

Childhood matters

AIF's Digital Magazine

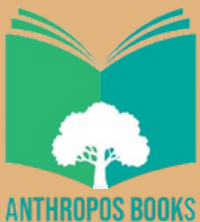
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A multilingual, quarterly, digital magazine by AIF's *Anthropos Books* catering to children, parents, teachers, and to all those who work for children.

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**CHILDHOOD MATTERS**

A Digital Magazine by *Anthropos Books*

Anthropos India Foundation, New Delhi

December, 2024

For a printed copy of the magazine, please write to us at anthroposif@gmail.com.

Table of Contents

1. About Us	4
2. The AIF Team	5
3. Editorial by Dr. Sunita Reddy.....	6
4. Guest Editorial by Trina Chakrabarti, Regional Director, CRY....	7
5. Stories of Hope:	
• Rescuing Lost Childhoods: A Journey from Exploitation to Empowerment by Bandana Nahata.....	9
• Growing up as an Anthropologist by Sohini Chakraborty.....	10
6. Film Review: 'A Review of Eco-cinema for Children' by Priyal Ranka.....	11
7. Book Review: 'Toying with Childhood' by R. Harini	14
8. Article: My Engagements with Metropolitan Children: Problematizing their 'Agencies' in Constructing Everyday Worlds and Suggestions for Changes by Chhandita Basu.....	16
9. Article: Preschool Necessity - A Requirement for the Modern Age by Dr. Lingaraj Niduvani.....	18
10. Parenting Tips: Digital detox: Kiran and Anjali's Screen Time Reduction Strategies for their Child by Bonthu Akhilesh.....	20
11. Child Health:	
• Unlived Childhood: Effect of Early Menarche by Saba Farhin..	22
• Supporting Child Health: The Foundations of Nutrition, Mental Health, and Sanitation by Ria Ghosh.....	24
• Lullabies and Lights Out: A Toddler's Guide to Sweet Sleep Hygiene by Zainab Samiwala.....	27
12. Regional Rhythms: Multilingual Section	
• किशोर-मने पर्नोग्राफिअर प्रभाव ओ यौनशिक्षाअर अभाव (The Impact of Pornography on the Adolescent Mind and Lack of Sex Education) by Abhra Ghoshal.....	29
• 'मायावी चशमा': एक आत्माजीवनी (The Enchanted Glasses: An Autobiography) by Kazi Roson.....	33

बोलता बचपन (Hindi Section)

1. अतीत के झरोखे से - "मेरा करमोली गांव" लेखक पवन कुमार पाण्डेय.....	36
2. 'पुनर्जन्म माँ का होता है' लेखक संजीव जैन	37

About Us

Anthropos India Foundation (AIF) is a trust registered in Delhi since October 2011. Anthropology is one of the most vibrant and fascinating subjects. Anthropology deals with communities both big and small and people from all walks of life. It engages with people and communities for solving various social issues of communities by furthering understanding from an 'emic' perspective and respecting the local cultures and ecology. The philosophy, theories, concepts and methods of anthropology have made notable contributions in every field, be it law, human rights, public health, education and child rights. The aim of AIF is to promote the discipline of anthropology, its philosophy and methods. It also aims to conduct anthropological research; applied, visual and action research.

Childhood matters and the experiences of childhood play an important role in the making of an adult. The impact of childhood experiences will decide the personalities, attitudes, and actions of future adults. The current situation is grim because crimes against children are on the rise. Child rights are violated every second in this vast country. To have a safe, healthy and happy childhood is

every child's right. This digital magazine aims to promote creative articulation of children and with its humble efforts seeks to disseminate the knowledge and information related to child rights and protection. We are publishing the digital magazine "CHILDHOOD MATTERS" for the well-being of children to bring a positive impact on society. The methodology and approach of the digital magazine is participatory, where all the stakeholders will be involved: children, parents, teachers, child welfare activists, child protection professionals and all those who are concerned about children. Each one of us can contribute to this digital magazine, in the form of poems, stories, illustrations, paintings, podcasts, short films, images and many other forms of expression. We attempt to take into consideration the existence of multiple childhoods along with specific circumstances of children shaped by the intersection of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, religion and other specific context. We shall keep the diversity of children in mind and come up with meaningful, useful, and impactful content. This is a small effort to bring a small change by the AIF team to make childhood a better experience.

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Editorial

**A Message to Our Children: Reflecting on the Year Gone by
and Looking Ahead****By Dr. Sunita Reddy***Founder-Chairperson, AIF**Associate Professor, JNU*

As the year comes to a close, it is a time for all of us to pause and reflect. Children are suffering as a result of war, conflict, poverty, neglect and abuse across the world. At the same time, the past year also has been filled with moments that brought both smiles and a sense of achievement for a lot of children in different fields. Here at AIF, we have tried to learn the value of resilience, kindness, and hope together in the year gone by. We believe that it is our responsibility as adults to make the life of children around us happier, peaceful and filled with joy in as many ways as possible.

Through our humble initiative of the Digital Magazine “Childhood Matters”, we have tried to usher in learnings about new things, collating beautiful and thought-provoking stories, articles, and poems etc. through this year. All those who have contributed to various issues have done a commendable job. These stories of hope and encouragement inspire everyone. The recent addition of the new multilingual section in the magazine has contributions from all over the country and it has been received so well. I welcome you all to freely contribute towards it too! Sharing your experiences will enrich our magazine immensely.

As we step into this New Year, let us all carry the lessons we have learnt with us into the future. Let us dream of days filled with laughter, play, and learning. Let us work together to make the world a safer and a happier place for everyone.

The New Year holds endless possibilities. It is a fresh chapter waiting to be written - with your creativity, kindness, and dreams leading the way. Remember, every small effort you make, whether helping a friend, caring for the planet, or reaching for a goal - it all brings us closer to a brighter tomorrow.

Here’s to a promising year ahead - a year filled with hope, peace, and opportunities for all the children to shine!

With love and hope
Sunita Reddy



Guest Editorial**Time for a WASH: United Drive for a Cleaner, Greener World**

By Trina Chakrabarti
Regional Director, CRY (East)

In the remote corners of East Champaran, Bihar, a quiet but powerful revolution is taking shape, led by adolescent girls from the Musahar community, a group historically marginalized and ostracized. These girls, once unaware of the importance of personal hygiene, now stand at the forefront of change, spreading awareness about cleanliness, not just for themselves but for their entire community. They have learned that cleanliness begins at home, with the self, and that its ripple effects can transform neighborhoods and villages. Thanks to regular sessions conducted by CRY and our partners, around 350 girls are challenging age-old neglect and isolation while instilling in their families and elders a renewed sense of pride in maintaining clean and green surroundings.

What these young change-makers are doing mirrors a growing awareness across the length and breadth of India — cleanliness is not just a personal habit, but a shared responsibility. And it aligns well with the government's Swachhta Hi Seva campaign, which aims to create a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for all, while also promoting a sense of social responsibility and community service.

From the neighboring Vaishali district comes another example of how small steps can lead to big changes, and the clear plan is to train them young. At two Anganwadis in Ismailpur village, children between the ages of 3-6 are being taught simple but crucial habits like washing hands before meals and maintaining personal hygiene. And at those very sessions, their parents are learning how to keep their homes and surroundings clean. This intergenerational dialogue on cleanliness fosters a sense of ownership over their environment and nurtures a healthier, more vibrant community.

Across the border, in Patharpratima, West Bengal, the Green Scout initiative started in 2021 has grown into a full-fledged campaign for environmental stewardship. Around 317 young Green Scouts, with support from CRY's partner Kaajla Janakalyan Samiti, have become local champions in the drive to boost waste management, plastic reduction, and tree planting. From their backyards to public spaces, their efforts to plant trees have added to the green cover and made waste segregation and disposal a norm within their community. Their clean-up drives and tree-planting efforts align perfectly with the Swachhta Hi Seva campaign's goals, illustrating how environmental consciousness and cleanliness go hand in hand.

Further down south, in Koraput, Odisha, community clean-up drives have become regular, spearheaded by adolescents and most importantly, with active participation from the Gaon Kalyan Samiti. While numerous hand-wash demonstrations have been held in the past, it is now time to put theory into action – “hand-wash stations” have been installed at the Village Health and Nutrition Day (VHND) locations to ensure that people practice what they have learned. Awareness is spreading, slowly but steadily!

What makes these stories particularly inspiring is not just the scale of impact, but the involvement of young people — girls and boys who are actively reshaping the narrative for their communities. Through their efforts, concepts like WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), waste management, and sustainability are no longer abstract terms. They are living realities, embodied in everyday actions that not only improve individual health and well-being but also elevate community standards.

At CRY, we believe that the key to sustainable change lies in empowering communities, particularly the youth, to take ownership of their future. When communities feel responsible for their surroundings and are equipped with the knowledge to maintain hygiene, manage waste, and protect their green spaces, the transformation is lasting and impactful.

These local efforts are a testament to the power of collective action. Civil society groups like us play a pivotal role in embedding the spirit of cleanliness, hygiene, and sustainability into the fabric of communities. Thereafter, the emphasis is always on supporting and sustaining these initiatives, bridging gaps, and building capacities where they are needed most. But the true credit goes to the communities themselves — the children, the parents, and the local leaders who are embracing these changes wholeheartedly.

As we continue to work towards the goal of a cleaner and greener world, it's important to recognize that cleanliness, hygiene, and environmental protection must be viewed as essential rights for all, not privileges for a few. The more we support and encourage community-led initiatives, the closer we get to building a healthier, greener, and more inclusive India.

Together, we can ensure that the winds of change continue to blow strong—from the remote hamlets of Bihar to the coastal villages of West Bengal, and tribal heartlands of Odisha and indeed across the miles of the country—and that these young leaders continue to inspire future generations to uphold the values of cleanliness, sustainability, and shared responsibility.



STORIES OF HOPE-I

Rescuing Lost Childhoods: A Journey from Exploitation to Empowerment



By Bandana Nahata

*NSHM Knowledge Campus
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Being a psychologist and psychotherapist, I had the opportunity to work with underprivileged children rescued from a toy factory under a case of child labor. It was an honor to be part of the organization Bachpan Bachao Andolan from April 2019 to June 2019, which focuses on child welfare and rescuing children from exploitative situations.

Child labor remains a significant issue in India, despite legal frameworks and persistent efforts to eliminate it. Recent estimates suggest that millions of children between the ages of 5 and 17 are engaged in labor, often under hazardous conditions.

I provide counseling and therapeutic interventions to help these children recover from trauma and rebuild their lives. This opportunity has deepened my understanding of the psychological impact of adverse childhood experiences and strengthened my skills in empathy, active listening, and creative therapeutic techniques like art therapy. I have heard numerous stories about what led them to run away from home. At such a vulnerable age, where they struggle to understand whom to trust, they leave home with the hope of a better life. Unfortunately, their journey led them to a toy factory in this particular case under discussion, where they were forced to work and live in the dark, cramped conditions, unable to go outside. Although the factory owner was aware that employing child labor was illegal, he continued to exploit these children. The children, however, did not understand how this environment was impacting their lives, both physically and psychologically. Some had vision issues due to poor lighting, while others had fallen into substance abuse as a means to cope.

One of the most poignant moments came when I observed the children carving their names into surfaces with iron wires—a painful act that spoke volumes about their desire for self-expression in a life that had denied them autonomy. Many were unable to understand the pain they endured daily, both physically and emotionally, as they clung to the illusion that they were on a path to a better life, unable to see that they were being manipulated and exploited.

In juvenile court, they were asked questions that intended to help them secure a better future and grant them the compensation they deserved. Yet, the children would often alter their statements when questioned, likely due to the deep manipulation they had experienced. This brainwashing made it challenging to work with them as they had lost a sense of insight and reality. The underlying reasons for their incongruent behavior often stemmed from a lack of tolerance for accepting any fault, which fueled their aggression and vulnerability. Growing up in a low socio-economic environment made them particularly susceptible to manipulation, as they were desperate to escape poverty and believed in the promises of a better life from exploitative figures.

I believe that, as a society, we must confront our role in perpetuating child labor. For instance, it is common to see children working at roadside eateries or as domestic help because people find them affordable. But it is essential to recognise that the money we offer in these cases comes at the cost of a child's innocence and freedom. We need to take a stand and refuse to engage in practices that exploit children.

We should engage in vocational training for these children, equipping them with skills they can use to build sustainable livelihoods. They need to understand that slow progress is better than getting caught in the rat race that leads to exploitation. Additionally, raising awareness about their rights can empower them to stand up against injustices. By standing together against child labor and supporting rehabilitation and education efforts, we can offer these children a genuine opportunity to experience a safe and fulfilling childhood while helping them shape a dignified and purposeful future.



