

CRITICAL CONVERSATION: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN MARATHI

Held by
Bookworm Library Educators'
Course Alumni



April 10- 12th, 2026
Hosted by
BELIEF at Nasik.





Organisations : Participants

Adhvan	Megha & Yasmin
BELIEF	Atul, Mukta, Manisha & Rasika
Bookworm	Sujata, Diksha, Vishwanath, Ashwini & Jennifer
Kalpakta	Tolesh
Kathavat	Priya
Pragat Shikshan Sanstha	Vidya
Sajag	Sajitha
Unnati	Hemangi



DAY 1: APRIL 10, 2026

We began the day by trying to come to a shared understanding of what is children's literature and what do we mean by childhoods.

Sujata led the conversation by welcoming everyone and inviting each person to share what is children's literature in their understanding. There were many distinct ideas shared but collectively the group agreed on the following:

- Children's literature is for any child up to the age of 14 years (a few in the group shared up to 16 or 18 years)
- It is written for children though adults too may enjoy it / relate to it
- It usually gives children "anand" and/or something to think about
- It is not necessary that it should have children as protagonists
- It should not be didactic but the purpose with which we take literature to children is distinct and beyond just the skill of learning to read
- Therefore, literary texts are also very different from graded readers – the purpose of the latter is to teach the skill of reading
- Literature on the other hand has a role to educate, inform, build perspectives and empower us to ask questions and think about the world differently from before we read.
- It must help us understand the world – engage with it, escape it or question it



DAY 1: APRIL 10, 2026

Everyone agreed that the purpose of reading must be clear to all but the sense for the group was that in Marathi language publishing, the purpose doesn't always seem to be clear.

Some questions that emerged from this session were:

- Who decides what children should read and are capable of reading?
- Is the 'market' deciding who is the child and what is childhood?
- Is this conception of childhood narrow and unidimensional or does it take into account diversity and difference?
- Thirty years ago, perhaps even our parents' generation read books meant for adults – there was no separate category of children's literature. Recently has there been a dumbing down of literature for children based on misconceptions about developmental theories of children?
- Are we influenced by western concepts of reading ages and childhood? International picture books don't typically have ages mentioned yet some Indian picture books do – why is this?



Display set up by BELIEF Team

PRESENTATION I

BY DIKSHA, VISHWANATH & ASHWINI, BOOKWORM, GOA

MAIN THEMES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN MARATHI

The team browsed, selected and read through the collection in their library as well as two public libraries in their locality in Goa . They also drew upon some books from their personal collection.

The team then collated lists of books having common themes or topics. Then all of them discussed the representations of characters, plot, setting, author's background information, language and illustration style etc.

Key Findings from this discussion and analysis which the team presented:

- The number of books is higher on themes related to Relationships and topics such as Environment and Science.
- There are few or no books that are originally written in Marathi on more complex themes of death, non-normative families, disability, and social justice.
- Representation of girls in stories is fewer than that of boys.
- Minority religious communities and marginalised caste groups also find fewer representations in books.
- No books were found on heterosexuality or nonbinary characters as protagonists. The books mostly reproduce ways of being in society that are normative.
- Non-fiction books lack variety , style and depth – e.g. books on Art are limited mainly to process books like Origami, craft etc.
- A brief comparison between representation of families over time across 25-30 years (in stories has shown that not much has changed. Normative families are found in most books. There is an emphasis on moral values like obedience, kindness, honesty, and patriotism without complicating social realities.
- If themes like disability emerge in books, it is usually only to demonstrate feelings of empathy, rather than addressing inclusivity, ableism or normalising disability.
- The quality of illustrations across most publications seems inadequate and appears to have not been given a priority in publishing. In some earlier published (old published) books the issue of unclear black and white pictures or sketches on low cost/quality paper were found. In newly published books a reliance on cartoony characters (probably used using easily accessible AI or free clip art) were found. Both of them do not add to the experience of enriching reading for children.

- Writers' conception of children and childhood remains limited. The intellectual capacity or thinking ability of the young reader is often underestimated and patronized. The child is typically not left with open ended questions or natural anchors to think from the text. The child is mostly told or taught something or given new information didactically.
- There are fewer original stories written in Marathi – with many more translations among popular publishers like Pratham Books and Tulika Books with varying qualities on translation.
- The variety of diverse topics represented in story books is fewer compared those found in some newer magazines like Chiku Piku and Kulfi.



Team Bookworm Presenting

Some questions that remained at the end of this presentation

- Do writers from non-dominant communities get opportunities to publish their books through major publishers? Do non-dominant community writers have visibility as much as dominant writers? Who are welcomed into the publishing industry or is there a gate keeping?
- Whose responsibility is it to create and nurture writers?
- How can we create platforms/courses to enable more people to write stories keeping more children and different childhoods in mind?
- There are many low-cost books in the market – are they filling a gap or should they be dismissed because they are lowering the quality of books.
- How do we stop gate-keeping grants/fellowships for writing? How do we become agents to disseminate grants or fellowships out of our own network and reach a larger/ wider range of people working in the sector? How do we move from just broadcasting in similar circles to systematic dissemination in all circles?
- Who is controlling the publishing industry? How do we break the Brahminical hegemony?

