

CHILDREN'S
AND
JUVENILE LITERATURE
IN
CEYLON

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A NEW APPROACH TO THE PREPARATION
PRODUCTION, AND DISTRIBUTION OF
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Headmaster, Royal Junior School, Colombo

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C. S. Kularatnam
AMMAN ROAD
KANTHAMADAM
JAFFNA
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Also by H. D. SUGATHAPALA

Author: THE NAVA MAGA READERS
(Eight Readers)

THE BEGINNING OF TEACHING READING

Children's Stories

Editor: KUDA HORA
OTUVAGE MOLLIYA
PUNCHIRALAGE HEENAYA
HETHU

Editor and Translator:
ALIYA SAHA MEKKA

UNESCO 1966

To

REGGIE SIRIWARDENE

for guiding me in my reading and writing

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INTRODUCTION

ANCIENT HERITAGE: The conception of a literature produced specially for children and juveniles is of comparatively recent origin in Sinhalese. In the traditional Sinhalese village community, before the impact of urbanisation and Western influences, there was undoubtedly a living oral tradition of folk tales, rhymes and songs which every child learnt at his mother's knee. This tradition fulfilled many of the impulses and needs which children in a modern literate community look to the printed word to satisfy. Many Sinhalese folk tales have the qualities of children's literature in their sense of mystery and wonder of their racy humour, while the folk rhymes and songs could give the child his first sense of the poetic qualities of language and of rhythmic form. Nevertheless, in the village community in which these stories, rhymes and songs were transmitted through the oral tradition, they served as a source of entertainment and education equally for child and adult. In this respect Sinhalese culture was not different from other traditional cultures. Even in Europe, the rise of a special children's literature had to await the eighteenth-century enlightenment and the new consciousness it brought of the distinctive individuality of the child as a being with a different personality from that of the adult.

There are other reasons, however, why the growth of a printed literature for children and juveniles in Sinhalese was delayed until the last twenty years. Until 1943, under British rule, there was a marked social stratification in education. In the bigger and better-equipped schools, which levied fees and which were attended by children of the upper classes and sections of the middle classes, the medium of instruction was English. On the other hand, the children of the less privileged classes of both town and country went to free schools where they were taught in Sinhalese (or Tamil, depending on their race). The demand for children's and juveniles' literature could have come at that time only from homes of the more prosperous classes, but since

children of these classes were taught in English, they looked for pleasure and knowledge almost exclusively to children's literature published in Britain or the United States. Most Sinhalese-speaking households during this period were too poor to be able to afford books for their children other than those text-books which were indispensable for their schooling. These social and economic factors were not the only reasons for the belated development of a children's literature in Sinhalese. The conception of a children's literature, distinct from adult literature on the one hand and class text-books on the other was until the last two decades remote from the minds of most authors as well as publishers. But the economic problem of producing books for a small and poverty-stricken market undoubtedly helped to delay further the emergence of a children's literature in Sinhalese.

FREE EDUCATION: The pioneering books for children and juveniles in Sinhalese were the product of individual writers of originality and imagination such as Munidasa Kumaranatunga, Martin Wickramasinghe and G. B. Senanayake. Their work may, no doubt, have stimulated others to follow in their path. But the main causes for the slow growth of a children's literature in the nineteen-forties and after lay in certain changes introduced by the State in educational policy. In 1943, the Government accepted the policy of making education free from kindergarten to university. In the same year Sinhalese was adopted as the medium of education for all Sinhalese children in the primary school; since that time it has been steadily advanced in the secondary school and universities as well. The enactment of the Official Language Act in 1956, making Sinhalese the official language of the country, further enhanced the position of the language. These changes have gradually diminished the social cleavages between the English-educated and Sinhalese-educated classes; they have removed to a large extent the contempt in which the Sinhalese language and Sinhalese literature were held by the anglicised upper and middle classes and has placed a new economic value on the knowledge of Sinhalese. Since children of the more privileged classes, if Sinhalese by birth, are now educated through the medium of Sinhalese, most of their parents have become conscious of the need to provide them with reading material in this language. At the same time free education has enormously increased the numbers of school-going children and has brought literacy to hitherto illiterate layers of the population, thus stimulating further the demand for books in Sinhalese. During the same period, moreover, the movement towards

the welfare state and the adoption of egalitarian social policies have led to rising living standards among the workers, peasants and lower middle class of town and country. This has widened the number of households able to buy books for their children. Finally, it may be said that the greater diffusion of education and the general rise in social consciousness have created a wider awareness than before among parents of different classes of the importance of providing their children with books and encouraging them to read. It is to the interaction of all these factors that we must attribute the growth of a certain body of children's and juveniles' literature in Sinhalese in the last two decades.