STORIES OF HOPE-II

Growing up as an Anthropologist



By Sohini Chakraborty

M.A Anthropology, IGNOU, Delhi

Once there was a girl named Tithi who used to live in her father's office quarter. She was good at her studies. But she loved to travel a lot. She kept rabbits, cats, and dogs as her pets. She treated them humanely, and gradually they became good friends of little Tithi.

Tithi used to cycle around the quarter while her dogs would follow her. She had friends and pets to play with all day long. She seemed to have good communication skills when it came to interacting meaningfully with them. Thus, she possessed a key quality or skill of communication which is essential for any Anthropologist, that too since childhood. She liked to explore the world on her own terms. She had a diary in which she wrote her experiences about her school and other places she went to or visited. She pasted photographs and other attractive articles in her diary. Anthropologists also usually keep field notes quite similar to hers.

Tithi loved to adopt new cultures of expression like dance, music, and drawing. She had drawn a danger sign on the door of her elder sister's room. It revealed her observation and curiosity about skeletons, a quality that reflects the basic behavior of Anthropologists.

She and her friend Tinni once wrote messages and kept them underground in a container. One year later they opened the 'Time Capsule' and read out their funny messages. Digging up soil and unearthing old artefacts is also something that Archaeologists and many Anthropologists do.

She loved to watch "Backyard Science", a television program, and eagerly learnt about fingerprint patterns (dermatoglyphics), which is a study area of Anthropologists. Tithi also learnt some languages like Hindi, Bengali, and English from television so that she can communicate well with people she met. Curious about tribal cultures, she loved to watch "Sabuj Dwiper Raja". It is a 1979 film related to the *Jarawas* tribe of Andamans. She learnt about flint stones for making fire, all through her books. In fact, her elder sister enlightened and thrilled her about Peking Man and Java Man (early human fossils) from her history book.

Tithi once visited Jaipur Museum in Rajasthan and saw an Egyptian mummy which amazed her a lot. It increased her eagerness about past cultures even more. She also watched a Satyajit Ray movie "Agantuk" from where she came to know about Anthropology for the first time. Tithi was very enthusiastic and she had a lot of energy and interest in exploring the world. She wanted to learn many new things at a young age. This is the story of Tithi who is raring to grow up and become an Anthropologist.

FILM REVIEW

How is Environmental Conflict Represented in Eco-cinema for Children? A Comparative Film Review of *Princess Mononoke* and *The Jungle Book*



By **Priyal Ranka**

University College Utrecht, Netherlands

When you think of animated films about nature, *The Jungle Book* (1967) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997) come to mind. They are the earliest and most well-known eco-cinemas based in Asia. Both are beloved tales, featuring children protagonists raised by wolves and caught in the middle of conflicts between people and the environment. Although they have overlapping characters and plots, these films are radically different in their representation of environmental issues, indigenous peoples, and even gender roles. In this article, both films will be analyzed through the lens of what they teach children about our relationship with nature; how they shape young minds and environmentalism.

The *Jungle Book*: Playful or Powerful?

Disney's *The Jungle Book* is a bright, musical adventure. Its lush animation and catchy soundtrack, like "The Bare Necessities," portray the forest as a lighthearted paradise where everything is provided for its inhabitants. The story follows Mowgli, a boy raised by wolves, as he encounters several animal characters during his journey back to the man-village to protect him from the man-loathing tiger, Shere Khan.

However, underlying the cheery tone, the film simplifies the forest and its animals, presenting nature as an entertaining backdrop for Mowgli's escapades. Animals like Baloo, Bagheera, and King Louie are portrayed as amusing, silly and clumsy. This anthropomorphism - giving animals human-like traits - turns them into comic relief instead of serious characters. It perpetuates an outlook that views animals as cognitively inferior to humans; reinforced in the song "I Wan'na Be Like You," with monkeys aspiring to human abilities of fire production. These reproduce an unequal human-animal relationship discourse that supports human exploitation of wildlife; for food, entertainment in zoos and cartoons, and habitat destruction.

Even the environmental message is overly romanticized. The forest is depicted as an untouched and plentiful utopia, neglecting the reality of deforestation, climate change, and endangered species. By ignoring the everyday struggles faced by forest-dwelling human and non-human beings, the film forgoes an opportunity to raise awareness about environmental challenges

Princess Mononoke: A Complex Forest

On the contrary, Studio Ghibli's *Princess Mononoke* delivers a grittier and more realistic take on environmental conflicts. The film, directed by Hayao Miyazaki, follows Ashitaka, a young warrior, as he navigates a war between humans and the spirits of a sacred forest. Along the way, he meets San, a child brought-up by wolves, who is fiercely loyal to the forest and its animal gods.

Unlike *The Jungle Book*, the story does not shy away from the complexities of environmental destruction. The flourishing forest in *Princess Mononoke* is alive, filled with gods, spirits, and animals fighting to protect their home. Simultaneously, it is under relentless threat from Lady Eboshi, the leader of Iron Town, whose industrial ambitions are destroying the land. The animals in *Princess Mononoke* are not anthropomorphized for laughs, rather, they are shrewd, sentient beings who claim respect. Their frustrations with anthropogenic destruction are valid, and the film fairly represents their perspectives and grievances. For instance, the boar and wolf clans strategize and lament over their losses, making them active participants in the story rather than mere sidekicks or comic relieves. Further, the film's depiction of the **Tataragami**, a Forest God turned evil by human actions (Figures 1, 2), shows nature's communicative capabilities when misused. The bewitching animation imbues nature with God-like consciousness, healing, and destructive powers, transcending human abilities. The presence of the **Shishigami** (forest spirit) (Figure 3), **Kodamas** (tree spirits) (Figure 4), and boar god, worshipped by animals and humans alike, portrays the forest as awe-inspiring and powerful.



Figures 1 & 2: *Tataragami* attacking Emishi village



Heroes, Villains, and Shades of Gray

Both films have central conflicts, but they handle their characters very differently. In *The Jungle Book*, Mowgli is the clear hero, and the tiger Shere Khan is painted as the antagonist, primarily because he wants to kill Mowgli. While Shere Khan's anger stems from human's destructiveness, such as hunting and triggering forest fires, this motivation is never explored, leaving him as a one-dimensional antagonist.

In *Princess Mononoke*, there is no direct encoding of characters as good or bad. Lady Eboshi, who cuts down the forest, is also a compassionate leader who provides shelter, a sense of belonging, and job security to lepers and former prostitutes. San, the wolf-child, is both fierce and vulnerable, willing to fight for the forest but struggling with her identity as a human raised by animals. This way, the film depicts all characters' intentions, including the animals' desire to protect the forest. This complexity makes the film's message more impactful: environmental conflicts are nuanced and messy, and there's no straightforward solution.



Figure 3: Shishigami

Indigenous Voices

When it comes to representing indigenous peoples, *The Jungle Book* falls short. The film is loosely inspired by Rudyard Kipling's novels, set in the Khana Forest in colonial India, inhabited by the Baiga, a tribal people who have inhabited the forest for centuries predating colonialism. Since colonialism, this tribe, among other forest-dwelling communities' survival is endangered by wildlife conservation legislations and climate change (Linton, 2017); but the film negates this reality, instead glamorizing the life of the Baiga. Shanti, the young Baiga girl who lures Mowgli back to human life, is depicted as a sweet, traditional homemaker. Her role reinforces stereotypes about women and oversimplifies the struggles of forest tribes, who often face displacement due to deforestation and wildlife conservation policies in India among other biodiverse hotspots worldwide.

By contrast, *Princess Mononoke* is rooted in respect for indigenous communities. The Emishi people, inspired by a marginalized Japanese group, are portrayed as stewards of the land, using non-exploitative practices and co-existing with nature. Their suffering, caused by industrial expansion, mirrors the real-world exploitation of indigenous peoples globally.

Gender Roles

The Jungle Book does not offer much when it comes to dismantling gender stereotypes. Almost all the major characters are male, and the only significant female character, Shanti, is reduced to a love interest who fits traditional expectations of femininity. Her brief appearance at the film's end perpetuates the idea that women's roles are tied to homemaking and charm.

In contrast, *Princess Mononoke* overturns these stereotypes. San is a strong, independent warrior who challenges both humans and gods to protect her home. Lady Eboshi is another powerful female figure, leading her community with astuteness and strength. The women of Iron Town, many of whom were once marginalized, work hard in the bellows and fight alongside men. They are also portrayed as warriors, as Eboshi fashions guns for their use. Furthermore, they boldly poke fun at the men, who are represented as being dumb.

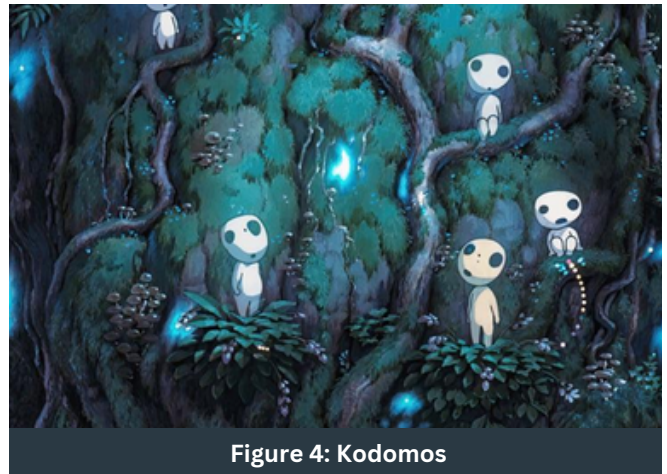


Figure 4: Kodomos



This empowerment of females is also emphasized by the shot compositions; Lady Eboshi and the IronTown females are always at the forefront, and the males in the background (figures below).

Besides, San's first appearance, outfit, and gestures, are antithetical to the charming femininity glorified in Shanti's character. Her first appearance, zoomed-in, is of her blood smeared face as she looks threateningly at Ashitaka. Her messy short hair, red-stained face, furry wolf-like dress, and mask, represent her wildness (Figure 4), as opposed to Shanti's soft appearance. Her animalness, shrewdness, and bravery, are reinforced in her deft nursing of Moro's wound. She is represented more wolf-like than human, transcending human-nature separations. Thus, Princess Mononoke defies traditional gender norms, representing meek men and women embodying typical masculine traits. While, concerning, The Jungle Book's narrow gender representations can constrict the young audience's perception of their own identities and their societal views.

Realities of environmental conflict & film ending

While The Jungle Book offers a fun adventure with lovable characters, it skims over the complexities of environmental issues. It paints a picture of nature as something simple and unchanging, which could lead young viewers to underestimate the challenges facing our planet. It ends with the conflict resolved and harmony restored; evident in Mowgli's safe return to the man-village where he belongs, for his and the animals' safety. This represents the 'happily-ever-after' trope.

Princess Mononoke, however, challenges its audience to think deeply about the cost of human progress and the importance of respecting nature. It ends with gore and unresolved human-environmental conflict. The Shishigami, Moro, and Okkoto die, Lady Eboshi loses an arm, and Ashitaka and San go their separate ways, with the latter saying she can never forgive humans. It represents an ambiguous environmental discourse closer-to-reality; there is no forthright solution to reconcile human progress with environmental destruction; inspiring curiosity and empathy-qualities that can motivate future generations to take action. Lastly, while San's loyalty to remain in the forest with her wolf family reinforces human-nature oneness, Mowgli's 'happily-ever-after' exit from forest life represents human-nature separateness.



