



A Descriptive Analysis Of Gender Representation In Contemporary Indian Children's Books

1Pooja, 2Roohi Sharma

1Assistant Professor, 2Assistant Professor

1Shivalik College of Education, Mustafabad Jattan, Gurdaspur,

2S.S.College of Education, Dinanagar

Abstract

This paper presents a descriptive analysis of gender representation in a curated sample of 50–75 contemporary children's books published in India between 2020 and 2025. Using a content analysis approach, the study examines how male, female, and non-binary characters are portrayed in terms of frequency, primary roles, occupations, personality traits, and spatial settings (e.g., home vs. public spaces). The objective is to offer a current, data-driven snapshot of gender representation, highlighting prevailing stereotypes as well as progressive trends. This research serves as a valuable resource for educators, parents, and publishers seeking to understand the implicit gender messages conveyed through children's literature in the Indian context.

Keywords: gender representation, children's literature, India, content analysis, gender stereotypes, children's books.

I. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is a powerful medium for socialization, influencing young readers' perceptions of the world and shaping their understanding of gender roles. The characters, narratives, and illustrations in storybooks serve as subtle yet influential sources of societal norms. Globally, studies have consistently revealed gender bias in children's books, with male characters often dominating in terms of visibility and narrative importance, while female characters are underrepresented or stereotypically portrayed (Temple, 1993; Hamilton, 2024).

In India—a country rich in cultural diversity and navigating a complex interplay of traditional values and modern reforms—the messages in children's literature carry unique significance. While classical Indian texts like the *Panchatantra* have historically centred male perspectives, recent years have seen a shift toward more inclusive storytelling (Sharma, 2019; Azmat, 2019). Publishers such as Tara Books and Pratham Books are actively working to challenge outdated gender norms by promoting narratives that reflect gender equity.

This study aims to systematically analyze the gender representations in contemporary Indian children's books. By focusing on recent publications, it seeks to identify both persistent stereotypes and emerging progressive trends, contributing to a deeper understanding of how gender roles are constructed and communicated through literature.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Underrepresentation and Visibility

Research has consistently found male characters to be more prevalent in titles, illustrations, and as protagonists. Studies such as those by Kneeskern and Reeder (2022) and Filipović (2018) note that while mothers are present, they are often confined to nurturing roles, while fathers and male figures take on more dynamic or authoritative roles. The *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal* (2019) highlights how the scarcity of relatable female figures in literature can impair children's understanding of their societal roles.

Stereotyped Roles and Traits

Classic studies (Temple, 1993) and contemporary research (Azmat, 2019) reveal that female characters are frequently depicted as passive, emotional, or domestic, while male characters are shown as adventurous, assertive, and independent. In Indian texts, women have often been relegated to secondary or unnamed roles, with some works portraying them as either voiceless or manipulative. The ERIC (2020) report on Indian publishers found that even when women were represented, they typically appeared as caregivers, while men were rarely shown in domestic roles.

Spatial and Occupational Stereotypes

Characters' physical environments further reinforce gender norms. Female characters are typically shown in private or domestic spaces—such as homes or kitchens—while male characters dominate public, professional, or exploratory environments. The ERIC (2020) study emphasized that although women were occasionally shown in professional roles, men were almost never portrayed as engaged in caregiving or household responsibilities.

Emergence of Progressive Narratives

In recent years, a notable shift has been observed in Indian children's literature. Independent publishers such as Tara Books, Tulika, and Pratham are producing stories featuring strong female protagonists who defy traditional roles. Pratham's "Gender Transformation Through Storybooks" (2024) initiative is a prime example of intentional efforts to reshape gender narratives. The *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal* (2019) notes an increasing number of stories that portray girls as brave, creative, and independent—signifying a gradual move towards balance.

This body of literature underscores both the persistence of traditional biases and the growing momentum toward more equitable representation, forming the foundation for the present study.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the quantitative representation of male, female, and non-binary characters in selected contemporary Indian children's books.
2. To identify the primary roles (e.g., hero, caregiver, professional) and occupations assigned to characters based on their gender.
3. To analyze the personality traits (e.g., brave, nurturing, passive) most frequently associated with male, female, and non-binary characters.
4. To investigate the visual representation of characters in terms of activities and spatial locations (e.g., domestic vs. public settings).