SUPPLEMENTARY READERS: It must be pointed out, however, that there was no clear realisation at first among most writers, publishers, teachers, or parents of the distinction between class text-books and creative literature for children and juveniles. The writing and production of children's books in Sinhalese began as a by-product of the text-book publishing industry in order to meet the growing demand created by the social and educational changes described in the last paragraph. The transitional stage between the text-book and creative writing for children was bridged by the supplementary reader. Many of the early story-books for children were produced in this form, and some of them even contained questions and exercises for class-room use. Some of these books were no doubt bought by parents for children's leisure-time reading, but the fact that they were produced as supplementary readers indicates that publishers and writers did not think there was a sufficiently large market for children's literature unless it could be used in the classroom too. The conception of the supplementary reader in Sinhalese arose as an attempt to provide the Sinhalese child with an equivalent for the A.L.Bright Story Readers and similar supplementary readers used by upper and middle class children at the time when the medium of education was English. At that time the prevalent approach to reading in the schools was that the child was taught his reading skills out of a basal reader, while a supplementary reader was used partly to fix these skills and partly to give the child a certain element of literary appreciation and enjoyment which was largely lacking in the basal reader. Outside these limited objectives of the classroom reading lesson, reading was

regarded as an extra-curricular activity to keep children busy or to amuse them during their leisure-time. But such reading was not thought of as having any essential relation to the educational curriculum; it was undirected and unorganised reading. When Sinhalese was adopted as the medium of education for all Sinhalese children, the conception of reading which had been generally current in English education became the goal which was set for the child who was now being educated in Sinhalese. Parents and teachers began to complain of the insufficiency of reading material in Sinhalese for use as supplementary readers in the class-room or as library books for leisure-time reading. The result was that some publishers and writers began to stir themselves to satisfy this demand. Most of the writers who came forward or whose services were secured by publishers for this purpose had no special talent in the writing of creative literature for children or understanding of the qualities needed in a good children's book. Many of them were text-book writers or professional writers of adult literature who lent their hand to the production of children's literature merely to enhance their earnings. Such authorship naturally resulted in the production of books unrelated in their content to children's interest and needs or unsuitable in the range and level of their language as children's reading material. Since there was a corresponding lack of appreciation among publishers of the manner in which children's books should be illustrated, laid out and printed, the pictorial material and design of these books were also unsatisfactory. Such were the beginnings of the growth of a children's literature in Sinhalese.

In spite of its serious limitations and imperfections, however, this development had certain positive aspects. It did bring into the school, and secondarily into the home, a certain body of reading material outside the basal reader, and to this extent fostered the habit of reading among children. It accustomed parents to the idea of buying books in Sinhalese for their children, at least at the only time when most of them visited bookshops—when they purchased text-books at the beginning of the school year. Publishers and writers, too, had begun to think in terms of a new field of writing and book-production. This development, however suffered a set-back when the Government decided in 1956 that no child should be asked to buy more than a single basal reader for use in the school. Since the production of a

children's literature has depended on the cushion provided by the use of story-books as supplementary readers in the schools, this decision inevitably slowed down the growth of publishing and writing for children.

Since that time the production of children's books has been directed towards the demand from parents who are interested in buying books for children to read in their spare time, and from school libraries. Although, as has been mentioned earlier, the class of book-buying parents has grown in recent years, it still represents only a small minority of the population. Some parents lack interest and awareness; some lack purchasing power; and many are without both. As far as school libraries are concerned they have not helped the production of books for young children, since hardly any primary schools have libraries. The purchase of books for school libraries has, however, provided a certain encouragement towards the production of books for children and juveniles in the age-groups above eleven.

NEW CONCEPTS OF READING: Meanwhile, there has been a gradual dissemination during the last decade among educationists, writers, teachers and parents in Ceylon of the concepts of children's reading which are accepted in progressive countries of the world. That a children's book must be related to the outlook, the interests and needs of children at the particular age-level to which it is addressed, that its vocabulary and sentence-patterns must be within their range of comprehension, and that its typography, lay-out and illustrations must encourage and assist the act of reading—these ideas have begun to make themselves felt in the writing and production of children's books though the body of literature based on them is still small. We shall now go on to survey the volume and range of the children's and juveniles' literature presently available in Sinhalese as well as the quality of this literature from the point of view of their content and languages as well as their production and presentation.

THE GENERAL PICTURE

MEAGRE OUTPUT: Even after the stimulus given to the production of Sinhalese books by the developments referred to in Section I of this report, the volume of children's and juveniles' literature remains very small. The total annual output of books specially produced for readers in these age groups at present does not amount to much more than ten titles. (This figure does not, of course, include either text books or books which are produced primarily for adult readers but which may be read by some juveniles). It can safely be said that a child with a keen and active interest in reading will inevitably be faced with an insufficiency of books at every stage of his early reading life. The point must be made here that the meagreness of the volume of children's and juveniles' literature is not the inevitable result of production for a small market where purchasing power is still comparatively low, though these factors have, of course, been a handicap. For the present, output of children's and juveniles' literature in Sinhalese must be regarded as inadequate not only when compared with publishing in the same field in larger and more developed countries but even when measured by the yardstick of the general growth of publishing in Sinhalese in recent years. The essential fact is the growth of publishing for children has not kept pace with the expansion of adult literature in Sinhalese. We are compelled to conclude, therefore, that there are special factors which have depressed the volume of production of children's and juveniles' literature. What these factors are will be a subject of inquiry in the last section of this report.

RANGE OF BOOKS: The smallness of the general volume of children's and juveniles' literature is not, however, the only unsatisfactory aspect of the present situation. In any country where children's literature is highly developed, there is not only a general abundance of books but also a great variety and range of reading available to children, in terms both of content and of reading

levels. In such countries, a child of any age should be able to find books related to many widely different fields of experience and knowledge written within the range of his comprehension and reading ability, and presented so as to appeal to his mental level. Thus, a child of, say, seven years should ideally have available to him a wide range of both fiction and non-fiction books. The story-books should themselves be of diverse kinds—animal stories, folk tales, stories related to the child's environment and experience etc. Even at this early age, moreover, he should have available to him a diversity of books which can stimulate and satisfy his intellectual curiosity—books about nature, about the sun, moon and stars, about rivers and oceans, about different races and countries; written simply and interestingly. The same is true of children at other age-levels. It is only when children's literature has such a range and diversity that it can foster every aspect of growth of the child's personality.