Final Thoughts

Both *The Jungle Book* and *Princess Mononoke* have earned their place as timeless classics, but they represent two very different approaches to storytelling. While Disney's film adheres to a cheerful, uncomplicated, and unrealistic narrative, Studio Ghibli's masterpiece dives into the heart of environmental conflict with nuance and respect for all its characters. *Princess Mononoke* also topples constricting stereotypes about gender and identity construction, which can impact younger audience beneficially, who are at a fragile state of developing their own selfhoods, and societal perceptions. For young viewers, these films are more than just recreation—they shape how they see the world. At a time when environmental issues are more urgent than ever, the messages we share with kids matter. Eco-cinema plays an important role in shaping and fostering environmental sensitivities in a child, and their effective participation in such pressing conflicts. So, whether you're singing along with Baloo or journeying through the mystical forests of Japan, remember: **every story has the power to change how we understand our place in nature.**

BOOK REVIEW

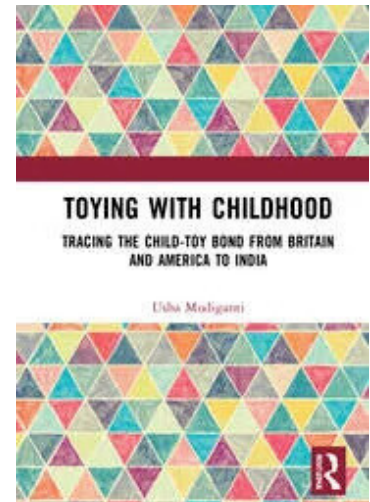
Toying with Childhood: Tracing the Child Toy Bond from Britain and America to India by Usha Mudiganti



By R. Harini
AIF

ABOUT THE BOOK

Usha Mudiganti's **'Toying With Childhood'** is a descriptive, engaging and interdisciplinary exploration of the cultural construction of childhood, essayed in particular through the toy-child bond. The author conducts her analysis through a layered review of historical literature as products of spatial, cognitive, familial and religious intersections as she examines the objectification of childhood. Childhood has been constituted within transnational and comparative paradigms, as norms and notions. My review of this work shall be penned as a summarized analysis of each chapter, with the hope that I am able to do justice to this reflexive and theoretically posited account. I also enjoy the lucid, almost conversational presentation of text in particular, which is accompanied by inquisitive titles. Opening with an introspection on the socio-cultural construction of childhood in reference to the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, Mudiganti draws our attention to the spatial, social and relational inequities emerging from a globally enforced quarantine. She opines that it is all the more necessary to analyze the cultural construction of childhood when childcare workers are trying to comprehend the longitudinal repercussions of these changes.



CONTENT, INTROSPECTION AND ANALYSIS

In Chapter 1 (Introduction), the author argues that the reductive structuring of childhood as a formative period simplifies its complexities, resulting in its fictionalization that provides adults the power to construct childhood. This construction is essayed through the propensity of 'notions', that later become norms by gaining acceptance and currency within society. The changing imagery associated with childhood is historically contextualized and culturally specific. The 'civilizing' process is concurrent with the performance of norms, which are disseminated through fiction, poetry, songs and toys. This dissemination propagates a sense of an homogenized ideal, that institutions collectively aim to cultivate and replicate. This means that while every stage of childhood is evaluated through normative metrics, every child is also trained to attain this ideal. Employing Chris Jenks's conflation of the social and the natural, the author opines that the belief in the uniformity of childhood experiences across cultures constructs the myth of the universally ideal childhood and child.

From the 19th century onwards, the bond between a child and their toys has been centralized. The author wishes to deconstruct how the fictional depictions of this bond in 19th century Britain conflated ideals of boyhood and girlhood in 20th century India. With the transfer of power from the East India Company to the

British crown, one could observe a heightened dissemination of 19th-century British notions of conduct. At the height of the Industrial Revolution, familial economic structures became highly segregated and thus, the 'home' was structured by feminine docility as a space of 'innocence'; a longing for which was narrativized through Victorian literature. This 'cult of domesticity' also emphasized emerging roles for children, as essayed in 19th century British society. The presence of children within the workspace was altered as child labor reduced drastically in the latter half of the 19th century. I believe that it is important to bring into focus the author's review of the characterization of Victorian 'innocence', confined within the barriers of law and religion. The child was a pristine, asexual being; representative of the 'purity' lost by mankind after banishment from the Garden of Eden. This definition shall become important in our analysis of succeeding chapters.

In Chapter 2 (**Constructing Childhood**), the author integrates the work of Philippe Aries who attests the periodic isolation of childhood as a way of familiarizing children with socialization and the critiques of deMause. A common consensus is that it was only after the middle of the 17th century that there were some recorded instances of empathy towards experiences of childhood. Daniel T Kline has criticized 'the Aries effect' and opines that the paradigm rejects the inclusion of childhood in Middle English texts.

There exists a *dichotomy* between the romanticization of childhood in 19th century literature as opposed to the enormous quantity of children joining the workforce during the Industrial Revolution. Thus, the subject of child labor became one that necessitated agitation, elaborated through legislation ensuring the providence of education for children of all classes. While these measures protected children, it conversely led to their objectification within the household as they became economic dependents. This objectification is pertinently internalized, as evidenced by David Gryll's view of the treatment of childhood as historically abominable and Durkheim's etymological deconstruction of the word 'infant'; the child does not yet exist until molded into the adult, when existence is socially legitimized. What becomes important to this discourse is how Sigmund Freud's theory of psychosexual development deconstructed the view of the child as a reified asexual entity, transitioning to the recognition of the same as a developmental stage. Employing the psychoanalytic method, Freud drew a connection between childhood and adulthood through the interpretation of dreams, rooting behavioural responses in suppressed sexual instincts. His youngest daughter Anna Freud distinguished between adult and 'infantile' cognition by elaborating on the distinctive separation of the inner and outer worlds within adults. The chapter closes with a review of the post-analytical paradigm in the discourse associated with childhood, including the work of Hermine Hug-Hellmuth, Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott among others.

In Chapter 3 (**Saving the child**) and 4 (**The child and toy bond**), the author approaches the fictional, literary and social conflation of the 'toy' with the child, tackling three works of literature in the late 19th century to explore the repercussions of the reification elaborated above. Though the myth of innocence is recognized to be one, it is created and perpetuated to act as a mechanism of social control. The child is 'saved' through its characterization as innately innocent as it retains its role within the family. Ideals of childhood were narrativized as experiences came to be homogenized as one of the primary roles of children became to emotionally contribute to the family's contentment. Though the role of the Victorian woman was perceived as ornamental, one of their primary duties was to socialize children towards gendered roles, as established in the work of Carol Dyhouse. The daughter in particular became a miniature replica of their diminutive and sheltered mothers, with much literature being focused on the conduct of girls and young women. The poem '*The Angel in the House*' by Coventry Patmore allegorized this idealism and the phrase 'angels of the house' came to be embedded within the ideals of childhood.

These ideals of femininity and masculinity developed into established gender roles, elaborated by the author's intricate exploration of literary and fictional depictions of femininity. Once again, the work of Freud is brought into discussion with reference to psychoanalytic treatments of feminine maladies and the scientific demonstration of the patriarchal construction of femininity. '*What Maise Knew*' by Henry James and the works of Charles Dickens are referenced in specificity.

We are introduced to the development of children and childhood literature in specific detail within chapter 4. A major portion of children's literature in 18th century America was constructed around their perceived spiritual proximity as the child was objectified through its pedestalization. Gradually, 'otherness' in relation to children's literature was structured on the notion that children were '*special creatures*'. Prescriptive literature dominated the market, ranging from books on etiquettes to encyclopedias. However, the author also explores the development of the ways in which fiction aimed at children evolved, with child protagonists braving the adult world through ingenious ways. A common theme among these stories was the usage of the toy as a central prop to socialize children into culturally acceptable behavior, with the doll in particular employed to awaken sensitivity within these fictional children, as in Gertrude's Child.

Stories that subtly aimed to 'civilize' children earned approval from parents while the prospect of child protagonists getting away with harmless mischief enamored younger readers. The toy-child continuum is perpetuated through literature and the toy is dualized as both the transition object and the projection of a self in many narratives of childhood.

Chapter 5 (**Resonances and Repercussions**) focuses upon the repercussions of the reification of childhood (elaborated through the cultural construction of childhood by the toy-child bond) and the ways in which these repercussions intersected within English Indian literature. Both World Wars led to the re-examination of domestic space as children had to rapidly adapt to conditions. A theme that became apparent in literature was the loss of innocent childhood, illustrated by the author through her voracious recount of literature. The author then examines childhood experiences in India and the work done to ensure children possess the right to dignity of life.

Formal education in India had been structured by colonial intent as R.K.Narayan captured the experiences of Indian middle-class boyhood in a colonized state in *Swami and Friends* (1935). Meanwhile, Ruby Lal's work allows one to explore intersecting expectations of good conduct for young women and its literary proliferation.

ARTICLE

My Engagements with Metropolitan Children: Problematizing their 'Agencies' in Constructing Everyday Worlds and Suggestions for Changes




By Chhandita Basu

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Childhood, chronologically spanning eighteen years, is the most crucial and interesting phase of an individual's life. Characterized by a certain level of physical, emotional, and cognitive maturation, Western developmental psychologists have always assessed children in terms of a few specified indicators of progression and subjected them to persistent quantitative evaluation for measuring, analyzing, and comparing their progression against some standardized yardsticks of development. Children are considered to be socially different from adults and increasingly identified through attributes like 'vulnerable', 'immature', 'innocent', 'naïve', and 'carefree', yet in the continuous process of growth and development. However, social science discourses (like Anthropology and Sociology) have tried to move beyond this narrower, universal, and generalizing way of defining childhood by dwelling deeply into their relational worlds and layers of multiple constructed meanings. Researchers in these domains no longer highlight the mere dependencies of children on their adult caregivers and try to focus attention on their agentic positions, and their role in decision-making, voicing, and channeling their opinions for matters related to their everyday lives. Children's narratives find a special place in different ethnographically guided child-centered research; raising pertinent questions about their rights, independencies, advocacies, and empowerment that undoubtedly throws light on their encounters, relations, and interactions with adults, within and beyond any institutional space.

My interest in children and understanding the phase of childhood heightened substantially instead of my doctoral journey that reframed my perspectives about children and approaches for conducting relevant research. Inspired by the theoretical framework of New Sociology and Anthropology of Childhood, I headed to set out my planned fieldwork in different 'carefully selected' and 'institutionally permitted' pre-school settings, predominately located in Eastern and Southern parts of the Kolkata metropolis. It took me nearly two years to complete the tenure of fieldwork, leaving behind some unforgettable memories of 'engagements' gathered through persistent challenges in doing child-centered ethnography, ethically-grounded manner of conversation, and reorientation of my positionality as a researcher for deeper access to children's conceptual worlds, which is different from adults' visions. Subsequently, it made me realize the everyday problems of these urban children (mostly hailing from upper-middle-class backgrounds), coming to private schools at tender ages and gradually bringing into the folds of a competitive culture of neoliberal educational practices to emerge as competent 'citizens' at later phases. Both schools and families function conjugatively in academically and socio-behaviorally training and disciplining children; often suppressing their voices, and hindering their interests in pressing their demands in different domains of everyday schedules. Despite the anthropological and/or sociological legitimization of children as independent social actors, most Indian caregivers hardly pay heed to children's perspectives, their independence in the meaning-making process, and their potential to influence everyday decisions.



Children's agencies are increasingly problematized within and beyond the urban institutionalized spaces as their constructed relational worlds are not merely seen as products of their understandings and manner of interpretations but indeed incessantly shaped by adults' expectations and prioritization of societal rules. As years roll on, children are ultimately rendered as 'docile', 'compliant' individuals who have silently accepted the institutionally acclaimed prescriptions, being mediated by their adult caretakers through rigorous disciplining practices and early academic pressures. In most cases, it happens against their wishes, and children's behaviors are skillfully regulated through seldom verbal negotiations, tactical procedures, and even punishments, enforcements, and coercion. Adults always want to curb the children's acts of resistance, thereby complicating the grounds of adult children's relationships as well as affecting their creativity, freedom, and sense of autonomy in framing their everyday lives and independently perceiving the world around them.

All these intensify the need for bringing certain changes in the early educational system and parenting practices in familial contexts. While researchers and policy-makers have always discussed issues like educational rights, child abuse, gender-based discrimination, and health and nutritional conditions, urban children who seemingly hail from 'privileged' family backgrounds are extremely marginalized in the face of educational competition, unrealistic adults' expectations, and stricter regulatory attitudes from adults. Indian educational policies and so private schools from metropolitan areas lack avenues for children to create meaningful spaces within institutional contexts and voice their opinions to influence the decisions about the curricular framework, everyday class activities, evaluation procedures, class schedules, and manner of arranging home assignments. Though beset with intrinsic difficulties in practicing the same at early learning spaces, both teachers and parents/guardians should take age-appropriate initiatives for facilitating the expression of their interests as well as sharing feedback/suggestions, which need to be appreciated and rightfully implemented, whenever required. Adults should think of ways of making children feel empowered in different institutionalized scenarios and enhance the decision-making abilities of children from early stages by instilling certain social-behavioral skills (like public speaking, careful observation, active listening, and analyzing adults' perspectives) that would help them to logically argue and confidently place their demands. Group activities should be part of everyday curricular practices, enabling children to build conducive relationships with peers of different interests and temperaments as they synchronize with them and pay heed to respective ideas and related practices. Likewise, adults (especially school teachers) should remain attentive to each child's interests, desires, and potentialities for designing individualized curricular practice and pathway of learning (particularly through play-based experiments and activity-based assignments) for early stages, rather than homogenizing their learning outcomes and universalizing their learning experiences against some pre-disposed institutionalized academic benchmarks and criterion for standardized evaluation. As children progress to higher grades, schools should provide them opportunities to form structured student forums, committees, and councils that could work in partnership with teachers and/or school administrative bodies to influence policy developments and incorporate guidelines about their institutionalized lives. Similar practices should also be followed at family levels, thereby highlighting the significant role of researchers in making adults recognize children's rights in framing everyday decisions and redress the power differentials in existing children-adults relationships.

