Different Worldviews in Children's Literature

A Thesis submitted to Goa University for the Award of the Degree of

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English

By

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DECLARATION

I, Layla Maria Mascarenhas, hereby declare that the Thesis titled *Different Worldviews in Children's Literature* is the outcome of my own research undertaken, under the supervision of Dr. Andre Rafael Fernandes, Associate Professor, Department of English, Goa University. All the sources used in the course of this work have been duly acknowledged in the thesis. This work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, or Certificate of this or any other University.

Layla Maria Mascarenhas

Date: 09.08.2015

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the thesis titled *Different Worldviews in Children's Literature* submitted by Ms. Layla Maria Mascarenhas for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the record of her own work done under my guidance and further that it has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, or Certificate of this or any other University.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

What is Children's Literature? What is a Child? What are Worldviews? What meanings do readers make of the texts they consume? Before I dive into the rich and varied universe of Children's Literature, let me first outline the importance of this area of academic scrutiny and clarify some definitions, issues and concepts related to my topic "Different Worldviews in Children's Literature."

1.1.1. Why Study Children's Literature?

Children's Literature, in oral, print and audio-visual formats, is often the very first "literature" that people are exposed to in the course of their development. It is also widely published, disseminated, and consumed in its various formats. Attractively produced in eye-catching products, children's story books, information books, comics, and animated films have a visible presence in the daily lives of a sizeable chunk of humanity. However, until recently, scholars of literature did not regard it as a subject worthy of serious study. Children's Literature was considered a field reserved for lady librarians, school teachers and moral educators. But in the last few decades, the study of Children's Literature in universities in Europe, Australia and America has begun to enjoy a higher status. According to Griswold, in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature*, "Scholars have begun to regard children's literature… as a literary genre available (like women's literature, say, or black literature) to scholarly study and as no less serious

(simply because of its association with children) than, say, its medical analogue of pediatrics. Scholarship continues to appear with increasing frequency" (181). An increasing number of PhD theses have been awarded around the globe for work done in this field. For example, "History, Landscape and National Identity: A Comparative Study of Contemporary English And Icelandic Literature For Children" by Dr. Anna Heida Palsdottir was a thesis awarded the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Coventry. Dr. Karline McLain of the Department of Asian Studies, University of Texas, Austin, came to India to do a major part of her doctoral research, "Whose Immortal Picture Stories?: *Amar Chitra Katha* and the Construction of Indian Identities." In India, "Children's Story Books and Their Pedagogic Functions: A Sociological Study of Three Select Schools of New Delhi" was a thesis submitted to the School of Social Sciences of Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the Degree of PhD by Disha Nawani in 1999.

Matthew Grenby's *Children's Literature* which is part of the "Edinburgh Critical Guides to Literature Series" tells us that the study of Children's Literature is challenging and should be treated on par with the study of adult literature because "both can make equally serious artistic statements." He says that "the greatest challenge…is to give children's books the kind of careful, nuanced and disinterested critical attention that for many years was reserved only for books written for adults" (8-9). In their popular scholarly book *Essentials of Children's Literature*, Kathy G. Short et al. make a strong case for the legitimacy of the study of Children's Literature in Departments of Literature:

> Children's books, first and foremost, are literature. Literature is not written to teach something, but to illuminate what it means to be human

> and to make accessible the most fundamental experiences of life—love, hope, loneliness, despair, fear, and belonging. Literature is the imaginative shaping of experience and thought into the forms and structures of language. Children read literature to experience life, and their experiences inside the world of a story challenge them to think in new ways about their lives and world. (4)

Many foreign universities, such as the University of Florida, University of Cambridge, and University of Roehampton, offer Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral research programs in the study of Children's Literature. Though there is a growing awareness of the field among Indian researchers, Children's Literature has not been a major area of academic scrutiny in most Departments of Literature in India. My thesis hopes to fill a tiny part of this gap and to encourage more research in this field our country.

The common impression among most people is that the simple stories that charm children are mere "kids stuff." People believe that Children's Literature is all about keeping children entertained, informed and gainfully occupied. It keeps them seated in one place and prevents them from wandering about and getting into mischief. However, as Hephzibah Anderson tells us, adults mistakenly think that fairy tales and Children's Literature are simple and escapist in nature. In her article, "The Hidden Messages in Children's Books," she tells us that only when we (as adults) revisit the tales that fascinated us as kids, we begin to realize that "these stories are about eternal human strengths and weaknesses, about how to exist in the world." She says that we become aware of strange and clever subtexts to these apparently innocent stories in adulthood; for

example, Dr Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is a parable of consumerism, but enjoyed in childhood at a much simpler level of comprehension. The difference in interpretation is because as adults we are equipped with more knowledge that allows us to recognize these deep meanings. This is due to learning from life and its experiences. We gain wisdom and understanding about life, and find meaning *in* life and *about* life as we go along. It is only natural that as adults, who have traveled more of the road of life, we more fully appreciate the texts that are created for children, largely, by adults themselves. Bettelheim's 1976 book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, speaks about the importance of children's books in helping children to grow in this wisdom step by step, "Only in adulthood can an intelligent understanding of the meaning of one's existence in this world be gained from one's experiences in it….Regarding this task [of helping children find that life is meaningful], nothing is more important than the impact of parents and others who take care of the child...when children are young, it is literature that carries such information best" (3-4). Therefore, as Children's Literature is not as simple as the general public thinks it to be, it is an important site of academic scrutiny. Much research has already been done in this field, and the approaches taken have been both varied and complex.

A survey of the research done in Children's Literature shows a wide spectrum of literary criticism ranging from applying literary theories of criticism to children's texts to statistical analyses of types of books produced and sold. M.O. Grenby and Andrea Immel tell us scholars have taken a variety of critical approaches to Children's Literature: textual analysis (focusing on both text and illustrations), "historical, sociological, theoretical or materialist approaches," reader-response criticism, and a focus on "contexts

of production." Furthermore, research efforts have also been directed to "extra-literary" elements of texts such as the "size, format, binding, illustration, decoration, style, paper-engineering and so on…" (xv). Hence, the field of Children's Literature studies cannot be dismissed as either trivial or babyish. Grenby and Immel warn us that "children's books may be small, short and apparently straightforward, but the study of children's literature is far from simple" (xiv). This is because the whole act of producing literature for children is an area where the cultural critic will find valuable information about the adults who produce these texts. Additionally, discussions of Children's Literature are themselves "far from being politically neutral" (Achar 188) and are part of the ideologies of the critic himself/herself. Additionally, the position of the texts within the matrices of the literary conventions of a particular location and time in history also affects the reception and validation of texts for children. Seth Lerer opines that "Children's literature retells a history of the conventions of interpretation and the reception of texts in different historical periods" (3-4). Let me now discuss what Children's Literature is.

1.1.2. What is Children's Literature?

The concept of Children's Literature is frequently discussed considering target group, format, content and genre. Deeptha Achar defines Children's Literature in two modes: by genre and by address. When a critic considers the field as a separate genre, he/she looks for "a set of internal conventions which distinguish it from other genres" (Achar 181). Perry Nodelman tells us that Myles McDowell has offered a detailed list of such characteristics of the genre: "children's books are generally shorter; they tend to favour an active rather than a passive treatment, with dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection; child protagonists are the rule; ...language is child-oriented;

plots are of a distinctive order, probability is often disregarded..." (189). However, many literary critics prefer to define Children's Literature by address: as "that which addresses children" (Achar 181). Grenby and Immel suggest that "Children's literature, uniquely, is defined by its intended audience;" however, they clarify that "the child," for whom Children's Literature is intended, can range from the infant being read to, to the teenager on the threshold of adulthood, not to mention those adults who delight in picture books, fantasy novels or fondly remembered classics" (xiii). The field covers every book written /digital product created for children, and read/used by them.

Now here lies the problem: children read books written for adults (especially when children are voracious readers and want to read any book that seems interesting), and adults read books written for children (for example, J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels are read by both adults and children.) Additionally, Children's Literature is available in different formats: oral tales, printed prose/poetry books, illustrated books and picture books, comic books/graphic novels, computer and video games, television cartoons, celluloid and digital films. In addition, we now have children's books in electronic formats, "including interactive digital books, books on e-readers, and applications on smartphones and tablets" (Short 4). Children's Literature is available across cultures and languages and could exist in oral formats as "grandmother's tales" within a culture, or could have evolved to print and digital formats in other cultures. Its content could include anything from fantasy, fairy tales, myths, legends, and religious stories, to factual and instructive material. "Children's books are about the full range of experiences of childhood from the difficult to the exciting. Whether these experiences are set in the past, present, or future, they should be relevant to children today" (Short 4).

Children's Literature is also categorized into several genres such as: prose fiction (traditional fantasy, modern fantasy and science fiction; historical fiction, and contemporary realistic fiction) and nonfiction (biography, and informational books), poetry (which could cover the same genres of prose), and drama (Jacobs 59-63). Adventure stories, animal stories, moral tales, family stories, school stories are some of the sub-categories within genres. The problem with trying to create a comprehensive definition of Children's Literature is that "it cuts across almost all genres, from myths to manga, humour to horror, science to self-help and religion to romance" (Grenby and Immel xiii). Moreover, the same story can appear in different formats with different styles of illustration. For example, you have children's Bible stories in large picture book format, in comic book format (including the Japanese manga style), in pure prose format, in television cartoon format, in the animated film format and in the live-action film format. So how does one define Children's Literature? Reynolds' observation in *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction* hits the nail on the head, "it is important to establish that there is no single, coherent, fixed body of work that makes up Children's Literature, but instead many Children's Literatures produced at different times in different ways for different purposes by different kinds of people using different formats and media" (2-3). Therefore, Children's Literature is the literature which is considered appropriate for children within a certain culture and at a particular period in history. This, in turn, depends on how that particular society defines the concept of a "child." The concept of childhood has evolved from viewing children as "little adults," to viewing them as "innocent people" who need to be protected from the harsh realities of life. "Like

the concept of childhood, children's literature is very much a cultural construct that continues to evolve over time" (Susina 178).

1.1.3. Changing Concepts of "The Child" and "Childhood"

As critics of Children's Literature, a scholar must be aware of the fact that the concept of "a child" is dependent on the dominant ideology of a particular political, historical, social and economic system. In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article, "The Philosophy of Childhood," Gareth Matthews and Amy Mullin tell us that Philippe Ariès' influential book in 1962, *Centuries of Childhood,* "made the reading public aware that conceptions of childhood have varied across the centuries. The very notion of a child … is both historically and culturally conditioned." The book *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* edited by Allison James and Alan Prout, emphasizes that "Childhood" is a social construct, a social institution that varies from culture to culture. Instead of talking about a universalistic conception of "Childhood," there are culturally specific "childhoods" which recognizes "significant differences of gender, class, ethnicity, disability etc" (xiv). There *is* no general, unchanging category called "children," and all ideas about "childhood" are relative to the power-relations, and worldviews of a particular culture, situated at a specific time and place. Quoting Jenks, James and Prout assert that "the child is 'a status of person which is comprised through a series of, often heterogeneous, images, representations, codes and constructs'" (xii). Talking about the composition of the particular human population we commonly classify as "children," Neil Postman explains that the concept of "Childhood" is a "social artifact, not a biological category." He says:

> …if we take the word "children" to mean a special class of people somewhere between the ages of seven and, say, seventeen, who require special forms of nurturing and protection, and who are believed to be qualitatively different from adults, then there is ample evidence that children have existed for less than four hundred years….The *idea* of childhood is one of the great inventions of the Renaissance … childhood as both a social principle and a psychological condition emerged around the 16th century. (148-149)

Additionally, the widely-held perception of childhood is that it is a time of innocence and separation from the harsh realities of the "adult world." In the introductory chapter to *The Children's Culture Reader*, "Introduction: Childhood Innocence and Other Modern Myths," Henry Jenkins expresses this idea succinctly:

> Too often, our culture imagines childhood as a utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries, free from sexuality, outside social divisions, closer to nature and the primitive world, more fluid in its identity and its access to the realms of imagination, beyond historical change, more just, pure, and innocent, and in the end, waiting to be corrupted or protected by adults. (3-4)

Therefore, if we attempt to define Children's Literature by its "intended audience," we risk overlooking the "overlapping and conflicting cultural constructions of childhood" (Grenby and Immel xiii). In my study of "Children's Literature," this variable nature of the concepts of "a child" or "Childhood," serves as a caveat that I must not generalize

about “children” as a universal group. It is with the awareness of the relativity of these concepts that I now venture into a discussion of the “child reader,” even while using the terminology of “the child” and “childhood.”

1.1.4. The Child Reader

In the essay “Defining Children’s Literature and Childhood,” Karín Lesnik-Oberstein endorses Jacqueline Rose’s view that “children’s fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple” (17). We have just seen that it is important for the literary critic to unpack such ideas and pinpoint what the assumptions about the child are. She says that “in examining various attempts to define ‘children’s literature’ we find a constant assumption of the existence of the (reading) child (that is: the assumption that there is such a thing as a unified, consistent, ‘objective’ ‘child reader’)” (21). However, if we think of the word “children” in Children’s Literature as an identification of the target consumer of the product, we can agree with Jan Susina’s view that Children's Literature “comprises those texts that have been written specifically for children…written, illustrated, published, marketed, and purchased consistently by adults to be given to children for their edification and entertainment” (178). Nonetheless, rather than limiting this study of Children’s Literature by genre or address, I prefer to focus my investigation on Children’s Literature as a function of the market, since “children’s books are now the most profitable area of publishing” (Lerer 8). This approach is in line with the New Historicists’ assumption that “every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices” (Veeser xi). My study takes into consideration the different dimensions of

production, marketing and consumption of the "texts" and explores how every element of the process contributes towards "meaning making."

Children's Literature publishers have developed their own set of ideas about the characteristics of the different groups of "children," and have then designed their commodities according to the perceived needs, likes and dislikes of the intended consumers. As such, these publishers have well-defined concepts of what a "child" is like at a certain biological age. Since the maturity level of growing children changes at a rapid rate, the products are designed to be suitably different for each stage of physical and intellectual growth. Publishing companies create products that are aimed at specific target groups of children. These publishing norms gradually become accepted practices of Children's Literature genre classification. To illustrate how publishers classify Children's Literature, I list out some of the age-appropriate publishing practices of children's print books.

- *Board books* to be used for infants till the age of 3. The thick texture of the book pages makes them suitable for rough usage. I have seen that well-worn board books have teeth marks on them, food stains and splash marks of wiped off spilt liquid, but many products in this range are well designed and withstand the baby's handling.

- *Picturebooks* aimed at ages 3–8. In these books, the illustrations fill the page (usually in bright colors) and the verbal text is kept to the bare minimum.

- *Coloring and Activity books* are aimed at ages 3–8. These have black and white outlines of animals, people, things and scenery for the child to fill in with colour.

Some may feature a tiny inset of a coloured version of the same picture, normally placed at the top of the page to act as a cue for the child to follow. Not all coloring books have this feature. Craft books are designed as activity books where the child can cut and paste chart paper, cardboard dolls and houses, or simple vehicle models. Easy sewing activity books could teach a child to sew a semblance of a "face" by sewing buttons on an old stuffed sock. Activity books on puppet making, jewelry-making and gift-box making are aimed at older children of ages 7-10.

- *Information books* are about animals, plants, fruits, transportation, etc. These are aimed at specific ages and accordingly include less or more verbal text along with beautiful illustrations. The illustrations are of good quality and are either artwork in the realistic mode, or actual photographs of cows, trees, ships etc.

- *Early Level Readers* are story books that aim at ages 5–7. The books are meant to help children learn to read and so the vocabulary is simple and the print fonts are bigger than the books for older children. There are some illustrations or scattered line-drawings too.

- *Fiction and Non-fiction chapter books* that target the ages of 6–9 or 7–10. These are books generally longer than 48 pages in length. At this level the chapters of the books are shorter than the book chapters for the 9-12 age groups. This is to factor in the shorter attention spans of younger children. The vocabulary used is limited and there are many abridged versions of famous adventure stories like *Robinson Crusoe* in this and the next variety.

- *Fiction and Non-fiction chapter books* that target the ages of 9–12. These have longer chapters than the earlier 6-9 category. Vocabulary and themes used are more advanced.

- *Young Adult novels:* fiction and non-fiction books that target the ages of 13-18. This category of books aims at the interests of teenagers and their problems: identity issues, issues of popularity, race and gender, emotional turmoil, substance abuse, conflicts with parents and authority figures, friendship, love and relationships, experimentation, getting into trouble.

As Lerer comments, "Such accounts reveal… how the categories of the children's books are codified not just by writers and readers, but by book sellers, librarians, and publishing houses" (8). Therefore, I situate my study in the discourse of twentieth century cultural practices of the creation of children's books, comics and movies for a market. I study the combination of factors that affect the "generation and circulation of meaning" (Hunt and Ray 33): the material practices of publication and marketing, a textual analysis of the cultural content and contexts of the texts, and an examination of different audience receptions of the texts.

This study puts a greater focus on the material practices and textual analysis of texts than on an examination of reader-responses to the same. The reason for this is that I am keener on uncovering the worldviews embedded in the texts, than on examining if the reader has received the message in the way the author intended it to be received. As such, I place a greater emphasis on the first part of the communicative act: the encoding of the message. In contrast, the world of the child-reader is a more complex area of exploration:

how an individual child reads, what he reads, and what he makes of the text. This, in turn, is a matter of the availability of a text, choice of text by parent/ child (if he has the autonomy to do so), literary skills and inclinations of that particular child, and several other cultural and material factors.