An examination of the children's literature presently available in Sinhalese reveals a very different picture. It shows that there is a total absence of reading material in certain fields of knowledge and experience at any level. At the same time, children of certain age groups have available to them books only of certain limited kinds while children and juveniles of other age groups have hardly any books suited to their interests and reading abilities.

PICTURE STORY BOOKS: The type of children's book most widely represented in the literature now available is the picture story book for children of 6-8 years. This does not mean that children of this age group enjoy a sufficiency of books to read, but only that they have been more favoured by writers and publishers than children at other levels. There may be an element of the accidental in this development, but it is likely that there is a somewhat bigger market for children's books at this age-level. Perhaps more parents buy books for their children at this stage in order to help them to master the elementary reading skills. Apparently not enough parents are conscious of the need to provide their children with a steady supply of books beyond this level, so that the development of reading skills should not stop at mechanical facility in word-recognition but should be extended into a habit of reading as an emotional and intellectual experience.

Among the picture-story books for children of 6-8 years the largest single group, according to content, consists of animal stories. These stories are derived in most cases from Buddhist Jataka tales or traditional folk tales; there are a few translations and a very few original stories about animals. Among the other types of picture-story books at this level are folk tales and legends. Most writers of stories at this level have sought to retell a traditional story or to translate a foreign one; only a few have attempted original creative writing. On the other hand, most of the small handful of outstanding children's books which have been produced in Sinhalese in recent years are picture-story books at this level.

If the 6-8 years-old child is better off than other children as far as the supply of story-books is concerned, he is virtually starved of other types of reading material. There are some books of simple children's verse, but not a single satisfactory or comprehensive collection of nursery rhymes. There are no informative books at all for children of this age-group, nothing which can awaken the young child's interest in the forces of nature or in the processes of life, in the history and geography of other countries or his own. Indeed, the whole field of non-fiction—of history, geography, nature, science, biography, art, etc.—is a complete blank as far as children under eleven are concerned.

Beyond the age of about eight, however, even the number of story-books available begins to dwindle sharply as the child grows older. The child under eleven has a certain number of collections of fairy tales and folk tales addressed to his reading level. Juveniles between eleven and sixteen, however, are severely starved of suitable story-books. The number of original story-books written for children of this age-group can certainly be counted on the fingers of one hand. There are a fair number of translations of standard English and European classics for young people, such as books by Stevenson, Ballantyne, Jules Verne etc., but most of these translations are pot-boilers and are of poor quality. More advanced and older readers within this age-group may also read some adult novels, but the poverty of story-books directed specially to juveniles is one of the most serious deficiencies in this field of literature. There are only three books of historical or semi-historical adventure with a Ceylon background written for young people; two of them are translations.

NON FICTION: In one field of non-fiction—that is, science books—there has been a certain amount of activity among writers and publishers in producing books for juveniles. This activity is due to the fact that there is a fairly widespread demand from school libraries for supplementary reading material in general science. There are a few original books on science for young people at this level, on subjects related to elementary physics and biology, and some translations. Outside the field of science, however, the juvenile is as badly off in the matter of non-fiction reading as the young child.

We have so far been concerned solely with the volume of children's and juveniles' literature available in different fields and for different age-groups. Summing up the general position as far as this aspect of our subject is concerned, it may be said that the development of children's literature has been unbalanced. Writers and publishers have concentrated mainly on one age-group, and on one type of book—the picture story-book. In many areas of reading it is not possible to discover a single book at any age level.

QUALITY OF BOOKS: There are equally serious criticisms to be made of the quality of the majority of children's books. It has already been pointed out that the publication of children's books in the nineteen-forties began as an attempt to meet an immediate demand from the market, without a proper comprehension by either writers or publishers of the qualities needed to make a good children's book. The books produced in this first phase of publishing show nearly all the faults and mistakes that can be made when writing and publishing for children are undertaken in this way.

As an example, it is instructive to examine a particular series of children's stories produced during this period. The books are intended for children ranging from 6-11 years. Yet all the books have the same page-size. This violates one fundamental principle of publishing for children that books for different age-groups must necessarily vary in format. The first book in this series, intended for 6-year olds, contains about twenty lines of reading matter on most pages. This quantity of reading matter per page is obviously excessive for children of this age, while the size of type

used is too small to make reading easy or attractive to them. There are few pictures, and these are crude and unimaginative, and are not tied in any essential way to the text so as to act as an inducement towards reading.

Some of these grosser faults have been corrected in recent children's publishing. It seems to be generally recognised now that picture-story books for children of 6-8 years need a larger format than books for older children. Books for young children now usually use a larger type face than before, there are many more and larger pictures, and a smaller extent of reading matter on each page.

Although some progress has been made in these directions, the lay-out, design and production of most children's books is still far short of desirable standards. Illustrations are more often used as an extraneous ornament than as an essential and integral part of the book, closely tied to the text. Except for the work of three or four good illustrators, the quality of pictures in children's books is generally poor. Colour is often used indiscriminately and tastelessly; there is apparently a mistaken notion that colour, however, badly used, enhances the appeal of a book. Illustrations and text are haphazardly laid out, with no sense of effective design. There is often no observance in laying out type of the eye span convenient for a child of a particular age group.