“Preschool Necessity – A Requirement for the Modern Age”



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“Preschool” is still a relatively new concept in our society. In the past, many of us went directly to first grade or, at most, attended Anganwadi. There is a strong belief in our culture that preschool education (aside from Anganwadi) is a part of the commercialization of education. There are reasons for this, but as times change, our lifestyle is changing too. Joint families are transforming into nuclear families, and we, who once lived close to nature, are now confined to urban life, surrounded by four walls. As a result, children today no longer have the opportunity to learn from grandparents or other elders at home. Therefore, we must accept that the “preschool system” is necessary for children’s development.

What is Preschool?

Preschool can be referred to by various names such as Nursery School, Pre-primary School, Playschool, Child Care, Anganwadi, etc. It is a one-year system that provides early childhood education to children before they start formal primary school. Preschools generally operate from morning to afternoon. During this time, children learn life values and lay the foundation for future education. This helps them adjust better to the school environment when they eventually transition to formal education.

What is the Right Age?

Parents often wonder at what age they should send their child to preschool. While most preschools accept children around the age of two and a half, the decision lies with the parents. Not every child at the same age develops physically, socially, or mentally in the same way. A child’s development must be considered before making the important decision to send them to school. When a child is physically and mentally ready to attend preschool, it becomes easier for them to adjust. At this stage, the child should be able to do basic tasks like eating, drinking water, using the toilet, washing hands after play, and sleeping alone. The child should also be able to understand simple instructions and communicate their feelings (even through gestures). Parents should teach these basic skills at home before sending the child to preschool to ensure a smooth transition into

the school environment, making it a fun and enjoyable experience.

The Role of Daycare Centers:

Children often spend considerable time in daycare centers. These centers are helpful, especially when both parents are working. It is important that children enjoy the teachers’ company and the daycare environment. Children in center-based care tend to show more development than those raised at home. They get more opportunities to interact with other children and have access to better learning materials. Additionally, staff at daycare centers typically receive more training to handle young children.

Activities in Preschool:

In preschool, children develop physical, social, emotional, language, and awareness skills. They are encouraged to explore their thoughts and engage in activities that help them learn. The focus is on helping children use their intellectual capabilities and pay attention to physical movement. Simple activities are designed to help children learn through play.

Benefits of Preschool Education:

- 1. Development of Independence:** Preschool helps children develop a sense of independence. They learn to make choices and pursue their interests. This skill proves to be beneficial in the future.
- 2. Responsibility and Alertness:** Children learn to do everyday tasks like eating, sleeping, and washing hands independently. This builds a responsible and alert mindset.
- 3. Improved Communication Skills:** Interaction with peers enhances communication abilities. A variety of activities help develop the child’s personality.
- 4. Emotional Expression:** Preschool provides children the opportunity to play and learn in groups, which helps them express their emotions more freely. They also learn to concentrate through activities like storytelling and reading.
- 5. Discipline and Time Management:** Children learn discipline and time management through daily routines at preschool. They follow specific schedules, which encourages creativity and curiosity.



How to Choose the Best Preschool?

When selecting a preschool, it is important to keep the following aspects in mind:

- 1. Child Safety:** Ensure the preschool has adequate safety measures, including first-aid facilities and fire safety systems.
- 2. Teacher Quality:** Teachers are crucial to the child's overall development. It's important to evaluate their ability to provide care and education. A competent teacher positively impacts the child's growth.
- 3. School Environment:** The preschool should have a positive, engaging, and safe environment that encourages growth. The classroom should be spacious and well-ventilated.
- 4. Communication with Parents:** The preschool should maintain regular communication with parents through meetings, emails, or phone calls. This ensures the child's progress is continually monitored.
- 5. Teacher-Student Ratio:** The teacher-student ratio is essential for effective communication and learning. A lower number of students ensures better interaction and understanding.

Anganwadis: A Government Initiative for Early Childhood Care: The government of India introduced the Anganwadi program for the comprehensive development of children.

Launched in 1975 under the "Integrated Child Development Services" (ICDS) scheme, it aims to combat malnutrition and ensure maternal and child care. Anganwadis primarily cater to children aged 0-6 years. They provide nutritious meals, immunizations, and educational services. Free preschool education along with health care makes Anganwadis widely popular.

Legal Provisions: The Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 emphasizes that education is a fundamental right for children. While the Act primarily covers children from 6 to 14 years of age, it indirectly supports early childhood education as an essential part of the foundation for primary education. Moreover, the National Policy on Education (NPE) encourages preschool education for all children in India as a part of holistic development.

Conclusion: Preschool education is no longer a luxury but a necessity in today's world. It plays a pivotal role in the social, emotional, and academic development of children. As families evolve, and the environment becomes more urbanized, providing children with early education ensures they are better prepared for the challenges ahead. Whether through formal preschools or Anganwadis, it is vital that every child receives the early care and education they deserve to thrive in the future.



ARTICLE

Digital Detox: Kiran and Anjali's Screen-Time Reduction Strategies for their Child

By Bonthu Akhilesh
AIF

This interview explores the experiences of Kiran and Anjali, parents residing in Bengaluru, India, as they navigate the challenges and strategies associated with reducing their child's screen time. The couple, both well-educated, with Kiran employed in the software industry and Anjali as a homemaker, undertook a digital detox for their two-year-old son, Hari, after observing developmental delays. This qualitative inquiry explores their motivations, methods, and the outcomes of their efforts, providing valuable insights into the role of parental involvement and the impact of digital media on early childhood development.

Akhilesh: Could you please introduce yourselves?

Kiran: I am Kiran, a software employee based in Bengaluru.

Anjali: I am Anjali, a homemaker. I left my job after the birth of our first child, a girl who is now eight years old.

Akhilesh: Could you describe the initial concerns you had regarding Hari's development?

Anjali: Initially, we noticed that Hari was not responding to us. He seemed disengaged and his speech development was noticeably delayed compared to other children his age.

Kiran: Yes, we realized that his screen time might be affecting his development. He was spending a lot of time on mobile phones and watching TV, which we thought might be contributing to his lack of responsiveness and poor speech.

Akhilesh: What steps did you take to address these concerns?

Anjali: The first step we took was to reduce his screen time. Initially, we limited it, and eventually, we stopped it completely. We also made a conscious effort to stop using devices in his presence to set a good example.

Kiran: We started paying more attention to him, and engaging him in various activities. We took him outside more often, played with him, and introduced



new toys that could stimulate his cognitive abilities. We also enrolled him in a daycare facility to help him interact with other children and develop social skills.

Akhilesh: How did you ensure that these changes were effective?

Anjali: We made sure to spend quality time with him every day. We focused on activities that required interaction, such as playing ball games, doing puzzles, and reading books together. We also encouraged him to imitate our actions and words, believing that this would help him develop his speech.

Kiran: We were consistent in our efforts. We made it a point to talk to him frequently, using simple words and phrases, and encouraged him to repeat them. We also praised him for his efforts, no matter how small, to boost his confidence.

Akhilesh: What changes did you observe after implementing these measures?

Anjali: After a couple of months, we noticed significant improvements. Hari started uttering simple words like "Amma" and "Bava." He also began imitating our actions, such as clapping hands or waving goodbye.

Kiran: We observed an increase in his cognitive skills and memory capacity. He became more interested in playing with toys, doing puzzles, and engaging in various activities. He also started enjoying outdoor activities like playing with sand and going to the park.

Akhilesh: What insights have you gained from this experience?

Anjali: It is crucial for parents to invest time and effort in nurturing their children, even with a busy lifestyle. Consistent efforts can lead to significant improvements in a child's development.

Kiran: Now, Hari is more interested in playing and exploring than in using mobile phones or watching TV. He enjoys playing with toys, doing puzzles, and engaging in outdoor activities. This experience has taught us the importance of being present and actively involved in our children's lives.

Akhilesh: What are the challenges you faced during this process?

Anjali: One of the main challenges was balancing our time and responsibilities. As a homemaker, I already had a lot of household duties, and dedicating additional time to focus on Hari's development required significant effort and adjustment. Another challenge was consistency. It was crucial to maintain a routine and consistently engage with Hari without reverting to the convenience of screen time, especially on days when we were particularly tired or busy. Additionally, finding the right activities that would stimulate his cognitive abilities and keep him engaged was a trial-and-error process. We had to experiment with different toys and activities to see what worked best for him. Despite these challenges, we remained committed to our goal. Seeing the positive changes in Hari's behavior and development made all the effort worthwhile.

Kiran: For me, managing work commitments while ensuring I spent quality time with Hari was challenging. Being a software employee, my job demands a lot of my time and attention, so finding a balance was difficult. We also faced some initial resistance from Hari. He was accustomed to spending time with screens, so transitioning him to more interactive and engaging activities took time and patience. Enrolling him in a daycare facility was another challenge.

We had to ensure that the environment was conducive to his development and that he was comfortable and happy there. It was a learning experience for us as parents. We realized the importance of being actively involved in our child's development and the impact of our actions on his growth.

Akhilesh: If you have to suggest some other parents regarding digital detox, what would you suggest?

Anjali: I would suggest starting gradually. Reducing screen time doesn't have to happen overnight. Begin by setting specific times when screens are not allowed, such as during meals or before bedtime. Gradually increase these screen-free periods. Find alternative activities that can capture your child's interest. Introduce them to toys, puzzles, books, and outdoor activities that stimulate their cognitive and physical development. The key is to make these activities enjoyable so that they don't miss the screens. Engage with your child during screen-free times. Spend quality time talking, playing, and doing activities together. This not only helps in reducing screen time but also strengthens the bond between you and your child.

Kiran: It's important to lead by example. Children often imitate their parents, so if they see us using devices less, they are more likely to follow suit. We made a conscious effort to reduce our own screen time and engage in more interactive activities with Hari. Consistency is crucial. Stick to the rules you set and be patient. There might be resistance initially, but with time, children will adapt to the new routine. It's also helpful to explain to them why reducing screen time is beneficial for their health and development. Lastly, be patient and persistent. Changes won't happen overnight, but with consistent effort, you will see positive results. It's about creating a balanced environment where children can thrive without relying heavily on digital devices.

Akhilesh: Thank you so much for your valuable insights.



ARTICLE

Unlived Childhood: Effect of Early Menarche**By Saba Farhin***AIF*

India, the world's most populous country, faces significant challenges in health, education, and social development, including rising public health concerns among adolescents. One pressing issue is the early onset of menarche (puberty) in girls, a milestone signaling reproductive maturity. Traditionally occurring between ages 10 and 16, with an average age of 12.4 years, menarche is now often observed as early as 8 years. While genetics partly influence menarche timing, environmental and lifestyle factors such as diet, stress, and exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs), play a significant role. Urbanization and industrialization have exacerbated EDC exposure, disrupting hormonal pathways that regulate pubertal timing. Elevated BMI and adiposity, linked to increased leptin levels, are also major contributors. Early menarche poses numerous risks, including anxiety, depression, body image concerns, and social pressures. It also heightens the likelihood of health issues such as metabolic syndrome, obesity, type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers. Furthermore, this trend places additional strain on healthcare, education, and housing systems, especially in densely populated nations like India.

For girls as young as eight, early menarche brings challenges that extend far beyond physical and hormonal changes. Their young minds are often unprepared to cope with such drastic shifts, and the premature alteration of their developmental timeline triggers a cascade of effects on their physical, emotional, and social well-being. While their bodies may mature faster, their emotional and cognitive development often lags, creating a disconnection that can impact their long-term growth and social integration. Menarche triggers a surge of hormones, leading to mood swings, acne, and other puberty-related changes that can overwhelm young girls. Early puberty can also disrupt growth, potentially resulting in shorter adult stature as growth plates may close prematurely. These sudden changes often cause significant stress and anxiety, leaving girls feeling isolated and confused. This is especially true for those who feel self-conscious about their changing bodies, particularly if they are the first among their peers to start puberty. The resulting pressure and uncertainty increase their vulnerability to mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.