Children are keen on reading stories or watching films that are new and interesting. The sheer variety of the storybooks available today can keep a child engrossed for hours on end. Though with the advent of the television, more and more children are losing out on the pleasures of reading, many children still read avidly. They eagerly read anything they can lay their hands on that promises to be a good story. To illustrate how children choose books without following any particular "age appropriate" order I will quote from an email correspondence with seventeen year old Julian D' Costa, one of the most widely read youngsters I have met (he has read more than 1500 books), who shared a list of some of his favourite books at different ages.

The following list does not include the hundreds of other books D' Costa also read at those ages (he says that the ages mentioned are approximations, because he is not sure of dates): at the age of seven, he loved Roald Dahl's *Danny the Champion of the World*. "I enjoyed the pencil-shaded illustrations and I liked the reading about the interesting things Danny and his father did," he says. At the age of eight, he read Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. He liked the sense of wonder and the fact that it was a real modern fairytale. He also enjoyed the Hindi puns. At the age of nine he loved Alistair Maclean's *Where Eagles Dare* because it was "A classic spy story with lots of treachery, suspense and action," Richmal Crompton's *Just William* because of the situational comedies and the way "she described life from the viewpoint of an eleven-

year old boy," and James Herriot's *It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet* because of the "very funny and deeply moving tales of life in the Yorkshire dales." At the age of ten he loved Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* because of its brilliant idea of "a boy young enough to believe in fairies and old enough to exploit them for personal gain." He remembers loving the font and typesetting as well.

The brief list given above shows us that when children are left free to read the books that interest them, no particular method of choosing books is followed. For instance, the list includes a book by Alistair Maclean who is not (according to publishers and librarians) a Children's Literature author. Children randomly sample a wide range of books before deciding on a favourite author, or a favourite book. The things that appear to interest them are good illustrations, a sense of wonder, adventure and suspense, comedy, and interesting plots. Interestingly, at the age of eleven D' Costa listed an information book, not a fiction book, as one of his favourite books: Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. He says he loved it because it helped him participate in quiz competitions and it covered a vast range of topics. Additionally, he appreciated the author's "gift for phrasing sentences in exactly the right way." This last book aroused my curiosity. Why would a young boy who loved reading fiction get fascinated by an "information book"? I got my answer on examining the book. Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is written in narrative style that resembles a novel. Unlike big, pedantic encyclopedias, this book talks about scientific things in a warm, chatty style. For example, Bryson describes the beginning of the universe with this charming narrative:

> And so, from nothing, our universe begins. In a single blinding pulse, a moment of glory much too swift and expansive for any form of words, the

> singularity assumes heavenly dimensions, space beyond conception. In the first lively second (a second that many cosmologists will devote careers to shaving into ever-finer wafers) is produced gravity and the other forces that govern physics…. In three minutes, 98 percent of all the matter there is or will ever be has been produced. We have a universe. It is a place of the most wondrous and gratifying possibility, and beautiful, too. And it was all done in about the time it takes to make a sandwich. (10)

This interesting comparison of two completely unrelated phenomena, the speed of the origin of the universe and the speed of making a sandwich, is the essence of humour, and also of the beauty of relating high-flown ideas to the simple, everyday world of children. In my study, I found that a good narrative style like this was very important in making books, artworks and films popular.

The texts selected for this study are all texts that have been popular among a significant number of children at some point in the twentieth century. And since the texts were widely circulated among different children populations through the century, I examine the significant worldviews encoded in them. My underlying assumption is that *some* of these popular texts must have had *some* effect on shaping the way *some* of the readers looked at the world. As Peter Hunt says in *Introduction to Children's Literature*, "It is arguably impossible for a children's book (especially one being read by a child) not to be educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology and, by extension, didacticism" (3).

1.1.5. Significance of Children's Literature

Psychology tells us that a child is deeply influenced by his/her environment. The stories adults tell him, the books he (I will use 'he' to refer to both genders) reads, the TV programmes and movies he watches, the songs he sings and the music he listens to all contribute to his mental, emotional and spiritual growth. Childhood stories, especially those mediated by a familiar caregiver, help to explain to him who he is and how the world began. Stories interpret the natural phenomena around him. Tony Watkins tells us how adults help children make sense of the world around them by telling them stories:

> The stories we tell our children, the narratives we give them to make sense of cultural experience, constitute a kind of mapping, maps of meaning that enable our children to make sense of the world. They contribute to children's sense of identity, an identity that is simultaneously personal and social: narratives, we might say, shape the way children find a "home" in the world. (183)

The adults who are the child's caregivers play a very important role in choosing both the food he eats and the books he reads. In as much as the food choices made by the adults affect the physical development of the child, the cultural choices of oral tales told, the entertainment programmes/ books consumed affect a child's interpretation of the world he lives in. Children's Literature offer rich material for framing his ideas about himself, his place in this world, his ambitions and his awareness of the needs of others. Different literatures place dissimilar emphases on values of power and domination, individualism and cooperation, respect and love for others, sympathy-for and empathy-with other beings. The ideologies and worldviews picked up during our childhoods contribute to framing lifelong ways of interpreting phenomena and subtle positive or negative attitudes towards certain social groups.

Interestingly, many of the popular fables, fairy tales, myths and legends that circulate among child readers today were originally shared among adult audiences. Jack Zipes writes, "Though it is impossible to trace the historical origins and evolution of fairy tales to a particular time and place, we do know that humans began telling tales as soon as they developed the capacity of speech"(2). These orally circulated texts were a cultural phenomenon that helped our ancestors "make sense of the world" around them. Zipes explains that "once a plethora of stories began to circulate in societies throughout the world, they contained the seeds of fairy tales, ironically tales at first without fairies formed by metaphor and metamorphosis and by a human disposition to communicate relevant experiences" (4). Today, many of the same stories are retold as "children's stories," and serve to contribute to the child's developing sense of identity.

When the parent /grandparent/ caregiver spends time in reading out stories to the child, the adult weaves his/her own emphasis and interpretation into the story being told. As the child grows and begins to read for himself, the books that the adult places into his hands are what that adult has selected as being "good reading material." Value based judgments of the adult shape the products the child gets to handle. Add to this the privilege of the purchasing power of the adult. The growing child is never completely free of the choices the adults around him are making. My thesis posits that *childhood is a time when the literary and media choices adults make can help shape a child's worldview in decisive ways*. For this reason, I limit this study to the timeframe before children generally acquire independent purchasing power, and focus on the available texts that target the 0 to 12 age group.

1.1.6. Defining a "Worldview"

In the article on "Weltanschauung," the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* explains that the English translation of the German word *Weltanschauung* is "Worldview;" it is defined as "a comprehensive conception or theory of the world and the place of humanity within it. It is an intellectual construct that provides both a unified method of analysis for and a set of solutions to the problems of existence." Craig Rusbult tells us that a worldview is a person's theory of the world which he uses to live in the world, a comprehensive framework of ideas, attitudes, and beliefs about the world. He says that this system of beliefs provides answers to questions about what is the purpose of life, and what should be one's values and priorities, "What are humans, why we are here…What can we know, and how? …Does reality include only matter/energy, or is there more? ... Does God exist? If so, what characteristics does God have, and what relationship with the universe?" A worldview is a method of interpreting things and events that permeates a culture and becomes the way a culture judges the importance, goodness and sacredness of things.

David K. Naugle classifies the Christian worldview as a metanarrative because it attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation of reality… an interpretation of the universe (4). In *The Christian Vision: The Truth That Sets Us Free,* John Powel outlines a "Christian worldview" and locates the problem of human suffering within this larger framework. He tells us that suffering, in many of its forms, is a signal of "a failure to love… ourselves, our neighbor, or God." He tells us that "happiness can come to us only as a byproduct of love and a life motivated by love" (119-120). Ecological problems have highlighted the need for people to share resources and to have a common vision for the good of humanity. However, not everyone shares a common worldview on these issues.

Hedonistic consumer ideologies focus more on the pleasures of the present moment and less on the conservation of resources for future generations. Powel points out that the media encourages us to make the most of available resources, "You only go around once. Grab all you can…Eat, drink and be merry; for tomorrow we die" (120). In the same fashion, if a person believes in the existence of an all-powerful being who is in control of the universe, his theistic vision of reality will be significantly different from another who does not believe in the existence of any all-powerful being, and who believes that the universe operates by means of its own natural physical forces. Questions about the nature of ultimate reality "form the driving force behind the religious, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic and political quest of humanity" (Aerts 8). John Valk suggests that the use of the term "worldview" in a postmodern era is more appropriate than limiting beliefs and values to the term "religion." The former "recognizes competing perspectives that go beyond traditional religions" and contradicts the idea that those who have "no religious affiliation thereby embrace no faith." By using the term worldview we go beyond focusing on traditional religion "to include other perspectives, such as secularism, capitalism … humanism and atheism," which helps us understand ourselves better, and acknowledge that these "ideas hold great sway today in the public realm" (5). Dr. Kenneth Funk of Oregon State University researches human performance in high risk and high stress workplaces like submarines, warships and airplanes. In his web page titled, "What is a Worldview?" Funk has proposed that one's worldview affects how we reason and make judgments about our environments. His delineation of the possible elements that could constitute a person's worldview/ beliefs about certain aspects of "Reality" is worth repeating:

- **epistemology**: beliefs about the nature and sources of knowledge;
- **metaphysics**: beliefs about the ultimate nature of Reality;
- **cosmology**: beliefs about the origins and nature of the universe, life, and especially Man;
- **teleology**: beliefs about the meaning and purpose of the universe, its inanimate elements, and its inhabitants;
- **theology**: beliefs about the existence and nature of God;
- **anthropology**: beliefs about the nature and purpose of Man in general and, oneself in particular;
- **axiology**: beliefs about the nature of value, what is good and bad, what is right and wrong.

It would be futile to think that all people have arrived at the complete answers to the questions arising from the above elements. It is more realistic to consider Life as a place to refine these ideas as one is confronted with the situations and problems of daily life. For example, Arjuna, in *The Gita*, would never have clarified his doubts about dharma if he had not been confronted with moral questions about the rectitude of killing his own cousins. This thesis seeks to point out these defining moments in the lives of the characters in the literary texts under scrutiny that help them refine their axiology, and other worldview elements.

Van der Kooij et al. distinguish between *organized* and *personal* worldviews: They classify an *organized worldview* as "a view on life that has developed over time as a more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas." An organized worldview has a

group of supporters who share this view of life (212). They also explain that though all religions can be considered worldviews, not all worldviews are religions. Humanism is not a religion, but it certainly is a worldview. "Humanism may not have fixed rituals and traditions, but it has certain ideals (e.g., human equality), certain sources (e.g., Kant), and certain values (e.g., responsibility for one's own actions) that are shared by a group of people who consider themselves to be Humanists" (212-213). "A *personal worldview* can be more eclectic and idiosyncratic than an organized worldview… people have begun to construct their own personal worldview not based on one specific organized worldview." These personal worldviews are a mix of several ideas and ideologies: *bricoleurs*. However, if a person professes a certain religion, his personal worldview will more or less be based on the organized worldview of that religion (213).

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The title of this study is "Different Worldviews in Children's Literature." Firstly, I begin my argument from the position that *all* literature offers a particular interpretation of reality. I focus my study on a variety of popular, easily available Children's Literature texts and try to uncover what those interpretations are. The aim of this thesis is to explore *what are the different worldviews in selected texts from Children's Literature* and to illustrate how these embedded frameworks can *direct the attention of the child towards what is important in life*. The study focuses on the particular personal worldview of the author/s and their links with organized worldviews. The discussion tries to understand the depth of the literary texts under study and not discard them as trivial "child's play."

I have selected two types of literary texts: those with explicit worldviews and those with implicit worldviews. In religious stories retold for children we find explicit

worldview statements, so I have examined both children's Bible stories and *Amar Chitra Katha* religious comics for explicit statements about the nature of reality. However, there are tons of non-religious/ secular children's story books and movies available in stores/theatres, which set out to entertain; here, the authorial intention does not seem to be a deliberate pointing out to a certain "way of seeing". Nevertheless, these texts are also "statements" which can be examined for the implicit worldviews of these stories. To this end, I do an in-depth textual analysis of *The Adventures of Tintin* comic series, two novels of E. Nesbit, and also examine the animated children's film, *The Prince of Egypt,* produced by DreamWorks SKG. This study is aware that focusing on the text alone is not sufficient to expose the potential for meaning making. Therefore, it also briefly discusses the reception of the texts by both children and their parents.

Secondly, along with discussing the authorial intention of the textual material, in chapters II and III, I also discuss how an adult storyteller can influence the target child consumer of the product by interpreting the stories in a variety of ways. I try to highlight how the text can take on extra meanings from those originally designed by the author. To a large extent, the storyteller functions as a co-author of the text being presented to a child.

Thirdly, this study highlights the importance of the formats of the texts in contributing to the meaning making: audio-visual film texts (*The Prince of Egypt*), word-picture comic formats (*Amar Chitra Katha* and *The Adventures of Tintin* comic series), illustrated texts (*The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* and *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book*), and pure prose texts without any illustration (novels by E. Nesbit).

Finally, the study attempts to expose the negative stereotypes and the positive role models available in the selected texts and to illustrate how these could influence a child's view of himself/herself and others. In the introductory chapter of *Understanding Children's Literature* Peter Hunt touches upon this dimension:

> Many people will deny that they were influenced by their childhood reading ('I read *xyz* when I was a child, and it didn't do *me* any harm'), and yet these may be the same people who accept that childhood is an important phase in our lives (as is almost universally acknowledged), and that children are vulnerable, susceptible, and must be protected from manipulation. (2)

My enquiry does not assume that the texts have universal self-contained meanings, but that in the intricate world of literary communication, the author of a text may be able to communicate his personal view of the world to the receiver of the text. The significance of such an enquiry is that worldviews not only influence people's thinking, but also their actions — worldviews have serious consequences.

"Ideas come first and lead to action. And basic differences among people are always in the end reducible to differences in ideas..." (Olthuis 153). According to Valk, "lived out" worldviews have, "dramatic consequences: liberation and freedom; oppression and destruction" (7). The *way one looks at* situations, things and people totally affects the way one reacts, responds or ignores the stimuli. For example, if I believe that bullying is unacceptable and I see a big boy manhandling a small boy, I will probably perceive it as bullying. I may then react to the older boy's behaviour by asking him to stop bullying the smaller boy, or choose to remain silent but feel upset about the

situation. Conversely, if I have grown up believing that violence is the best way to control others, I may not perceive the same situation as unacceptable, and may ignore it or may even encourage the older boy to "give the small chap a good thrashing!" In the last analysis, my attitudes and consequent actions are all affected by the way I view the world.

1.3. Scope and Limitations

The texts selected were based on the criteria for good children's books laid down in "Literature for Children" by *Britannica Student Library*, "A good children's book is engaging, with interesting characters, lots of action, lively writing, and good illustrations." All the selected texts had to first meet these criteria (though the novels, by virtue of their format, are not illustrated.) Books and a film with a good narrative technique were chosen. A distinguishable worldview positioning was apparent on first reading. And the series of which texts were drawn had to have had a significant number of sales / box-office successes for the films surveyed. This criterion was used as an indicator of audience approval of the product.

As the selected texts are numerous, a thorough discussion of each sample is outside the scope of this discussion. A market survey of available texts in a particular genre was first conducted to isolate the trends and general patterns of pricing, distribution, booksellers' practices of book display, availability and overall popularity of particular texts. After surveying the scene, a selection of one particular popular author, publisher or film animator was used to narrow down the focus. For instance, I have studied the author Hergé's comic book series, *The Adventures of Tintin,* as one complete "text." In contrast, the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book series proved too vast for adequate

discussion. So I selected a few religious comics from the *Amar Chitra Katha* series for a discussion of the philosophical ideas encoded in the texts. Some texts are discussed in detail to illustrate a particular argument.

The major focus of this study is on existential issues, cultural studies, and gender representations. The texts under consideration were all produced in the twentieth century and span the century from 1901 to 1998. The only text formats considered are novel, picturebook, illustrated picture story book, comic book, and animated film.

A final limitation of this study is that the detailed textual analyses are *my* readings of the texts, located within the discourses of the Academia and the ideologies of the culture I inhabit at this point in history. The interpretations are also influenced by my encounters with Children's Literature as I was growing up and also when I was mothering my children. Therefore, the same texts could be "read" quite differently by someone else, located at some other place or point in time, and with different life experiences.

1.4. Methodology

Being the first researcher in the field of Children's Literature at Goa University, it took me some time to figure out just how large the field of investigation would turn out to be. I read a couple of general introductions to the Children's Literature and began narrowing down the focus of the study to two basic types of books: religious stories and stories without any religious overtones. I placed children's Bible stories, *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* and *Amar Chitra Katha* comics in the first category; religious stories were examined as the most obvious place to look for worldview statements and ideologies. Novels by E. Nesbit, *The Adventures of Tintin* comics and Disney and

DreamWorks SKG animated films were surveyed in the second category of secular texts. I selected one film from the surveyed group for detailed analysis, DreamWorks SKG's *The Prince of Egypt,* as a sample of the animated film genre.