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“While I was studying with my team about the topic prior to the workshop, I couldn't find the exact definition of Marathi Children's Literature. So it was not clear for us, and we felt it was because of our limited knowledge. Discussion opened out during the workshop made it evident that it was actually a blur and unclear area. So I felt that if we have a notable point, we should be firm about it and such platforms are great opportunity to share it openly and discuss about it together.

– **Vishwanath**

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PRESENTATION II

BY MEGHA, ADHVAN, MUMBAI

FORMATS AND GENRES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN MARATHI

Based on the collection library at Adhvan and discussion with her team Megha, identified a variety of genres and formats available. Publishers surveyed included – Pratham Books, Jyotsna Prakashan, Rajhans Prakashan and Eklavya Publication. Magazines included – Kulfi and Chiku-Piku.

Key Findings:

- The variety of themes and genres across publishers is very limited
- The following formats were identified, but in uneven quantities:
 - Picture books (Quite a few)
 - Board books (very few)
 - Wordless books (Very few? In translation?)
 - Readers
 - Chapter books
 - Activity books
 - Riddles/jokes
- Genres identified were
 - Realistic fiction
 - Animal fantasy
 - Fairy tales and fables
 - Mythology
 - Poetry
- An important gap seems to be in Non-Fiction – further in the Informative books – no encyclopedias. Besides this, even the very popular genre of biographies were limited in Picture Book formats and there was almost no fact fiction despite such a rich and complicated history of the region.



PRESENTATION III

BY ATUL, BELIEF, NASIK

TRANSLATIONS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN MARATHI

Based on the collection in the library, overall information about the books available in Marathi (based on the years of experience with Marathi children's literature), discussions with the team, Atul analysed and presented books in translation in two ways. He shared about the source oriented (window) approach and target oriented (mirror) approach to translations. He also presented a theoretical framework for all of us to think about. This is the Polysystem Theory of Literature and how it applies to Translations.

Some specific books were analysed and shared about resulted in the following.

Key Findings:

- Publishers like Pratham Books and Jyotsna Prakashan are Maharashtra-based organisations yet original stories published in Marathi are surprisingly few.
- There are many problems and differences in the quality of translations. Examples and analysis shared included – Kyon Kyon Ladki, The Water Melon Route. It appears that some sanitisation of texts are in process when translated into Marathi and thereby a loss of the richness of the story.
- The translations veer towards Standard Marathi (different from spoken Marathi in most of Maharashtra , barring Pune)– often showing the hegemony of publishers with language.
- Other aspects which change or diminish in translations include font, arrangement of text and proofreading for typographical errors.
- Translations in order of quality appear to be
 - Jyotsna Prakashan
 - Pratham Books
 - NBT
 - Tulika Books



Some questions that remained at the end of this presentation

- Who decides what is changed in translations? And why?
- Who translates these books ? Where do they come from ? What imagination and understanding do they have of the Marathis of the region ?
- What about asking children what they want in children's books? (Vidya gave the example of the focus group discussion she held with children – one of the things they mentioned was books without errors / books that are well-proofed)
- Can there be more books in other varieties of the language spoken by our children?
- What does the low level of books in Marathi language for children, even with translations say of the readership of children in Marathi or the market's understanding of readership in Marathi ?



Team BELIEF Presenting

PRESENTATION IV

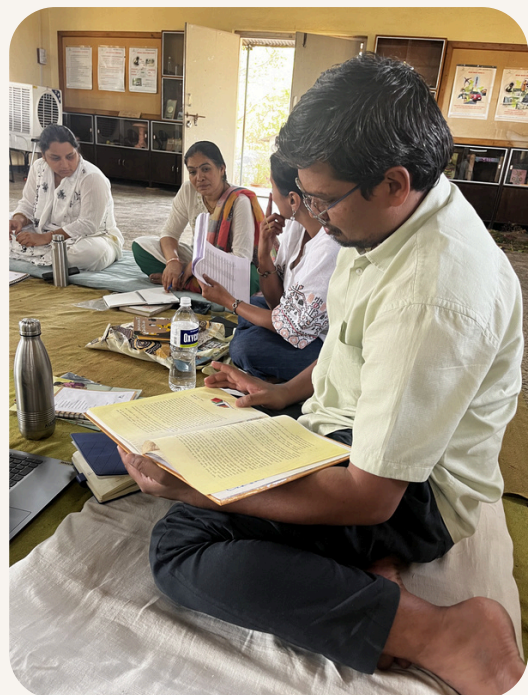
BY TOLESH, KALPAKTA, NAGPUR

GAPS IN PUBLISHING ACCORDING TO AGE GROUPS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN MARATHI

In his library practice at the Kalpakta community library, Tolesh observed that he struggles to find adequate and appropriate books for middle school children. Based on the collection in his organisation and overall availability of books with publications, he identified gaps in Marathi Children's literature as per the age groups.

