

Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature

 **Children's Books** ed. by Shailaja Menon and Sandhya Rao
(review)

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Review

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Additional Information

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

I remember the exact moment when I decided for myself that literature was interesting! I was eleven years old, and in the Hindi class we were reading a funny and scary play with the title *Papa Kho Gaye*. That humor and anxiety could be evoked together was a very new experience for me.

Why do some stories stick even twenty years after we last read them? These questions and many more kept me hooked as I read *Children's Books: An Indian Story*, an anthology comprising essays written by publishers, authors, illustrators, educators, editors, commissioners, booksellers, librarians, and teachers. It is an attempt to explain what goes into producing and caring for books for children.

The book takes the reader on a journey through the history of children's literature in India from before India's independence to the contemporary trends emerging in the publishing landscape. It analyzes decisions related to content and illustration in both past successful publications and contemporary award winners.

The first section, "Understanding the Terrain," lays out the nostalgic terrain of children's literature in India, paying homage to the long tradition of oral storytelling, and discusses the strategy of multilingual publishing. For a country where every one hundred kilometers, flora, fauna, food, clothing, language, habitat, and customs change, you can find stories everywhere you look. But finding stories isn't enough. We also need to be able to tell these stories and get people interested in listening to them. "The Moving Landscape" examines the mobility of content and different genres in children's books after the 1990s. Here the reader gets to explore developments in picturebooks and understand the art of creating humor through animals in fiction, poetry, and drama. This section also sheds light on some major turns in creative nonfiction, such as the importance of visual language and the widening range of topics that can be explored with children rather than for them. This transitions into examining how young adult books have evolved in terms of content, context, and characters. As times change and issues persist, "Uneven Ground" explores problems in children's literature, discussing the need for diversity and designing books for readers with special needs. Inclusion brings translation challenges, and readers learn about innovative approaches that Indian publishers are taking to create inclusive books. Finally, the section "As You Sow" focuses on classroom and library spaces, exploring how early language classrooms can use literature for holistic education. It supports various claims with responses **[End Page 75]** from children to such literature—voices that had been missing from the essays until now.

In terms of editing, care has been taken to preserve a consistent tone, making it easy to move from one chapter to another, while preserving the unique voices and points of view of the different contributors.

The writers have taken considerable care in analyzing individual children's titles, avoiding name-dropping in favor of substantive analysis. This approach is particularly evident in essays on illustrations, picturebooks, tactile book design, and literary themes. The conversational tone creates an accessible, intimate quality that makes the volume a valuable resource for educators, administrators, policymakers, librarians, and anyone else who is interested. I highly recommend that schools acquire *Children's Books: An Indian Story* and incorporate discussions of relevant sections into their professional development meetings.

Children's Books: An Indian Story covers a considerable breadth of issues. While I admire its wide scope, I would welcome more in-depth explorations of individual topics. Given India's diversity as a multicultural and multilingual nation, children's literature requires greater representation and adaptation from local communities and regional contexts. The volume focuses primarily on four renowned independent publishers: Tulika, Tara, Eklavya, and Duckbill. However, it was refreshing to read about smaller presses as well, particularly since India's book market remains dominated by three major international publishing houses: Penguin, HarperCollins, and Hachette.

For a country with oral and performative traditions in children's literature stretching back five thousand years, the discourse in this volume still tilts toward an elite perspective, focusing primarily on printed and award-winning books. Given these observations and the repetition of many titles, children's literature needs to feature previously neglected perspectives...

Additional Information

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