After outlining the area of enquiry, I started reading the scientific literature written on the specific areas. Alongside the study of scientific literature I worked on reading the texts and viewing animated children's film several times. Each text was examined in detail for content and formal details. The content analysis examined the ideologies within the texts. Both the artwork and the verbal texts were studied. For the animated film *The Prince of Egypt,* I also studied the music (sound files and scores) and lyrics of the film, and made enquiries with a computer engineer who works in an animation filmmaking studio about the procedures involved in creating such films. The textual analysis of the films had to be reduced to only one film due to space constraints.

Background research was conducted into the making of the books, comics and films. An attempt was made to locate the products within the matrices of the cultural situation of the writers/producers, the material practices of the production and marketing of the product, and a very brief mention of the reception of the product. For example, when researching Christian Bible stories for children, I first did a market survey of the types of products available in this category in general bookstores, religious stores, and online stores. Then I narrowed down the search to one text that had a coherent narrative thread running through all the different stories, *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*. I also interviewed a mother and three children who had used the text.

The *Amar Chitra Katha* (*ACK*) comics series also turned out to be too large and unwieldy for a single chapter. With over 454 "singles" (the series also has several bound

issues and special issues) produced, the discussion on the comics had to be restricted to a few select comics. It is unfortunate that due to the requirements of the chapter on religious worldviews, I have had to discuss only the comics with religious overtones. I, thus, leave out from this discussion the numerous *ACK* comics that feature folk tales (largely sourced from *The Panchatantra* and *Jataka Tales*) and the equally large number of titles devoted to historical biographies. Nonetheless, I have surveyed the whole series by borrowing from friends, purchasing two-thirds of the series, and reading the rest in public libraries. There were three book-length research studies available on *ACK* and several journal articles. I emailed ACK Media, the producers of the comics, and also spoke to some of their employees over the phone to clarify different issues.

For the *The Adventures of Tintin* comics series I am indebted to two students who lent me their entire comic book collections for this study. These texts and the scientific literature on the author and the comic series were studied. I also viewed some of the TV productions based on the comic series on YouTube videos. The two novels of E. Nesbit were researched by direct textual analysis and by referring to scientific literature on the author and her novels.

The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book did not have any scientific literature on the text itself, so I used this text to explore the dialogic nature of bedtime story-telling practices and to study about the child's engagement with printed texts through an adult story-teller.

Learning about some of the basic philosophies of the cultures represented in the selected texts was conducted by reading books and encyclopedias on Religion and by discussing with people from different faiths and outlooks about the "lived experiences" of their beliefs. Miscellaneous blogs and internet sites were scanned for articles of interest

and reviews and user comments on the texts were studied. I visited bookshops and spoke with the owners about purchasing habits of parents and their children and general sales trends. Finally, I also spoke with or emailed children who love to read books to enquire about their reading preferences and habits.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIAN BIBLE STORIES FOR CHILDREN

2.1. Presence of Children's Bible Stories in Cultural Spaces

I begin this chapter by considering the phenomenon of the market presence of Bible stories for children, the demand-supply chain, the types of products produced and distributed, and the difference between faith-formation directed Bible stories and informational Bible stories. The discussion also locates the product within the discourses of the users of the product. Children's Bible stories circulate in different formats: as printed texts, as digital products, and as oral texts. I first discuss children's Bible stories as commoditized, marketable products, then I discuss free online digital children's Bible stories, and finally I examine the texts in their oral form.

2.1.1. As Marketable Commodities

Children's Bibles are marketable as commodities. They are published in a multiplicity of formats, targeting people of different age groups, spending-power, and tastes. They appear in several varieties of book formats of children's books according to the thickness of the paper used and the amount of verbal and pictorial content in the text. As *Summeredward.com* explains, "Board books" (for the very young), "Picturebooks" (where the illustrations are more important than the verbal text; meant for children from 3-7), "Easy readers" (for children from 6 to 8 who are reading on their own), and "Picture storybooks" (which have more verbal text and higher vocabulary level compared to Picturebooks). There are also children's Bibles in the "comic book" format (with image-

text combine, speech balloons and captions) are also popular today. These can be in the "graphic novel" format (a book which tells a single long story in image-text combine): for example, *The Lion Graphic Bible*. Japanese graphic novel style "Manga" children's Bibles are also available, for example, *Manga Bible* and *Manga Messiah*. The latter varieties are easily available from big online retail services like *Amazon.com.* I will now discuss the nature and use of such products.

When I set out to collect data for this chapter, I was amazed at the variety of children's "Bibles" available in local bookstores. On closer examination, they all turned out to be collections of Bible stories retold for children. Not a single edition was a real "Bible" in the sense of being a proper translation of the Bible prepared specially for children. The available editions were all in storybook format with paraphrased stories from the source text, the Bible. Hardbound editions with brightly coloured illustrations, printed on good quality paper were the norm. Children's Bible stories by international publishers like Hamlyn, Ladybird Books Ltd, and Lion Hudson plc were available at general fiction and non-fiction bookstores. I surveyed some of the titles of children's Bible stories currently available on the website of the Indian bookstore chain *Crossword* to determine if there were any common features of the products available (see Table 1). According to Zachary S. Teicher "In the last thirty years, both religious and secular publishers have greatly increased the number of children's Bibles they offer due to an increase in demand. … Some of the most popular children's Bibles in American publishing have sold multiple millions of volumes…" (55). As there is a good demand for the product, publishers have offered a variety of children's Bible stories to the

customer. Table 1 illustrates some of the different types of children's Bible stories available in the market.

Table 1

List of Some Children's Bible Stories Available at the Online Store *Crossword.in*

Title of book	**Author/ Illustrator**	**Publisher**	**Price**	**Binding**
Baby's First Bible Stories	Rachel Elliot	Parragon Publications	Rs. 295	Paperback
Bible Heroes	Christin Ditchfield	Golden Books	Rs. 210	Hardbound
My First Book of Bible Stories	Guille Gill	Brown Watson	Rs. 225	Hardbound
Children's Stories from the Bible	Saviour Pirotta	Templar Publishing	Rs. 299	Hardbound
First Bible Stories	John Dillow	Parragon Plus	Rs. 395	Hardbound
My First Bible Stories	Nick Ellsworth	Igloo Books Ltd.	Rs. 450	Hardbound
100 New Testament Bible Stories for Children	Jackie Andrews; Illustrated by Biro Val	Award Publications Ltd.	Rs. 450	Hardbound
Classic Bible Stories for Little Children	Louie Stowell	Usborne Publishing	Rs. 750	Hardbound
My Big Book of Catholic Bible Stories	Heidi Hess Saxton	Thomas Nelson Publishers	Rs. 936	Hardbound
The Illustrated Bible: *Retold and Explained From The Creation to The Resurrection*	Michael Collins	Penguin UK	Rs. 1499	Hardbound

Source: *Crossword.in*

The common factors among the above titles is that they are all international publications, mostly hardbound and illustrated, with relatively high prices ranging from Rs. 210 to Rs. 1499. The books differ in quality of illustration and amount of verbal content depending on the specific target age-group of the child reader. Those that target the very young (3-5 years old) have more illustrations and sparing verbal content as compared to the stories that target older children. Even the type of illustrations varies: the drawings are simple, multi-coloured; the figures have bold outlines and the animals and people look very young and cuddly in the books for younger children. All the titles in Table 1 are *collections* of stories from the Bible and, hence, strictly cannot be termed "Children's Bibles." They are aimed at introducing children to the world of biblical heroes and heroines. The secular market does not aim at faith formation, so the books can be bought by anyone for pure general knowledge about Judeo-Christian mythological stories (though these books do not brand themselves as such). Many of the listed products are a general account of the heroic exploits of famous biblical personages. The common list of stories about famous biblical characters available across editions are: "The Creation Story," "Adam and Eve," "Noah and the Great Flood," "Abraham," "Isaac," "Jacob," "Joseph," "Moses and the Exodus from Egypt," "Joshua," "Gideon," "Samson," "Ruth," "Samuel," "David and Goliath," "Solomon," "Elijah," "Jeremiah," "Daniel in the Lion's Den," "Esther," and "Jonah and the Whale." These deal with the important figures from the Old Testament section of the Bible. From the New Testament section of the Bible we have stories such as "John the Baptist," "The Christmas Story/ The Birth of Jesus," "Stories about Jesus," "Parables of Jesus," "Jesus' Death and Resurrection," "Paul," and "The Revelations." Further, we must note that these stories are all based on

Protestant Christian Bibles; the title *My Big Book of Catholic Bible Stories* highlights that it is different from mainstream products. This particular edition clarifies that its source is the *New Revised Standard Version* Catholic Bible, and that it contains additional stories from the Deuterocanonical Books ("Tobias and Sarah", "The Maccabees Decide to Revolt", "Judas Dedicates the Temple", "The Story of Seven Brothers", "Baruch on Wisdom"). It must be clarified that Christian Protestant Bibles contain 66 books, while the Catholic Bible contains 73 books. The additional 7 books of the latter are called Deuterocanonical Books; these books are Judith, Tobit, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Baruch, and Ecclesiasticus. Martin Luther is credited with dismissing these 7 books from the canon during the Protestant Reformation. I found it rare to find a children's Bible stories edition in bookstores which contained any of these 7 books. Both general and religious bookstores largely stock children's Bible stories based on Protestant Christian Bibles.

Apart from general bookstores stocking children's Bible stories, there are also religious bookstores that stock specifically religious material. The stores cater to the faith-formation needs of Christians. St Pauls is one such well known chain of bookstores in Asia, U.S.A. and Canada. St Pauls is also a leading publisher of titles which include Bibles, books on Spirituality, Prayer, Faith, stories and biographies of Christian Saints, Theology, and Christian Catechism. There are two St Pauls bookstores in Panaji, Goa. They stock their own publications along with several "Better-Yourself-Books" on Human Relations, Marriage and Family, Leadership and Management, and so on. The presence of these stores in the market shows that a definite market exists for such religious material. The customers who browse the books at St Pauls are both men and women.

However, women often bring along their children and allow them to choose their own books. Children are attracted to brightly coloured cover-pages, and the store has plenty of them. For example, *My First Bible*, by Marion Thomas, published by St Pauls Publications Australia, has each letter of the words "My First" in a different colour and "Bible" is in a big, red font on the front-cover. The illustration behind the title is a multicolored illustration of Noah's ark, different animals, and a bright rainbow in the background. The book has 160 pages and is well illustrated. This very same text is also marketed as *My First Communion Bible*, with only the title changed. The book is advertised in this fashion: "This beautifully illustrated Bible is especially for children receiving their first Communion.… It aims to inform children about the faith handed down for thousands of years, and of which they are a part today" (*Stpauls.org.uk*). This brings us to the target audience of children receiving "The Sacrament of First Holy Communion," which I discuss next.

Religious books and articles stores cater to the Sunday school needs of teachers and children. Sunday school is a worldwide Christian practice of ongoing, regular religious education for children. Starting at an early age of five to six years and extending up to adolescence, children are separated into different groups according to their ages. A regular faith-formation curriculum is followed to instruct children about the Christian Faith. Teachers use Bible story-telling, stories of saints, and different activities like art and craft, question and answer, and free-discussions in class. The classes are held on Sundays, sometimes in the church building itself, but usually in adjoining classrooms, if available. The atmosphere is generally relaxed and classroom practices are loosely-structured. The children don't pay fees and the teachers provide voluntary service. This

worldwide practice is also followed by the churches in India. In Goa, most Catholic churches hold regular Sunday "Catechism" classes for children, and the child's attendance is recorded. The key age groups that are most regular in attendance are the 7-8 year olds and the 13-15 year olds. This is because the children prepare for two important religious ceremonies at these ages: The Sacrament of First Holy Communion, and The Sacrament of Confirmation, respectively. These two ceremonies are solemnly celebrated by the church as marking important milestones in the child's religious formation. Several families in Goa host lavish celebrations especially for the Sacrament of First Holy Communion. It is for such celebrations that Children's Bibles are used as gifts for the young children. Guests of the First Holy Communion feast are willing to pay the relatively high prices of the books due to the solemnity of the occasion, and the lavishness of the hosted party. It is a kind of social exchange where the price of the gift must match the generosity of the person hosting the feast. Interestingly, many guests purchase Children's Bibles as appropriate gifts and the recipient child is often dismayed to find a whole stack of them as gifts. After her First Holy Communion party celebration, a young Rochelle complained, "I've received 15 Bibles as gifts!" She exclaimed, "I'm going to start a shop and sell them!"

In my market survey, I have found that there exists a well-defined demand for Children's Bible Stories, even though many editions mistakenly call themselves "Bibles." The market for these books is wider among Protestant Christian denominations than among Roman Catholics. This is because the former have a strong tradition of *Sola scriptura* (which is the Protestant Reformation idea that the Bible alone is the final authority, and that Christian Faith must be based solely on what is found in the Bible).

Because of this emphasis, several Christian denominations conduct family Bible studies within their own homes and children are expected to become thorough with the contents of the Bible. Quoting biblical passages from memory is highly encouraged. *The Open Bible: The New King James Version* is designed as a study Bible and has exhaustive notes and cross-references. It has a section called "How to study the Bible," by Donald E. Hoke which explains the history of the formation of the Bible, how to do a personal Bible study, how to study for knowledge, how to focus on books, chapters, paragraphs, verses, and topics. It explains the importance of Family Bible study, "Nothing is more important in a Christian home than the family altar. At a convenient time when all members of the family are at home, father or mother should lead them in worship of God and in reading His Word" (21). Hoke explains that the Bible study should be preceded and ended with prayer. He also offers several practical tips on how to make the family Bible study interesting by suggesting that the sessions be conducted in a prayerful manner to strengthen the faith of the family members. If a family can afford it, every member of the family must possess a personal copy of the Bible for individual study and reflection. It is here that the demand for children's versions of the Bible inserts itself. Children should be able to handle a book that looks interesting, is age appropriate, and is preferably shorn of some of the violent and unsavory details in the original. Retelling biblical stories in a child-friendly manner became the norm for children's Bible book publishers.

It is important to note that in the past, family Bible reading was used for gaining basic literacy in America. Zachary S. Teicher tells us that from colonial times to early America, youth were educated in households and the church, "Parents, most often

mothers, taught their children how to read using the catechism and the Bible through oral recitation and memorization. Bible study in the home was commonplace among family members" (28-29). Lissa Paul's article "Learning to be literate" also mentions that for many children in late medieval England, learning to read meant learning to be a Christian by reading the Bible, "The first forms of programmed literacy instruction (hornbooks and primers) directly linked reading with religion…" (130). Here we can note that Bible reading was formerly used for both literacy and faith-formation.

2.1.2. As Free Online Resources

Online resources for downloadable children's Bible stories are common due to the popularity of gadgets like *iPads* and *Kindle.* Many texts are available in both hardcopy as well as electronic book (eBook) formats. Most eBooks have to be purchased. However, some sites offer free viewing of old children's Bible editions and Bible stories that no longer have copyright restrictions. A children's Bible is available either as a free download or for reading online from the website *Biblesnet.com*. This edition, *The Children's Bible,* by Henry A. Sherman and Charles Foster Kent has a few beautiful paintings that illustrate some stories. For example, "Hagar and Ishmael in the Wilderness", "Rebekah Comes to Isaac" and "Saul and David" painted by W. L. Taylor. The text is in simple English and features stories from both the Old and the New Testament. The website *Biblesnet.com* also offers several children's Bible stories, and religious stories for free online viewing:

- *A Book for Boys and Girls* by John Bunyan
- *A Child's Story of the Bible* by Mary A. Lathbury

- *Bible in Its Making* by Mildred Duff & Noel Hope
- *Bibles Stories & Classics*
- *Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan*
- *The Life of Jesus Christ for the Young* by Richard Newton
- *The Wonder Book of Bible Stories*
- *The Years of One's Youth eight lessons* by Jeff Smith
- *Wee Ones Bible Stories*
- *Wonder Book of Bible Stories*

Biblestoryguy.com has a collection of illustrated Bible stories for kids available for free online viewing. This website's stories focus on God's love: "If you take all the stories in the Bible and put them all together, and then you ask me what they are all about, this is what I will tell you... Jesus loves you!" There are also Sunday school resources available on the internet which offer beautifully illustrated Bible Stories for free non-commercial use. The line drawings can be printed out and used as coloring pages for young children to reinforce the storytelling. The website *dltk-bible.com* has a big list of children's Bible stories. They are aimed at faith-formation and use everyday language, "One day three visitors came to Abraham's house. He hurried to meet them. "May I get you something to eat and drink?" Abraham asked. "Please come in and join us, and have a rest on the couch."The visitors agreed, so Abraham brought them some fresh bread, milk, and hamburgers" (Guenther). I found the introduction of the concept of hamburgers in an ancient story an interesting way to relate to modern children. Leanne Guenther, mother of two young girls and the creator of the website *Dltk-*

bible.com, says that she offers free art and crafts ideas, coloring pages and activity worksheets to share with Sunday schools.

2.1.3. As Oral Texts

The presence of children's Bible stories in oral format exists in homes and schools. These oral texts are fluid and changeable. The storytellers have the license to be co-creators of the texts. Even while sticking to the plot outlines of the Bible stories, the storyteller can interpret the stories in whatever way he/she pleases. The power of what to dwell on, what to omit, what to elaborate on and what to change all lies in the hands of the storyteller. I will discuss this angle in greater detail later on.

We have just seen how there are several cultural spaces that children's Bible stories inhabit. I will now survey four printed and commoditized "Children's Bible Stories" texts before narrowing down my discussion to one of the texts for textual analysis.

