kapur makes it amply clear that institutions like schools have a major role to play in the well being of children and can make all the difference to their personality development and emotional welfare. To be able to preserve the smile on every child's lips, to ensure smooth transition from one stage to another in the developmental process and to be able to help them adapt to changes in the environment are in fact according to her conceptualization the main challenges of 'children's mental health'. Another feature highlighted is the fact that mental health is not exclusively the

right of the trained clinical psychologist or psychiatrist—it is very much within the realm of the teacher's role. One of the basic focal themes in the book in fact addresses itself to visualizing the teacher as a mental health worker illustrating clearly that counselling and guidance are integral to her role. Her responsibility towards children's well being in being able to provide an ethos, environment and a range of socio-emotional experiences which are conducive to the child's development are implied.

The book itself is organized into eight chapters, each dealing with a specific aspect of mental health. The role of the school in children's mental health has been spelt out convincingly in the introductory chapter. The book then goes on to describe some experiments in mental health intervention which have been undertaken in different school settings and also appraises the reader with the range of training and orientation programmes. Which have been conducted on teachers in the quest for sensitizing them towards their role as mental health workers. The subsequent chapters present interesting cases demonstrating the use of specific strategies to help children with problems and the mental health perspective relevant for schools in rural areas. The last three chapters focus on evaluation of service research policy perspectives on children's mental health and spell out clearly the mental health agenda for developing countries like India especially in the context of globalisation. The appendices give rich statistical data and also provide formats of tools usable by teachers.

A noteworthy aspect of the book is the fact that it takes into account the social and cultural realities of India. Kapur maintains very clearly that the models advocated for the western countries and other developed parts of the world are often impractical and not very relevant for the developing ones. It is thus desirable that an indigenous perspective be developed. For a country like India the focus according to her should not be on training specialized personnel or expecting large financial outlays—instead, situating mental health in the school setting and sensitizing the teachers should assume primacy. Provision of mental health serv-

ices in rural schools should also be a priority.

In her earlier book entitled *Mental Health of Indian Children*, Kapur had pointed out that despite the existence of sound policy guidelines, scant attention had been paid to the provision of services and funding or to the setting up of priorities for research and training for child mental health care in India. She had also discussed the nature of some specific disorders in terms of phenomenology, aetiology and intervention and had located the troubled child in the dynamics of the home, school and society.

Thus, while her first book had reported the status as it exists and had served to raise issues and point out the gaps and lacunae which exist in the system of mental health services, the present book attempts to bridge them and leaves the reader on a note of hope and optimism, that "indeed, mental health services are both" tenable and

possible."

Anecdotal in nature, culturally cued, written from a non-clinical perspective and replete with examples, illustrations and cases, Kapur's book is of considerable value to the community of counsellors, teachers, child psychologists, school administrators and parents. In terms of theoretical orientation the distinct humanistic phenomenological thrust in understanding the child has been emphasised thereby giving a boost to more growth-oriented counselling and transforming mental health from a curative to a promotional and preventive activity as well. One hopes that Kapur succeeds in stimulating schools to contemplate the possibility of providing "Education for Mental Health" and thereby empowering the child psychologically.

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Manmohini Gujral

TEENAGE BLUES

By Vimala Veeraraghavan and Shalini Singh

Mosaic Books, 1999, pp. 110, Rs. 120.00

It's not easy being a teenager or even trying to handle one. All rules, tried and tested methods, all sense flies out of the window as each situation is so unique and yet so common/similar. It's a trying time for both, teenagers and parents.

Urmī Charitable Trust is an organization started to help teenagers in all walks of life, by organising workshops seminars camps and various other programmes.

'Teenage Blues', is a very aptly named, slim, hundred page guide for parents teachers and counsellors. The co-authors Vimala Veeraraghavan and Shalini Singh, from the Department of Applied Psychology Delhi University have tried to put together some basic points for all who deal with this special breed.

Their experience in this field is evident from the way they have handled the subject and the kind of examples or

cases they have talked about to highlight the different aspects of the problem faced by the teenagers have been systematically dealt with from the physical, emotional and psychological viewpoint. They have viewed the situations not just from the parents and counsellors' viewpoint but also from the teenagers' systematically viewing the problem from each angle so as to create a better understanding between all, bridge the gap and lessen tensions.