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Sample Selection

A purposive sample of 50–75 children's books published in India between 2020 and 2025 will be analyzed. The selection includes books from mainstream publishers (e.g., Penguin Random House India), independent presses (e.g., Tara Books, Pratham Books), and regional language publishers, to capture diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

4.2 Content Analysis Framework

A structured coding sheet will be developed to analyze each book across the following dimensions:

- **Character Demographics:** Gender identification (male, female, non-binary) and character role (protagonist, supporting, minor).
- **Roles and Occupations:** Categorization of each main character's narrative function and occupational identity.
- **Personality Traits:** Evaluation of attributes such as bravery, empathy, leadership, passivity, and creativity based on textual and visual cues.
- **Visual and Spatial Representation:** Assessment of characters' depicted environments and activities (e.g., domestic vs. public, passive vs. active roles).

4.3 Data Collection and Reliability

Two trained coders will independently analyze each book to ensure inter-rater reliability. Discrepancies will be resolved through discussion. Data will be compiled in a spreadsheet for statistical analysis.

4.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, visual charts) will be used to identify patterns and trends. While the study does not aim to establish causality, it will provide a robust descriptive overview of the current gender landscape in children's literature.

V. EXPECTED FINDINGS

Although the study is exploratory and descriptive, the following trends are anticipated:

- A continued but narrowing gap in the representation of male vs. female protagonists.
- Ongoing reinforcement of some traditional roles in supporting characters.
- Increased visibility of female characters in leadership and non-traditional roles, particularly in books from socially conscious publishers.
- A growing trend of depicting girls in public, dynamic, and adventurous spaces, indicating a shift in visual storytelling.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study will contribute a timely, empirical snapshot of gender representation in contemporary Indian children's literature. The findings aim to inform educators, parents, librarians, and publishers, enabling more thoughtful book selections and content creation. By documenting the current state of gender portrayal, this research serves as both a mirror and a roadmap for those committed to fostering gender-equitable storytelling for young readers in India.

VII. REFERENCES

- Azmat, Z. (2019). *Gender roles and stereotypes in children's literature: An analysis*. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 7(6), 15–20.
- Bhaskar, A., & Mohanty, A. K. (2018). *Reading beyond words: Gender ideologies in Indian language children's literature*. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 25(3), 371–389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971521518783895>
- Crisp, T., & Hiller, B. (2011). *Is this a boy or a girl? Rethinking sex-role representation in Caldecott Medal-winning picturebooks, 1938–2011*. *Children's Literature in Education*, 42(3), 196–212. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-011-9128-1>
- ERIC. (2020). *Gender representation and language use in children's storybooks* (ED622615). <https://eric.ed.gov>
- Filipović, N. (2018). *Feminist literary criticism and representation of female characters in children's literature*. SAGE Publications.
- Gooden, A. M., & Gooden, M. A. (2001). *Gender representation in notable children's picture books: 1995–1999*. *Sex Roles*, 45(1–2), 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1013064418674>

- Hamilton, M. O. (2024). *Gender stereotyping and under-representation of female characters in 21st century award-winning picturebooks*. *Literary Oracle Journal*, 13(1), 45–59.
- Kneeskern, D., & Reeder, S. (2022). *Gender representation in children's books: Case of an early childhood setting*. ResearchGate. <https://www.researchgate.net>
- McCabe, J., Fairchild, E., Grauerholz, L., Pescosolido, B., & Tope, D. (2011). *Gender in Twentieth-Century Children's Books: Patterns of Disparity in Titles and Central Characters*. *Gender & Society*, 25(2), 197–226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211398358>
- Narayan, S. (2022). *Decoding the gender lens in contemporary Indian picture books*. *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 13(2), 100–116.
- Nanda, A. (2020). *Children's literature and the shaping of gender roles: A cultural perspective*. *The Eastern Anthropologist*, 73(1), 55–70.
- Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal. (2019). *Study on representation of female characters in children's literature in India*. *OIJRJ*, 9(4), 22–29.
- Pratham Books. (2024). *Enabling change—book by book, child by child* (Annual Report). <https://www.prathambooks.org>
- Sharma, A. (2019). *The ideology of the Panchatantra is biased*. *International Education and Research Journal*, 5(9), 34–38.
- Temple, C. (1993). *Children's literature: A study of stereotypes*. McGraw-Hill.
- Tiwari, R. (2021). *Exploring gender bias in Indian storybooks for children: A content analysis*. *Journal of Indian Education*, 47(2), 15–29.