2.2. Survey of Four Printed Children's Bible Stories Texts

I surveyed the following four editions before selecting *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* for analysis: *The Children's Bible, The Bible for Children, International Children's Bible* and *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories.*

2.2. 1.*The Children's Bible*

The Children's Bible, by David Christie-Murray, illustrated by Andrew Wheatcroft, and published by Hamlyn, U.K. This 1993 edition is an impressively big 26.8 x 20.4 cm hardbound book printed on high quality paper. It has vivid full-page

illustrations at regular intervals, and some illustrations even extend over two facing pages, creating a life-like prominence to the characters in focus. The artwork is in the realistic style, and the ethnic features of the characters appear to be modeled on real people. A Christian lady says she bought this book "because of the beautiful illustrations," even though it was way too expensive at that time, and that she "invested in it" because it was the first children's Bible she was buying for her children. However, on examination, I found that the copy was not a well-worn book, and I suspected that it had remained safely on a bookshelf for many years. She corroborated that her children had probably only flipped through the pictures, and had never really read the 320-pages book. The current price of the book is Rs.1300.

2.2. 2. *The Bible for Children*

The Bible for Children, illustrated by Jose Perez Montero, was published by The Bible Society of India for the Society of St. Paul. The translation is simple and easy for a child of nine years to read by him/herself. The print is large and there are over two hundred illustrations. The paper on which it is printed is of a good quality. There is no date of publication on the edition I have examined. The current price of the book available on *Amazon.in* is Rs. 250. Booksellers say that this edition is an extremely fast-moving product. This is because the product matches the quality of international publications, and with its detailed content, it is clearly value-for-money to the middle-class customer (unlike most international publications priced in the range of Rs.200 to 250 which either consist of elementary board-book Bible stories or are collections of a very few Bible stories).

This volume gives an interesting introduction to the Bible, "The bible [sic] is a very special book. These books were written by many different people. They lived in different places at different times" (v). The introduction goes on to explain that the Bible contains different kinds of literature, and has been translated from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek into modern languages. The aim of the books was to help "people to understand God and his love for them" (v). The first part of the Bible is called the Old Testament. After Jesus' life on earth, his followers "wrote about why he came to live on earth…what he taught…how he lived…how he died and rose again…" (v), and these writings form the second part of the Bible called the New Testament.

The stories are arranged in a manner that closely resembles the original order of books in the Bible. The titles and their subheadings link the stories in an interpretative fashion, creating a thread of chronological events along with their spiritual significance. For example, the Old Testament stories have titles like "The beginning," "How things went wrong," "Punishment and mercy." The individual stories are grouped under the following main headings:

OLD TESTAMENT

- This is God's world
- The nation of Israel begins
- The great escape
- People of Courage
- Great kings and brave prophets
- Far from home

NEW TESTAMENT

- Born to be King
- How Jesus lived
- Stories told by Jesus
- Jesus the teacher
- The road to the cross
- How Jesus died
- The victory of Jesus
- The Good News spreads

The Bible for Children would have been a good text to study in detail as the stories are narrated along with their spiritual significance. One twenty-two year old reader said that he had read this Bible several times when he was young, and still remembers the stories and their illustrations clearly, many years after he had read them. Another young girl of nineteen says that this is the only children's Bible that she has read from start to finish, "The book was full of well done illustrations that made it appealing to me as a child. There is one image in the story of Daniel, of a table of food and in particular a leg of lamb that has remained with me for at least 10 years. The language used in the book is simple and easy to understand." I found it interesting that the first thing she remembered about the book was a vivid illustration of food.

2.2. 3. *International Children's Bible*

I found one "real" children's Bible published by Tommy Nelson Inc.: *International Children's Bible.* It is available on *Amazon.com* for $28.8 plus shipping

charges. The preface of the book clarifies that it is "not a storybook or a paraphrased Bible… It is the first translation of the Holy Scriptures prepared specifically for children. Until now children have had to learn God's truths either from Bible storybooks or adult-language Bibles." This volume uses clear and simple language and the choice of vocabulary is comprehensible at third grade school level. Modern connotations of words are accounted for: they avoid using biblical phrases like "God drove out…" (This, in the modern context, could make a child think God was driving a car). The chapters and verse numbering is the same as the edition meant for adults, the *New Century Version*. It also has coloured maps, a dictionary and an index of biblical words and concepts. The book is organized into different sections; these sections are the closest parallel I have found in juvenile biblical literature to the original division of books in editions of the Bible used by adults (see Table 2).

Table 2

The Sections of the Collected Books in *International Children's Bible, The New Community Bible* and *The New Jerusalem Bible.*

International Children's Bible	***The New Community Bible***	***The New Jerusalem Bible***
OLD TESTAMENT • The Beginning Books • Books of History • Books of Poetry • Books of the Prophets	OLD TESTAMENT • The Pentateuch • The Historical Books • The Wisdom Books • The Prophetic Books	OLD TESTAMENT • The Pentateuch • The Historical Books • The Wisdom Books • The Prophets

NEW TESTAMENT	NEW TESTAMENT	NEW TESTAMENT
• The Life of Jesus Christ • Letters of Paul • Letters to Help Christians	• The Gospels • Pauline and Other Letters • The Catholic Letters	• The Synoptic Gospels; Gospel and Letters of John; Acts of the Apostles • Letters of Paul • Letters to all Christians • The Revelation to John

Source: *International Children's Bible, The New Community Bible* and *The New Jerusalem Bible.*

2.2. 4.*The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*

The Children's Bible in 365 Stories is a collection of 365 illustrated stories from the Bible retold by Mary Batchelor and illustrated by John Haysom. *Worldcat.org*, the large online library catalogue, succinctly calls it "an illustrated collection of 365 stories retold from the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation." The print format book is marketed as a non-fiction book for a "Juvenile audience." The book is a selection of famous stories from the Bible which are retold with the imaginative verve of a serial. The title reveals that the stories can be "told" one story at a time over a whole year. The implied oral story-telling adds a new dimension to the "text." It involves more than one person in the reception and interpretation of the text. The meaning of the text varies according to its various uses. For example, if it is used by a Sunday school teacher for an audience of young children with ages ranging from 4 to 7, the teacher would add to the "text" by

adding his/her own interpretation to the printed word. In contrast, the same text could be handled by a much older child, say of 10 to 12 years of age, all by him/herself, curled up in the corner of a room, engrossed in the narrative. This text would then be read at long stretches, and would function the way a novel does: telling one story straight through. Batchelor's text lends itself to such a usage by connecting the different Bible stories with consummate artistry. Her authorial voice draws a thread through the separate stories and strings them together like beads on a necklace. This is the most praiseworthy part of her literary skill because the original texts from the Bible (on which these stories are based) are written by dissimilar writers, in different time periods and with diverse literary styles.

Each of the 365 stories—one for every day in the year—is spread over one or two pages and is well illustrated by John Haysom. As with all illustrated children's stories, the pictures add an important dimension to the narrative. John Haysom is an established illustrator of children's books and has been published by prestigious publishing houses: *The Story of Easter,* published by Concordia Publishing House, *The Story Of Christmas*, published by Abingdon Press, and *The First Easter,* published by Lion Hudson plc. He has illustrated two books along with the author Mary Batchelor: *The Jesus Story*, published by Lion Children's Books, and *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories,* published by Lion Hudson plc. According to the fine art reproduction company*, Formatrix.co.uk,* "Having trained at Winchester and Harrow schools of art, John Haysom began his career as an illustrator working in television, publishing and advertising here in the UK and internationally. John's Children's Bible has sold over two and a half million copies worldwide." The popularity of this edition is due to the charming text-illustration narrative, the wide distribution networks through which it is sold, and the pricing of the

product vis-à-vis the content available in the book. I selected this book for analysis because of the clear "worldview orientation" of the authorial narrative. The discussion considers the different worldview elements that are explicit in the stories contained in the text: The creation of the world and the personality of the Creator; the nature of Man and the dimension of his relationship with his Creator; and the problem of evil and undeserved suffering.

2.3. Textual Analysis of *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*: Worldview Elements

The Children's Bible in 365 Stories by Mary Batchelor is a children's story book that interprets the theological element of the famous stories of the Bible. The Bible is a compilation of writings of many different people over hundreds of years. It is in two parts: The Old Testament (originally written in Hebrew) and the New Testament (first written in Greek). Many modern translations of the Bible are available in several languages of the world. Of the numerous stories available in the Bible, Mary Batchelor has picked out the 'most exciting' and 'the best-loved' stories of the Bible and has squeezed them into this volume. She manages to maintain continuity in the story line and the volume reads like a whole. She says, "Although the Bible may seem to be a puzzling mixture of different kinds of writing, the separate parts fit together, like pieces in a jig-saw, to make one whole picture"(4).

Mary Batchelor has deliberately tried to convey a definite "Worldview" in the book. She tries to make clear the vision she has culled from reading the Bible, "The Bible shows us what God is like, and what we are really like too. Because God never changes and human nature stays the same, the Bible is always up-to-date. It answers the sort of

questions which people are always asking: 'What is God like?' 'Why is there unhappiness and evil and death in our world?' 'What is the purpose of living?' and 'Does it matter how I behave?'" (Batchelor 4). This passage reveals Batchelor's personal worldview orientation which is based on the organized worldview shared by Christians. It is important that we keep in mind that this is *her* interpretation of the Christian faith, and therefore need not have a one-to-one correspondence with the "official version" held by any one particular Church organization. *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* is Batchelor's interpretation of the Bible and is a retelling of parts of the sacred texts. She has selected from, and remodeled the original texts and has located her narration in simple, modern language.

2.3.1. Theology, Axiology, Cosmology and Anthropology

Theology is one of the elements of a worldview. Theology is "an intellectual discipline," "an ordered body of knowledge about God" (Hill 1011). It deals with explanations about the existence and nature of God. Theology is a rational cognitive act, exercised under the light of faith; it is "faith seeking understanding" (Hill 1013). *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* deals with the religious experience of several groups of historical people mentioned in the Bible and highlights the "depth dimension to ordinary human experience" (Hill 1012). Batchelor's overall narrative, as well as her specific authorial comments, seeks to convey an idea of God that explains His nature, His purposes, and His way of dealing with human beings. The title page of The Old Testament section, tells us that the word "Testament" refers to God's agreement or covenant with Abraham and his family. This family became "God's special people," and God taught them "all about himself." The reader is introduced to the concept of "God" in

the context of an intelligible human relationship. The text continues to tell us about God by using the pronoun "He", "He promised to care for them and they agreed to keep his laws. They often failed, but God stayed true to his covenant" (9). Here we get our first insight into the nature of "God" whom Batchelor will be talking about: God promises to look after the special people with whom he is making a covenant. Story no. 65 "The Agreement" tells us that God had made a covenant with Abraham and had promised that he would have many descendants. These descendants became the nation of Israel. God promises to take care of the whole Israelite community and to make them his special people. On their part, they were to promise to obey all God's laws and commandments. "There was no doubt at all that God would keep to his side of the covenant. But would the people of Israel keep to theirs?" asks Batchelor (81). The different episodes in the narrative give us several example of how the Israelites break this covenant and disobey God. So God gives them instructions of how to put things right with Him: An offender was to ask for forgiveness and to make a sacrificial offering to show "how truly sorry he was for what he had done" (84). The author clarifies that the sacrificial offering was not the thing that made God forgive the sinner, "God looked right into the person's heart. When he was really sorry, God forgave him" (84).

In story no. 61, "God's Mountain," Batchelor deals with the nature of God. She tells us that the Israelites had learned that God was good at taking care of them, and now they begin to realize that "God is not a human being with faults and failings. He is utterly good, with nothing bad in him" (76). They begin to realize that God is holy, separate or different from them. In response to this nature of God, "His people …must love and obey him by doing what is right" (76). This brings us to the worldview element of axiology.

We already know that axiology deals with notions of value, ethics, good and bad, right and wrong. Batchelor links the goodness of God with the reason why humans should do what is right. Stories no.62 and 63 deal with the Ten Commandments, the primordial rules of right living. These ten laws lay down the framework for a theory of right living, and set down clearly what is right and what is wrong.

Story no. 62 deal with the laws about loving God. Batchelor explains that because God created Man, "he knows best what will make us happy" (77). These laws which God gave to His people were for their well-being and prosperity. She tells us that respect and care for parents is part of our duty to God because God has authorized parents to be in charge of their families. Her comment at the end of this story links these first five commandments to Jesus (who appears in the second half of the volume), "Jesus summed up all these commandments in the single commandment to love God with all our heart. We love God when we obey him" (77).

Story no. 63 deals with the laws concerning loving other human beings. "To love others means to treat them as we would like them to treat us, and do nothing that would harm them" (78). These next five laws prohibit murder, adultery, stealing, lying on oath, and coveting other's spouses or the belongings of others. In the next story no.64, "God Cares," the author mentions some minor rules and regulations that God gave to the people. She tells us that God showed his people by these laws that he cared for their safety, that he cared about the weak who were "not strong enough to fight for their rights," and that he cared for animals too. The last paragraph of the story shows us that all throughout this narrative the author is trying to draw attention to her understanding of the nature of God, "God's laws taught the people what God is like. They helped people to

understand that God is just and good and that he cares about every detail of life. Even the least important people matter to him and ordinary everyday happenings are his concern" (64). The story of Hagar, the pregnant slave girl who ran away from her mistress' harsh treatment, emphasizes that God also loves the marginalized. God speaks to her and tells her that He has seen her plight. He tells her that He had heard her tears and cries. He promises to look after her and her unborn son, Ishmael. "Hagar thought it wonderful that God should see and help her, when she was just a poor slave-girl whom nobody thought important. She called him 'The God who sees'" (26).

Cosmology and anthropology are other elements of a worldview. Cosmology deals with "beliefs about the origins and nature of the universe, life, and especially Man." Anthropology deals with "beliefs about the nature and purpose of Man in general and, oneself in particular" (Funk). Story no.1 "God Makes the World" and story no.2 "God Makes People" are grouped as "The Story of Creation." The two stories are about the origin of the world and the origin of people. The titles categorically assert that God is the origin of the world and that He created Man. The stories give us an account of how God created "order and beauty" out of darkness and desolation. We are told that God created light, the oceans and land, vegetation on the earth; He created the sun, moon and stars, the fish in the ocean and the animals on land. God was pleased with all He had made. Story no.2 tells us that "the most wonderful part" of creation was still to be made. The narrative here is significant, "'Now I will make human beings,' God said. 'They will have minds to think and know and love me, and I will put them in charge of this world to keep it in order'" (12). The origin and purpose of Man is laid out: Man is created by God to know and love God, and to manage the world. The narrative continues with how God

created Adam, the first human being, and then created woman because Adam was lonely, "So God made the woman, Eve, to be his wife, so that they could plan and talk and laugh and love together" (12). Batchelor highlights that Adam and Eve were to enjoy the whole of creation and were to beget children to help them in their work. She notes, "But although they were in charge of the world, they must always obey God. He loved them and knew what was best for them. They would be happy as long as they did as he told them" (12). The author continues the tale with the episode of Adam and Eve's act of disobedience to God's directive not to eat the fruit of a certain tree. She tells us that "They had disobeyed the wise and loving God who was their Creator and their Friend," and that they felt ashamed of themselves "because they had disobeyed him" (13). The repetition of the word "disobeyed" stresses the point that they are now no longer happy because they are *not* doing as they were told, in contrast to how they were happy when they were obeying God. In the next story, "Paradise Lost," Batchelor brings out the same point again, "God spoke to each of them in turn. He explained that by disobeying him they had spoiled his lovely world;" the earth becomes difficult to work on, weeds and thorns spring up making work "hard and wearisome" (14). This theme of disobedience of God's laws and directives as being the cause of human misadventures and unhappiness recurs throughout the collection of stories. According to Batchelor's personal worldview, this seems to be the root cause of human misery.

Along with obedience to God, Batchelor repeatedly highlights the importance of complete trust in God. Many stories illustrate the folly of not trusting God, and the prosperity and success that the Israelites achieve when they do trust and obey God. God gives them instructions about what he expects of them and how they should act in certain

situations. These instructions are given to special people like prophets and judges who serve as conduits to inform the general populace about God's instructions. Moses is one such prophet who consults God on a regular basis asking Him where to find water and food as the Israelite community journeys through the desert. When the group reaches Mount Sinai, Moses climbs the mountain to speak with God. "'Tell the Israelites,' God said, 'that I have looked after them just like a mother bird looking after her chicks. I will go on caring for them, but they, for their part, must obey me" (76). The paradigm offered in this volume is that the secret of right living is a total trust and reliance on the goodness of God. The stories illustrate that Faith requires courage.