Socially, girls experiencing early menarche often feel out of place among their peers, leading to social withdrawal and difficulty forming age-appropriate friendships. This sense of isolation may be further compounded by bullying or teasing, which damages self-esteem and hinders social interactions. In some cultures, early puberty is mistakenly seen as a sign of readiness for adult responsibilities, such as marriage and motherhood, imposing harmful and inappropriate expectations on these young girls. Moreover, the premature push into adulthood robs these children of the joys and innocence of childhood. Instead of spending carefree days playing and exploring, they are often burdened with expectations to act maturely, forcing them into adult roles and responsibilities they are not ready to handle. This abrupt shift exposes them to adult issues they cannot fully comprehend, stripping away their innocence and placing them in emotionally taxing situations.



These kinds of psychological and social pressures caused by early menarche also disrupt education. Stress and stigma can lead to decreased academic performance or school absenteeism, depriving these girls of opportunities to learn and grow. Most concerning is that recent research has established links between early menarche and childhood trauma, including sexual abuse. Trauma can lead to elevated stress hormone levels, which may accelerate physical maturation processes. This adds an urgent layer to the conversation, as early menarche could potentially serve as an indicator of a child's exposure to adverse experiences. A study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* highlights this connection, showing that childhood sexual abuse is significantly associated with early menarche. Thus, addressing this issue requires targeted interventions, such as nutritional education, mental health support, and societal awareness programs, to mitigate the risks and ensure that young girls can enjoy the childhood they deserve.

Recently Whisper India released an advertisement featuring a school teacher educating her students about periods (a general term used for menstrual cycles), breaking the taboo and normalizing the conversation around menstruation. The campaign emphasizes that since girls as young as eight years old are experiencing their menarche thus it is necessary to educate children about periods at an early age as they are a natural and healthy part of life, with the catchy jingle, "*Periods ka matlab, healthy hai aap*" (i.e. an onset of periods implies that you are healthy, and normal). It is a really good initiative as part of the fifth edition of their #KeepGirlsInSchool (KGIS) movement, which seeks to address the lack of menstrual hygiene education and reduce dropout rates among girls. You can check the advertisement [here](#).

Along with addressing and educating our children, it is also necessary to foster healthy habits in them and among us adults, as children see and learn from their adults. To help delay the early onset of menarche and ensure children enjoy a healthy, carefree childhood, we can make a few simple but powerful changes. First, let's cut down on the use of plastics, especially for food storage and heating, as they contain harmful chemicals that can mess with children's hormones. Switching to glass or traditional metal/clay cookware and containers can make a big difference. Encouraging children to be more active and reducing their screen time is also crucial. Getting them involved in sports or outdoor play from an early age not only helps them maintain a healthy weight but also boosts their overall mood and energy.

Nutrition plays a big role too. Providing balanced, nutritious meals while cutting back on junk food can prevent obesity which is linked to early puberty. It's important to talk openly with children about these changes and why they're necessary, building their confidence and understanding. Schools and communities can also support this by promoting physical activities and healthy eating habits.

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to overlook the small yet significant steps that shape the well-being of our children. While implementing changes like reducing EDC exposure or encouraging active lifestyles might seem inconvenient, these efforts are vital to nurturing healthy childhoods. By fostering supportive home and community environments, we can help young girls delay premature developmental challenges and enjoy their carefree years to the fullest setting them up to be happy, healthy adults. When parents and caregivers are involved and attentive, children feel more secure and ready to tackle the challenges of growing up. Together, let us work towards a future where every child can grow up happy, healthy, and ready to thrive.

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ARTICLE

Supporting Child Health: The Foundations of Nutrition, Mental Health and Sanitation**By Ria Ghosh***Managing Director, Forency India*

Child health encompasses much more than simply keeping children free from illness. Holistic health strategies that focus on nutrition, mental well-being, sanitation, and supportive environments are vital for raising children who can thrive. These elements interconnect to shape children's physical, cognitive, and emotional development, each influencing and reinforcing the other. Investing in these areas sets the stage for lifelong health, resilience, and success.

Nutrition: Building Blocks of Healthy Growth

Proper nutrition is a cornerstone of child health, influencing every aspect of physical and cognitive development. From infancy, essential nutrients support brain development, muscle growth, immune function, and energy levels.

Early Nutrition and Brain Development

Infancy and early childhood are critical periods for brain development, with 80% of the brain's growth happening by age three. Nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids (found in breast milk, certain fish, and fortified foods) are crucial for brain development, while iron, zinc, iodine, and choline play key roles in cognitive function and memory formation. Ensuring that children receive adequate nutrition early on has been shown to improve academic performance, attention span, and behavioral outcomes later in life.



The Role of Balanced Diets and Micronutrients

A balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats provides the essential vitamins and minerals that children need to grow. Vitamins like A, D, and C, along with minerals such as calcium and iron, support bone strength, immunity, and blood health. Insufficient nutrition can lead to stunted growth, weakened immunity, and developmental delays, and deficiencies can have lasting consequences, underscoring the importance of a varied, nutrient-rich diet.

Challenges to Child Nutrition

Despite the importance of nutrition, many children face barriers to healthy eating, such as food insecurity, lack of access to diverse foods, or over-reliance on processed, calorie-dense foods with low nutritional value. Programs like school lunches, community food initiatives, and parental education can help address these challenges by ensuring more children have access to nutritious food, regardless of socio-economic status.

Mental Health: Emotional Foundations for Life

Mental health is an integral part of overall health and influences a child's ability to handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Children who experience strong mental health are more resilient, better able to cope with adversity, and often have stronger social relationships.

- **Recognizing Early Mental Health Needs:** Mental health concerns can arise in children as young as preschool age, and early intervention is key. Anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues affect millions of children globally, with factors such as family stress, trauma, and genetics contributing to these conditions. Recognizing early warning signs—like prolonged sadness, withdrawal, irritability, or aggressive behavior—can help parents and caregivers seek timely support.
- **Supporting Mental Health Through Environment and Relationships:** Positive, supportive environments at home, school, and in the community help children feel safe and valued. Encouraging open communication, validating emotions, and modeling healthy coping mechanisms contribute to a child's emotional resilience. Furthermore, the caregiver-child relationship is foundational for healthy emotional development. Secure attachments with caregivers promote a child's ability to form trusting relationships and manage emotions, while inconsistent or negative relationships can lead to increased anxiety or behavioral challenges.
- **The Role of Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence:** Introducing children to mindfulness and emotional awareness can help them develop skills to manage their emotions effectively. Simple mindfulness exercises, like focusing on breathing or naming emotions, foster self-awareness, focus, and emotional regulation. By teaching children to recognize and express their feelings, they become better equipped to handle stress, communicate effectively, and engage with others empathetically.

Sanitation and Hygiene: Preventing Disease and Building Health

Proper sanitation and hygiene practices are essential to preventing illnesses, especially in developing countries where children are more susceptible to waterborne diseases, respiratory infections, and skin conditions. Simple practices, like handwashing, safe drinking water, and clean environments, contribute significantly to reducing disease.

Impact of Poor Sanitation on Child Health

Children exposed to unsanitary environments are at a higher risk of contracting infections such as diarrhea, which remains one of the leading causes of child mortality worldwide. Parasitic infections, respiratory diseases, and skin ailments are also common in areas with inadequate sanitation. Poor sanitation can stunt growth, affect school attendance, and hinder children's cognitive and physical development.



Promoting Hygiene Practices

Teaching children basic hygiene practices, such as regular handwashing, covering their mouths when coughing, and proper toilet use, can prevent many common illnesses. Schools play a crucial role by reinforcing these habits, offering clean facilities, and educating children on the importance of hygiene. In communities with limited access to clean water, initiatives to improve water infrastructure and sanitation facilities can greatly improve health outcomes.

Community Health and Public Initiatives

Large-scale public health campaigns, community involvement, and government support are essential to establishing sanitation practices in resource-limited areas. Programs that provide access to clean water, distribute hygiene kits, and educate families can significantly impact child health outcomes. By addressing sanitation at both individual and community levels, countries can prevent the spread of disease and reduce child mortality rates.

The Power of Integrated Health Initiatives

Combining nutrition, mental health, and sanitation efforts creates a holistic approach to child health that addresses multiple aspects of well-being simultaneously. Schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations can collaborate to build environments that support children's physical and mental health needs.

School-Based Health Programs

Schools are well-positioned to promote health by offering nutritious meals, hygiene education, mental health resources, and physical activity. For example, school breakfast and lunch programs help children receive balanced meals, ensuring they have the energy and focus needed to learn. Counselling services within schools also provide mental health support, helping children deal with issues ranging from academic stress to bullying.

Parental and Community Education

Parent and caregiver education is vital to reinforcing healthy habits at home. Workshops and informational campaigns on nutrition, mental health awareness, and hygiene practices empower families to create supportive home environments. Community health programs can address local needs, providing families with resources and information to support their children's health.

Healthcare Access and Preventive Care

Access to healthcare services is essential for monitoring and maintaining child health. Regular check-ups allow for the early detection of potential health issues and provide opportunities for vaccinations, nutritional counseling, and mental health assessments. Immunization programs, especially in rural or underserved areas, prevent diseases like measles, polio, and tetanus, which can have severe consequences for children.

Conclusion

Prioritizing child health through a combination of nutrition, mental well-being, sanitation, and supportive environments is essential for fostering resilient, well-rounded individuals. When children receive balanced nutrition, and mental health support, and live in clean environments, they are better prepared to overcome challenges and achieve their full potential. This holistic approach requires a collaborative effort among parents, educators, healthcare providers, and communities. By investing in child health today, we create a foundation for healthier, happier generations to come.

ARTICLE

Lullabies and Lights Out: A Toddler's Guide to Sweet Sleep Hygiene**By Zainab Samiwala***Art and Play Psychotherapist, Nagpur*

"Just as the moon watches over the night, sleep watches over the well-being of our toddlers, offering them the serenity they need to thrive."

Sleep is a key part of a child's development, and for small children, laying out solid rest designs is pivotal for their general well-being. Satisfactory and quality rest assumes a crucial part in mental, emotional, and physical improvement during this developmental phase of life. In babies, resting has all the earmarks of being important for memory combination, executive attention, and motor skill improvement. Sleep also has important effects on growth, especially in early infancy.

A tot who is lacking in sleep can swing between being cranky and hyperactive, with impacts that can mirror ADHD. Tiredness can likewise influence your toddler's capacity to focus, with repercussions for their exhibition at school. Indeed, even insignificant sleep limitations can affect your toddler's everyday life.

As per the American Institute of Pediatrics (AAP), a quarter of children under the age of five years do not get satisfactory sleep. This is stressed because poor sleep in early systems has been connected to unfavorably susceptible rhinitis and issues with the immune system, as well as anxiety and depression. There is additional proof that insufficient sleep in childhood might convey future cardiovascular dangers such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension.

Fortunately, specific behavioral changes and adjustments to the sleep environment will help most children. Sleep hygiene refers to a set of practices and habits that promote healthy and restful sleep. It encompasses a range of behaviors and environmental factors that contribute to the quality and duration of one's sleep. Developing good sleep hygiene habits is essential for fostering a regular sleep-wake cycle, improving sleep quality, and ultimately supporting overall physical and mental well-being.

1. Consistent Bedtime Routine

Make bedtime the same time every night. This helps your child know what to expect and helps them establish healthy sleep patterns. Establishing a consistent bedtime routine signals to toddlers that it's time to wind down. The actual routine can be specific to your child, but it should last around 20 minutes and consist of three to four quiet, soothing activities such as a warm bath, reading a bedtime story, or gentle lullabies. Consistency is key, as it helps create a sense of predictability for the child. Bedtime routines provide children with a sense of familiarity and comfort, which acts in direct opposition to the uncertainty of insomnia.

2. Optimal Sleep Environment

Creating an optimal sleep environment is crucial for quality sleep. Ensure the toddler's sleep space is quiet, dark, and at a comfortable temperature. Additionally, using a security object like a favorite blanket or stuffed animal can provide comfort and promote a sense of security. These tips can help you create the perfect sleep setup for your little one:

- **Room temperature:** The body and brain both cool down in preparation for sleep, and this can be disrupted by a stuffy bedroom.
- **Noise:** Research suggests that even mild sound disturbances can affect the quality of slumber, even if the sleeper never awakens. Consider noise-blocking curtains to cut down on street noise.
- **Soothing smells:** Calming scents like lavender can have mild sedative effects. You might try using essential oils, a room diffuser, or a dried potpourri sachet to provide a soothing, sleep-inducing smell.
- **Light levels:** Start dimming indoor lights as bedtime approaches, and keep your child's bedroom as dark as possible. This promotes healthy levels of melatonin and supports your child's natural biological clock. If your child is afraid of the dark, a small nightlight is okay.