CONTENT AND LANGUAGE: To return from design to content and language, it must be observed that the early children's books were filled with raw didacticism of a kind that was unpalatable to the child reader. This element is now less obtrusive in children's literature. But it is not uncommon to find books which embody themes that are likely to arouse emotions and attitudes that are undesirable in the minds of their younger readers—such emotions as the fear of deprivation, fear or hostility towards animals, and contempt or aggressiveness towards other people. But the best that can be said for the majority of children's books as far as their content is concerned, is that they are innocuous. There is a stereotype character about their stories, a lack of imagination and originality, and also a failure to use the medium of literature to foster the growth of the child's personality—by

awakening his sense of wonder, by sharpening his curiosity, by helping him to understand the world in which he lives and his fellow-beings.

Many of the early children's books suffered too from their authors' incomprehension of the language appropriate to children's literature—from the use of an over-literary and pedantic idiom and of complicated sentence structures. These faults have now been largely shed. It is generally accepted now in practice that the language of children's books should vary with the age level of the readers to which they are addressed. The gulf between the written and spoken languages is greater in Sinhalese than in most European languages. The use of an idiom, close to that of the spoken language and free of the grammatical inflections of the written language, has now become a standard practice in books for young children. This movement towards simplicity of language in children's books is a step forward. But the writers who have been able to use language in a creative, imaginative way in writing for children are still very few.

It is indeed only a very small number of children's books in Sinhalese that can be excepted from the criticisms made in this section—that embody original and valuable themes, show a creative quality in their writing and marry text, illustrations and design in such a way as to enhance their appeal to the child reader. The fact that a few such books have been produced in Sinhalese in recent years, however, indicates that there is talent in the country in this field and more of it probably remains undiscovered and unutilised. In the last section of this report, we shall consider the steps that need to be taken to enable such talent to be directed to the production of a wider body of good children's literature.

AGENCIES IN THE FIELD OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

As a general statement, it must be stated that there are no specialised agencies devoted exclusively to the preparation, production or distribution of children's literature in Ceylon. In the present section, however, notice will be taken of the activities of various organisations which impinge on the field of children's literature.

WRITERS: There are several writers' associations, of which three were recognised and represented at the Seminar held in August 1962 for the promotion of co-operation among professional associations connected with production promotion, and distribution of reading materials within Ceylon. These associations were the Sinhala Writers' Association, the Ceylon Writers' Association and the Progressive Writers' Association. Mr. M. J. Perera in "A Survey of Professional Associations in Ceylon in the Field of Reading Materials" pointed out, however, that although these associations claimed large memberships, this was "a somewhat deceptive situation "since the more reputed authors are not members of any Association" and "in the absence of professional criteria, the associations can have members who are strictly not writers at all".

A working party of authors from these associations at the seminar referred to above, made the following recommendations which have a bearing on children's literature:-

- "1. Sinhala and Tamil books for children should be written with a view to foster nationalism and socialism, in view of the changes taking place at present in Ceylon.
- "2. Children's literature should be written in a language to suit the age of the child.

- “3. The standard of children’s literature should be raised gradually to the standard existing in advanced countries”

PUBLISHERS, PRINTERS AND BOOKSELLERS: There is not a single publishing house in Ceylon specialising in children’s and juveniles’ literature. The publishing houses which have been active in this field entered it as a line subsidiary to their other publishing activities. Only four publishing firms have been engaged in the production of children’s and juveniles’ literature on any appreciable scale. Three of them came into this field as an extension of their activities in text-book publishing, while the fourth has included the production of children’s books in general publishing. In none of these cases can it be said that the production of children’s books constitutes a major part of their activity, in terms either of output or of income. Nor does any of them have a special section or department handling the production of children’s literature.

It must be stated here that publishing in Sinhalese arose from the printing and bookselling trades, and is still closely linked with them. There is still not a single publishing house which does not do its own printing as well as its own bookselling. The main distribution channels in the trade are tied to the big firms who combine all three branches of the book business.

There have been estimated to be about 1200 bookshops in Ceylon, of which about 400 deal only in books, reading materials and allied articles, while the other 800 include books among articles of general trade. There is not a single bookshop which specialises in indigenous children’s literature, nor one which has a properly organised and laid-out department for such books.

There are two associations of the bookselling trade—viz: the Booksellers’ Association of Ceylon, formed in 1958, consisting of the largest importers and distributors of Books, and the Sri Lanka Poth Velanda Mandalaya, formed in 1962, consisting of a number of retail booksellers.

A working party of booksellers at the recent national seminar suggested the following measures which have a bearing on the distribution of children’s literature.

C. S. Kuttanadan
AMMAN ROAD
KANTHAMADAM,
JAFFNA.

“(a) A nation-wide drive to develop the reading habit in schools, by providing books for use and enjoyment at every step in a child’s career, with assistance from the Ministry of Education, schools, Training Colleges, Universities, newspaper, radio, conferences etc.

“(b) Special efforts of production to cater for tastes of young readers and adult new readers—chiefly books for the joy of reading.

“(c) Closer liaison between publishers, booksellers and librarians, and encouragement of facilities leading to better production promotion and distribution.

“(d) Promotion of a library scheme covering the island with central libraries in principal towns from which supplies are circulated to branch libraries in the region, and books sent out to selected places too small to have their own libraries. Co-ordination between school and library in each area”.

LIBRARIES: Apart from school libraries, there is not a single special children’s library in Ceylon stocking indigenous children’s books. One public library, in Anuradhapura, has a children’s department. In 1958, the late Mr. P. Kandiah, M.P., who was appointed as a Commissioner to investigate the working of the Colombo Public Library, the largest public library in the Island, recommended the establishment of a children’s section but this recommendation has not yet been carried out.