This book has also tried to show what the counsellor might do. In a country where going for therapy or visiting the counsellor is not looked upon too kindly, it helps to dispel fears by showing what the counsellor would do—namely try to create an understanding between the concerned parties and for them to make sense of the changing situations.

The inclusion of drawings makes the text more interesting and catches the eye, even when one is just flipping through, making the referred problem simpler to comprehend.

The simple language, direct handling and of day to day situations makes it a very readable even for the teenager.

Manmohini Gujral is a teacher and counsellor.

In Conversation

The Centre for Education Management and Development, a tertiary service to the school education sector, focusses on developing leadership skills. While teacher-training is state-mandated, the managers of schools—faculty heads, principals, directors or deputy directors in schools are not given any special training for their jobs. The CEMD in New Delhi seeks to fill this lacuna. Arundhati Chowdhury spoke to Jayashree Oza (Director CEMD) about the rationale behind the centre and its aims and ways of functioning. We carry excerpts of their conversation.

Arundhati Chowdhury: What are the areas of focus at the CEMD?

Jayashree Oza: We need to see what we have to do in the next few years in order to see that twenty years down the line we are there . . . as institutions, as individuals... what kind of products we want after twelve years of schooling. So we help managers really to be able to focus on that vision and be able to guide. We look at leaders as being trustworthy people, we believe that there has to be interpersonal trust, we believe that leaders' role is to empower people and make sure that their individual goals meet with the organisational goals. We also believe that ultimately there has to be an alignment and there can't be too many dichotomies and contradictions at a basic level. Education management will essentially mean keeping the centrality of education and what needs to happen as processes to develop and nurture human beings. We believe that collaboration and cooperation are absolutely critical in the development of children and in the effective management of organizations. We also believe that diversity is absolutely critical, particularly in a society like ours... all over the world I think.

A.C.: What are your ongoing programmes?

J.O.: Well, currently we have two institutional development programmes. One is with private and mainly minority schools with some non-denominational schools which is the educational management resource programme, briefly EMRP. Another institutional development programme is with the Delhi government system and we are essentially starting with headmasters and teachers too. The Director of Education is looking into developing leadership skills and establishing effective systems which will empower the schools to be more effective. We have an Educational Leadership Programme (ELP) which is an in-service programme for mid-career professionals, which is a year-long open learning programme and which results in a post diploma degree. This would be the kind of prerequisite or training for people who are moving up the educational hierarchy and being ready for it. While you can be a very, very good teacher you may not have the managerial skills to manage a school or be an educational officer to manage a few schools... and this is the kind of programme which essentially helps to develop all of those.

A.C.: Is counselling also part of your agenda?

J.O.: We don't do individual counselling. I think part of our site-based work with teachers, takes note of what we call consultative and participatory behaviour. And essentially when people are going through some kind of a conflict or when they are at a low ebb, we are really looking at how we can help them focus on and achieve what they need to achieve. Counselling other than career-counselling is what we do. Our goal is to make the schools effective, to empower them, like with government schools and systems. . . . we would be working with educational officers, deputy directors to say what will you do to help schools become more effective.

A.C.: Do any of the programmes involve interacting and participating with children directly?

J.O.: Well, as I said we are a tertiary service to education, so almost all of our programmes are directly with adults who are in the field of education. We do interact with children from time to time to get first hand knowledge or information to understand where they are. Its not even information about teachers or about schools...no. Its to say who is the student who is ultimately the beneficiary of our work. . . . so that is our direct contact with students. But all of our services are targeted—whether its publication, research, training, consultancy—at adult educators and managers who are in the field. Even in our leadership programme—which is an open learning programme—an individual comes out of the system and is with us for fifteen days in the course of one year. Almost everything in these fifteen days of three contact programmes is done by way of simulation. But between the three contact programmes, the individuals have to go back to their institutions, practise them, reflect on them and send us assignments on which we give feedback to individuals. So essentially in all of our programmes we try and see that this learning cycle—we call this an experiential learning cycle—is completed, which calls for total participation... they have to internalise it till the time its over.

A.C.: Evidently, the media too has some kind of a role to play in all this, but is it concrete enough?

J.O.: I do get disheartened when I look at the media, at the kind of reports that come out. I think there needs to be much more educated participation by educators which is hardly ever there. It is either what the journalists are saying or what the politicians are saying about it, not enough educators are saying it. And partly because we haven't created a cadre of educators who are influencing policy, who are influencing media, and those are the leaders that I'm talking about.

