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Evaluation of Shree Mohanbhai S. Patel's Book - *Gujarati Bal-Sahitya: Darshan ane Disha: A Study*

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ABSTRACT

This study interrogates Mohanlal Shankarlal Patel's insights presented in Gujarati Bal-Sahitya: Darshan ane Disha to assess the present condition and possible future development of Gujarati children's literature. Divided into two principal sections, the inquiry first surveys Patel's observations on the substantial yet underestimated place of children's literature within the Gujarati tradition and the intersecting cultural and pedagogical difficulties that it endures. The latter section then advances the argument that literary portrayals for young audiences ought to include exemplars whose provenance extends across the entirety of Indian civilisation, thereby nurturing an enduring consciousness of cultural lineage. Patel, whose deep dedication to educational progress is widely acknowledged, mourns the waning vitality of traditional storytelling once stewarded by wise elder women whose voices braided cultural wisdom and ethical imperatives into the hearts of children. The ascendancy of Western media figures has eclipsed these indigenous narratives. Though animation has burgeoned in India, the majority of present-day protagonists compete in Hindi, marginalising young speakers of Gujarati whose fluency in the vernacular is eclipsed by commercial imperatives. The present work contends that the urgent revitalisation of Gujarati children's literature must proceed with the deliberate creation of resonant cultural heroes and a broadening of media channels, thereby cultivating a future in which Gujarati texts arbitrate formative influence and invigorate the imaginative contours of the society they once, and could once more, cradle.

Keywords: *Children's Literature, Role of Story-telling, Models of Western Heroes, Eastern Heroes*

FULL PAPER

1. Introduction

The writer of the Gujarati Book, taken for studying the thoughts, is Gujarati Bal-Sahitya: Darshan ane Disha, none other than Shree Mohanlal Shankarlal Patel, who was an educator by heart rather than an educationist only. This is because he took education as a pious duty of his career. The aforesaid book is worthy of being read by all the teachers, irrespective of whether they are associated with the education of children or not. The only reason for this is that a child never dies from the self of a student. The very first edition of this book was published in the year 2004. The literature for children in the language of Gujarati remained highly neglected in comparison to the classical Gujarati literature, but later on, some foundational work has been carried out nicely over the last twenty to thirty years. In the journey of children's literature, the conspicuous work carried out on the part of Gijubhai Badheka deserves special type of mention. The greatness of Shree Badheka in ploughing the field of children's literature may be summed up in that, despite having a moustache on his face, owing to the motherly sentiments imparted to his children-readers, he is called "Moochhaali Ma" (the mother with a moustache). The work of the selected writer, Shree Mohanlal Shankarlal Patel, has remained quite glorious in the assessment of the work done in the direction of children's literature in Gujarati. The significance of Shree Patel is such that his name may be placed in parallel to Gijubhai, Nanabhai, Jugatrambhai, and Moolshankarbhai so far as children's literature in Gujarati is concerned. Being seriously concerned with children's literature in Gujarati, he has freely discussed many contexts in the book selected for this research paper, which is the outcome of contemplative silence in his mind and conscience wedded to children's literature in Gujarati.

2. Ideas Regarding the Conservation of Children's Literature in Gujarati:

Gujarati Bal-Sahitya: Darshan ane Disha is divided into four parts overall, but the most significant two of them are (1) Contemplation, (2) Rearing and Education of Children. From the leisurely reading of this book, it is further understood how Shree Patel used to worry and contemplate about children's literature in Gujarati. After reading the articles in the book, an innate query arises in our mind about whether, being parents, teachers, and elders, genuine concern is to be kept for our children. The contributor of this research paper believes that, as children are to be the citizens of tomorrow, there should be some room for the invocation of Mother India in children's literature, composed in a diversity of ways, given the changes in time. Shree Patel's divine concern for the children, their education, and for the literature composed for them as the requirement for the nourishment of their intelligence and psyche is found everywhere in black and white in this book. There is a kind of clarification of thought and a range of impatient restlessness in his heart, and a variety of passionate vigour in his language everywhere. He has written:

The divine task of storytelling was assigned to the elderly ladies by our society, but where are such elderly ladies to be found? Many such media and mass media have been invented for children. However, how to find out the ways of assigning the traditional role of the older women to both these types of media? (Trivedi, 89)