3. Screen Time Curfew

Exposure to screens, such as smartphones or tablets, close to bedtime can interfere with the production of melatonin, the hormone responsible for sleep. Establish a screen-free period before bedtime to facilitate the natural transition to sleep. Screen time also stimulates the brain, making it harder to wind down for sleep. Electronic devices should be kept out of the bedroom and ideally not used within one hour of bedtime.

4. Balanced Diet and Physical Activity

A balanced diet and regular physical activity contribute to overall health and can positively impact sleep. Ensure that toddlers have nutritious meals and engage in age-appropriate physical activities during the day.

5. Avoid Scary & Violent Content

Feeling scared or worried is a common reason kids can't sleep. So it's no wonder that scary or violent movies, TV, video games, and even books in the evening are linked to sleep disturbances in children. If your kiddo likes the gory or spooky stuff, save it for the daytime. It's normal for even the best little sleepers to awaken from slumber and ask for a parent. When your child cries out for you, it's okay to tend to them. However, you should do so with intention. Fulfilling your child's every request can also reinforce an unhelpful pattern of relying on parental assistance for sleep.

Helping your child develop good sleep habits can be a challenge, and it is normal to get upset when a child keeps you awake at night. Try to be understanding. A negative response by a parent can sometimes make a sleep problem worse. Keep in mind that children need the time and opportunity to find out how to go back to sleep on their own when they wake up during the night. In the journey of toddlerhood, where growth and development occur at a rapid pace, the importance of sleep cannot be overstated. By fostering good sleep hygiene practices, parents and caregivers contribute significantly to a toddler's physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. Through consistent routines, a conducive sleep environment, and attention to sleep cues, we pave the way for toddlers to embark on a journey of sweet slumber and optimal development.



ARTICLE

কিশোর-মনে পর্নোগ্রাফির প্রভাব ও যৌনশিক্ষার অভাব

The Impact of Pornography on the Adolescent Mind and Lack of Sex Education

(For English translation of the article, please scroll below)



অভ্র ঘোষাল (বিধাননগর কলেজ)

By Abhra Ghoshal

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আজকালকার এই তথ্য-প্রযুক্তিময় দ্রুতগতির জীবনে ইন্টারনেট একটি অবিচ্ছেদ্য অঙ্গ। আট থেকে আশি, যে-কেউ অতি সহজেই ইন্টারনেট পেয়ে যেতে পারে মাত্র কিছু মূল্যের বিনিময়ে। কিন্তু এখানে উল্লেখযোগ্য বিষয়টা হলো, সব মুদ্রারই দুটো পিঠ থাকে। এই দুইয়ের এক পিঠ যেমন ঝলমলে, উজ্জ্বল এবং জৌলুসময়; তেমনি আর-এক পিঠ অতীব সঁাতসঁাতে, অন্ধকার এবং কুয়াশাচ্ছন্ন। আর এই সঁাতসঁাতে-অন্ধকার পিঠের একটা অন্যতম ভয়াবহ দিক তথা পর্নোগ্রাফি নিয়ে আমার এই আলোচনা।

আজকের যুগে পর্নোগ্রাফির সহজলভ্যতার পেছনে অন্যতম গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কারণ হলো ইন্টারনেটের সহজলভ্যতা। যে কেউ যে-কোনো জায়গা থেকে, বয়সের সীমারেখার পরোয়া না করে অতি সহজেই পেয়ে যেতে পারে পর্নোগ্রাফির একের-পর-এক ঠিকানা। আর এর সবচেয়ে বেশি কুপ্রভাব পড়ে শিশু-কিশোরদের মনে। বিভিন্ন গবেষণায় জানা যাচ্ছে, যে পর্নোগ্রাফির প্রতি অনিয়ন্ত্রিত আসক্তি একটা সময় পর আমাদের স্বভাবের অংশ হয়ে যায় ও কালক্রমে নেশায় পরিণত হয়। আর এর ফলে আরও পরে মস্তিষ্ক-বিকৃতি, একাকীত্ব, বিষণ্ণতাসহ নানাবিধ জটিল মানসিক সমস্যা সৃষ্টি হওয়ার প্রবল সম্ভাবনা তৈরি হয়।

জিন ম্যাককনেল এবং কীথ ক্যাম্পবেল পর্নোগ্রাফির প্রতি আসক্তিকে পাঁচটি স্তরে বিভক্ত করার চেষ্টা করেছেন।

প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে অধিকাংশ মানুষই অত্যন্ত কম বয়স থেকে সামান্য একটু উত্তেজনা লাভের আশায় পর্নোগ্রাফির প্রতি আসক্ত হতে শুরু করেন। তারা বুঝতেও পারেন না কখন এই অভ্যাস তাদের স্বভাবের সঙ্গে সম্পৃক্ত হতে শুরু করেছে।

দ্বিতীয় পর্যায়ে এই আসক্তি নেশায় রূপান্তরিত হয়। মানুষ বারবার ফিরে আসে এই অন্ধকার জগতে। আর পর্নোগ্রাফিকে বানিয়ে তোলে দৈনন্দিন জীবনের অংশ। এ এক অত্যন্ত জটিল অবস্থা। তৃতীয় পর্যায়ে এই নেশা ক্রমশ বাড়তে থাকে। প্রথম-প্রথম যে-সমস্ত দৃশ্য একজনকে বিচলিত করতো, এই পর্যায়ে সেই সকল দৃশ্য তার জন্যে অপরিহার্য হয়ে ওঠে।

পঞ্চম তথা অন্তিম পর্যায়ে যখন একজন মানুষ এসে পৌঁছায়, ততোদিনে সে ভয়াবহতার শিখর চুম্বন করে ফেলে। এই পর্যায়ে একজনের আর পর্দায় আটকে থাকতে মন চায় না। সে তার যাবতীয় কামনা-বাসনা চরিতার্থ করতে হাত বাড়াতে চেষ্টা করে বাস্তব দুনিয়ায়। আর এই কারণেই এই পর্যায়ে এতোখানি ভয়াবহ। এই পর্যায়ে সে তার নিকটস্থ ব্যক্তিসহ সমগ্র সমাজের পক্ষে অত্যন্ত ক্ষতিকর হয়ে ওঠে। কাজেই, আশা করি, পর্নোগ্রাফির ভয়াবহতা সম্পর্কে পাঠকদের এখন অজানা কিছুই নেই। এখন আরও কিছু গুরুত্বপূর্ণ আলোচনায় আসা যাক।

শিশু-কিশোরদের মধ্যে পর্নোগ্রাফির প্রতি আসক্তি তৈরি হওয়ার পেছনে দু-রকম কারণ চিহ্নিত করা যায়। প্রথমটি জৈবিক এবং দ্বিতীয়টি সামাজিক।



জৈবিক কারণ বলতে গেলে অবশ্যই বলতে হয় উঠতি বয়সে শরীরে সেরোটনিন, অক্সিটোসিন এবং ডোপামিন হরমোনের অত্যধিক ক্ষরণ এবং তার ফলে নিউরোট্রান্সমিটারগুলিতে পৌঁছাতে-থাকা বিরামহীন উদ্দীপনা।

কিন্তু এই নিয়ে আমি এর বেশি আলোচনা করছি না। আমার আলোচনা সীমাবদ্ধ থাকবে, মূলত, সামাজিক কারণগুলির মধ্যে।

এই সমস্যা কিশোর এবং কিশোরী উভয়ের ক্ষেত্রেই দেখা দেয়। তারা তাদের শরীরে বিভিন্ন পরিবর্তন দেখতে পায় ঠিকই, কিন্তু সেগুলির সঠিক বৈজ্ঞানিক ব্যাখ্যা পায় না কারো কাছ থেকে। লজ্জা এবং ভীতি নামক দুটি অত্যন্ত কঠিন শেকল তাদেরকে কোনোরকম প্রশ্ন করা থেকে বিরত রেখে দেয়। ছোটবেলা থেকেই এই সব বিষয় নিয়ে প্রশ্ন করার ক্ষেত্রে নিষেধাজ্ঞা জারী করে দেন বাবা-মা সহ বাড়ির অন্যান্য অভিভাবকগণ।

আর এর ফলে অতি স্বাভাবিকভাবেই তৈরি হয় নিষিদ্ধ বস্তুর প্রতি তীব্র আকর্ষণ। আর এখান থেকেই শুরু হয় পর্নোগ্রাফির প্রতি আসক্তি। উঠতি বয়সের দুরন্ত 'অ্যাড্রিনালিন রাশ'।

বাবা-মায়েরাই তাঁদের সন্তানদেরকে এই বিপদ থেকে উদ্ধার করার ক্ষেত্রে সর্বাধিক গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা গ্রহণ করতে পারেন, বা বলা ভালো, করা উচিত। সমাজবদ্ধতা আমাদের, তথা, আধুনিক মানুষের সহজাত প্রবৃত্তি। কিন্তু পর্নোগ্রাফির প্রতি আসক্তি কিশোর-কিশোরীদের এই সহজাত প্রবৃত্তিকে নষ্ট করে দেয়। তাই, বাবা-মায়ের উচিত তাঁদের সন্তানদের সঙ্গে খোলাখুলি এই সমস্ত সমস্যাগুলি নিয়ে আলোচনা করা। ছেলেমেয়েকে যৌনতা সম্বন্ধে শুচবায়ুগ্রস্ত করে তুললে দিনের শেষে ক্ষতি বৈ লাভ নেই কোনো। প্রত্যেক মা-বাবাকে বুঝতে হবে যে, ছেলেমেয়েরা তাঁদের আশ্রয়কেই নিজেদের সবচেয়ে সুরক্ষিত ঠাঁই বলে মনে করে। কিন্তু তথাকথিত লজ্জা এবং ভয়ের কারণে তাদের মনের মধ্যে চলতে-থাকা নানাবিধ জটিলতাকে তারা বাবা-মায়ের সঙ্গে ভাগ করে নিতে পারে না।

আর এই ভয় সারাজীবনের মতো একজন কিশোর বা কিশোরীকে তাড়া করে বেড়ায়। কাজেই, বাবা-মায়ের উচিত তাঁদের সন্তানদের সঙ্গে বসে কথা বলা; সন্তানদের গতিবিধির ওপর নজর রাখা; তাদের ওপর কোনোরকম মানসিক চাপ তৈরি না করে বন্ধুর মতো মেশা।

বাবা-মায়ের উচিত, শত ব্যস্ততার মাঝেও দিনের কয়েক ঘন্টা তাঁদের সন্তানদের সঙ্গে কাটানো। মুখোমুখি বসে কথা বললে অনেক জটিলতা অতি সহজেই কেটে যেতে পারে। প্রতিটি বাবা-মায়ের তাঁর সন্তানকে বোঝানো উচিত যে যৌনতা অত্যন্ত স্বাভাবিক একটি বিষয় এবং এই নিয়ে অহেতুক মাতামাতি করার কিংবা একে 'পাপ' বা 'অন্যায়' হিসেবে গণ্য করার মধ্যে কোনো যুক্তি নেই। জীবনে মল-মূত্র ত্যাগ যতোটা জরুরি, যৌনতাও ঠিক ততোটাই জরুরি। কিন্তু যৌনতা বোঝার বা জানার জন্য পর্নোগ্রাফি কোনোদিনই সঠিক মাধ্যম হতে পারে না। কারণ দিনের শেষে এটাই সত্য যে, পর্নোগ্রাফিতে যৌনবিজ্ঞানকে বিকৃত করে দেখানো হয় যা মোটেই স্বাস্থ্যকর কোনো বিষয় নয়।



In today's fast-paced information-based life, the Internet is an inseparable part of existence. Anyone from eight years to eighty can easily access the Internet for just a few rupees. But the notable thing here is that just like every coin has two sides, the Internet also has its pros and cons. On the one hand the fast-paced Internet is informative, entertaining, sparkling bright and glamorous while on the other, the possibilities on the World Wide Web can very well make the experience quite dark and foggy. One of the terrible aspects of this dark and gloomy side of the freely accessible Internet space is pornography.

