

# Gripping tales of children's literature

I can't say that children's literature is an entirely neglected area but books available to them in different genres are limited. Prominent literature festivals also don't do justice to the children's books and authors, barring a few exceptions, nor do the mainstream publishers.

The book under review, I must confess, is of such quality content which I have not read in many years, despite the fact that I have been regularly reviewing books of all kinds for over 15 years for various publications.

I had a plethora of books in Hindi and Marathi which made my childhood delightful. I did not read English books much then but they were around. However, the general impression among literary circles is that children's book writing and publishing is on the low key. This book attempts to enlighten many of us and presents a rosy picture.

Perhaps, with television, hand-held phones and social media, the book reading habits among readers of all ages have been impacted a great deal. But the editors tell us that the economy of publishing for children in various languages has expanded and is projected to increase rapidly over the next several years. "...A smaller, visible qualitative change is also underway, spear-headed by small, independ-

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**Editors:** Shailaja Menon & Sandhya Rao  
**Publishers:** Parag & Eklavya Foundation  
**Pages:** 424  
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ent publishing houses and some larger international ones," say Dr Shailaja Menon and Sandhya Rao. Both are doyens in the area of children literature.

They have listed a few names such as Pratham Books, Duckbill, Tulika Publishers, Eklavya, Ektara, Talking Club, Ponytale Books, Pickle Yolk as among those publishers or organisations which have been driving the children's literary movement in India.

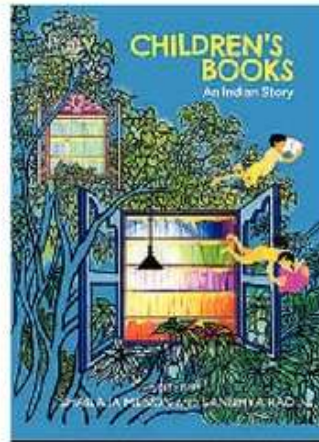
The book notes that much of children's literature published in India today presumes the middle-class, urban child as its reader, although organisations like Eklavya have been promoting reading culture among the rural landscape and tribal communities.

The book traces the history of children's literature while also examining the different dimensions of this interesting world of books. Parag is an initiative of the Tata Trusts which has been working with individuals and organisations who have been engaged with the promotion of reading and in children's literature. They

## BOOK REVIEW



Abhilash Khandekar



teamed up with Eklavya, Bhopal to bring out this wonderful work. It has dealt with the entire gamut of children's books, problems children face, socio-economic issues, the rural-urban divide and evolving technology.

It contains essays from experts in the field including Keerthi Mukunda, Tultul Biswas, Namita Jakob, Teresa Antony, V Geetha, Thejaswi Shivanand, among others, besides the editors duo.

Menon and Rao bring back to us the memories and efforts of the National Book Trust which used to send 'book buses' to several remote parts of the country in an effort to bring libraries to the reach of the unreached.

Quoting Neil Postman, a media theorist and cultural critic, the book states: "...a point has come where childhood is disappearing at a

dazzling speed in terms of the increasing blurring of distinctions between adult and child spheres of activity, for example, through media and Internet."

The authors have covered a wide spectrum of children literature from regional language books to translations and content quality to creative illustrations; one thing is clear from this book that a lot of activities are happening in India for the children though much more is required to be done to shape India's future generations.

International Children's Book Day (ICBD) is held every year on April 2 and many organisations hold a variety of activities for the children and are promoting reading habits. A few dedicated children book festivals are also held in India.

Namita and Teresa have dealt with the issue of writing for the special children. Close to 80 lakhs children with different disabilities have been identified by the UNESCO for whom 'print disability' is a major hindrance in acquiring knowledge.

Some organisations like Chetana Trust in Chennai are working towards providing access to early, user-friendly and enjoyable reading experiences for children with print disabilities, the very well illustrated and designed book informs us.

*The author is the roving editor, Lokmat Media Group.*