Shree Patel drew our attention to the specialities of the stories of the older women obtained through inheritance from their counterparts of earlier generations. He writes about the requirement of both the aspects of food-nourishment as well as the suitability of the type of food, to encourage healthy digestion for the growing children:

Only body-building in the symmetrical frame or the physical wellness is not expected from the view-point of the human beings. Mind or conscience also plays a vital role along with it. Using body, mind and intelligence the human beings are expected to develop detachment from all the three of them and to be free from them altogether slowly and gradually. Children's literature the veritable nursery of plants for that. The resources, spent for the development of the care, attention for and attendance to it, remains largely unspent. There are a large number of the possibilities converting a handful of grains into the tons of the same there only. The multiplication of the vigorous and strong personalities is nothing, but enormous society. (Trivedi, 89)

The care, attention to, and attendance to children's literature is the duty of all of us. Shree Mohanbhai Patel states that just as the children want something and they also desire to be something or somebody as well. Shree Patel also states that the models of such desires are found in the pieces of children's literature, or rather, movies or other platforms, given the recent development of social media and all. In this book, Shree Patel repeatedly warns regarding the direction and level of finding models available on different types of platforms available to them. Given the passage of twenty years since the publication of the book of Shree Patel, the platform including panoramic screens of animated stories showing Chhota Bheem, Shaktimaan, Doraemon, Spiderman, and other heroes of children. Some of the examples of the concern and care of the author for the development of children's literature appear when he writes in the essay entitled *Gujarati Bal-Sahitya: Darshan ane Disha*

How can it be held passable when the very directions of development are found to be quite dim, dark and foggy? On getting the warning prior to the occurrence of the cyclonic disturbances in the Arabian Ocean, we remain quite cautiously worried about the concerned disasters, and will nobody care for the directions of the literature of children looking dim, blurry and vague? (Trivedi, 89)

Then, thinking about the elemental innocence of the children, Shree Patel says that our children are so gullible that they could be made merry, even by giving them defective toys with cracks and crevices. He emphasises that this is the reason why the role of the composers of children's literature in the language of Gujarati is considered significant. If the target audience is somewhat familiar with the scope of rejection of

what is being served to them, the presenters have to remain on their guard every time. However, in the absence of the loveliest, the mediocre things may be accepted, and hence the presenters may be and are often alleged of not attempting for the superlative status. If the tiny toddlers do not listen to the stories of their established cultural heroes like Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Nachiketa, and all the others, the very seed of the cultural values will remain ungerminated in their psyche. This very thing may be done very specifically through cartoons like Chhota Bheem, Krishna, and all, but what about the Gujarati heroes of childhood? Jivram Joshi's Miya Fuski, Tabha Bhatt, more precisely Mansen Sahasi, are unquestionably among ones of the many panoramic pictures of the consciousness of the children. To find out what the tiny tots of the second half of the second decade of the twenty-first century desire to be projected before the mind's eye of their childhood consciousness, certain findings must be reached. Shree Mohanbhai was not a person to raise a question to leave a spark in the middle after talking about a miraculous future for the spark. At the closure of his article entitled *Call for Consciousness* as per my translation of *Jagruktaanu Avaahan* from the said book, Shree Mohanbhai has presented the exclusive findings. Shree Patel has reflected on the challenges being faced by the twenty-first-century children's literature before presenting, as the findings, the omnipresent ones, which may serve as the polar star for the emerging creative writers of children's literature. The greatness of Shree Patel as a guiding star is that he is not prone to the aspects of either beating about the bush or of exaggeration. This is because the one who propounds a principle in any of the branches of education must always attempt to get rid of its demerits even in some other relevant branch, if not to avail the heights of its merits everywhere. An ideal composer of children's literature is expected to get rid of both beating about the bush and exaggeration. This is because after arousing the excitement of children as target readers, a single more thread of exhilaration is always feared to lead to the disturbance of the equilibrium in human physique and well as psyche of theirs. Dr. Patel's precision and judicious critical judgment, combined with his sharp style, establish his supreme reign in the realm of children's literature criticism. The threesome amalgamation of the features mentioned above is closely acquainted within all the meticulous articles, encompassed within the selected book of Shree Patel. His impatient restlessness for children's literature appears to be fairly fathomable from the feelings and further findings perceptible in the selected book, especially when he writes:

Still, we have not entered the very irritating effort or labour of developing a full-fledged familiarity with a child, nor have we even got off the mark from the attempts of feeling acquainted. Before making the very fresh start of something, the very thoughts about the sinister signs rush to the deplorable psyche...The social order still has to ponder much over children's literature and their education about the child itself. (Trivedi, 90)

3. Observations & Conclusions of Shree Patel Regarding Children's Literature:

Let us have a rapid glance at the findings marked up by Late Shree Mohanlal S. Patel from the said book:

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- Children's literature in Gujarati is still lagging in the reputable status of literature, being imparted to it along with all the shades of meanings of the terminological terms associated with it.
 - No critical deliberation, including even that of the inevitable and inescapable concepts too, takes place regarding the criticism of children's literature.
 - No such a healthy academic atmosphere is born yet that we can assuredly assert about even the existence of definite measures for judging children's literature, most specifically in Gujarati.
 - Today, in response to the question being asked regarding the readiness of mentioning at least even the titles of the books of poems, short stories, or of the life-sketches of the great personalities in the fields of developing the national consciousness for being read by the children of the age group of seven, the only heart-pinching silence is encountered. As mentioned earlier, the children of the hi-tech or AI-driven age of the existing period would not be satisfied with texts for reading only. However, they would rather feel contentment in the aforementioned characters, zealously justifying their acts and deeds not only in the screen of their mind's eyes, but also in the animated version. Today's generation of children is not the one, is happy with reading Miya Fuski, Tabha Bhatt, or Mansen Sahasi of Jivram Joshi in black and white or the television screen of the concerned serials on Sunday noon of Doordarshan only. However, looking at the cartoon heroes on the crowded entertaining channels and social media and AI too, the requirement and responsibility of the whole team concerned with children's literature including the authors of the concerned genres, screen-play developers, directors and the production agencies is of a very significant importance if we enlarge the scope of the vision of Shree Mohanlal Patel's ideas uttered in the said book after the passage of twenty years of publication of the first edition.
 - There are not many well-programmed academic curricula for children's education even at the university level.
 - A project of studying the prose and the prose-style of some specific writers of the Gujarati short stories for children may be encouraged as a particular research programme, quite separate from studying those who write the short stories in general in the established mainstream. Thereby, the critics of children's literature may be encouraged, and their findings may uphold the novel ideas in the genre.
 - The creator of the short stories, most specifically meant for the children, is not the least inferior to writers of the short story in general in any language, including Gujarati.
 - Only those who have meaningful access to the throbs of children can and should write creatively about children in general.
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- There is no room for bombastic rhetoric and didacticism in the pieces of ideal literature for children. The moral coming from the concerned genre of children's literature should be as innate as the availability of the fruit of a mango on a mango tree.
- Is there any use in only uttering that ours is a golden civilisation, having its existence since time immemorial? What to do to make available to every youthful representative the very key of what can be done in order to secure the conservation of the age-old civilisation of ours? This very conscious thinking for the conservation of the cultural nuances of Bharatvarsha in the very psyche of the toddlers and their further growth and advancement till their adulthood via the 'first ever flush of youth' itself proclaims about the fact that children's literature has many expectations from its diversified practitioners of a single genre.

In this way, Shree Mohanlal Patel has pondered comprehensively about the significant aspects of referential contexts of children's literature, carefully keeping in mind the ever-fleeting psyche of children. In the said book, the various divergent topics associated with children's literature, the divergent pictorial aspects of it, its language, the age of the target audience-children, and the scopes of timely edition in children's literature are discussed. All these facets have been copiously discoursed upon with examples wherever felt necessary. At several points, Shree Patel has made use of the weapon of sarcasm and expressed his ideas in a way that affects the readers quite sincerely. Sometimes the very title of the article, encompassed in the book, is sufficient in order to surmise about what it contains, for instance, the article entitled *Baal-sahitya etle bas, Chalakchalanu?*, which has been given the English rendering as *Children's Literature: Only the Play of Passing the Buck?* Makes it loud and clear that the author expresses his agony regarding the prevalence of the tendency not to accept accountability for something, mostly in cases of disastrous failures. This much clarification apparent from the very title leads the interested scholars not only to go for reading the whole piece, but for discuss the same quite extensively to point out the concerned aspects left out in the concerned piece. This is precisely what has happened in the case of this research paper by the contributor of this book chapter. After reading about the concern of Shree Patel for children's literature in Gujarati, the research contributor was led to deal with what the soul and spirit of Shree Patel would have expected from the experts of children's literature in Gujarati in special in our contemporary time. Moreover, thinking about the heightened scope of social media and AI-friendly media nowadays, one such expectation hit my mind. In this paper, the contributor of this paper has enlarged Shree Patel's concern for the development of the nuances of Indian culture in children's literature under the name of the 'expectation' in view of the rapidly changing scenario since the first publication of the book.