A large number of schools in the island have libraries, but they vary greatly in size, in quality of books and in organisation. Mr. H. V. Bonny, UNESCO Library Adviser, who reported on Library Services for Ceylon after a visit to the Island in 1960, found seven school libraries worthy of mention in his report. (The libraries in teachers’ training colleges listed in Mr. Bonny’s report under the heading “School Libraries” have been excluded from this number). Mr. Bonny made recommendations to the Director of Education regarding the creation of a special organisation to distribute books to schools and the training of teacher-librarians: these have not so far been carried out.

The Ceylon Library Association was formed in 1960. In a paper written for the Regional Seminar of December 1961, the President of the Association, Mr. S. C. Blok, stated as follows on the subject of school libraries and librarians:-

“When we consider library personnel, we have to think not only of the persons who man our libraries, our special and university libraries, but also of that very large group of school libraries. Hitherto, they have had no guidance of any kind in this important aspect of primary and secondary education, the use of the library in the curriculum of the school.

“The Ceylon Library Association views this question as having an important bearing upon the whole pattern of library service in the country. In the schools of all grades, we have pupils, some of whom in course of time pass into the University as undergraduates, and from there graduate as scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, administrators, business executives and research scholars.

“Whatever vocation each pupil chooses, there is not one where he will not at some time or other need books and libraries. It behoves us, therefore, to see that children in the schools learn from their early years the value of books and how to use them from the time they enter the primary school until they say goodbye to secondary education; they should rely on the school library and on the school librarian as two important features in their school career.

“The importance of placing the libraries in our schools, both primary and secondary, on a sound footing cannot be emphasised too much. Together with this is the necessity of having a band of enthusiastic teacher-cum librarians, devoted to the task of inculcating in our children, toddlers to teenagers, a love of books and thereby a love of reading”.

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THE PLACE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN EDUCATION

Before examining the problems in the particular fields of preparation, production and distribution of children's and juveniles' literature and suggesting measures for their solution, we wish to clarify the place of children's literature in education and child development. This will help us towards an understanding of the objectives to be set for the future development of children's literature in Sinhalese.

CREATIVE CONCEPTION OF READING: It has been mentioned earlier that the production of children's literature in Sinhalese was influenced originally by a conception of the child's reading as being divided between the study of a basal reader (with perhaps a supplementary reader) mainly used for the purpose of developing the language skills and free, undirected leisure-time reading for recreation and enjoyment. This conception of reading is still for the most part prevalent among teachers, parents and writers and publishers of children's literature in Ceylon. But it is being left behind in countries where the educational system embodies a more integrated and creative conception of reading.

The approach to reading and to children's literature should be based on the fact that the child of today needs to grow into a steadily widening and deepening understanding of his relationships with his natural and social environment. He must learn to see himself as a member of a family unit, of a local community and of a country and a nation shaped by its geography and its history. He must acquire an understanding of the relationship between his life and that of his fellow human beings in relation to the forces of nature, to animals, rocks, soil, atmosphere, river and oceans, plants and trees. Living as he does in the mid-twentieth century, he must not only be educated to see

his country as part of the wider community of man; he must also realise that the earth itself is part of a larger and a changing universe.

On the basis of such an approach, the basal reader used in the classroom can be regarded only as a means of arousing interest in a wide variety of experiences and fields of knowledge and as a springboard for further reading. The basal reader provides merely a skeletal outline of knowledge; the flesh and blood must be derived from a wide range of other resource material in class and school libraries and in the home. This approach differs from the older notion that the child should receive all knowledge from the text-book or from an omniscient teacher; it stimulates the child continually to push out into channels of new learning and to steer himself in his progress in reading. The growth of knowledge or the skills of reading will not be limited by grade progress as in the old reading curricula. Such an approach to reading integrates classroom and leisure-time reading, whether in the school library or in the home, in an organised and purposeful way, so that they are no longer unrelated activities.

FICTION AND NON-FICTION: This conception of reading in relation to education and child development involves also a transformation of the traditional notions of children's literature. The writing and production of children's literature must be directed towards guiding the child at every level towards the understanding of his relation to his natural and human environment. On this basis the traditional distinction between fiction for amusement and non-fiction for information becomes unreal. On the one hand, the children's story is a vehicle for encouraging in the child those motivations and creating in him that kind of awareness which will foster his intellectual and emotional growth. On the other hand, the non-fiction book must be written, illustrated and designed creatively and imaginatively so that it will provide the same pleasure in the act of reading as a good story-book. Indeed, in the best contemporary children's books, the aims and techniques are similar, whether in the case of fiction or non-fiction; a story-book may provide an insight into the life of people of another country, into history or geography or biology; on the other hand, a book about the sun or about rivers or numbers may be written and produced with the same poetic use of language and the same imaginative

visual appeal as a children's story. Into such a pattern of children's literature will fall picture books, beginning to read books, fiction of all kinds, and books on a variety of fields of knowledge at all levels. The non-fiction books may include books on all branches of science, books on the history and geography of different countries, books on transport and communications, biographies and many others. In each of these fields it is possible to have books at each age level. Thus books on basic science concepts at the simplest level will not treat science as a subject area but will promote the understanding of relationships. There can be a book on the moon for the child who is six, seven, eight and nine etc. And at every level books, whether fiction or non-fiction, must utilise the creative possibilities of language of pictures and of book design in order to enlist the child's entire personality in the act of reading. It is against the background of this progressive conception of children's literature that we wish to examine the problems relating to the preparation, production and distribution of children's literature in Sinhalese.

