



SABUN KE BULBULE/SOAP BUBBLES

By Anjali Pimpalkhare;

MERI PHOTO/MY PHOTO; JUNGLE MEIN KAUN-KAUN?/WHO'S IN THE JUNGLE; KAGAZ LAO, KHEL KHELO!/FUN WITH PAPER; KHIDKI PAR/AT THE WINDOW; KHILAUNE/TOYS

All five by Mangala Godbole

SHOR HI SHOR/TOO MUCH NOISE; MERA SAAF-SUTHRA SCHOOL/MY SCHOOL IS CLEAN; NAYI LADKI/THE NEW GIRL; MERA NAYA DIBBA/MY NEW LUNCH BOX; MERI BAHAN AUR MEIN/MY SISTER AND ME

All five by Mini Srinivasan

Adaptation of the set into Hindi by Meeta Srivasatav & into English by Zakia Kuriem. 2014, ₹13.00 each (₹140.00 for the set)

A delightful set of eleven little bilingual books from Eklavya would make an ideal gift for the pre-school child for read-alouds and for the beginners who can enjoy learning two languages side by side. Short sentences about the familiar world around a child are structured to help increase cognition of words and instill a sense of fun in learning to read 'real' books. The quirky imaginative illustrations ably complement the simple text adapted from the original Marathi.

Ekalavya Ki Bhent

SAIR: Illustrated by Vagmi Raghav (₹7.00); **CHEENTA:** Illustrated by Sowmya Menon (₹30.00); **TEEN DOST:** Text and Illustrations by Indu Harikumar (₹35.00); **MEERA SCHOOL** by Saraswati Nandini Majumdar. Illustrated by Renuka Rajiv (₹45.00); **PATANG KI KARAMEET:** Text by Nicholas Burn and Illustrated by Priya (₹30.00); **SAANP NE SOCHA** by Ashok Husain. Illustrated by Bindiya Purbiya (₹30.00); **HAMAARI GAAY JANI** by Abhilasha Rajauriya, Illustrated by Ramesh Hengadi and Sanket Pethkar (₹60.00)

When I got this clutch of seven little gifts from Ekalavya, I wished I was back in pre-school and being given these to start learning to read. The delightful illustrations tell the stories more effectively than words. An elder sibling introducing the new entrant to her first day in school? How three good friends—Red, Yellow and Blue go in search of other colours to make up a rainbow—have you heard of *bayani hapeenala*? Antics of ants? Or those of a Kite who helps two men on the moon to come down to earth? Or shall we follow the Umbrella, Ball and a Box on a journey up and down a mountain like Humpty Dumpty? Will a snake think better of biting a little girl? Have you known the joy of having a little calf being born in your backyard? Imagination runs wild as would the little reader's who holds these titles in her hands. Thank you Ekalavya for your creativity collective.

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Manisha Chaudhry

LYNETTE'S JOURNEY

By Hanne Bramness. Translated into English by Marietta Taralrud Maddrell Eklavya, 2014, pp. 156, ₹110.00

If you like your young adult novel sepia-tinted, then this book is for you. The beautifully detailed cover illustration of lilies in shades of grey, beige and the cleverest touch of red captures the mood of the book. It is a sombre account of twelve year old Evelyn's journey from Argentina to war-torn England. While war tears families asunder, Evelyn's predicament of turning into Lynette and being banished with her little sister Winnie, to the industrial town of Nottingham leaves a trail of loose ends in the schema of the novel. However, it is to the author, Hanne Bramness's credit that she builds mood and character so skillfully that the reader only wishes for Lynette to emerge as her own person from the grey fog of Nottingham, duly rewarded for her grit. The loose ends remain but do not jar enough to distance you from the fortunes of the tough and tender heroine.

The journey from sunny and white-hued Argentina to the cold and grey shores of England delineates all the family dynamics through the eyes of Evelyn. She is sharp and sensitive and often self-critical and you share all her apprehensions about times to come and the inexplicable undercurrents in her parents' relationship. As her brother is born on sea and they reach England, her father disappears quite abruptly only to reappear near the end. Her mother is waif-like, mysterious and absent too, only to reappear at moments where she adds to Lynette's woes with an extra baby instead of providing her succour.