A.C.: Don't you think advocacy is a must, especially in organisations like the CEMD?

J.O.: Advocacy is a big part of our agenda. And advocacy is at all levels not only with the government. . . . with the public at large, with the community, with the school systems in particular. The other thing is creating networks with other educators, other training agencies countrywide and having meets with them annually, publications, inviting people to write on matters related to this. So we are creating a networking pattern...number of activities that will make for this kind of a pattern to generate public opinion or a studied opinion of educators or education managers which will influence policy.

A.C.: Do you think your programmes should be carried forward to colleges or do you want to restrict them to just schools?

J.O.: Well, I certainly believe that it has to go to the universities as well. But as for why we are restricting ourselves is because the whole field is so large...as a matter of fact while I believe that rural education absolutely needs support, we as a centre don't provide that. Because in a diverse country like this, with so many demands on you, unless you are focused on a particular sector, you probably will spread yourselves too thin and not create the kind of impact you want to. But we would like to meet with agencies working in rural areas and with those in higher education and share the methods, approaches and beliefs that we work with. And if that gets taken up, it would be wonderful. We could transfer and modify them in a manner that would help us. Our approach as an organisation is to focus on the area where we can really make an impact. And also try and learn from others and share what we have learnt in our experiences.

A.C.: What do you have to say about the present curriculum that is being used in schools?

J.O.: The curriculum at the basic level is upto class ten—what we call general education—was decided by our National committees and the government. It certainly needs to be looked at. Not necessarily because children are choosing a variety of professions and other things, but more so to be in touch with the changing world—technologically, geographically, historically and in many other ways. Does general education have merits of its own? Certainly it does. I don't believe that we need to professionalise or vocationalise education from earlier ages than that. Can we provide a little more of that? Certainly we need to add that. But general education is absolutely necessary once they go beyond that point, the individual does not ever have a chance to come back to that kind of education, which means that a child who might take up science later in life, who also knows geography and history and culture, has somewhere sensed a taste for poetry, so, to bring about a holistic society, I think its important that we are able to appreciate diversity, able to appreciate people from other walks of life. That has been the general idea behind it. On the other hand, I would say that in highly democratising the curriculum and trying to provide the same curriculum to the entire country, obviously somewhere we have failed to contextualise it, so that it would have generic principles that children will learn this and this at the conceptual level. Therefore the state government needs to play a far greater role in decentralising these things; and now with programmes like DPEP even at the district levels, it really needs to be far more contextualised. We have alienated children from education itself, which is sad.

A.C.: Have you ever involved parents in your programmes?

J.O.: Certainly. In our institutional development programmes, we always involve parents. As a matter of fact, our goal is to create school/parent partnerships. And for that, we really help the school to work towards it; because parents always feel the need to become partners with the school. They see themselves as just a pair of individuals. . . . even when they come together as a collective, their outlook is that the school is far stronger than what they are. So essentially, the school needs to look at this partnership as a relationship of equality and so what we try and do is to make the schools understand the need for this partnership. And we have had really successful programmes. A lot of our work includes the marginalised sector where the children are educationally and socially marginalised and where parents have no idea of good parenting or anything else. The schools have gone out and talked to parents and talked about what their needs are. We have had programmes at three different levels—for children with early childhood needs, children at the adolescent age and the middle school. And, across the board, we have had, say about ten schools together, so all the parents become partners at three levels. We've had

forums we've invited experts and based on their questions, we've called them together, created a panel of experts and called parents to say—here are the four or five different presentations from different experts. And the experts could range from a pediatrician to a child psychologist to a school in charge, to say what are the kind of things a parents could do and what is the kind of support the school could provide. So we've met with real success on that.

The Special Place for Special Children

Kamini Mustafi

The Learning Centre has become such an integral part of the Bishop Cotton School community that it would be difficult to imagine the place without its children. However, in terms of months and years it has been in existence for less than 2 years!!

The Learning Centre started functioning in March 1998 with ten children. It was established in recognition of the need of children with mental disabilities in Shimla who could not find a place in mainstream education. The need of these children is NOT pity or charity, but the right to be different and to be accepted as such by society.