Faith, it appears, is the courage to trust God. All too often, the odds are terribly against the Israelites, and the advice they receive from God seems utterly illogical. After Moses' death, Joshua takes over the leadership of the nation. He crosses over the River Jordan with the huge company of Israelites into the "Promised Land," Canaan. Here they are faced with the huge walls of the city of Jericho which stands at the entrance of Canaan. Joshua receives instructions to send a procession of seven priests followed by the Israelite soldiers marching around the wall for seven days. The priests were to carry the holy chest containing the sacred Ten Commandments as a sign that God was with them. The priests were also to keep blowing trumpets as they marched round the city. On the seventh day they were to march around seven times and on the seventh round the priests were to blow the trumpets loudly and the soldiers were to shout out loud. The Israelites obediently followed these instructions and on the seventh day when they all shouted loudly, to their surprise, "the walls of Jericho trembled and shook and crashed to the ground." Excitedly they swoop down on the city and capture it easily. The author

comments, “Jericho was captured because Joshua …trusted God and did not rely on his own cleverness or strength” (97). This theme of relying on God’s wisdom over human wisdom is repeated in several stories throughout the book. For example, there is the story of the puny, unarmed boy David defeating the well-armed giant Goliath with a mere sling and a stone; and the story of Gideon and just three hundred soldiers against a huge Midianite army. In Gideon’s story, story no.92, Gideon is feeling afraid of facing the vast army. “Gideon had trusted and obeyed God up to now, but his heart sank at the thought of attacking the vast enemy camp with so few men” (109). However, God encourages him and he pulls himself together and courageously leads his men forward. “‘Get up! he shouted, this very night God is going to give us victory!”(109).The next story tells us how Gideon’s band of soldiers are victorious, “God had given a mighty victory to Gideon and his three hundred men” (111). When the Israelites trust and obey God they win battles, conquer new territories, and have civil peace.

2.3.2. Concept of Why There is Evil and Suffering in the World

We read about the problem of evil in the world from two early stories in *The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories*. Stories no.5 and 6, “The Two Brothers” and “The First Murder,” are about Cain and Abel, two sons born to the first human beings on earth, Adam and Eve. Cain became a farmer and Abel became a shepherd. One day, both brothers offered gifts to God. The story’s text tells us, “God looked at the fine offerings they had brought, and then he looked at the two brothers themselves. He saw the kind of people they were. He knew that Abel loved and trusted him, so he accepted Abel and his gift. But God refused Cain’s present. He could not accept Cain because he was cold and proud and self-willed” (15). Batchelor skillfully interprets the reasons for God’s rejection

of Cain's offering. She suggests that they were not the same type (implying a good-bad binary) and that Abel had a different attitude to God from what Cain had. Cain's proud, unloving attitude does not please God, while Abel's love and trust pleases God. She tells us that Abel was good and that "God was pleased with him" (15). "Cain was furiously jealous of his brother and the sight of Abel's happy face only made him angrier," explains the author (16). Cain asks his brother to accompany him on a walk through the fields. The author narrates that as they walked through the peaceful countryside, "Cain's anger burned more and more fiercely against the brother who had done him no wrong" (16). The semantic markers are clear: Abel is not to be blamed for Cain's hatred and jealousy. Cain does not control his violent feelings and acting on his rage, he murders Abel out in the fields. We are told that God had warned Cain earlier on that he must fight against his angry feelings, "'Why are you so angry, Cain?' he asked. 'If you had done right, you would be happy now. I should have accepted your present. But evil is like a wild animal. It is crouching close, waiting to spring at you and overpower you. You must fight against it"(15). Batchelor highlights that uncontrolled negative feelings are a personification of "Evil"; untamed, they function like wild animals. Feleke and De Tavernier tell us that the biblical account of Cain's murderous act "describes the origin, development, and consequences of human violence" (475). The two stories discussed above suggest that untamed violent feelings are causal factors of evil in the world.

There are two distinct parts to the problem of evil as identified in Batchelor's authorial comment at the end of story no. 6, "So Cain went away from his farm and from his home. Worse still, he went away from God. He had been too proud to listen to God's warning. He had chosen to hate Abel and to murder him instead of loving his brother and

being happy with him" (17). She suggests that Cain's choice of breaking away from God is one half of the problem, the second half being his choice of hatred rather than love with regard to his brother. Cain's feelings of deep hatred and jealousy of his brother had caused him to first turn his back on God, and then to hurt his brother. Instead of accepting correction from God gracefully, "Cain did not want to listen to God" (15). Story no.7 "Noah Starts Building," connects with story no. 6 with the following introductory paragraph, "Cain's murder of his brother Abel was only a beginning of wickedness in the world. Although people began to invent all kinds of lovely and useful things, they also found more and more ways to disobey God and hurt one another" (17). Herein, Batchelor again identifies the two dimensions to the problem of evil: disobedience to God and hurting other human beings. This insight can be classified as a worldview element called *axiology*. Batchelor suggests that turning away from God's directives is part of the problem of evil. She narrates, "God knew that nothing he could do would bring people back to loving him and being good. They would not even listen to him!" (17). This is a recurring theme throughout the volume: God wants people to love Him with their hearts, and to listen to Him and heed His advice.

In the introduction on the inside front cover to the Indian Bible comic version, "Cain and Abel" scripted by Michael Karimattam, the author interprets the situation differently. He says that competition between Cain and his brother Abel led to violence and murder. He points out that the spirit of competition pervades all areas of life: from the classroom to the world superpowers who try to dominate the world. "In this struggle, our own fellow men are often pushed aside, oppressed and even destroyed," he opines. Karimattam says that while Adam sinned by rejecting God in his heart, "Cain's sin was

the acting out of that rejection. So, ultimately sin is rejection of God." And that rejection of God is "the root cause of evil in the world," he concludes (*Bible Comics -1*). Karimattam ends the comic by explaining that Cain is not just some primordial man, but is "the symbol of the man who hates and kills his brother" that "lives on in history" (32). Both Batchelor and Karimattam are retelling the same biblical story, but each brings out a different emphasis from the other. There is a strong social justice thread that weaves through Karimattam's entire *Bible Comics* series.

Mary Batchelor deals with the problem of suffering in three connected stories that deal with "The Story of Job": "Troubles for Job" no.227, "Cheering Job Up?" no.228, and "God talks to Job" no.229. I was keen to see how she would structure her narrative and bring out the essence of the original biblical "The Book of Job." I learnt that the original biblical text "deals with one of the thorniest questions about the human condition: the problem of suffering. People through the centuries…have had questions to ask about this: first of all, why is there suffering in the world if a good God manages it? secondly, how come that so often the innocent suffer while the wicked prosper?" (*The New Community Bible* 822). Batchelor captures the basics of the problem-of-suffering "argument" in her retelling of this famous book from the Bible. She tells us that Job was a very rich man who loved God. He was not selfish and gave help to anyone in trouble or need. He was honest and kind and loved God with all his heart. Batchelor tells us that Satan was God's enemy and the source of all evil. Satan asks God if he may put Job to the test. "'Job only loves you for what he can get out of you,' Satan told God. 'If things went wrong for him, he would soon change his tune.'" (Batchelor 260). After misfortunes hit him, Job does not blame God. When his wife complains bitterly, that it is all God's

fault, Job tells her that they were happy with God when he gave them good times so now they should bear patiently the troubles that he has sent them.

Three of Job's best friends came to visit him and when they saw him sitting by the rubbish dump in rags, covered in sores, they were horrified at the extent of his downfall. They all offer their own interpretation of his predicament. They tell Job that God must be punishing him for his secret sins since God would not make a good man suffer. They tell him to ask God for forgiveness. But Job has a clear conscience and he sees no reason to ask God for forgiveness for sins he had never committed. However, he questions God for His "unfairness", and God answers him. It must be mentioned that in Hebrew thought there was no clear notion of an afterlife….Hence, if god was good and just, any reward for good or punishment for evil had to happen here below" (*The New Community Bible* 822).

God's answer is in the form of counter questions. God questions Job where he was when God made the world and set the limits of the sea. God asks Job if he is able to make the rain fall, give life to plants and animals, teach the birds to fly, or provide food for the wild beasts. God first demands an answer from Job to these questions. "Job had nothing to say. He felt very ashamed.... He had expected to understand everything God did. God did not explain to Job the reason for his troubles. But he made Job realize that he could safely trust such a great and wise God to do what was right.... Job admitted, 'I realize how great and wonderful you are. I am bitterly ashamed that I was so full of myself and my own importance.'"(Batchelor 262). The questions God asks him show Job the vastness of God's power and omnipotence. They reveal the limits of man's ability to comprehend the riddle of life and the mystery of evil and suffering. Batchelor stresses the

importance of trusting the wisdom of God to do what was right, even when it seems to make no sense. This is her analysis of the essence of Faith. T.W. Tilley says that some theologians, like A. Plantinga, have given up trying to develop explanations for why God permits evil in the world, "and have instead constructed defenses of the compatibility of believing both in the existence of God and in the reality of worldly evil.…" Evil still remains a mystery, but "it is not irrational to believe that God has the answers" (362). Batchelor tells us that God was pleased with Job's humility and assertion of faith in Him, even in the face of such terrible losses and suffering. Batchelor concludes the narrative by telling us that God restored all the wealth Job had lost, gave him more children (seven sons and three daughters to make up for the children who had been killed in a disaster earlier in the story), and also gave him a long life. She "resolves" the problem-tension by highlighting that order has been restored because of Job's profession of faith in God. Her narrative is dramatic: starting with a situation of prosperity and calm, moving to a problem situation, and then the final restoration of good fortune.

The Worldview dimension revealed in this story is cosmological and metaphysical; it illustrates the belief that the universe originated because God created it. The nature of the universe and all life and creation has been determined by God, so ultimate reality is that God is in control of everything that happens to us. In The 'Story of Job,' Batchelor lays the cause of Evil at the door of Satan, the evil one. She implies that Satan is jealous of Job's good fortune and the fact that God is pleased with him. She says, "God noticed Job's goodness and kindness and was pleased. But someone else was watching Job. It was Satan, God's enemy and the source of all evil" (260). *But someone else was watching* implies envy. She shows him trying to spoil this relationship of trust

that Job and God share. Satan needles God, "If things went wrong for him, he would soon change his tune" (260). So Satan deliberately causes suffering for Job. However, he has to take God's *permission* to do so. God *allows* Satan to beset Job with suffering. We see that it is not God who causes suffering but the jealous Satan who wants to turn good people away from their faith in God. Mary Batchelor highlights that the right way to respond to evil is to trust in the goodness of God. God is wise and God works everything for the good of those who trust in Him. God rewards Job but admonishes his friends for their wrong interpretation of God's ways. She also highlights the greatness of God and the impudence of us questioning God. She phrases it in a modern way, "I am bitterly ashamed that I was so full of myself and my own importance". These words come from a writer who lived in a century that can be called "The Century of The Self." In the last century, there was a huge shift from focusing on God to focusing on Human beings as the centre of all meaning. This authorial comment could be a dig at modern man's preoccupation with his own importance.

Besides "The Book of Job," the problem of undeserved suffering is tackled right in the first book of the Bible, "The Book of Genesis," chapters 37-46 which deals with the story of Joseph. Here we find a more down-to-earth story about the problem of Evil and Divine Justice. Here, Evil is not directly caused by an otherworldly being but by ordinary mortals who choose to do wrong. The worldview conveyed in this story is one in which God is in control of the events in the lives of everyone. God allows bad things to happen to good people but He doesn't allow the people who trust Him to get overwhelmed by the disasters. He works out His plan for the preservation of mankind even through the mistakes of people. Joseph seems to have alternating good times and

bad times. His fortunes change drastically within the progress of a single day: on one day he is the most favored son of the family; the next day he is sold as a slave; he proves to be a trusted slave to Potiphar but in a day he is thrown into prison. From a hard life in prison he is raised to the position of Governor of Egypt. The narration emphasizes how a person who trusts in God is in safe hands. With the curious logic of a Master-Planner, God turns every adversity into an advantage. The Israelites become an example to people of other nations of how good it is to be protected by God. This religious story of Joseph is one of the foundational texts in the faith education of Jews and Christians. It helps to impart a certain view of the world: of the importance of trusting God and right living.

In *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* the account of the history of the Israelite people progresses through the stories of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Esau and Jacob. Stories nos. 31 to 43 tells us the interesting "Story of Joseph." Joseph was the son of Jacob. Jacob, grandson of Abraham, had tricked his older twin, Esau, and had claimed the rights that belong to the first-born. Fleeing his furious brother, Jacob goes to live with his mother's brother, Laban, till Esau's anger should cool down. He falls in love with Laban's younger daughter, Rachel. He works without wages for seven years in order to gain her as his wife. However, Laban tricks Jacob into marrying the older sister, Leah, before giving him Rachel. Leah bore many children for Jacob, but Rachel was childless for a long time. Finally, Joseph was born to her, and later Rachel died giving birth to a second son, Benjamin. Story no. 31, 'Joseph the Boy', tells us that Jacob favoured Joseph and loved him more than Leah's sons. He openly showered his love on Joseph and gave him a special multi-coloured coat with long sleeves. Consequently, his older half-brothers hated him. To make matters worse, Joseph told Jacob tales about his brothers'

misdemeanours. They hated him so much that they could not say a civil word to him. Story no. 32, "Dreams!" tells us about the strange dreams Joseph had. He dreamed that the brothers were all out in the harvest field, tying up the sheaves of corn. Suddenly the sheaf Joseph was tying stood up straight and his brothers' sheaves bowed down to his. Joseph had another dream in which the sun and moon and eleven stars were all bowing down to him. When Joseph told his family about his dream, his eleven brothers guessed the import of his dream. Even Jacob was annoyed with the implication that he and his wife (the sun and the moon) were bowing to their son. They all scolded Joseph for his presumptuousness. Batchelor inserts her comment, "Could it be God's way of telling him that he had chosen Joseph to be someone very special in the family?" (44). This comment acts as an interpretation to a young reader and inserts the concept of Joseph being a person specially chosen by God for some purpose. The story continues with the jealous brothers plotting to murder Joseph when they get him alone, and then selling him off for twenty silver pieces to some Midianite traders who were on their way to Egypt with their caravans loaded with spices. Joseph's brothers report to their father that some wild beast had killed him. The author comments, "All this while, Joseph, securely roped, was being pushed and dragged along the road to Egypt. But God was still with him" (46).

Stories nos.35 to 37 tell us about Joseph's fate in Egypt. Potiphar, an important officer of the Egyptian king, bought Joseph. Joseph proves to be a good servant and Potiphar grows to trust him with his household affairs. The author writes, "Joseph worked well. He was able to plan and organize work for himself, as well as obeying orders. He was honest and did not grumble or shirk his duties…God helped Joseph to do his work well and made him successful" (47). Again we have the semantic indicator of

God's hand in Joseph's story. Pg 48 opens with a full page illustration of Joseph chained at the neck, hands and knees sitting despondently on the floor of a dreary prison. "Thrown into Prison!" is the title of the story. We learn that Potiphar's wife tried to convince Joseph "to make love to her." Joseph refuses. Furious with his rejection she lies to her husband and falsely accuses Joseph of "wrongdoing". The original biblical version tells us that she accuses him of attempted rape. This detail is covered with the word "wrongdoing" in this children's version. The story ends with the reminder, "But God was with Joseph, even in the dark prison. He had not forgotten him, or the great plan he had for Joseph's future" (49).

The interesting thing about this story is that while in prison, the darkest of places, Joseph meets the Egyptian Pharaoh's baker and wine-steward. This prison was the one where Pharaoh's prisoners were kept and it is here that Joseph makes an important 'connection'. When the baker and wine-steward have strange dreams, Joseph interprets them. He tells the baker that he will be put to death in three days time and the wine-steward will be restored to royal service in three days. This prophecy comes true. Two years later, when the Pharaoh himself is troubled by strange dreams, the wine-steward remembers that there was a man in jail, Joseph, who could interpret dreams. Joseph is called and he helps the Pharaoh to see that his dreams of seven fat cows eaten by seven thin cows are a prophecy indicating seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. "God is telling you what is going to happen, so that you can be prepared," says Joseph. Joseph suggests that during the seven years of plenty sufficient grain should be stored in huge granaries to tide them through the famine. Pharaoh is so impressed with this revelation that he appoints Joseph as his Governor to overseer this mammoth task.

Overnight Joseph's fortunes change. He becomes rich, powerful and important. When the famine sets in, there is enough food for all of Egypt. The neighboring countries come to them to buy food. Joseph's brothers from Canaan come to buy grain. They do not recognize their brother and he reveals his true identity only on their second trip to Egypt. He forgives them and tells them to migrate to Egypt with their whole clan to survive the bleak famine. The brother they had treated so badly many years ago was the great governor of Egypt! Joseph's dream had come true: here was his entire clan at his feet. The whole chronicle of Joseph's past undeserved suffering is brought into perspective when Joseph tells his brothers, "Don't blame yourself for what you did…God had a plan when he brought me here. I have been able to save many lives" (Batchelor 56).

2.4. Reader-Response to *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*

The relevance of the above story may seem obvious to an adult reader or researcher, but to a child reader the significance of a faith-narrative may not be obvious. This is because unlike an adult, the child has less life-experience to bank on; these life-experiences act as a framework where he/she can insert the current narrative to engage meaningfully with the text. The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky proposed a socio-cultural theory in which he considered learning as "an apprenticeship in which children advance when they collaborate with others who are more skilled" or more knowledgeable about a certain domain of knowledge (Kail 183). The child's understanding of things develops first in a social setting where he is initiated into a new skill or theoretical explanation by someone who knows more than he does about the field. "Through guided participation, children learn from others how to connect new experiences and new skills with what they already know" (Kail 183). Without the active participation of a more

mature guide, can the above story really explain the reasons for the existence of evil and suffering in the world to an inexperienced juvenile reader? The philosophical significance of Joseph's story is in how individual wrong choices have a chain effect: One person chooses a wrong action and another person suffers; the second person visits his pain on a third person and the chain continues (just like the process of nuclear fission). Only forgiveness can break the ongoing chain of hate, deceit and pain. Joseph's story shows how he forgave his brothers, embraced them, and saved them from starvation. As family of the governor of Egypt, there is no doubt that they were well-off and comfortable. This ended the chain of pain started by Rebekah and Jacob. Jacob, later known as Israel, and his twelve sons, were the ancestors of the Israelite nation. The story brings out how forgiveness seems to be a method with which a family or, in this case, a nation, can douse the fire of hatred and revenge and thereby reach constructive solutions to problems. But for a child reader to get to the relevance of this story, he / she would need a more knowledgeable parent, teacher or older sibling to point it out to him.