PREPARATION OF BOOKS

LACK OF OBJECTIVES: The conception of children's literature out-lined in the preceding sub-section indicates how inadequate the existing body of children's literature in Sinhalese is in fulfilling the reading needs of the present-day child. As has already been pointed out, the whole field of non-fiction has been virtually neglected, so that in many areas of knowledge there is not a single book to be found. Even though publishing for children has concentrated on the production of story-books, there are, as has been shown in the first section of this report, large deficiencies even in the field of fiction for children and juveniles.

This situation is the outcome of the lack of clear understanding among both writers and publishers of the objectives towards which the production of children's literature in Sinhalese should be directed. None of the publishing houses which have been engaged in this field have had a definite publishing programme for children's literature. In this situation, it is the writer on whom has fallen the burden of thinking out what books are needed, but most writers, whatever their enthusiasm and desire to write, have lacked special knowledge of this field of literature.

PROBLEMS OF NEW WRITERS: At the UNESCO Seminar held in August 1962, for the promotion of co-operation among professional associations connected with production, promotion and distribution of reading materials within Ceylon, Dr. A. W. P. Guruge made the following statement regarding the problems faced by new writers in Ceylon:-

"These young writers often have nothing but their zeal and their command of the language to help them. They have no means of obtaining any instructions from experienced writers or of getting their works critically read before publication....."

"It should be very clear to any student of modern literature in Ceylon that our writers have to learn the hard way through trial and error. They work without the basic training required for the profession. They do not have any data relating to the literary tastes, the reading habits or the word-power of their reading public. They have no idea of the marketing possibilities of their books. Neither the writers nor the publishers had been conducting the requisite inquiries to obtain this information as both parties handled the production of general literature as a subsidiary venture".

Dr. Guruge was speaking generally of the problems of new writers in Ceylon, but his remarks apply with especial force to the writer of children's literature, since in this field, perhaps more than in any other, the writer needs to have a definite knowledge of the reading levels, interests and needs of the readers for whom he is writing.

PUBLISHER AND WRITER: The fact that in the preparation of books, the initiative has fallen on the writer is confirmed by a statement made by Mr. Lionel Lokuliyana, the representative, of the largest publishing house in Ceylon, in this paper, "The Author and the Book Trade", read at the UNESCO-sponsored Seminar on Bookselling in 1961:-

"The author it is who must approach a publisher and not vice versa. The author must decide under which publisher's imprint he would wish his book to be published. He can examine the record of the publishers and see who it is that appears to him to be best in the particular field of publishing, who it is who will best promote the book's sales. He will then write to the publisher giving a synopsis of the book and indicating its length, to whom the book will appeal, what he thinks would be the demand, his method of treatment of the subject matter etc. If the publisher is interested, he will call for the manuscript and have it reported on by his readers, and depending on their advice and his own judgement he will decide to issue the book and arrange to interview the author for preliminary discussion of terms etc."

At another point in this same paper, Mr. Lokuliyana makes a somewhat different statement:-

“You know that a good percentage of the works published are commissioned, that is, the publisher feels the pulse of the reader and invites someone well-read in the particular subject to write a work to meet the demand for that information”.

Whatever the situation in other branches of publishing, it has been the exception rather than the rule for children's books in Sinhalese to be commissioned by publishers. The exceptions mainly concern science books for older children, where publishers have been concerned to meet an immediate demand from the schools for supplementary reading for general science students, and where they were compelled also to find writers with a specialised knowledge of this particular field. In other fields of children's literature, the task of initiating the preparation of books has been left almost entirely to the writer.

PLANNED PROGRAMMES: If the present unbalanced development of children's literature in Sinhalese is to be corrected, if the large areas in which there are few books or none at all are to be filled, the publisher must assume a greater responsibility than at present; he must work out a planned programme of publishing for children. It is necessary for this purpose that the larger publishing houses, at any rate, should create special departments or sections for children's literature, headed by competent editors with interest in and knowledge of this field of publishing. Particularly in the sphere of non-fiction, the editor in charge of such a department should initiate the preparation of books by picking the subjects and commissioning reputed authors to write on them. These authors should be not merely “well-read in the particular subject” but, as often as possible, experts. We need to draw the best authorities in various fields of knowledge into writing for children and juveniles, as is done in advanced countries. Writing of the experience of Western countries, the authors of “A Critical History of Children's Literature” state:-

“Even as artists of the twenties made the discovery of children as an exciting new audience, so scientists began to realize that a new audience was also waiting for them,

that through the medium of children's books—not just school texts, but the wide field of books for pleasure reading—they could recapture the thrills of their first discoveries and transmit that enthusiasm to children. Scientific careers, many times, have been the outgrowth of childhood interests, and the scientist who writes for children joins the ranks of the other writers in remembering his own childhood and in so doing gives respect to the interest and curiosity of today's child Just as through knowledge of a subject and enthusiasm for it can make a public speaker of an otherwise shy person, so many of these scientists found they could write with clarity and careful organisation—for many were teachers—and also with imagination and a good feeling for words.....

“The recognition of the child's intelligence, of his right to wide vistas as well as known facts, was evident in the growing tendency to interrelate various branches of science, and bringing thorough, accurate knowledge and personal enthusiasm to his writing, the scientist knew his subject to be fascinating in itself and felt no temptation to write down or to embroider science with frills of fancy”.