The main objective of the Centre was to make its children independent with regard to their individual needs; to expose them to the functioning of a regular school and its students, and to create as many opportunities as possible for healthy interaction and integration. The emphasis was not to be on impairments but on how human beings learn and the ways in which a system can make use of what a child can do and compensate for what the impairment has deprived him/her of. An important part of the programme was to develop life skills and communication skills, in terms of literacy and numeracy to the extent possible. It was hoped that this segment of potentially useful citizens would find in The Learning Centre a suitable environment to nurture their latent potential.

The various options our children in The Learning Centre have in the future are (a) is some instances they could join mainstream education; (b) they could pursue vocational training or appear for the Open School Examinations; (c) they could, at least, acquire skills for life and responsible functioning in society.

Three of our children have joined the Open School and are in the process of acquiring vocational training. Of the ten children who joined initially, three have already left us to pursue mainstream education. That they have felt sufficiently confident to do so is heartening to us.

We expect the children to be at The Learning Centre long enough to obtain the foundation they need, built on acceptance, trust, love, self confidence and self worth, in order to move on to a more meaningful and fulfilled life as contributors to society at large. In school our children have been taking part in a number of cocurricular activities, have stood on stage, before a full house and performed very well indeed, following directions, remembering instructions and most of all enjoying themselves while performing.

However, the success of such a venture and the realisation of its objectives is only possible with a great deal of help, sensitivity and acceptance from all those who come into contact with our children. The unconditional love and acceptance extended by the students and staff for these very special children has enriched their lives and created the atmosphere for future successes. Moreover, The Learning Centre has been inundated with requests from young boys and girls, as well as adults, from within and outside Shimla, all desirous of being a part of The Centre and working with its children. Since its inception at least 30, 40 such committed youngsters and adults have been with us at different times, working with the children, contributing in every possible way to their growth and development.

The most significant fact in this integration for all of us has been the comparative ease with which it was achieved. The children fit so naturally into the school set up that we wonder at our earlier apprehensions. Children always surprise us. Our regular students who welcomed The Learning Centre children with warmth and compassion and most of all our special children, who have so naturally taken to an environment 'which was their due and right' and which had been denied to them for so long.

At this juncture we realise the limitations with which we are faced. There are so many more children whom we cannot reach, who need a similar set-up in order to blossom, children who have nowhere to go. It is time for us as a society to introspect and realise what is being denied to all those children who unfortunately have been denied the complete use of their mental and physical faculties. Instead of being provided help and assistance they have been further pushed by the community into which they were born

to a life of rejection and oblivion.

By not making room for them in our educational system and society we are failing. We as a society must address their needs and accept and accommodate them or take the blame for allow-

ing their impairments to become a severe disability. Thus it is we who make them truly and totally handicapped.

Kamini Mustafi teaches at the Bishop Cotton School, Shimla.

Inclusive Education—Mainstreaming Children with Special Needs

Shalini Dave and Abha Ranjan

The Vasant Valley School (New Delhi) is a centre for education that integrates various aspects of education. The Vasant Valley Special Section represents a pioneering move in Inclusive Education in a developing country where there is little recognition, acceptance or resources for educating children with special needs in an inclusive environment.

The emphasis at Vasant Valley is on learning and not on teaching. Knowledge is not just imparted but students are trained to experiment, collate information, draw inferences and to arrive at their own conclusions. We believe that real learning comes from doing things, taking the knowledge thus learnt and applying it in other situations.

In our school we believe that children have many strengths that must be inculcated, reinforced and used to develop a balanced personality. Our children see the relevance of what they are learning in real-life situations. So our curriculum, apart from classroom teaching integrates practicals, field trips and project work. Inculcation of values is also an integral part of our philosophy—caring for others and for the environment around us is not taught but is built into the curriculum of every subject.

The section for students with special needs has grown out of this commitment to society, as also our friendship with the villagers of a neighbouring village. From this has evolved the philosophy of the special section—every individual is dynamic and modifiable. All children have the potential to change, given the right kind of intervention. Our objective is to provide children with special needs an appropriate learning environment whereby they graduate from a regular school equipped with the necessary academic, functional and social skills.

Based upon our experience, we feel that for any school to practise inclusion it is essential to have a team of professionals working on the different development aspects of the child. A full team of professionals constituting special educators, speech therapists, occupa-

tional therapists, and psychologists staffs the Special Section. Therapy is provided on a daily basis.

The Director of the school and regular teachers are fully integrated into the planning and execution of programmes for the children of the Section. The class teacher requires the support of these inputs to meet the curriculum demands of individualised planning.