2.4.1. An Adult's Response

The author of *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* emphasizes certain dimensions of the stories retold. It is a selective vision, and is non-dramatic in form. Children's Bible stories are widely used by Sunday school teachers to teach the faith to young children. This adds a dramatic dimension to the textual artifact. We can visualize the teaching-learning scene: a teacher reads the text to a group of young children seated around him/her. During the reading session, the teacher could dramatize some parts of the story and highlight certain elements. This would draw the child's attention to the dimensions the teacher finds worthwhile. Additionally, the teacher's own religious worldview would

significantly impact the meanings the child will "receive" from the text. The teacher will orally communicate his/her vision of the world and help the child develop and share the same understanding and interpretation of the world (Longhurst 25). The textual artifact no longer has complete authority over the narrative act but can take on additional meanings in the hands of an imaginative narrator. The more knowledgeable story teller could bring out the religious relevance of the story by tracing out a link between individual acts and general misfortune. The explanation could interpret the events in Joseph's life to explain the process of the chain of interlinked actions and reactions. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to illustrate how meaning is constructed in the very act of reading the text. As Reader-Response theories highlight, the meaning of texts is contingent on how the individual reader experiences the text. Additionally, since there are two "readers" of the text when an adult tells the story to a child, the oral narrative can direct the child to look at the world in particularized ways.

As an example of the potential of oral storytelling by an adult, I will elaborate on the "Story of Joseph" that Batchelor has narrated to us, and add one kind of reading to the bare story printed in the textual artifact *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*:

The first act that started the chain of pain was when Jacob cheated his brother of his birthright. He was egged on to cheat Esau by their mother, Rebekah. Story no. 24 tells us that while she was expecting the twin brothers, God had told her that the younger twin would become the head of the family. At that time, the first- born was considered the 'older' brother and he would inherit all the family rights and privileges. Batchelor tells us, "Instead of leaving God to work out his own plan for the boys, she thought out a scheme to trick Isaac and snatch the blessing from Esau. (36). She took things into her

own hands to make the prophecy come true. We know from the Shakespearean play *Macbeth* how dangerous it is to force the realization of a prophecy. Macbeth resorted to murder to become king, as the three witches had foretold. Rebekah and Jacob did wrong. They chose to cheat their own family members. Their choice was a deliberate one and it interfered with the smooth flow of God's Plan. Instead of trusting God to work out His prophesy, they trusted themselves. In contrast, Joseph also had dreams of greatness, but he never forced the pace. He trusted God's providence and rose to become greater than anyone could have ever thought.

Secondly, the chain of pain continues when Jacob flees to his uncle Laban's household, to save his own life. Here, Laban did him wrong. Batchelor calls this story 'The Trickster Tricked.' We feel a curious sense of delight that Jacob had to bear the same sort of deception that he played on his own father. With the custom of veils and the cover of darkness, Laban passed off Leah as Rachel. No doubt his intentions were honourable in trying to prevent his older daughter from "remaining on the shelf," but in practice, he resorted to deception to do so. His erroneous action was the root of the lack of love Jacob felt for his first wife and their many sons. He openly favoured Joseph and Benjamin. Modern psychology tells us how unhealthy this is for all concerned. Leah's sons hated Joseph and Leah was jealous of Rachel. Batchelor comments, "No one in that home was really happy" (43).

At the third level, furthering this chain of pain is the evildoing of the disgruntled older brothers of Joseph. They chose to do forbidden things and when Joseph reported their behaviour to their patriarch, Jacob, they detested him for "squealing on them." All evildoers hate a whistleblower and try to silence one in order to cover their tracks.

Joseph's older brothers try to murder him. Only Reuben, Jacob's eldest son, tried to stop them. He convinced his brothers to throw Joseph into a dried well (intending to rescue him later). At this point in the drama we see a band of travelling tradesmen arriving close to where Joseph was dumped. The brothers haul him out of the well, change their plans and sell him as a slave. We see how God used the arrival of the caravan of traders to preserve Joseph's life and, through him, to protect the Israelites from starvation. We see that at crucial moments in Joseph's life, God intervenes and works out His plan for Joseph's good. This is like the *deus ex machina* convention of ancient Greek and Roman drama, where the timely appearance of divine intervention helps to unravel and resolve an apparently insoluble difficulty in the plot (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).

At the final level of the chain, we see Joseph having to suffer unjustly because of a woman's false accusations. In Egypt, Joseph works hard and is an honest human being. He is too honest to cheat his master by sleeping with his wife. Neither is he willing to sin against God whom he loves and serves. Batchelor's text reads, "Potiphar's wife had taken a great liking to this handsome young man and soon she was trying to persuade him to make love to her, while Potiphar was at work" (49). Here we see that workplace sexual harassment is as old as mankind! Joseph refuses to do wrong; using her superior status, Potiphar's wife has him thrown into jail. Down the ages, many honest people have lost their jobs or have been falsely accused of crimes because they refused to cooperate with evildoers. Bad luck, one might say, but the story shows how God can use even 'bad luck' to bring 'good luck.' Joseph's ticket to the pharaoh's presence was through the connections he made in jail. Again, Joseph refuses to be depressed by his incarceration and whatever he did, even in prison, he did very well. The art illustration for this story is,

therefore, misleading. Joseph refuses to wallow in misery. This is an important insight when we consider how Joseph responds to the injustice that is meted out to him. Humans normally rant and rage and curse their oppressors. Joseph just carries on cheerfully. Only a deep faith in the Power of God could have given him the strength to put his misfortunes behind him. We are told that he was helpful to the prison warden and helped in looking after other prisoners. It requires real mettle to avoid the pitfall of self-pity. Joseph doesn't brood or get depressed. People commit suicide due to depression, but Joseph's faith in God helps him to tide over this bad phase.

The discussion outlined above is an example of how a more knowledgeable adult can use a story framework to elaborate on metaphysical questions. Adult users of texts can go beyond the given authorial narrative to construct narratives of their own. I examine this dimension of the process of meaning making in greater detail in the chapter that follows. On the other hand, what meanings do children make when they handle a text all on their own, with no adult mediation?

2.4.2. A Child's Response

To find out what a child found worthy in *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories*, I asked a reader (currently a teenager) who had read this book from cover to cover all on his own, at the early age of six to seven, why he liked the book when he was young. This reader is very widely read and had read several books targeted at a higher age group when he was two or three years younger than the target reader. This is what he told me:

> I liked *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* because it was easy to read and the events flowed in a nice story like way. I read it three times during the ages of six to seven years. The illustrations were very well done and I still

> remember them even now. These stories provided some meaningfulness to the readings of the Bible I used to hear in Church.

On further enquiry, I learned that the stories in the book served him as a mental map of biblical events in a chronological order. This mental map helped him to fit and organize the scripture passages he heard in church into a meaningful narrative. He never mentioned any philosophical insights gained from his early encounter with the Bible stories.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I suggest that the popularity of *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* (which has been an economically successful product which has seen multiple reprints) is due to the skillful storytelling by the author, Mary Bachelor. By weaving the various Bible stories into a coherent over-arching narrative of the importance of loving and trusting God, the author "speaks" to her readers. However, the reader can experience the text in his/her own way. It would be worthwhile for future researchers to document the variety of readings different adults and children from dissimilar age groups and social situations make of the same printed material.

CHAPTER III

EVERYDAY STORIES FOR CHILDREN WITH A FAITH-DIMENSION

3.1. Storytelling and Meaning Making

This chapter discusses how simple everyday stories can be narrated with a faith-dimension in order to orient a child in a particular manner. The stories in *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* by V. Gilbert Beers draw the attention of the child to transcendental elements in Nature and in everyday occurrences in the home. The stories are elementary and aim at very young children, but are narrated with text-image combine in an engaging fashion.

My discussion seeks to illustrate how the positioning of both the authorial narrator as well as the adult story-teller can influence the whole meaning of the text. The messages received by the child are more influenced by the act-of-storytelling than the stories themselves. This highlights the importance of the oral dimension of a text, and the element of relationship between caregiver and child.

3.1.1. The Importance of Storytelling

Storytelling is probably as old as the existence of man. We can imagine the way the ancient hunter told his community of how he chased an animal and how he captured it after overcoming many dangers and trials. The habit of sharing knowledge through oral stories is part of all human cultures. However, the practice of *reading out* stories to pre-school young children is a culturally shared practice in certain communities. Some communities with better incomes, more leisure and higher levels of parental education

tend to view reading out stories to children as a desirable activity. Yet, not all communities view such an activity as a necessary pursuit. Janes and Kermani studied the attitudes of adult caregivers (parent/grandparent/aunt/uncle) to story-reading for nonmainstream children in Southern California. They found that literacy was not a strong point in certain low-income immigrant communities. With an average fourth-grade level of schooling, the adults of these groups tended to look at reading out books to their children as a “punishment” and not as an enjoyable activity. "Reading was always a punishment when I was small," commented one caregiver to them, "I never liked to read" and "I don't like books," said several others (460). In contrast, the text under consideration in this chapter, *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* by V. Gilbert Beers, is embedded in a culture that has shared values about the importance of reading out stories to children, especially at bedtime. Reading out to children is considered important in improving the literacy skills of children and in using the stories to pass on values and worldviews of that particular social group. Children learn to “read” by memorizing the oft-repeated favourite narratives, and can point to the pictures in a book and tell you the whole story almost verbatim. If asked to read the same text in another printed context, the young child will not be able to go beyond stammering out a few recognizable words. Their earlier fluency was due to the picture-text combine of a story they had heard many times over, either sitting in their parent’s laps or sitting close by and looking at the illustrations. Children like to turn pages and point to small details of the illustrations while the reading is in progress. They often interrupt the narrative and ask for seemingly unrelated clarifications of the text/illustration. For example, a child may focus on the picture and point to the animal and say, “Did the cat have only *three* whiskers?” This

contact with print narratives makes them familiar with literacy practices, and encourages them to start reading story books on their own as they grow up. However, the important thing is that such reading should be a recreational activity for it to become a life-long habit of learning to love to read. Strommen, Teran, and Mates have concluded that "the home environment and support from a parent or other adult may be essential to encouraging literacy development" in the early stages of learning to read (188). This story-reading practice is also favored for the opportunity for bonding between caregiver and child. Book publishers are good at emphasizing this dimension for the sake of attracting the parent to purchase the book. Beers' introduction to the stories says, "I wanted to write stories that build that sense of joy or delight in toddlers as they listen and parents or teachers or teachers or friends as they read" (10). There is an illustration of a mother and child engaged in bedtime storytelling on page 152. It shows a little girl sitting on her mother's lap while the mother reads out a story from an illustrated story book. They are both wearing nightgowns. They are seated on a large, comfortably cushioned chair, and the little girl is holding the bottom of the page, as if to turn the page. The illustration reinforces the concept of bedtime storytelling, and encourages the user of the book to do likewise. The verbal text accompanying the illustration is, "Thank you, Mommy for story time. Thank you for loving me enough to read each night to me," subtly telling the adult caregiver that bedtime storytelling is an expression of love.

3.1.2. The Value of Bedtime Storytelling

Bedtime storytelling routines are established by parents to create a relaxing environment before putting the active toddler or young child into bed. The routine becomes a ritual and children delight in the undivided attention they get at story time.

The famous childcare best-selling handbook (for more than half a century) *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care: A Handbook for Parents of Developing Children from Birth through Adolescence* by Benjamin Spock and Robert Needlman advises parents that though they need to be a little flexible about bedtime, a bedtime routine is very helpful, "When things happen in the same way every day, it gives a young child a comforting sense of control. Bedtime routines can include stories, songs, prayers, hugs, and kisses. What's important is that the same things happen in roughly the same order" (Spock and Needlman 146). The routine of reading stories to children before tucking them into bed and putting off the lights is important for the closeness between parents and children due to the atmosphere of sharing narratives together. Additionally, in Western cultures it is a common practice for children to sleep in a different room from their parents because parents "value their privacy." Unlike Asian cultures where very small children sleep in the same room alongside their mothers, Western cultures consider it a desirable habit to make children independent from babyhood. Parents are advised not to let babies get into the habit of sleeping in the parent's room and to move them to another room well before they are six months old, "Children can sleep in a room by themselves from the time they are born as long as the parents are near enough to hear them when they cry....If your child starts out sleeping in your room, two to three months is a good age to move her out: when she's sleeping through the night and doesn't need so much care" (Spock and Needlman 59-60). In such a context, the ritual of reading bedtime stories serves as a ritual to ease the separation anxiety of a child who will be left alone to sleep in his/her own room. The parent reads till the child falls asleep and then tiptoes out of the room and goes to his/her own room. Therefore, stories about calming a child's fears about the dark are appropriate.

The story “Thunder and Lightning” in *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* shows a mother hugging and comforting her little son when thunder and lightning prevent him from falling asleep. The aim of bedtime storytelling is to let the child relax, doze off and have happy dreams.

Storytelling routines also serve to prepare pre-school children for mainstream formal educational systems. Heath’s article, “What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and School,” tells us that children model their parents ways of handling literacy. She considers story reading sessions as “literacy events” where “participants follow socially established rules for verbalizing what they know from and about the written material” (50). She says that “the "bedtime story" is widely accepted as a given—a natural way for parents to interact with their child at bedtime,” which is used by advertisers and book publishing houses for aiming their sales pitch (51). She tells us that in the dialogical nature of this practice, “the mother directs the child's attention to the book and/or asks what-questions and/or labels items on the page.” Though, these pictures on the page are only representations of their “real” counterparts, the child slowly learns to grasp and manipulate these pictures as “decontextualized” and arbitrary visual objects by the routine of “interactional dialogue in which mother and child take turns playing a labelling game.” (51). Verbal feedback from the parent to the child’s questions and answers about the reading material helps to reinforce abstract concepts and to improve their literacy skills.

3.1.3. The Significance of the Storyteller

The stories in *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* attempt to imparting definite religious interpretations to the meaning of existence; the authors attempt to encode adult religious concepts for young minds. However, the role of the story-teller as transmitter of the relevance of these ideas is crucial. In *Children and Their Development*, Kail explains how the psychologist Lev Vygotsky proposed that a child's cognitive development is enriched by a more knowledgeable other person or 'teacher', whom he called the MKO (the More Knowledgeable Other.) Parents, teachers, adults and other children can be a child's MKO. I suggest that at the early stages of a child's worldview development, the explanations offered by the MKO for the arguments and ideas suggested by the authors of texts are more important than the ideas in the text themselves. The act-of-storytelling has a greater influence on meaning making for the child who is confronted with two communicative acts: the printed text and the oral narrative of the printed text. A pre-literate child will not be in a position to absorb the original text's authorial intention if the adult storyteller offers a different understanding to the print text. The oral narrator *creates* a new text for the child that can affirm, subvert, expand on or detract from the given published artifact. I can remember an occasion when my father was reading to me the story "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" when I was a young child. He had reached the part, "…and they lived happily ever after," when I asked, "And then?" Without batting an eyelid, he continued "reading" an expanded edition of the story which took the prince and princess through further episodes of their married life. It was pure on-the-spot imagination. When I grew up, I tried to find a printed version of the story's extended text. Only on my failure to find dad's version did I realize that he had created a text out of thin

air and had "read" it out to me in response to my request for a continuation of the story. I do see the MKO as *the key element* in worldview formation for children.

3.2. Material and Cultural Setting of *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book*

Dr. V. Gilbert Beers is a prolific writer, editor and publisher of Christian literature. The website *Biblesoft.com* tells us that:

> Dr. V. Gilbert Beers is often considered the consummate Bible storyteller of our era. Author of more than 150 books, with total sales of more than thirteen million copies, he has been honored with dozens of awards, among them the Evangelical Christian Publishers Assn. Gold Medallion Book Award in 1985, 1986, 1991, and 1992…. Dr. Beers holds four different Masters' degrees in theology and ministry and a PhD in communications from Northwestern University. ("V. Gilbert Beers")

Beers has held privileged positions in the publishing industry: He has been Editorial Director at David C. Cook Publishing, Executive Editor at *Christianity Today,* and is the President of Scripture Press Publications. His numerous important positions in Christian publishing have helped him contribute several books designed for Christian faith-instruction. Some of his well-known titles are: *The Toddlers Bible, Early Reader's Bible, The One Year Bible for Children*, *The Victor Journey Through The Bible* and *The Preschoolers Bible.* On the webpage "About David C. Cook," I learnt that David C. Cook, now known as Cook Communications Ministries International (CCM), is a "leading nonprofit discipleship resource provider" in Colorado that has for 130 years provided Christians "with life transforming materials from best-selling books and

curriculum, to toys and games and small group resources." The organization has offices in Elgin, Illinois, Paris, Ontario, and Eastbourne in the UK. "David C. Cook is a global organization whose resources are published in more than 150 languages, distributed in more than 80 countries, and sold worldwide through retail stores, catalogs, and online," says David C. Cook's webpage. In 1996 "Scripture Press and Victor Books of Wheaton, Illinois joined the CCM family," reports the website. *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* by V. Gilbert Beers, published by Victor Books, is embedded in this international discourse of writing, publishing and disseminating Christian evangelical literature. Beers' books have also been commercially successful, as several regular marketing websites list these products for sale and vouch for their worldwide popularity.

