

Thakurma's stories: Bengali lit for children



The origin and development of Bengali literature for children can be dated back to the times when colonial modernity began to emerge. Perhaps beginning from the fascinating tales of Thakurmar Jhuli and Sukumar Ray's nonsensical yet hilarious collections, children's stories written in Bengali have evolved and taken shape over the passing decades. With the rise of new modern writers, styles, tones and storylines of books have transformed in a positive light, and today, with a rich variety, Bengali literature for children stands in a place of pride.

All parents and guardians usually look for stories that have a lesson to give. Childhood is the time when children are most impressionable. They learn from everything that surrounds them. Moreover, their thinking and perception forms its initial foundations based on what they read and they continue to mould into shape as they grow older.

When it comes to Bengali children's books, the stories of 'Thakurmar Jhuli' by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder are not unheard of. Some of the characters of these stories, such as Tuntuni Pakhi, Shakchunni, Bamun Thakur, Byangoma-Byangomi, etc. are so familiar that their tales are told in almost every Bengali and Bangladeshi household.

While some of these stories are frightening, and others are humorous, each of them still has an intriguing and crucial moral message. This is how children get to form some positive perception and moral values as well.

From the Western Bengal side of literature, Sukumar Ray's collection of poems and stories is another rich trove of treasure for children. His works reflect his clever sense of humour that can make no sense, but still make one roll over with laughter. They are enjoyable, just as much as they are helpful to develop positivity and a good sense of humour in the child's mind.

Apart from this, many children also like to read comics which may seem like a more interactive form of book where the characters are brought closer to life. Bengali comics such as like Chacha Chowdhury, Batool and Nontey-Fontey are so celebrated that they are read even by grown-ups today.

On the other hand, Bangladeshi literature for children and teenagers have developed

consistently over time, yet never failed to inspire the readers. The stories written by Zafar Iqbal have the laudable ability to bring itself to life to the reader. His stories like Fobianer Jatri, Bokulappu, etc. captivate the young reader's minds and take them on an adventure in their head.

Another personal favourite is 'Teen Goyenda' collection. While the stories are fascinating, they also help the young mind to think critically and logically. Young Observer, Rising Stars, supplements for children and teenagers, played a crucial role as an English print media, and publishing a variety of articles for its young readers. While Rising Star is no longer in print, SHOUT has created a fan-following of their own.

Several Bengali stories and characters are timeless. However, with changing times, the audience's mind set and tastes are constantly evolving.

In fact, nowadays, the inclination to read books is quite low among children. This is where writers and publishers have to be witty and creative with their books, and come up with ideas that would attract the young readers. For instance, in recent times, graphic novels have gained reasonable popularity amid the youth crowd nowadays.

There is no doubt that reading or listening to good books and good stories is important for any child's full cognitive development. The learning they take away influences their thinking, behaviour, attitude and even how they express

themselves. This is why picking the right kind of book or story is always crucial.

By Nafisa Faruque

Once upon a time

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CHOOSING THE RIGHT STORIES

When children start reading or listening to various stories, they are setting up the first blocks of foundation in terms of their mentality and perception. Unfortunately, even today, a considerable number of parents nurture the misconception that fairy tales and story books do not help the development of children more than academic readings do. In stark contrast to this, Dr Ahmed encourages reading fairy tales and rhymes to children as it enhances their core cognitive development.

However, it is crucial that parents double check the stories they are choosing for their precious little ones. Some people may argue that children are too young to understand the slight darkness or ambiguity underlying behind some fairy tales. However, children are actually smart and they pick up on whatever they read or learn faster than most full grown adults do. This is mainly why classics of the past that would enable children to suppress their thoughts or to be fearful of things should be fine-tuned to give away better morals or learnings.

In fact, in today's times, dumbing down children's story books is not an ideal way to reach them at all. Moreover, Dr Ahmed highlighted that children should be motivated to read books with high social and moral values.

"When they read stories about heroism, equality, etc. they are naturally encouraged to behave in a certain positive way," he explained. Societal stories with positive messages teach them not to discriminate and to treat everyone justly.

While children nowadays are less inclined to reading books, as they rely on smartphones and tablets as a replacement for reading, Dr Ahmed still believes there is no alternative to reading books for gaining key skills and knowledge.

He pointed out that if the parents love to read books, it is likely that they will inspire their children to read more often. "And the more they read, the more they will become capable of thinking on their own," Dr Ahmed added. Moreover, he suggests to limit the use of technological devices to a rational time span so that children can spare some time to read storybooks while staying on par with the rapidly changing modern world at the same time.

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