Key Findings:

- Age classification seems to be lacking in Marathi literature for children, although not sure if it should be there at all ? But it is uneven
- Publishers often seem to take a one-size-fits-all approach
- There are many books that cater to younger age groups (3-6 years) – mainly moral stories, fables, personified stories etc. The variety in books for older children is low
- There are very few books that move from a person to a social approach
- The craft of stories/books is also weak – in a focus group discussion, children shared how some stories felt too emotional with the plot resolution seeming forced
- There are too few books that encourage children to ask questions
- Why do children stop coming to the library after std.7/8? The progression from picture books to chapter books is uneven. Diversity in themes, formats, genres for older children is very low. There are no books for this age group that could grip them to read, like how young adult fiction is there in English.
- Academic work in Marathi children's literature seems weak or not widely present or not freely available to read. There is a need to study current trends in publishing and also understand children's interests so that this informs the publishing world.



PRESENTATION V

BY PRIYA, KATHAVAT, PUNE

CLASSICS V/S CONTEMPORARY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN MARATHI

Based on the collection at Kathavat library and her own understanding/ exposure of Marathi literature, Priya tried identifying shifts from classics to contemporary children's literature in Marathi. Priya created a data collection form and circulated it among her network of Marathi readers and librarians. Based on the responses and some literature review, she presented her observations and findings.

- Origins of Marathi Children's literature in Oral traditions
- Explored the meaning/ Definition of Classic Literature and arrived at the understanding that Classic Literature in Marathi may be books that have cultural or traditional roots of certain groups of people.
- Classic writers & work identified:
 - Sane Guruji (Shyamchi Aai)
 - Na Dho Tamhankar (Gotya)
 - Chi Vi Joshi (Chimanrao)
 - Rural writers- V. Madgulkar, Shankar Patil, D.M. Mirasdar
- The transition of Marathi Children's literature from Classic to Contemporary observed a shift of the protagonist from 'Obedient Ideal Child' to 'Mischievous, restless, thinking Child'.
- 'Vachu Anande- four parts' by Madhuri Purandare is one of the best works ever done to document the Marathi Classic children's literature. Despite this body of work, it does not seem to be recognised as an academic or resource document from educators' and publishers point of view. It's just limited to collection of /reference to classic works
- We also have to keep in mind the generational gap and timelines when we discuss about Classics vs. Contemporary.



DAY 2: APRIL 11, 2026

We began the day with a round of cross-sharing of reflections, where everyone appreciated the time and space to think together about Marathi Children's Literature. This affordance gave everyone a much-needed sense of community and also reminded us of the importance of "problematizing" issues as an important step in moving towards solutions.

PRESENTATION VI

BY SAJITHA, SAJAG, THANE,

REPRESENTATION IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN MARATHI (WHOSE STORY IS BEING TOLD?)

In this presentation, Sajag reviewed 50 Marathi Picture books from their library collection to present an analysis of the diversity of representation in the books available. Using a systematic tool for data collection that was designed by Sajitha. The analysis revealed that the dominant representation in the books reviewed were that of a fair-skinned, middle-class, Hindu boy in picture books. This points to a large gap in Marathi children's literature today. This study by Sajag has also inspired all the participants of the workshop to look at their own library collections and do a more detailed and systematic study that will explore the question of diversity in children's literature in Marathi.

The tentative working title of this consolidated study is:

Baajarat upalabdh aslele marathi baalsahitya vyavidhyapurna aahe ka?



Team Sajag Presenting

A WORKSHOP ON CRITICAL LENSES

As a group, we also spent some time returning to the question of how do we look at books from a critical standpoint. We explored 5 critical lenses as follows:

- Transactional lens
- Genetic lens
- Formal lens
- Text-to-Text lens
- Sociocultural lens

In pairs, we tried to apply these lenses to one book each – looking at the book from different perspectives and deepening our understanding of what it means to look at a book critically. We cross-shared and hopefully strengthened our own positions and the overall discourse.

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“Through this experience, my awareness about different publishers in Marathi Children’s literature has increased. I have begun reading Marathi books deeply, looking carefully at the text as well as illustrations, wherein I could notice a few gaps and discuss them with others.”

– Diksha

“My understanding of looking at books critically has evolved. This helped me through the process of analysis we did for the presentation on various themes. The workshop opened up and added to different perspectives of looking at Marathi children’s literature. This has built our confidence while we continue analysing texts critically.”

– Ashwini

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Meeting after 10 years



Discussions spilling over tea time



Bookworm LEC Alumni





DAY 3 : APRIL 12, 2026

NEXT STEPS

Proceed further and collectively work on the study begun by
Sajag Team.
and
Continue to stay in touch, cross-share and support each other.