Lynette and her sister are sent away to live in Nottingham with a step-motherly landlady Mrs. Nuttall, who is firmly typecast to be angry or drunk. This forces Lynette to be resourceful and brave to keep Winnie and herself fed, presentable and casting about for other friends. The industrial soot-laden landscape of Nottingham is woven skillfully into the narrative.

Young Italian immigrant Tom stands in a shaft of sunlight and soon becomes a significant part of Lynette's coming of age. New feelings blossom even under grey skies and his family's warmth and close bonds provide a much needed counter point to Lynette's strangely cold and snobbish clan. Tom's character however remains somewhat unformed as he is soon swallowed by the war only to return as an inmate of the mental health facility presumably with PTSD. Lynette helps him find relief through her own experiments with how to deal with the vicissitudes of life and you see them grow together. None of the characters topple over into caricatures even as they skate along the thin line of being typecast along certain paths to provide a backdrop to Lynette's literal and metaphorical journey. Place and mood is evoked with a sure and light touch so that you tread new roads with Lynette with a sense of connection as she grows from an anxious child with keen eyes to a young person who learns to value the things that truly matter—love and warmth.

Marietta Taralrud Maddrell has done such an excellent job of translating Hanne Bramness's original work in Norwegian into English. The lyricism and minute details shine through. It provides the much needed variety in the young adult writing landscape to show that angst can have many hues and some journeys are universal. The production by Eklavya is beautiful and the font and point size make for an easy and pleasing read. NORLA and the Parag Initiative are to be commended for bringing world literature such as this for Indian readers at affordable prices.

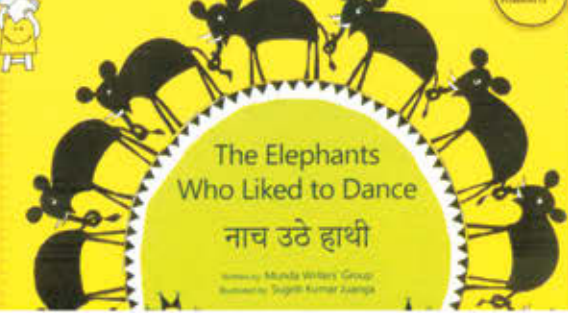
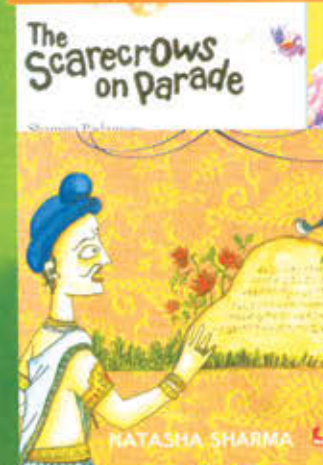
THE BOOK REVIEW

VOLUME XXXVIII NUMBER 11 NOVEMBER 2014

Books for Children



आओ पढ़ें
Let's Read



Neera Jain

THREE FRIENDS

By Indu Harikumar
2013, pp. 24, ₹45.00

RAIN

By Nandini Majumdar, Art: Rafia Bano
2012, pp. 12, ₹30.00

THE RIVER AT NIGHT

By Nandini Majumdar, Art: Zarina Khatun
2012, pp. 16, ₹40.00

MY SCHOOL

By Saraswati Nandini Majumdar. Illustrated by Renuka Rajiv
2014, pp. 28, ₹60.00

THE CYCLE'S DREAM

Story by Prabhat. Art: Bidyut Rai. Translated from the Hindi by Tultul Biswas
2013, pp. 14, ₹70.00

All published by Eklavya

I AM AN ARTIST

Text and Illustrations by Marta Altes
Macmillan Children's Books, 2013, pp. 24, ₹299.00

Eklavya is a non-profit organization that works for the education of children at the grass-root level and does the commendable work of creating reading material for the purpose. We look at five picture books brought out by Eklavya from 2012 onwards.

Three Friends is on the theme of how primary colours blend to form new colours. The book begins with, 'Long ago, there were just three colours: red, yellow and blue.' Two colours befriend each other and find new colours, for instance, 'Red and yellow went together and found a new friend orange.'

All the illustrations in the book are through embroidery and patchwork done on cloth. In some places fabric paint has been used. Indu Harikumar, the author and illustrator of the story has studied fashion and history. She has combined her love for words and fabric in this book.

