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Author

It is not the "what" but the "How" that is Key to Writing for Children

What role can awards play in the children's literature sector?

Children's literature and children's writers are deprived of limelight. Even Sahitya Academy got the sector on its radar just seven years before. This attitude of the society towards children's literature will change with awards and recognition. It will help society appreciate the role of children's literature in children's lives and the space it can enjoy in their psyche. Most importantly, parents and teachers alike will realise that children's literature is a serious business.

How did you become a children's Author?

I had never imagined I'd ever write for children. But then my six year daughter and her friends pressed me for a play which they wanted to stage at their school gathering. It started with that small script and then I started writing; writing only for children.

What was the first story you did for children?

Dinnertime with my daughters demanded a new story every day. They would not eat unless they got it out of me. The stories had to be made to order. One of my daughters wanted crocodiles and eagles while the other favoured magic and herself as the heroine. A new menu was ordered every night and I had to serve the "menu" thoroughly spiced, garnished and all. So this is the story of how the story wrote itself.

Who are some of your favourite authors and why?

Many writers and poets don my list of favourites starting with Rabindranath Tagore whose fundamental thinking about how a child learns remains one of his greatest gifts. He wrote Sahaj Path as so that children may learn language singing and dancing in a play-way, fun-filled manner and also created a unique alphabet primer. Shedding all his adult affectations, he started learning with a first grader, teaching and learning from each other in the process. He was not just a prolific writer but also ably handled various genres. Whatever he wrote for children can also be enjoyed by adults thus creating multi-dimensional masterpieces. I also enjoy the work of Tetsuko Kuroyanagi. Her "Totto-chan" changed and enriched many a teacher's and parent's life. She opened a window of teaching children and learning along with them employing an easy and simple style. The events she depicted neither belong to any particular country or language, nor are culture-specific. They are everyday happenings common to any and every school. Others include Satyajit Ray, Ruskin Bond, Victor Dragunski, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Madhuri Purandare, C. V. Joshi, Ratnakar Matkari, Vinda Karandikar, Mangesh Padgaonkar and Indira Sant.

How can new talent be encouraged in this field?

The best way is to identify authors, build their capacities by arranging multilevel workshops and guide them to delve into various genres such as science stories, fantasies, adventures, travelogues etc. An introduction and exposure to the best of children's literature from India and the world will also open up new dimensions for budding authors.

Is there any type of project you haven't done yet, but dream of doing?

While I have worked with a large number of children I have not written anything that would aid children who are physically or mentally challenged. I would like to understand what

difficulties they face while learning and integrate that into my books and workshops or even design something specifically for them to make learning playful and enjoyable. These could be easy math and language games and zero cost science experiments. I would like to spend time with them in their schools and learn with them before writing for them.

If you had a piece of advice for aspiring authors, what would it be?

Never worry about what you will write for children. The important part is "How to write for children" and that you can learn from children themselves, by observing them, spending time with them and look at the world from their point of view. Only such writing is welcome by children as their very own.