There is no reason why scientists and other scholars in Ceylon cannot be similarly enlisted in the task of writing for children, with assistance from the editors of a children's publishing department in techniques of writing and presentation. At the same time publishers should commission writers with a special gift for imaginative, simple and lucid writing to prepare books relating to various fields of knowledge. Manuscripts should be checked by the editors of the children's department, and data cleared for accuracy at the highest level of expert knowledge. In some cases, collaboration between a scholar who is an authority in his field and a good writer for children can produce a children's book which is both factually sound and appealing in its presentation.

These remarks apply particularly to the preparation of non-fiction, but even in the case of story-books, the publisher needs to take an active interest in finding out what types of books are needed at various age levels and to encourage writers to produce them.

The question may be raised whether there is at present a sufficient economic demand for children's books to justify the approach taken in this section and to support the establishment of special children's departments and the initiation of comprehensive publishing programmes for children, as suggested here. This question will be considered when we deal with the problems of distribution.

PRODUCTION OF BOOKS

Except for a small minority of well-designed and well-illustrated books, the quality of production of children's books in Sinhalese is still low. Here again, it is the publisher who must bear the main responsibility for raising standards. It is perfectly possible within the present price levels of children's books (determined by the purchasing power of the Sinhalese book-buyer) to improve the quality of production by exercising more care and discrimination in the production of books.

BOOK DESIGNING: TEXT, TYPE AND IMAGE: There is at present little conscious designing of children's books. Questions of format and layout are often left to the printer to determine. Although publishers are now aware that children's books, particularly at the level of the lower age-groups, must be plentifully illustrated, they are too often indifferent to the quality of illustrations. There seems to be no awareness that particularly in the case of books for younger children, illustrations can be as important or sometimes even more important than the text in capturing the attention of the child and in introducing him to the joy of books.

Writing of the developments in the illustration of children's books in the United States, the authors of "A Critical History of Children's Literature" state:-

"In a very few years, in respect to the books for the the younger children, the artist has attained a place of equal importance with the writer. In many cases this necessary partnership of artist and author has stimulated an artist to experiment in writing his own stories The establishment of the artist's importance in children's books has been one of the important contributions—and certainly the most spectacular — of the past twenty years".

Up to now illustrations in children's books in Sinhalese have been almost entirely confined to halftone illustrations and line drawings. It can be envisaged that if the system of distribution of children's literature is developed on the lines advocated in the next sub-section of this report, larger editions of books would be printed, and this would make possible the use of lithographic processes. The advantage of lithography is that it enables the complete integration of text and illustrations in a way that was not achieved in the older printing processes. Such integration is, of course, ideally suited to children's literature. Writing of the revolution in children's literature created by the picture-story books produced in the nineteen-thirties in America, Frank Eyre writes in "20th Century Children's Books":—

"The distinguishing feature of all these new American books was the use of colour lithography, by which full-colour illustrations could be printed on cartridge and other rough-surfaced papers, in place of the traditional colour halftone which has to be specially printed on 'art' paper with its glossy surface. The way in which the text and illustrations are put down together on the printing plate in the lithographic process also makes it possible for the artist to design his book as a much more homogeneous whole than is possible with the rigid separation between text and illustrations necessitated by the use of line or half-tone blocks. This complete fusion of text and illustration is a characteristic feature of the twentieth-century picture book".

TYPOGRAPHY: One aspect of book design which is sorely deficient in Sinhalese children's books is the artistic use of typography. It has been said that "in book production it is the type faces used which, first of all, determine the character and maturity of a country". Both the body or text face for continuous reading and the fancy or jobbing letters used to catch the eye in chapter headings and titles have undergone continuous development in the hands of typographers in the West. The traditional arrangement of printing types has ceased to be acceptable to the twentieth-century book designer. Type has ceased to be merely a passive element in book design; the characters are now used in a plastic and dynamic way so that they come to life and attract the eye

like pictures on a cinema screen. As a result of this revolution, traditional conceptions of layout have been modified; the old rules about the positions for pagination, headlines or the proportions of margins are being broken. In Western countries, big publishing houses have special typographic artistes to design this aspect of their books. The artistic use of typography is important in children's literature so as to vary the appearance of the printed page and give the child an added element of pleasure in book design.

Typography as an element of book design presents special problems in Sinhalese since there is only a very small range of type faces available at present. There has been little interest in developing new type faces which can be used to give variety to the appearance of a printed page and to relate the style of book design to the content and character of a book. In Europe, the development of a large number of type faces arose out of the art of calligraphy. There should be a fruitful source for the invention of type faces in Sinhalese in the study of traditional styles of calligraphy in the handwritten manuscripts and ola books of the past. We suggest that this is a task in which the initial research should be undertaken by some official agency. The very few new type faces so far introduced, have been done on the initiative of the Government Printer, Mr. Bernard de Silva.