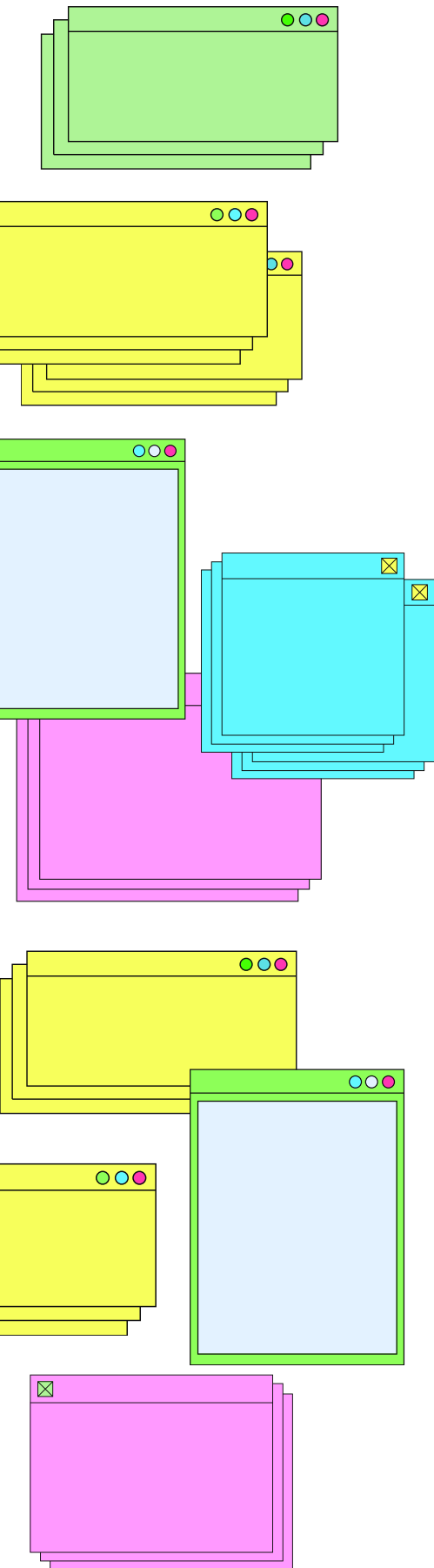
Anyone can easily find one porn site after another irrespective of any geographical location and regardless of age. This exposure is most harmful for children and adolescents as it impacts their impressionable minds. Various studies have shown that uncontrolled addiction to pornography becomes a part of our nature after a while and over time, it turns into an addiction. The result is that there is a strong possibility of developing various complex mental problems including brain deformation, loneliness, depression etc. later on.

Gene McConnell and Keith Campbell have tried to divide pornography addiction into five stages.

In the initial stage, most people start getting addicted to pornography in the hope of getting a little excitement. They do not even realise when this habit starts getting internalised and starts getting associated with their basic nature. In the second stage, this habit turns into proper addiction. People return to this dark world again and again, viewing pornography as part of their daily life. This becomes a complex situation at this stage. In the third stage, this addiction gradually increases. At first, all the scenes that disturbed a person, at this stage, they become indispensable for him. From the fourth stage, the impact starts increasing. At this stage, a person gradually starts losing sensitivity towards the acts and after a while, inertia swallows him. A person watches a lot of porn, and is no longer excited like before.

Furthermore, when a person reaches the fifth and final stage, he touches the worst stages of impact. At this stage, one no longer wants to be stuck on the screen. The person tries to reach out to the real world to fulfil all his cultivated desires. At this stage, the person becomes extremely harmful to the people close to him and by default, to the entire society.





Two reasons can be identified behind the development of addiction to pornography among children and adolescents. The first is biological and the second is social. When talking about biological reasons, of course, we have to say the excessive secretion of serotonin, oxytocin and dopamine hormones in the body at a young age and the resulting continuous stimulation reaching the neurotransmitters. But I will not be discussing this point further. My discussion will be limited mainly to social factors.

The lack of proper sex education in our Indian society is rampant. Children grow and change physically, but mental changes are delayed due to the lack of proper sex education. This problem occurs in both boys and girls. They see various changes in their bodies, but they do not get a proper scientific explanation for them from anyone. Two extremely difficult chains called 'shame' and 'fear' prevent them from asking any questions. Parents and other guardians of the house prohibit asking questions about these things from childhood. As a result, a strong attraction towards forbidden things is naturally created. From here begins the high likelihood of addiction to pornography. The fierce 'adrenaline rush' of adolescence adds fuel to the fire.

Parents can, or should, play the most important role in rescuing their children from this danger of addiction. Socialization is a human instinct. But addiction to pornography destroys this instinct of teenagers. Therefore, parents should discuss all these problems openly with their children.

Every parent should understand that children consider their shelter as their safest place. But due to the so-called shame and fear, they cannot share the various complications going on in their minds with their parents. And this fear haunts a teenager or teenagers for the rest of their life. Therefore, parents should sit and talk with their children; keep an eye on their their movements; don't put any pressure on them and try to be friendly with them at all times. Parents should spend a few hours a day with their children despite their busy schedule. Many complications can be easily resolved by talking face-to-face. Every parent should explain to their child that sex is a very natural thing and there is no point in making unnecessary fuss about it or considering it a 'sin' or 'unjust'. As important as defecation is in life, sex is equally important. But pornography can never be the right medium to understand or know about sex or sexual relationships. At the end of the day we should understand that pornography distorts the viewer's sense of sexology, which is not a healthy outcome for anyone.

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(Translated in English by Subham Kundu, AIF; please scroll below)



কাজী রোশন মুস্তাফা হাসান

By Kazi Roson

AIF

বছর চোদ্দো আগে ইতালির একটি ছোট্ট শহরে আমার জন্ম। বাবা আর মা আমায় যথেষ্ট দক্ষতার সাথেই প্রতিটা ক্ষুদ্রাতিক্ষুদ্র কণা তিলে তিলে জুড়ে আমার বর্তমান মস্তিষ্ক, হৃদয় ও দেহের রূপ দিয়েছেন। সাবেকী ছোঁয়ায় ও অসীম ভালোবাসায় তারা আমায় সবসময় দেখভাল করেছেন। ভারতের এক প্রাণবন্ত শহর কলকাতায় একদিন আমায় পাঠানো হল যাতে আমি নিজের মতো করে স্থায়ীভাবে ওখানে বসবাস করতে শুরু করি, যদিও বাবা ও মায়ের থেকে এতো দূরে থাকতে আমার বেশ কষ্ট ও ভয়ই করছিল। তবুও মা-বাবা আমায় এটাই বোঝালেন যে, এখন থেকে নিজ জীবনের প্রকৃত উদ্দেশ্য খুঁজে বের করতে হলে একাই থাকতে হবে। তাই এরপর তারা নিজেদের চোখের কোণে জমে ওঠা কান্নাকে সরিয়ে হাসিমুখের ভান করে আমায় বিদায় জানালেন, কিন্তু তাদের সেই অভিনয় আমার ছোট্ট অবুঝ হৃদয়কেও বোকা বানাতে পারেনি। পৌঁছে কলকাতায়, বোধহয় এক-দুদিন ওখানে কাটলাম, তারপরই রওনা হলাম পাশেরই ঘন্টা দেড়েক দূরের এক মফস্বল উলুবেড়িয়াতে। সেখানে আমার ঠাঁই হল এক মাতোয়ারা মধ্যবিত্ত পরিবারে। একদিন সকালে একজন কিশোর ছেলে একজন বয়স্ক ভদ্রলোকের সাথে আমার কাছে আসে এবং তাদের কথোপকথন থেকে আমি জানতে পারি যে ছেলেটির মায়োপিয়া হয়েছে তাই তার বাবা আমাকে একটি অস্থায়ী প্রতিকার হিসেবে কিনে দিয়েছেন। সেই ছেলেটা আমায় পেয়ে আনন্দে আত্মহারা! যখন সে আমাকে প্রথমবার এতো ঘনিষ্ঠভাবে পরিধান করলো, তখন তার চোখগুলো এতটাই জীবন্ত হয়ে উঠেছিল যেন মনে হচ্ছে যে চোখগুলো আমাকে প্রমাণ করার চেষ্টা করছে তাদের কোনও ত্রুটি নেই। ছেলেটি আমাকে তার সমস্ত বন্ধুদের কাছে দেখিয়েছিল এবং প্রতিবারের মতোই আমার আকৃতি এবং বকঝককে চেহারার জন্য আমি প্রশংসিত হয়েছিলাম। সেই অনুভূতি যেন আমার বুক গর্বে ফুলিয়ে বেলুনের মতো উড়িয়ে ছিল। প্রতিদিন সে আমায় জল দিয়ে পরিষ্কার করে একটি মসৃণ কাপড় দিয়ে মুছতো। এই প্রক্রিয়াটি আমাকে বারংবার অনুভব করাতো যেন সময় কখনও আমার সৌন্দর্যকে নষ্ট করতে পারবে না। সেই ছেলেটির একটি সুন্দর নাম ছিল—রোশন এবং তার যত্নশীল মনোভাব আমাকে আমার নিজের বাবা-মায়ের কথা মনে করিয়ে দিতো। কালক্রমে আমরা একে অপরের প্রতি অনুরাগী হয়ে উঠলাম, প্রায় অবিচ্ছেদ্যও বলা চলে।

তাই রোশন যখন স্নান করতে বা ঘুমোতে যেতো তখন আমি বড়োই একাকীবোধ করতাম। ৪ কিংবা ৫ বছর পর একদিন আমার খুড়ি রোশনের বাড়িতে পরীক্ষায় তার ভালো ফলাফলের জন্য উৎসব চলছিল। টেবিলে বসে বসে সেই উদযাপন দেখার সময় আমারও খুশির বাঁধ ভেঙে গেছিল, মনে হচ্ছিল যেন এটিও আমার সাফল্য। সবাই মজা করছিল, হঠাৎ একটা পুঁচকে বাচ্চা এসে, আমার একটা কান ধরে, সর্বশক্তি দিয়ে অনিয়ন্ত্রিতভাবে আমাকে ঘোরাতে লাগলো। ঘূর্ণায়মান গতির জন্য আমি এতটাই ভীত হয়ে পড়লাম যে প্রায় অজ্ঞানই হয়ে গিয়েছিলাম। আচমকা, আমি বাচ্চাটির খুদে আঙ্গুলের আলগা প্রান্ত থেকে পিছলে বেরিয়ে গিয়ে দেয়ালে সজোরে আছাড় খেয়ে নিচে পড়লাম। গুরুতর আহত হয়ে আমায় সাথে সাথেই আইসিইউতে পাঠানোর বন্দোবস্ত করা হল। রোশন আমার জন্য এতটাই নিজেকে দোষী এবং দুঃখিত বোধ করছিল যে সেই মুহুর্তে শিশুসুলভ ভাবে কেঁদেই চলেছিল, যার স্নিয়মাণ ধ্বনি আমার কানেও এলা। দু'সপ্তাহ পরে আমার স্বাস্থ্যের মতিগতি ফিরে আসতে আমি একেবারেই নতুন চেহারায় ছিলাম। তবে আমি উদ্ভিন্ন ছিলাম কারণ রোশন আমায় এই নতুন চেহারায় গ্রহণ করবে কি না সেই ভেবে! কিন্তু ছেলেটার আনন্দের সীমা ছিল না যখন সে আমায় দেখে এবং সঙ্গে সঙ্গে সে তার চোখের স্পর্শে আমাকে দৃঢ়ভাবে জড়িয়ে ধরে। এবং আমাকে এও বলেছিল যে, এই বেদনাদায়ক দিনগুলিতে সে আমার জন্য কতটা গভীরভাবে প্রার্থনা করেছিল। কিছুক্ষণের মধ্যেই রোশনের প্রতি জমাটবাঁধা যে অভিমান আমার মনে ছিল (সেইদিনের তারই অসাবধানতার জন্য যেন আমার এ সমস্ত যন্ত্রণা এবং হয়রানি) সবই মুছে গেল নিমেষে। কয়েক ফোঁটা অশ্রু আমার উপর পড়ল কিন্তু আমি জানি এটা সেই ধরনের অশ্রু ছিল যা আমি বাড়ি থেকে বের হওয়ার সময় আমার বাবা-মায়ের দিকে তাকিয়ে দেখেছিলাম। এটি ছিল জানা আনন্দ এবং অজানা দুঃখের প্রতীক। এই মুহুর্তে, আমি নিজেকে প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছিলাম যে যতক্ষণ না ল্যাসিক সার্জারি কিছু স্থায়ী প্রতিকার আনবে ততক্ষণ আমি রোশনের সাথে থাকব। আমার জীবনের উদ্দেশ্য এবং স্বপ্ন পূরণের জন্য ছেলেটা যে ত্যাগ স্বীকার করেছে তা আমি অনুভব করতে পারি। আমার পিতামাতার প্রত্যাশা, ব্যয়, মহত্ব ও সম্ভ্রষ্টির জন্য উৎসর্গিত আমার এ ক্ষণস্থায়ী জীবনটা। তাই শেষ কিন্তু অন্তত নয়, আমিও রোশনকে গর্বিত করব প্রশান্তিদায়ক সুখের মধ্য দিয়ে, আমার নিষ্ঠার মাধ্যমে এবং ক্ষণস্থায়ী প্রতিকারের মধ্য দিয়ে যা ডেকে আনতে পারে আমার ক্ষয়। "আমার জীবন আমার বার্তা", যে গান্ধীবাদী দর্শন আমি চিরকাল আমার হৃদয়ে ধরে রাখব। এই সমস্ত চিন্তাভাবনা নিয়ে ভাবতে ভাবতে আমার চোখও কখন ঝাপসা হয়ে গেল তা খেয়ালই করিনি।

Fourteen years ago, in a quiet town in Italy, I was born to a loving father and mother. With great care and tenderness, they shaped every part of me, ensuring I was perfect in every way. They nurtured me, polished me, and infused me with a purpose—to bring clarity to someone’s life. Their love made me feel special, but I knew one day, I would have to leave them to fulfill my destiny.