The theme is interesting and the idea of presenting colours through patchwork is also fun to look at. The fault lies in the execution of the idea. There are avoidable errors, such as saying that rain that falls from tips of trees is blue. Since this book is about actual colours one should not expect the reader to imagine that rain is blue. The colours of the balloons representing the three colours—yellow, red and blue look orange, red and purple. This is confusing.

Then again, the text could have been more imaginative. As it stands, it is rather bland.

Nandini Majumdar, a musician and writer, has brought together her writing skills and experience with the craftspeople of the NGO Nirman in the picture book, *Rain*. A young zaradozi embroiderer from Varanasi, Rafia Bano, has embroidered on yellow cloth scenes of a hot day followed by rain. The text is very simple, three, four or five words on one page. The embroidery is beautiful in itself. And yet one cannot help wondering if the beauty of the embroidery would captivate a child of three or four. If this book were to be illustrated in the traditional way, there would be realistic images of a hot sun, people and nature wilting beneath it and finally images of nature smiling under beneficent rain.

In *The River at Night* once again, the embroidery is exquisite, fine chain stitch is used to create rivers, trees, moon, wind, a boat bumping against the river ghats and even a cow with a bell around its neck. The story and the artwork together create an atmosphere of gentle peace in which the reader is invited to hear the music of the quietly flowing river. A lovely reflective idea that would best be appreciated by an adult reader and also perhaps by older children to whom the beauty of the creation can be pointed out. Not a book for three to five year olds but certainly interesting for everyone above that.

One appreciates the attempt to use Indian craft to create books

for children but in creating a picture book one must first and foremost keep in mind that the text and the visuals should be capable of engaging a child's attention spontaneously. The picture book may be read aloud by an adult and the beauty of the pictures pointed out but there should be something that makes the child reach out for the book on his own.

My School developed at Nirman, Varanasi is about a child's first day at school and the story is told by the child's elder brother who goes to the same school. The author has done a good job of seeing school through young eyes and one is reminded of the famous Calvin and Hobbes comics in which the whole world is seen through the eyes of a little boy. It takes a little time though to understand that the characters in the book are all animals. It is not clear how the story is helped by having animal characters. The same could very easily have been a story about human characters. The watercolour paintings are caricatures of animals and certainly don't attempt to be pleasing or pretty. Renuka Rajiv, the artist, perhaps wanted to appeal to children's fascination with the grotesque and the unusual. All in all, the visuals are more strange than appealing.

The Cycle's Dream was created during a workshop for development of content for children under the Damroo project of Industrial Design Centre, IIT, Bombay and first published in June 2013. The format is interesting, the pages open like those of a desktop calendar. The colours are khaki and black. The rough khaki texture of the paper and the black grunge font work well with the motorcycle element of the story and not so well with the green and happy nature element. The overall look is interesting but harsh.

The theme of the story and the story itself is clever as well as interesting. A cycle wants to become a motorcycle but later realizes that being a cycle is so much better for the environment. This is a smart way of making a point about the environment to children. However, and unfortunately it must be said, smartness is no excuse for tossing aside grammar. There are no markers to show when the first person narration changes into a notice-board sign or into a hawker's cry. There is also no reason to begin common nouns with capital letters.

I Am An Artist by Marta Altes is a rather large 24 page picture book that would appeal to children above seven years of age. The theme is a little foreign for Indian children as in India 'the artistic temperament' has not received much attention. However there is no reason why it should not receive its due in India too, especially since it adds a bit of fun to life! The cover has letters dripping colour and there is no boring half-title page either. The copyright page has the text tilting at crazy angles and one feels quite pleased to see that even this page can be a little wonky. On the title page itself the child draws a moustache on his face and sports it throughout the book. He begins by smugly announcing, 'I am an artist.' And then the pages unfold to show that the little artist likes to paint everywhere possible—the walls of the house, the furniture, the closets, and so on. It is not surprising that his mother is one tormented woman.

The language is idiomatic and likely to be more familiar to native English speakers. For instance, on one page the little artist says, 'Where I see The Loneliness of the Carrot my mum sees An Unfinished Dinner.' And then again, 'Where I see A Window to the World my mum sees A Hole in the Wall.' The book would appeal to children above six or seven years.



Neera Jain is an editor and writer of children's books.