

Children's Literature and Popular Culture

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Abstract: *This article tries to interrogate the idea of hegemonization associated with children's literature as a sub-genre of popular culture. This article talks about the world of difference between a boy's and a girl's world which shapes and at the same time shaped by popular culture.*

Keywords: Popular Culture, Children's literature, hegemonization, Socialization

Among different kinds of popular cultural texts such as films, soap operas, performing arts, music, etc., we have chosen literature as a tool for studying differences in the world of a boy and that of a girl. In our opinion literature strikes one's consciousness and remains a part of one's personality for a very long time. According to Kakar, by analysis of the symbolic products, one can look into the condensed and the shared fantasies; the psychological constellations they represent offer clues to the sensitivities and defenses of the audiences they attract and hold. For Kakar, symbolization, in the form of poetry and children's language, enriches and unfolds one's inner world (Kakar 1981). Myths form the basic literary texts of a society and hold the quintessence of a particular culture, according to Kakar (Kakar 1981). Similarly popular literature holds the dominant ideas of a society or in the terminology of Gramsci, the civil society hegemonizes the citizens to follow the dominant ideology. And one way of hegemonising comes with popular literature. In Althusser's word, "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (Althusser 1966). Individuals become subjects to the illusory social reality and relationship that is imposed on them but unfortunately they are not aware of it or in other words it can be called what sociologists call this process, i.e. socialization (Strinati 1995:154) by which individuals gradually learn the cultural norms and values of their society. Thus every institution with its dominant ideology "interpellates" individuals on its own terms. Religion "interpellates" individuals as subjects of God and certain religious groups try to manipulate it to breed hatred among various religious sects. The ideology of patriarchy hails women to suggest them that they are inferior to men. And perhaps the popular culture ideology follows all these dominant ideas of a society. We are dealing with basically children's literature and also the texts famous among adolescents.

Different cultures shape the development of their members in different ways, choosing whether childhood, youth or adulthood is to be a period of maximum or minimum strain. In India, for instance, in contrast with Germany or France, it is the early childhood rather than adulthood, which is considered the Golden age of individual life (Kakar 1981). With children, ideas are shaped with the help

of certain socializing agents, one of which happens to be literature. And adolescence is a phase where the individual does not completely work within the constraints of structure, but his/her own individuality comes into play as s/he is in search of her/his identity. Neither does s/he completely goes beyond structures nor s/he gets restrained by it. There is an assimilation of both the values put forward by the society and also his/her own belief system comes into play. Thus, it is interesting to look at the popular culture meant for this pre-adult group which includes both 'children' and adolescents that we prefer to call 'teenagers'.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A SUB-GENRE OF POPULAR LITERATURE

It seems that there exists a similarity between women and children. Children constitute another voiceless category. In fact, Lisa Paul in her article, "Enigma Variations; What Feminists Theory Knows about Children's Literature," says that there is a similarity between children's literature and women's literature. Unlike men, women and children cannot stray very far from the bounds of home and gardens at least when they are unaccompanied. They generally have to stay at home without the affairs of state to worry about their stories tend to focus on the contents of their traps. Their world revolves around the minute and mundane features of everyday life. Their life is unlike James Bond stories, are private stories. (Paul 1990:148). Hughs has said about "Treasure Island" that it reflects the consciousness of a child, a reality. He has been for such a quest in childhood only in supposition (Hughes 1990). Such pieces of literature help children cross the four walls of their houses and go on adventures and see distant places in their imaginations.

Paul names this characteristic of women's stories as linguistic repressions where someone like Harriet the spy's, secret writings being typical of what women and children do with their small scale stories, diaries, little poems, secret letters and romance novels. Paul felt that the character in Little Women, Jo March was the alter-ego of Louisa May Alcott and she was the most repressed writer. She was the 19th century embodiment of physical, economic and linguistic entrapment. She used to write in her attic and later was ashamed of her writing before her husband, Professor Bhaer, and

Jo finally gives up writing as a career to take care of orphan boys (Paul 1990: 151-153). Similarly, Gilbert and Gubar in their work *The Madwoman in the Attic* say the woman writer are in some sense like 'Bertha Mason' in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, the mad woman in

the attic. The latter represents the author's double, who the author identifies with and revise the definitions of femininity and female authorship.

Women from Jane Austen and Mary Shelley to Emily Dickinson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal and obscure deeper, less accessible (less socially acceptable) levels of meaning (Gilbert and Gubar cited in Tharu and Lalita 1991:20).

Both children and women take the help of deceit and trickery to get out of trouble. But this survival tactic is considered to be a lower order survival strategy (Paul 1990). And besides this, it seems that both quietly wait for some miracle to rescue them and in fact it always happens in children and women's literature.

In boys' literature, this is not the case. Boys fight out their enemies. Just like in the adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer where both always go for rescuing each other. They never prefer an easy way out. They love taking up challenges. This very much reflects on the different ways in which boys and girls approaches a problem. This might not be the case but this is what literature as a socializing agent tries to propagate.

Anthony Giddens says that school textbooks perpetuate gender images. (Giddens 2001:515) Storybooks in primary schools often portray boys as sharing initiative and independence, while girls if at all they appear, are passive and watch their brothers carrying out interesting activities. And those stories written for girls may have in it an element of suspense; it always has a domestic or school setting. On the other hand, boy's adventure stories are more wide ranging, having heroes who travel off to distant places or are sturdily independent in other ways (Statham 1986). Well, Paul has equated children with women; it seems girl children are even more repressed than boy children in popular literature.

Reference :

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Let us now attempt to define children's literature? The line between children's literature and adult's is very arbitrary. It forms a sub-category in the list of popular literature. According to John Rowe Townsend,

No such thing as children's literature exists, as it is not separate from literature as a whole as children are also a part of mankind. It could be that in the long run children's literature could be regarded as consisting of those books which by consensus of adults and children were assigned to the children's shelves. In short run it appears that, for better or worse, the publisher decides. If it puts a book on the children's literature list, it will be reviewed as one (Townsend 1990:58-65).

Children's literature is different from serious novels, which is meant for educated adult male outside home. Women and children are excluded from it. James in "The Future of the Novel" published in 1899 expressed dismay at the growing popularity of novels and its increased number of readership, which included women and children:

The diffusion of the rudiments, the multiplication of the common schools, has more and more had the effect of making readers of women and of the very young (James 1990:65).

Even F.J.Coleman, in "Contemporary essays in Aesthetics" published in 1968 was of the opinion that "The lowest pleasures would be that any sentient human being can feel - children, idiots, the senile, they are such pleasures that do not require any power of discrimination" (Coleman cited in Hughes 1990: 77-78). Children's books are the one that are written and published, reviewed and also bought by adults. "The whole process is carried out at one, two, three or more removes from the ultimate consumer" (Townsend 1990:58-65). Since the reins of production and distribution of these products remain in the hand of adults, it would be interesting to know what kind of ideology these texts of popular culture present in order to hegemonize the so-called immature citizens belonging to this pre-adult category. Children's literature works as an important tool for hegemonizing the young mind.