DISTRIBUTION OF BOOKS

SMALLNESS OF DEMAND: The common complaint of both writers and publishers of children's books is that the demand for childrens' books from the book-buying public is still small. At present, an edition of a children's book does not run to more than 2000 copies, and this takes many years to exhaust, if it is exhausted at all. A variety of factors have contributed to this situation; among these the important are the following:-

- (a) The purchasing power of the Sinhalese public is still generally low.
- (b) There is an insufficient awareness among parents of the need to buy books, other than text-books, for their children. The habit of buying books or even of visiting bookshops except at the beginning of the year when school-books are purchased still exists only among a small minority.
- (c) Distribution channels are tied to a few big firms who are publishers as well as distributors and booksellers and who do not have therefore a sufficient interest in promoting books other than those published by themselves.
- (d) Even the major distributing chains do not yet reach every part of the country; there are large areas where bookshops are scarce or non-existent,
- (e) There are many schools with no libraries or none worthy of the name. In particular, primary schools for the most part do not possess libraries.
- (f) The official policy that children should not be required to purchase more than a single reader eliminates one potential avenue of developing publishing for children.
- (g) Techniques of distribution and sales are still primitive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DISTRIBUTION THROUGH SCHOOL LIBRARIES: Some of the factors contributing to the slow growth of a book buying public are dependent on social and economic situations which cannot easily or speedily be altered. For the present, therefore, we suggest that the most effective and convenient way of expanding the distribution of children's books is through the school library system. Even in more advanced and prosperous countries, such as the United States, it is being found that the school library is increasingly providing the chief market for children's literature. The school library must assume a still greater importance in the distribution structure in a country such as Ceylon where the majority of the public is still too poor to buy books regularly and where the book-buying habit is undeveloped even among many members of the more prosperous classes. This would, however, necessitate an active effort on the part of the State to develop the school library system by establishing libraries in every school, by providing adequate funds for this purpose and by making provision for trained full-time librarians or teacher-librarians in schools.

NEW METHODS OF TEACHING READING: The development of the school library systems as the main channel of distribution for children's books should go hand in hand with the development of the concept of children's literature outlined at the beginning of this section in the preparation and production of books. Once it is recognised that children's reading should no longer be an unorganised leisure-time activity unrelated to education, the school and the school library become naturally the focus for the distribution of children's literature. As the American educationist Paul Witty has said, "A child's progress with free choice reading for fun is most effective when done with materials that teachers and librarians have found best suited to the child's interests and abilities".

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT: The State should at the same time encourage the use of children's literature in the classroom itself by abolishing the principle of restricting the purchase of books to a single basal reader,

MODERN TECHNIQUES OF DISTRIBUTION: As far as the trade is concerned, there is a need for the modernisation of techniques of distribution and selling children's books. Following the practice of advanced countries, the editors of children's publishing departments should in advance of the publication of new books hold sales conferences where the selling points of the books will be discussed with the sales staff who are going to deal with libraries and booksellers. Advertising campaigns need to be more systematically and intelligently planned. Advance copies should be sent out not only to newspaper, magazine and radio reviewers but also to key sales agents and to all kinds of key persons, to important libraries and other organisations. Regular book exhibitions, displaying new books should be held at Library Association Meetings, at National and Regional education conferences, at Parent-Teacher Association meetings, in schools and universities. Such exhibitions could also be taken on tour through book caravans.

The questions of discounts to the trade is one which affects children's literature in common with other books. It was pointed out, at the Training Course on Bookselling, sponsored by UNESCO in 1961, that while publishers in Western countries allow substantial discounts for books, the discounts allowed to retail booksellers in Ceylon are as low as 10 to 20%. There is little incentive for retail booksellers to carry large stocks of books because of low turnover and small profits in comparison with investments. We are in agreement with the point made at the same training course that the unethical practices of publishers who allow the same discount to schools and libraries and even for quantity orders as to booksellers hampers the trade. In the interests of the book trade, it is essential that there should be one rate of discount for the trade and another for schools, libraries and members of educational institutions.

RAISING STANDARDS: The improvement of the quality of production of children's books requires an organised movement towards raising standards for which the co-operation of official and semi-official agencies and publishers and printers is needed. We suggest that institutions, such as the Cultural Department, the Education Department and the Sri Lanka Sahitya Mandalaya should undertake, with the help of UNESCO, the task of educating publishers, printers, book designers and artists regarding the need to raise the quality of production of children's books.

The following are some of the ways in which this can be done; these measures will raise production standards not only of children's literature but also indigenous literature generally:-

- (a) Organising of a nation-wide exhibition of the fifty best-produced books of the year. Some of these no doubt will be children's books. Such an exhibition will educate not only publishers and others directly concerned with the production of books but also parents, teachers and book-buyers generally and help them in their selection of books.
- (b) Educating groups of publishers and personnel involved in designing and production by conducting Trade Book Clinics and Seminar Workshops. The holding of similar Seminar Workshops for artists.
- (c) The development of training in graphic arts through the Government College of Fine Arts and the holding of regular courses in book illustration and design.
- (d) The encouragement of printing activities in schools.

INCENTIVES: It is very important that writers, illustrators and publishers of literature for children and juveniles should be given adequate incentives to improve the quality of books. One recognised way of doing this in countries such as Britain and the U.S. has been the award of prizes for the best children's books. In Ceylon, there are several literary awards offered periodically by the Cultural Department, the Sri Lanka Sahitya Mandalaya and by UNESCO. But none of these awards are open to those who produce children's books. It would be of the greatest value, if a set of awards for children's literature were instituted by some official or semi-official agency. This would not only encourage writers, illustrators and publishers of children's literature to raise standards for the sake of the distinction and prestige conferred by an award: it would materially benefit them, not only through the prize money but also through the increased sales of a prize-winning book; it would also educate the public and help them to make a discriminating selection in the purchase of children's books. We suggest that there should be at least three such awards—for text, illustrations and general production and design, open to the writer, the illustrator and the publisher respectively.

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