That day came sooner than I had expected. I was sent far away to India, first to the bustling city of Kolkata. The thought of being so far from my parents filled me with fear and sadness. But they assured me, with tears in their eyes and a brave smile, that it was time for me to discover my true purpose. Their parting words stayed with me: *“Your life will carry our love and devotion. Serve well.”*

After a brief stay in Kolkata, I arrived in a small town called Uluberia, where I met Roson. He was a young boy with dreams in his heart but a blurry view of the world. His father brought him to me, and from the moment Roson put me on, his eyes sparkled with life. I became his constant companion, helping him see the world clearly for the first time. Roson treated me with such care that I often felt like I was still in the safe hands of my parents. Each day, he would clean me gently, ensuring I stayed as clear and polished as the day we met. His kindness reminded me of my father’s steady hands and my mother’s soft touch. For years, we shared an unbreakable bond. I witnessed Roson’s laughter, tears, and quiet moments of determination. He relied on me, and I found my purpose in being there for him.

But life, as my parents had once told me, is unpredictable. One day, during a family celebration, a small child grabbed me. Before I knew it, I slipped from his tiny hands and crashed onto the floor. My frame cracked, and my lenses shattered. Roson rushed to me, his face pale with guilt and sorrow. He cradled me gently, tears streaming down his cheeks. I was taken for repair, but those weeks felt like an eternity. I worried: would Roson still accept me when I returned, changed and imperfect? When I was finally restored, I looked different. But Roson’s reaction erased all my fears. He held me close and said, *“I have missed you so much.”* In that moment, I understood that his love for me was not about my appearance but about the bond we shared. From then on, I served Roson with even greater devotion. I knew our time together was temporary. One day, a permanent solution like surgery might replace me. But until that day came, I vowed to remain by his side, giving him the gift of clear sight.

Through my journey with Roson, I realized a truth my parents had always known: life is not about how long we exist, but how well we serve. Like Gandhiji said, *“My life is my message.”* In my small way, I had lived that message, carrying love and clarity to someone who needed me. I may just be a pair of glasses, but my story is one of love, sacrifice and purpose. My parents’ hopes, Roson’s faith and my own journey have made my life meaningful.



बोलता बचपन
(Hindi Section)

अतीत के झरोखे से - "मेरा करमोली गांव"...



पवन कुमार पाण्डेय
एम. ए. (साहित्य), एम. ए. (लोक प्रशासन), एम. ए. (ज्योतिष)
अनुभाग अधिकारी, श्री वेंकटेश्वर महाविद्यालय
दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय

आओ; चलो! तुम्हें अपना "करमोली गांव" घुमा लाता हूं,
खेत, खलिहान और बाग दिखा लाता हूं।
आम, जामुन, अमरूद जैसे फल बहुत हैं वहां,
नहर, ताल और तलइयों में डुबकी लगा आता हूं।।।

हरी-भरी घास है वहां और हैं डरावने जंगल,
सब तरफ है अपूर्व शान्ति और मंगल ही मंगल।
गाय-भैंसों के तो अनगिनत झुण्ड वहां मिल जाएंगे,
प्रकृति में अदृश्य मेरे अम्मा-बाबू भी मिल जाएंगे।।2।।

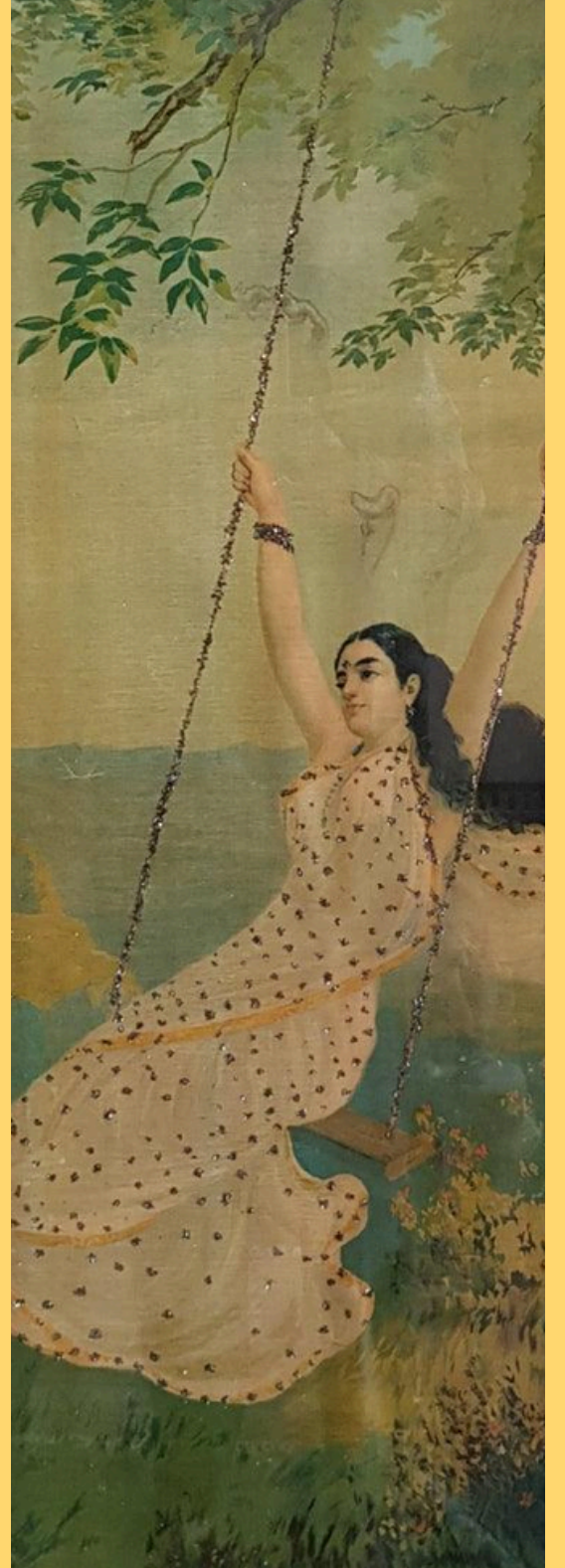
बीता हुआ बचपना होगा; कुछ परिपक्व बालसखा होंगे,
उस निश्चल हंसी की यादें होंगी और कुछ चाचा-ताऊ भी होंगे।
लोगों का तो पता नहीं; पर मेरा गांव बड़ा ही सीधा है,
"फिर वापस आना" कहकर हर बार बिलख कर विदा लेता है।। 3।।

मेरा आन - बान - शान और मान है - "मेरा करमोली गांव",
ढेर सारी यादों और हसीन पल का साक्षी भी है मेरा गांव।
कैसे भूल सकता हूं अपनी उस परम पावन मातृभूमि को,
सच, बड़ा ही सरल और बहुत ही प्यारा है मेरा अपना गांव।।4।।

जितनी भी बार जाओ; बड़ी ही दुआ देता है,
आ गए "मेरे लाल" जैसे अम्मा के शब्द का अहसास करा देता है।
नगर का नगरीय जीवन मुझे बिल्कुल भी रास नहीं आता है,
अम्मा-बाबू का पावन दुलार हर पल याद आता है।।5।।

असंख्य दुआओं का साक्षी है-"मेरा करमोली गांव",
अतीत के झरोखे से आज फिर अपने बचपने की याद आयी,
खट्टी-मीठी यादों के साथ आंसुओं की बाढ़ भी लायी।
समय और जीवन से तो तालमेल कर लेता हूं,
पर, दिल और दिमाग में सामंजस्य अभी भी बिठा नहीं पाता हूं।।6।।

समय बीतता गया और हम बड़े हो गए,
बचपना तो कब का खो गया और मेरे अपने भी कहीं खो गए।
काश! 'पवन' बचपन का बचपना मिल पाता,
सब तरफ होती अपूर्व शान्ति और मैं भी जन्नत पाता।।7।।



पुनर्जन्म माँ का होता है...



संजीव जैन
प्रिंसिपल जज, फॅमिली कोर्ट (HQ) द्वारका कोर्ट
नई दिल्ली

एक जन्म देती है माँ जब, पुनर्जन्म माँ का होता है।
कभी लौटता फिर से बचपन, कभी बड़ी हो जाती है माँ।
मित्र, गुरु, और प्रहरी बन कर, कितने रूप निभाती है माँ।
भूख, नींद, रूप और यौवन, हंस-हंस स्वयं लुटाती है माँ।
गाते-गाते कभी लोरियाँ, सपनों में खो जाती है माँ।
गीला बिस्तर और रतजगा, तब जाकर बच्चा सोता है।
एक जन्म देती है माँ जब, पुनर्जन्म माँ का होता है।

बच्चे से बतियाती है जब, माँ खुद भी तुतलाने लगती।
फूले नहीं समाती खुद में, और कभी झुंझलाने लगती।
अपने काजल से बच्चे को, टीका कभी लगाने लगाती।
और कभी अपनी नज़रों से, शिशु को स्वयं बचाने लगती।
अमृत धार छलकने लगती, जब-जब कोई शिशु रोता है।
एक जन्म देती है माँ जब, पुनर्जन्म माँ का होता है।

दर्द, बीमारी, थकन स्वयं की, शिशु को कभी जताती कब माँ।
अपनी खुशियाँ, अपनी मुश्किल, मन की बात बताती कब माँ।
कभी चैन से बैठ कहीं पर, एक पल कभी बिताती कब माँ।
जीवन की आपाधापी में, शिशु से नज़र हटाती कब माँ।
खोज डालती धरा गगन सब, शिशु ज़रा ओझल होता है।
एक जन्म देती है माँ जब, पुनर्जन्म माँ का होता है।

कुदरत का विधान, नया जन्म दोनों लेते है।
अद्भुत है सम्मान, नया जन्म दोनों लेते है।
सृजन और परिवर्तन मिल कर, चढ़ते है परवान।
जीवन है वरदान, नया जन्म दोनों लेते है।
एक माँ का अवतार उतरता, एक अस्तित्व कहीं खोता है।
एक जन्म देती है माँ जब, पुनर्जन्म माँ का होता है।





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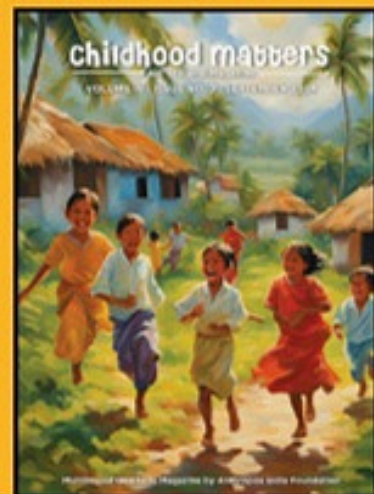
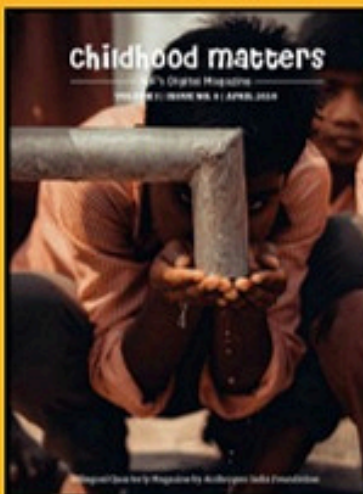
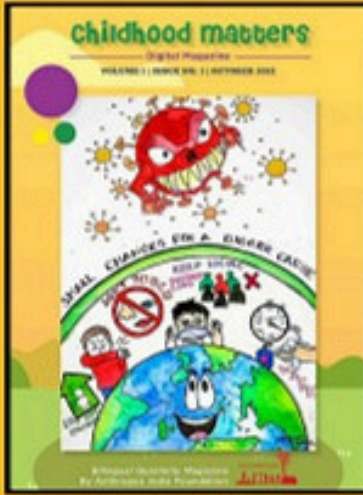
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