The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book starts off with Beers exhorting parents to take this story-time seriously: "Construction zone ahead… You're about to enter one of the most important building projects of all time… bigger than the Golden Gate Bridge. It's bigger than constructing the ancient pyramids" (9). The author goes on to explain that though a toddler may look small, the first three years of life lay the foundation stones for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth. Parents have the opportunity to shape their children into tomorrow's leaders or villains. Children are "under construction" and the toddler has been entrusted to the parent by God. Beers reminds the parents if the parent delights in his or her job of parenting small children, this joy is conveyed to the children who will later imitate this parenting model when they have to raise their own offspring.

Beers claims firsthand experience with parenting five of his own children. He says that he worked with his children at home for twenty years and also interacted with

his eight grandchildren when they were toddlers. Beers comes down to the level of toddlers and presents small episodes of everyday matters in twelve paged stories. Each episode deals with emphasizing a certain value: honesty, obedience, gratitude, truthfulness, patience, politeness etc. For example, the story "Danny's Candy Bar" illustrates how Danny steals a bar of candy from the grocer's shop while his mother is buying groceries. The language is simple and to-the-point, "Then Danny saw a candy bar. He wanted it. So Danny picked it up. He put it in his pocket" (109). The story narrates how Danny feels guilty for his wrongdoing and confesses his little crime to his mother. The mother tells him he must return the candy to the store, and apologize to the owner. They go back to the store and do so. His mother offers to buy the candy and they go home happy. His mother tells Danny that she is sad that he stole the candy, but is happy that he told her the truth. The last illustration shows mother and son sharing the candy bar with happy faces. This simple story offers a practical model for emulation to a child who has erred. The child must confess his fault, make restitution and apologize to the person offended. The fact that Danny's mother buys him the candy is portrayed as a reward for telling the truth and making amends for the transgression. Beers says that he writes stories that build a sense of joy in parent and child as they partake of this activity of reading bedtime stories together. Most of the stories are woven around activities that include a parent-child combine. The stories seem to offer a paradigm of ideal behaviour for both "good parents" and "good children." Beers stresses the importance of good parenting. He says that the toddler has been entrusted to the parent's care by God. The parent should regard it as life's biggest construction job of all: building up the life of this "VIP" (11). "Every world leader was once a toddler. Every world villain was once a

toddler. During those toddler years, the leader or villain was under construction—with someone acting as general contractor" (9). The author's introduction ends with a prayer that God may help the parent to shape his or her beautiful child 'forever' (11).This is a clear reference to the Christian concept of 'Eternity': life on earth is just the beginning of a long life stretching endlessly into eternity. The introduction hints at the setting of the stories.

The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book is embedded in the culturally accepted norms and philosophy of a Christian family committed to their faith. Though not all Christian families practice their faith, many small Christian communities in the world actively try to live their lives by biblically inspired principles. *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* is a product that is produced and consumed within the context of such communities that try to live life according to Christian values. The stories are set in a predominantly white, middle-class/upper-middle-class family, with a stay-at-home mother who takes care of the childrearing, the cleanliness of the home, the cooking, the washing, and the grocery marketing. The interactions described have the mother in a strong role as "homemaker;" it is she who enforces discipline and sets the routines for the children: she wakes them up, helps them to get dressed, gives them their meals, clears their rooms, bathes them and tucks them into bed at night. The father figure also appears in twelve stories. There is no explanation of where the fathers in the stories are employed/from where they get the resources to provide a comfortable life-style for their families. The father-figure is shown in outdoor roles of doing the gardening, taking the family out on a picnic, and playing in the snow. One story depicts the father indoors praying, "Shhhh! Daddy is Praying." This story shows a small church in the "thought bubble" when the father is praying. This gives

us a clue that he may be a Christian pastor, or some senior "elder" of a Protestant church. Each story has a different family setting, but most families are of Caucasian colour (there are only three stories with children/families of colour in them, of which only one entire story revolves round a curly-haired darker skinned family.) The homes depicted are all well-furnished, clean, well-upholstered, and have cooking ranges, washing machines and decent bathrooms. The locales portrayed are neat neighborhoods with separate bungalows and a yard outside. The characters wear westernized clothing: jeans, sneakers, jackets; mothers wear dresses and fathers wear T-shirts or shirts. The upper garments of all the characters look to be of light warm materials, perhaps they are thin woolen pullovers worn over shirts.

The story "Thank You for My House" is a window into the everyday life of the target reader. The mother cooks the food and the child helps her in small ways. The backdoor of the house leads out to a small yard where the child can play. The mother washes the clothes in a washing machine and the child has her own cozy bedroom. The father of the child reads to her and takes her out for a stroll. The mother bathes her in a bathtub and keeps the house nice and tidy. The child is taught to be grateful for all the good things she has. The written text has the words, "Thank You, God, for my house," on each page. Each page is devoted to thanking God for one dimension of the house: the kitchen, the place outside the backdoor, the washing machine, the child's bedroom, the big chair where her father sits and reads to her, the well-carpeted staircase, the warmth of the house on a cold winter night, the comfortable bathroom and the clothes closet. The narration ends with, "Thank You, God, for my house. Thank You for all of it. I know You helped Mommy and Daddy get it. Thank You. Thank You" (249). The reader's

attention is directed to the fact that all these good things come from God. This story is specific about giving God thanks for all good comforts in the house. “Thank You, God, for my house” is repeated ten times, and foregrounds the aim of the story. The review questions at the end also highlight this, “Who gave us our houses? Why should we thank him?” (251). The story directs the child’s attention to the dimension of transcendental providence of personal wealth. The question is not about how clever the parents are to have earned such a lifestyle, but focuses on how God has helped them acquire it.

3.3. Textual Analysis of *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book*

The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book is a thick, hard-bound collection of twenty-eight elementary-level stories which present every day, real-life situations and problems that are common to toddlers. The book, illustrated by Carol Boerke, has large, bright colourful drawings. The illustrations dominate the text, while the written content is minimal and the vocabulary simple. The novel-sized book is easy to carry and the paper is thick enough to withstand frequent page turning. Slightly older children with basic reading skills can easily hold this book and read to themselves. However, the book seems to be designed for a parent-child combine: the cover page image shows a mother reading to her two children. This image is one of comfort, security and mother’s love. A mother sits on a bed and two small children snuggle close to her and ‘read’ the pictures in the book as she reads out the text to them. A comfortable cat is curled up near the mother’s feet and has one eye open and both ears cocked up. The cat too is listening to the stories. Everyone is ready for bed and the whole scene is cozy. It is in this warm, loving atmosphere that the child is introduced to a metaphysical concept: God.

3.3.1. The Concept of God

The first story in the book, “I Want to See the Wind,” introduces the child to the concept of “God.” It tackles one of the basic existential questions of worldview formation, “Is there a God? And if there is one, how do we know he/she exists if we cannot see him/her?” The story is an unusually creative little piece that illustrates to a young listener/ reader that God may be invisible, but the actions of His power are visible.

Little Jason is a toddler who is going outdoors to “see the wind”. His mother helps him put on a nice warm jacket before he goes outdoors. The illustrations show Jason’s experiences outside his house. Jason feels the wind blowing in his face. He then sees a kite flying in the wind. He blows soap bubbles and the wind takes the bubbles far away. But Jason cannot ‘see’ the wind. Each experience of Jason is illustrated with a full-page picture. Jason sees a man trying to catch his hat— the wind is blowing it away. The wind tugs at little Jason’s coat and he tries to grab the wind. He can see clouds racing across the sky but he still cannot “see the wind”. Jason goes back indoors and his mother asks him if he saw the wind. He replied that he saw the wind do many good things, but that he failed to see the wind. Jason’s mother helps him to take off his coat and sitting down at the dining table she gives him cookies and something to drink. In this warm and pleasant ambience Jason’s mother explains to her little boy that just as we cannot see the wind but can see its effects, we cannot see God but we can see the many good things He does for us. In this simple way, Jason's mother conveys the most profound concept a human being can ever grasp: the concept of God. Trusting his mother’s explanation, Jason accepts the concept of an invisible-but-active God. He thanks God for the many good things He does for him.

The story, “I Want to See the Wind” is covered from page 12 to 21. Pages 22 and 23 are a revision of the scenes we have already flipped through. They are a story-at-a-glance reinforcement of the message of the full episode. The text is interactive and asks questions, “Look! What is the wind doing? What is blowing with the wind? Point to some of them…” (22-23). The simplicity of the story, along with the questions asked at the end, makes it easy for a small child to grasp abstract concepts. The writer uses the analogy of the wind to explain the lofty concept of ‘God’ and His power. To a parent or caregiver, this story could serve as a useful tool to teach a concept that baffles even the most erudite philosopher. The interesting thing about this story is the naturalness with which the mother explains things to her son. Wrapped in the warmth of the ambience of loving care, a child will effortlessly believe what the adult wishes to teach him. Small children respond easily to the questions that come at the end of the story (see fig.1).

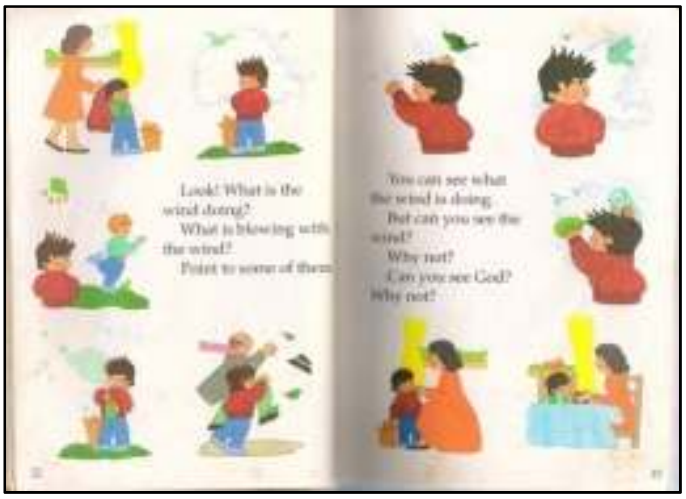


Fig. 1. Revision Questions for the Story “I Want to See the Wind” in V. Gilbert Beers, *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book*, Illus. Carol Boerke (Illinois: Victor Books, 1993; print; 22-23). © 1993 V. Gilbert Beers. *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* is [currently] published by David C Cook. All rights reserved.

To drive home the main point of the "lesson," Beer's last questions are "But can you see the wind? ... Can you see God?"(23) The whole story is framed like a good teacher's lesson plan. There is the exposition of the issue, an observation of the facts, an analysis of the observations and, finally, a repetition of the lessons learnt. The artwork is cheerful and is the most attractive part of the narrative. Besides the didactic intention of the text, the unhurried interaction between parent and child is an important model of parenting for the adult. The unhurried, organized lifestyle portrayed in all the stories offers a worldview that a disciplined family life is a desirable goal for families. This little story is located in the discourse of contemporary, moderately affluent, nuclear family experiences.

3.3.2. The Concept of *Where Does it all Come From*?

The story "Who Could Make These Things" deals with the concept of *where does it all come from?* The dominant worldview in this book is that of a warm and secure world in which God is the provider of all good things. The story directs the child's attention to the wonders of the clouds in the sky, the apples in a steaming home-baked apple pie, the insects moving around, the beautiful trees, and the gurgling of a small baby sibling. The text reads, "I cannot make these special things, and I really don't know why. But since I know what God can do, I will not even try!" (44-45). The accompanying image is of carefree children and animals bounding across a green field. The difficulty of having faith in God is introduced as being a 'leap-in-faith' as the children leap about in gay abandon. This leap-in-faith is a setting aside the attempt to figure things out that are too lofty to grasp. The words that make this point are, "but since I know what God can do, I will not even try." The story suggests that since the child knows in his heart that he

believes in God, why try to break his head over trying to understand how God made things? The text-picture narrative offers the idea that matters of faith involve a suspension of trying to rationalize all theological and metaphysical matters. There is a famous story of a great Christian theologian, Saint Augustine, who was trying to figure out the mystery of "The Trinitarian God." He puzzled how The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit could be One God. How could they be three and yet one? Saint Augustine walked along the sea shore, engrossed in his rationalizations, when he came upon a small child who was busy making trips back and forth filling sea-water into a sand-pit on the beach. The child told the theologian that he was trying to empty the whole ocean into the small sand-pit that he had dug. The theologian laughed and told the child that his efforts were ridiculous; the water of the ocean was too much to fit in a small sand-pit. The child retorted that the theologian was just as ridiculous in his attempt to fathom the mystery of the Trinity; his mind was too small for such a big idea. The charming child vanished from the scene and the theologian was suitably humbled by this experience. The story "Who Could Make These Things" reaches the same conclusion about the futility of trying to figure out where all of creation comes from. In fact, the simplicity of the story is disarmingly deceptive: the story is affirming an answer to deep philosophical questions. Where does it all come from? How did we get our natural environment? This story highlights the simple leap of faith that the child must make to believe that "God made it all." The adult tells the child not to try to break his head about who could make all the beautiful things around him, just believe that God made them all. Such a story could only be consumed within a culture that primarily believes in the existence of God and, secondly, wants to transmit that belief to its children. The narrative act of parent telling

the story to a receptive child is qualified by the level of faith the adult has in the worldview offered by the narrative.

If the adult has faith in God, he/she will affirm the lessons being taught by the story. But if the adult does not believe in God, he/she will be a resistant-reader who will offer alternate explanations for the existence of our natural environment. Such a story would only be pooh-poohed by the adult and the child would receive a totally different message from that intended by the author of the story. This is an important consideration to the whole communicative act: there is the sender, there is the constructed message, and there are the intended readers/receivers of the message. By introducing the fourth element, the adult story-teller, we see a fourth dimension being added to the whole process of meaning making. The caregiver plays a huge role in interpreting the textual artifact to the juvenile audience. He can reinforce the messages within the text or offer his own explanations for the situation described in the story. Additionally, the caregiver would probably not spend time or money perusing or buying such a product. For example, for a caregiver who is of a secular outlook, *The Berenstain Bears in the Bears's Nature Guide: A Nature Walk through Bear Country,* by Stan and Jan Berenstain, would be more acceptable for him/her to read aloud to the child than *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book.*This story features a family of bears who go on a nature walk. "A few pages into the book appears a sunrise with the following exclamation, including the capital letters, 'Nature...is all that IS, or WAS, or EVER WILL BE!'"(Anderson 17-18). The emphasis is a deliberate denial of the existence of any supernatural god-like being. DeMar also notices a naturalistic worldview embedded in *The Bears's Nature Guide* text; he tells us that Stan and Jan Berenstain had a secular worldview.

3.3.3. Good Values

All the stories in the volume try to teach the child good values. There is an index of "Values Taught" on pages 348-351. These pages list out several universal good values such as honesty, obedience, truthfulness, patience, politeness, and the virtue of apologizing for a wrong committed. Other stories deal with keeping the home clean, how selfishness is bad, how grumbling/whining is negative behaviour, and how lying or stealing makes others sad. . In *Children's Books About Religion*, Patricia P. Dole lists the book under the section "Christian Life" and offers the following summary of its contents:

> A series of short, simple stories dealing with ethical and religious matters in everyday situations includes topics such as honesty, cleanliness, generosity, good manners, consideration, and bravery. Thanksgiving for God's creativity and special gifts is stressed. Questions to test comprehension and aid discussion follow each story. The book contains a special index to the values represented. (88)

The stories in this collection emphasize the need to be grateful to God and to one's parents for all the favors granted.

The attitude of gratitude is stressed throughout the book. Gratitude for being who I am, gratitude for the love and services provided by parents, and gratitude to God for creating the world, the rain, for giving us water and food, housing and good things. The story "Sweet, Sour, Hot and Cold" is a simple story that talks about our sense of taste. The child in the story tastes some cold, sweet vanilla-flavored ice-cream, a hot chocolate drink, sour pickle and salty salt crystals, and the mother explains the sense of taste to her. "Where did I get such a wonderful taster?" asks Katy, the child (211). The mother tells

her that God gave it to her. Katy is then shown with eyes closed and hands folded in prayer as she thanks God for her "taster." The story ends with a question directed to the reader, "Have you thanked God today for your taster?" (213). This is the way the author directs the attention of the child reader to the faith-dimension of an everyday experience. In a secular book, no reference is made to the creator of the sense of taste. When illustrating the five senses, normal information books for children restrict the text to the direct experience at hand. "Sweet, Sour, Hot and Cold" is aimed at teaching the reader about the transcendental dimension of life, and uses simple life experiences to do so. In another story, "I'm Glad I'm Not a Turtle," the children rejoice in the beauty of themselves. They give thanks to God for making them "in His special way" and for not making them either a frog, a hairy dog, or a kangaroo. Each page is illustrated with the respective animal being talked about.

Almost all the stories link the story episode to God. There are a few exceptions like "I'm Coming!" which reinforces the value of responding quickly when parents call out to a child, and "Whine-itis" which is about Rachel, a child who whines and grumbles about everything. Her mother handles the negative behaviour by treating Rachel as if she has fallen ill with an illness called "whine-it is." "Stop whining," says the mother, "If you don't, I may catch it. Then I'll start whining. You won't want that, would you?" (199).