A 'life skills functional curriculum' has been developed for each child within the section so as to guide their development in a focused and strategic manner particular to the circumstances of each child as an individual. The life skills curriculum has a time horizon of 6-8 years in the areas of cognitive development, social competency, leisure, home management and employment.

Our emphasis has also been on how the child's routine is structured through the day. The academic content has been individualized to cater to the needs and abilities of each child. Some of the children follow the mainstream curriculum, some a parallel curriculum and the others a functional curriculum. The functional curriculum has been designed to prepare the children to function as independently as possible in an integrated society. They share the same timetable as the mainstream and participate in all activities, hobbies, physical education and performing arts as provided in the time-table of the regular school.

The challenge lies in putting forward changes in attitude and the process through which changes occurred. We know that attitudes do not change as a result of 'fix all' prescriptions or through another's will to change the way we think, the way we work and interact.

Successful integration requires modification in functional real life ways—our belief is that, in essence, life is the curriculum.

Shalini Dave is Psychologist and Senior Consultant, Jt. Head and Abha Ranjan is an Occupational Therapist, and Senior Consultant, Jt. Head, at Vasant Valley School, New Delhi.

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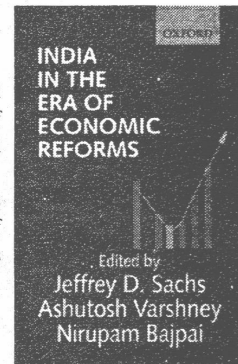
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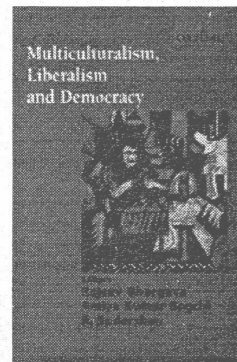


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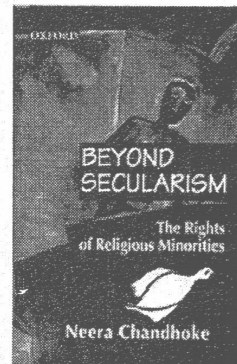
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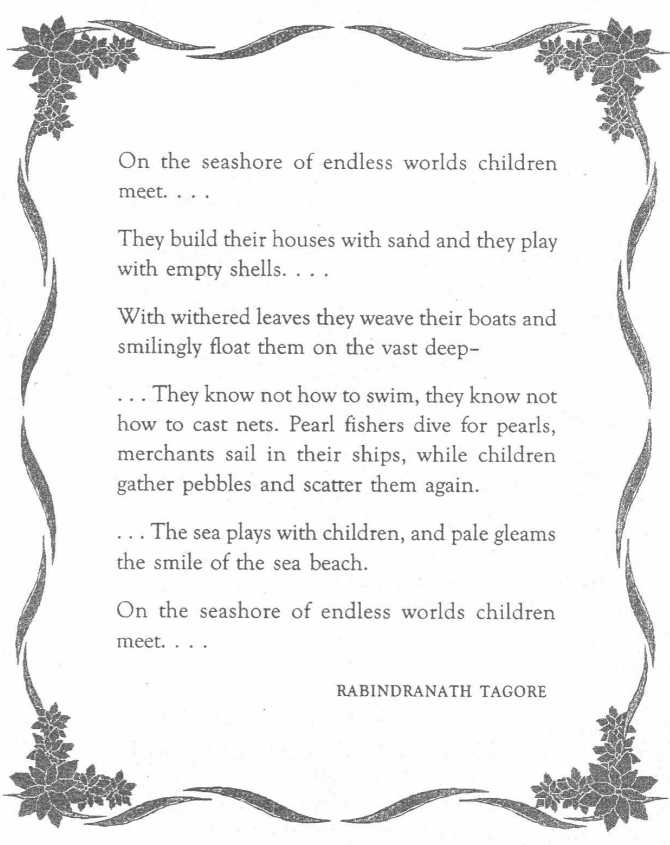
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On the seashore of endless worlds children
meet. . . .

They build their houses with sand and they play
with empty shells. . . .

With withered leaves they weave their boats and
smilingly float them on the vast deep-

. . . They know not how to swim, they know not
how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls,
merchants sail in their ships, while children
gather pebbles and scatter them again.

. . . The sea plays with children, and pale gleams
the smile of the sea beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children
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