Some of the things taken to be discussed by Shree Patel in this book need to be contemplated because the essentials of the academic discussion regarding the literature for children never appear to be quite bare and arid. While reading and

digesting the views in the book, the readers experience the very elegance of the Gujarati prose and Shree Patel's praiseworthy mastery over it every now and then. For instance, at one place he writes: The sensibility of a child is just like the soft buds, whereas that of an adolescent boy is something like the opening up of a flower (Trivedi 91). At another place, the very statement of Shree Patel is replete with his tendency of calling a spade a spade, which is as below: Even the various types of children's literature are not perceived by the Academy. There are big guns, seated in the academy. May God bless them." (Trivedi, 91).

Many a time, he has made the literary artists of children's literature realise their duties and accept the responsibility for their mistakes. He states, "The literary artist of children's literature should have the approach of 'LET THE LIGHT COME INSTEAD OF PREVENTING IT'" (Trivedi 91). Showing the literary artists of children's literature how to proceed further, he states:

Perform the duty of the traffic police man, show them such a direction that no accident takes place, but let him go in that direction. Prevent yourself from rushing into there. (Trivedi, 91)

Many dimensions of children's literature have been discussed in many articles in the selected book on one hand, and on the other, he has dealt with the discussion of the stories and songs for children as the constituent aspects of children's literature quite in short, but profoundly. These articles acquaint the readers with his sharp and unfailing style in an excellent way. At several other places, Shree Patel has discussed fundamentally about the creative and critical output of Meghani, Ishvar Parmar, Yashvant Mehta, Shraddha Trivedi, etc. Besides, he has discussed at length about children and writing, prose work, and child along with children and the library, etc. In the article *Prose Work and Child*, he has attempted to make the pun of a word combining the two words 'KAL' and 'YUG', the former meaning a key and the latter means epoch or age. The coined word KAL-YUGA means the age of key. Shree Patel states that this is the era in which everything depends upon the child's understanding of the appropriate key for the concerned issue. Shree Patel has precisely spoken about the homophone with the slight variation of KAL-YUGA (i.e., the age of key) KALIYUGA (i.e., the very last age of the four mythological ages of the Indian scriptures, which abounds in the prevalence of overall wickedness under the sky).

The author Shree Patel seems to have opened up his very conscience in the quiz. All his views about both child and children's literature appear to have been perfectly explicit through both his articles and the quiz encompassed in the selected book. However, he appears to be livelier in the quiz session as the emotional ecstasy of his heart, throbbing for children, touches the very heart of the sensitive readers. The two quizzes in the selected book serve as the leader of any organisation in a sense. The former quiz encompasses children's literature at the core, and the latter deals with the interrelations of children's literature with society and education at the core of the issue. The very first quiz taken up by Shree Patel talks about the poignant and heart-rending references of the aspects based on his own experiences. The very second quiz taken up by Shree Chandrakant Sheth talks more about his views on education and society as

the facets touching children's literature, which is also a heart-rending one, as it is associated with children's literature in general. About the tradition of education, he has mentioned a noteworthy aspect,

Undoubtedly, there is much comfort in determining a specific framework of education. The systematic educational platform, using which I got trained academically, also had a framework. However, that the framework gets us packed as if the concerned persons were the items, like the TV set or refrigerator, is not desirable. During my student days, the reservations like those of today did not exist, yet among my fellow-students there were Vohras, Sheikhs, and Kumbhars (the ones belonging to the caste of the traditional profession of the potter)... and we (although today the post-independence tag of 'Unreserved' or 'Open' associated with us seems to be an abusive term for us) did never entertain a kind of dismissive attitude for anybody belonging to the specific community shown through the surname...The ultimate target of education is excellence only. (Trivedi, 92).

At one more place, Dr. Patel has revealed, as an educationist, Rabindranath touches my heart most. There is no room for the speed-breakers of denial and negations in him; there is a multitude of readily available representatives of encouragement in him. (Trivedi, 92-93).

He has answered the questions, asked as part of the quiz in the selected book, in a rebuking tone of enormity. For instance,

What do you mean by 'as per your reference'? Are the Gandhian concepts regarding education facing the attributive or predicative adjectival tag of 'outdated'?... Do we still have any idea to envision the classic example of the supreme special concept of Rabindranath and Gandhi, directly staged upon our mind's eye? Do we still have that type of patience anymore? That type of generosity? That type of forbearance? ...In haste we have dropped Mahatma Gandhi down in our attempts of being directed by Rajiv Gandhi. (Trivedi, 93).

About the long-time goals of the philanthropic education, Shree Patel cannot help expressing:

What is the use of that education imparting its practitioners the scientific art or artful science of destroying several living beings after the fatal bomb-blasts in New York or Mumbai or Oklahoma? (Trivedi, 93).

In her article *Baal-sahitya Kshetre Ek Mahatvano Granth*, Dr. Shraddha Trivedi remarks, "How pessimist it is!" on referring to Shree Patel's consideration of ponderings over education and the pattern of examination in it as like the 'nirdhanmanorathnyay'. In the same way, in another article entitled *Baal-Sahityama Ek Gauravprad Ghatna*, Dr Shraddha Trivedi discusses the dignified event in the very beginning:

Shree Ramanlal Soni may be considered an epoch of children's literature in Gujarati. The children of Gujarat are fortunate in view of the availability of

the creative writers writing for them, along with understanding and loving them, such as Gijubhai, Jugatrambhai, Moolshankar Bhatt, Hansa Mehta, Hariprasad Vyas, R.N. Shah, Nagardas Patel, Jivram Joshi, Ramanlal Soni, etc. How many more are to be remembered? Ramanlal Soni has contributed invaluable to both the fields- children's literature and translation. (Trivedi, 122).

Most of all, the aforementioned masters of children's literature have taken care to teach our cultural aspects to children through their projection in the genres of children's literature enriched by them. To sum up, it may be remarked that Dr. Shraddha Trivedi has considered Shree Patel's book as a significant one in the genres of children's literature, not only for the creative writers of children's literature, but for academicians, teachers, and parents also, in showing a proper direction to their respective listeners. The author Shree Mohanlal Shankarlal Patel's all-time ponderings for and his advice to the future practitioners of children's literature in providing the literary models of ease and quality are incredibly welcome and thought-provoking. The contributor of this research paper would like to add that if the literature for children prepares a sound project of developing the cultural awareness and the nationalistic preference, the very concept of 'Art for Life's Sake' will get shaped well. Another challenge for those working in the preparation of children's literature, or, instead, what is mentioned in the very title of this paper as 'expectation from them', is to project the same idea in a somewhat changed format, which may be, in the form of animation pictures in Gujarati. The very thought of Nachiketa, in its new incarnation of Gujarati animation picture, discussing with the God of Death about the grave topics about the mystery of what comes after the death of the body, appears to be very impressive. Such animation pictures in Gujarati about Lord Kubera flying the Pushpak aircraft, about the different ayurvedic medicines on the mount near the Himalayas, one of which brought Laxman to life from the near-fatal wounds from Ravan's son Indrajit, will establish and add to the knowledge of children. The contributor of this paper believes that the time to remove the misunderstandings caused by the education system of Thomas Babington Macaulay has come. This may be done safely by serving the above-said expectations of children's literature. We may quote from the introductory words of Shree Jivram Joshi from his adventure stories for teenagers, i.e., Mansen Khalasi, about his role in being true to the expectations of him:

The readers among children like the stories of adventure, energy, and enormity very much, a type of literature that is found in abundance in English. In Gujarati literature, too, direct or indirect copying of such English leaflets is also found in plenty. We have no objection to it, but reading the stories in such literature leads the reader to mental, physical, and financial loss. The lovers of stories belonging to any age group have read the stories of the adventure of Mansen, Kumar, and Sukesh with interest. The stories of Mansen have been given for imparting to the children-readers purity of soul along with the sustenance of their interest. (Joshi, II [Introduction])

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