3.3.4. Discussion

The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book narrates everyday activities in a toddler's life with an additional dimension: Faith in God. These stories seek to point out existential answers about proof of the existence of God and the importance of orienting one's life in

gratitude to God. The narrative uses a verbal text and pictorial image amalgamation, and combines it with an assumed adult narrator who is supposed to point out the transcendental dimensions to the child listener/co-reader. The adult functions as a MKO and teaches the child to appreciate the presence of God in all of nature and in the home environment. The text has a review section at the end of every story which has a reprint of each picture in a miniature sequence. This spread-page has questions for the parent to ask the child. For example, the review questions in the story "Listen! What do You Hear?"are, "What did the boys and girls in the story hear? Listen! Who made the sounds that you hear?" The questions end with an exhortation, "Thank God for each one now" (226-227). Each story serves basically to reinforce faith in an all-good and generous God. The author's introduction tells us that *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* "seeks to acquaint the toddler with God and godliness, with values and the right way to live" (10). Beers also mentions that this book should be used in conjunction with *The Toddlers Bible* (also authored by him) to create a "life building program for your toddler" (10-11). We can see that the author wants parents to take the book seriously and to use it sincerely for faith-formation of their children. This locates the product within the discourse of Christian evangelical publication practices. The product is of superior quality and is well marketed, but the price at rupees two thousand six hundred and three (as listed on *Amazon.in*) is too high for an average Indian middle-class consumer. Not widely available off the shelf in general Indian bookstores, (though some Christian religious stores do stock it in India) it is available with online book merchants

The major demerit of *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* is that it takes no account of poverty, pain and suffering, in connection with faith in God. The image of comfort,

good things and a decent lifestyle portrayed in the stories are shown as a gift from God. The target child reader is assumed to have the same socio-economic background. The stories suggest that there is a direct link between gratitude to God and having a decent home. There are no indications in these stories that there are alternate realities for children of poor parents living in the filth and squalor of a slum dwelling. There is a total absence of any real pain or misery in the stories. The worldview suggested is that if you pray hard and thank God for His gifts, he will give you all the comforts you need. This simplistic portrayal of God could lead to a belief that a person should love God only because of what He has given him. This could be considered as a "prosperity gospel" ideology. Falsani says that the "prosperity gospel" is a popular heresy among American Christians in recent years, which "teaches that God blesses those God favors most with material wealth." "The gospel of prosperity turns Christianity into a vapid bless-me club, with a doctrine that amounts to little more than spiritual magical thinking: If you pray the right way, God will make you rich," she analyzes. She asks, what about the poor? Are they not favored by God? This is a pertinent question to a country like ours. The stories in *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* would have little relevance for a reader with an impoverished background. Additionally, the world depicted is a self-contained one. There is no clue in the text about poorer children with whom the rich child could share some of his good things. There is one story in the book that deals with the concept of sharing, "Sharing a Sandwich." In this episode, Alan and Alison go on a picnic in the countryside, and Alan shares his sandwich with Alison because she has forgotten to bring one along. The moral of the story is "It's fun to share…sharing makes us BOTH happy….Are you happy when you share?" (129). what is significant in this story is that both Alan and

Alison are social equals. Their clothes and shoes indicate that they come from the same socio-economic level. The author has not considered introducing the concept of sharing with the less-fortunate. Nonetheless, a creative parent can modify the story to include this dimension when narrating the story to his/her children. This is how the user of a product can put it to further uses than originally designed by the producers of the textual artifact.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the importance of the adult storyteller in directing the attention of the receiver of the story to views of the world that go beyond the printed text. The text can take on different meanings in the hands of different storytellers, as each one will place his/her particular emphasis on different things at different times. The dialogical nature of the encounter gives added scope to the child to interpret the text from his/her own perspective, and the adult caregiver can encourage or suppress the child's interpretation of the meaning of the text. Each reading of the text could lead to different responses from both adult and child depending on their gender, social class, economic status, religious orientation and cultural background. The text serves as a catalyst to shaping the creation of meaning and helping the adult to direct the child's attention to particular interpretations of life. *The Toddlers Bedtime Story Book* is a literary descendant of American Puritan didactic literature for children. It tries to orient the "listener" to the existence of God.

This chapter and the previous one analyzed religiously oriented texts from Western Euro-American Christian culture. In the next chapter I examine faith-formation stories from a different religious tradition: Hinduism.

CHAPTER IV

FAITH-FORMATION STORIES FROM HINDUISM

4.1. Presence of *Amar Chitra Katha* Comics in Cultural Spaces

Popular media products like comic books, films and T.V. serials are created, marketed and consumed by different agents. The producers of a media product first choose a "marketable commodity," and then create and distribute it. If the market receives it well, the producers maintain production of a series of comics or a particular T.V. serial, but if the consumers of the media product reject it, it is natural for the producers to ease the product off the market. The *Amar Chitra Katha* (*ACK*) comic book series is one such media product which for 46 years (from 1969 till date) has weathered the storms of demand and supply and has currently re-emerged as a strong presence in the market today. There are over 450 published titles in the series.

Feeding on the need for faith-formation stories from Hinduism, the *ACK* has served as affordable, readily available literature for the middle-class Indian family. Initially published as a periodical, it was aimed at entertaining and educating the full family. A young BITS Pilani, Goa campus, engineering student told me that in his youth, his mother would place a bunch of mythological *ACK* comics on his table and say, "*Kuch to seek lo, beta*" ("Learn something, son"). He grinned, "She hoped I'd learn something about God!" Other adults have also corroborated that the series was useful as a faith-formation instructional tool.

As the series evolved, the initial focus of educating the young in their Hindu faith was broadened to include educating them about historical figures, scientists and other interesting famous personages. The series was essentially in the biographical mode, and

each title features one main hero or heroine whose life history was charted on the pages of the comic book.

Researchers from both India and abroad have worked on the cultural implications of the *ACK* series. There is a growing body of research about the series. However, there is no major research that explores the series from the angle of what are the religious concepts encoded in the texts. My discussion seeks to explore this uncharted path.

I first discuss the presence of the comic series in cultural space of the market, then I examine the comics in the context of religious and cultural education, and finally I give a brief literature review of the significant academic research work done on the comic series.

4.1.1. In the Market

The *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book series owes its format and style to the English language comic series *Classics Illustrated.* According to Carter, *Classics Illustrated***,** was first published in America by Albert Kanter in 1941. These comics were created "by adapting literary classics to comic-book format…they became an instant hit, and the first 26 titles sold 100 million comics by 1946" (100). The publishers, India Book House (IBH) had initially tried selling Indian language translations of *Classics Illustrated* comics like *Cinderella* and *Pinocchio* in 1967; these were published under the title "Amar Chitra Katha" comics. This initial product failed. So in 1969, IBH allowed Pai to try his hand at creating Indian classics in English. Anant Pai borrowed the idea of adapting literary classics into comic books and applied the comic book formula to Indian Classics. He featured in his series a long list of Indian mythological characters, historical heroes and heroines, biographies and folktales. He called his product *Amar Chitra Katha,*

"Immortal Picture Stories." However, since the ten Indian language translations of the *Classics Illustrated* had also been marketed under the same brand name, we must not confuse them with the body of work that is now considered the "true" *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book series. So, for all practical purposes, the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic series starts with number 11 (Barth 254).

The first *ACK* comic book title *Krishna* (no.11) rolled out in February 1970. The idea was novel: Indian mythology published in comic book format, and in the English language. Karline McLain tells us that Pai knew from his earlier experience with *Indrajal Comics* that the market for such comic books was the English-speaking, urban, middle-classes; so "*Krishna* inaugurated the birth of the Indian comic book industry" (*India's Immortal* 25). Sales were decent, but not encouraging. "To get the comics more exposure, Pai went to shops, restaurants and petrol pumps, urging their owners to display the series. Once, when a restaurant manager said he had no tools to put up racks, Pai opened his briefcase, took out hammer and nails, and did the job himself" (Gangadhar 139). Undauted by the relatively slow response to his product, Anant Pai persisted in his efforts to print Indian stories in English. This was a vital factor in the continuation of the series, Pai was determined that it was a good idea, and he was equally determined that it should succeed. He had a missionary zeal in his efforts and worked hard to blaze a trail in this new venture, which eventually became a runaway publishing success. "But like the heroes in his stories he persevered, bringing out two new issues of Amar Chitra Katha (ACK) every month. By the mid-1970s, ACK had become a household name and was well on its way to making publishing history in India," says Deepa Sreenivas. She also tells us that wide distribution and good pricing influenced this fact:

> Bookstalls everywhere— roadside magazine stands, regular bookshops and especially bookstalls in railway stations and bus stations across the country— were flooded with these picture stories. Attractively produced on newsprint, colourfully illustrated and available at a very reasonable price, these chitrakathas soon became part and parcel of middle-class homes. (1)

Unlike the expensive foreign comics like *Tintin* and *Asterix,* the *ACK* product was affordable: priced at around three rupees each, they soon became a visible presence in the marketplace. Children pestered their parents to buy them comics while they waited at railway stations, or went to the local newsstand to buy their daily newspapers. Pai also personally marketed the series in innovative ways by giving free copies to schools and arranging for students to be tested on what they read… and through annual subscriptions, so that the comics were received regularly through the mail like magazines (Pritchett 77). This idea of mailing the comics took advantage of the wide network of the Indian postal system, *India Post*. *India Post* is a cheap and reliable carrier, and magazines have very reasonable postal rates. *ACK* promised the subscribers that they would receive their issues before they hit the newsstands. This was important, because in the initial print-run of the comics, novelty was a major factor that kept customers faithful to the brand: ACK was producing a variety of known and unknown "Indian" tales from different epochs and places, and like the character, Scheherazade from *The Arabian Nights,* by recounting this unending variety of "new" tales to eager readers/listeners, *ACK* survived the length of the years from 1970 to 1991. Each new story meant staying alive just a little longer in the

marketplace just as each new tale was told by Scheherazade in order to survive a little longer at the mercy of her listener, the Sultan.

In the late 1970s, the *ACK* publishers changed the marketing focus from entertainment to education. After 1978, schools became a major customer for ACK comics after "IBH organized a seminar on "The Role of Chitra Katha in School Education." Many urban school principals attended and the Union Minister of Education, Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder, was the chief guest" (McLain, *India's Immortal* 48). The seminar emphasized the use of ACKs in teaching History as compared to traditional History textbooks. They also pointed out that the comics promote national integration and Indian values. Barth points out that the number of historical titles rose dramatically in the *ACK* canon in order to meet this demand (86-87). The producers of the comics took pains to promote themselves as educational material and not mere entertainment stuff. "After the seminar concluded… sales soared as English-medium schools across the nation ordered *ACK* for their libraries and classrooms' (McLain, *India's Immortal* 43). In this regard, the CEO of the Bookstore chain *Crossword,* R. Shriram's, description of *ACK* as a unique product, which both entertains and educates, and addresses both children and adults, is relevant. He claimed that in the Mumbai *Crossword* stores, 2 lakh *ACK* copies are sold each year (Barth 80). "The reinvention of ACK as a quasi-public educational institution" (Chandra 16) was a further step at legitimizing its claims to being valuable reading material. Even today, this is an important part of its marketing efforts. Historical titles like *Rabindranath Tagore* (no.548), *Babasaheb Ambedkar* (no.611), *Jallianwala Bagh* (no.no.704), *Mahatma Gandhi* (Special Issue), *Jawaharlal Nehru* (no.700), and titles on famous industrialists *Ghanshyamdas Birla* (no.733) and *Jamsetji Tata* (no.737)

make up the *ACK* pack for the school tenth standard level: *Education Alive Series Class X* . Some other current *ACK* packs that are aimed at educational institutions are *Education Alive Series Class VI Set 1 of 2* (fourteen titles) priced at Rs.1450/- and *Education Alive Series Class VI Set 2 of 2* (fifteen titles) priced at Rs.1425/-.

The *ACK* comic series' popularity grew from the 1970s through the '80s. Productivity was at its height with a total of 410 original "Singles" titles coming out in print during this time (the greatest production took place from 1974 till 1987). However, from March 1985 to March 1989, *ACK* embarked on retelling the whole epic *Mahabharata* in 60 monthly installments (it was later reduced to only 42 installments). Though the fortnightly *ACK* produced other titles in between the monthly serialization of the epic titles, this mini-series experiment proved to be the death-knell of *ACK*'s popularity. To make matters worse, B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharata* television serial also ran from September 1988 to July 1990 on India's government funded TV channel, *Doordarshan*. McLain says that many fans got bored with this repetition:

> Uncle Pai lost me as a reader when he introduced his never-ending *Mahabharat* series. That is when I stopped reading *ACK* and stopped my subscription too. The best part about *ACK* was the unpredictability of what was coming next! There was *Mahabharat* on TV and now *Mahabharat* in *ACK* (that too in excruciating detail). I wish he had never done that. I would have continued to buy *ACK*. (*India's Immortal* 46)

From the late 1980s, only seventeen original "Singles" titles were published from 1990 to 1999. But Mr. Pai had a never-say-die attitude to obstacles. He was realistic about the competition from television. In response to this challenge, the publishers, India

Book House, changed their strategy and went on to repackage old *ACK* titles in new formats. According to McLain, in order to recapture the market, in 1994 IBH relaunched "deluxe editions" of more than two hundred of the earlier titles. The covers were glossy, thicker, and had a brightly coloured border. Priced at a steep 25 rupees each, this was far higher than the mid-80s 10 rupees per comic. Accompanying these releases, release parties were held in urban centers all over India (*India's Immortal* 47). *The Story of the Freedom Struggle* was released in 1997 by Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, at Sapru House, Delhi. *The Mahabharata* was released in 1999 at Patkar Hall, Mumbai by Dr. P.C. Alexander, Governor of Maharashtra (Barth 83). At the end of the nineties the sales of *ACK* print comics rose again. Pai believed that it was because television was losing its novelty, and also, improving the *ACK* product with better editions had helped.

However, Nandini Chandra is of the opinion that the limited deluxe editions titles were "selected by their editor for their selling potential within a Hindu-dominated nonresident Indian market. One could argue that a loosely defined secular market was given up for a more lucrative albeit narrowly Hinduised market" (15-16). She called it market segmentation, and says that the stable domestic market was abandoned for the more lucrative but narrow market of affluent Diaspora. This could be true because many adults of the Indian Hindu Diaspora are the very children who were once brought up on *ACK* comics during their childhood years in India. *ACK* brands itself as a "route to your roots" and this reflects a marketing thrust of meeting the demand for a tangible "Indian Culture." Many Hindu Indians have settled abroad after pursuing higher studies in foreign universities and they feel nostalgic about stories of India. Aware that their own children are being brought up in foreign lands, they feel a need to pass on their religious

beliefs and culture to their children. A 45 year old Hindu Indian engineer settled in the U.S. told me that she lugged her whole childhood collection of *ACK* comics from India back to the U.S. on the trips when she used to visit her parents in India, some twenty years ago. Today, with the wide distribution networks of electronic commerce companies like *Amazon.com*, this laborious exercise is unnecessary. The inside front covers of the latest 2014 *ACK* titles give us a clue about how this marketing works, "When they look back at their formative years, many Indians nostalgically recall the vital part *ACK* picture books have played in their lives….Over 90 million copies have been sold worldwide…you can buy all the titles through our online store www.theackshop.com. We provide quick delivery anywhere in the world." Online shopping and the wide distribution network of a company like *Amazon.com* make distribution of the *ACK* products enter a much wider marketing arena than before.

A prominent trend in *ACK* marketing today is the sale of collections of related comics in packs. The pack titled *Indian Heroes* consists of 25 titles including *Chanakya* (no.508), *Vivekananda* (no. 517), *Ahilyabai Holkar* (no.773), *Akbar* (no.603), *Rabindranath Tagore* (no.548), *Ashoka* (no.536), *Babasaheb Ambedkar* (no.611) and *Lokamanya Tilak* (no.645). It costs Rs 1300/-. The *ACK Mythology Collection 45* and *Jataka, Panchatantra and Hitopadesha Collection 45* are packs of 45 titles each which cost Rs 2000/- per pack. *The Complete Collection* pack consists of 300 "Singles" titles plus10 "Specials"; it costs Rs. 17,785/- The bound volumes of 3-in-1 titles are especially popular in bookstores due to their pricing. They cost Rs 150/- each. *Adventures Of Krishna* (no.10018), *Tales of the Mother Goddess* (no.10019) and *Vishnu to the Rescue* (no.10020) are some common titles. *Stories of Krishna* (no.1001), *Stories of*

Birbal (no.1002), *Stories from The Jatakas* (no.1003), *Stories from The Panchatantra* (no.1004) and *Stories of Rama* (no.1005) are some of the 5-in-1 hardbound volumes which are priced at Rs. 250/- each. With the name written on the spines of the covers, these volumes are easy to display in bookstore shelves, so booksellers stock them regularly.

Keeping itself abreast of the demands of an internet generation, India Book House, the earlier publishers of the series, sold their rights in 2007 to a company dealing with print, digital and film production, *ACK* Media. "Reena [Puri] became Editor at Amar Chitra Katha in 2007 and was instrumental in the revival of the series" says the company's website ack-media.com. Khedekar reports that according to Manas Mohan, CEO-Publishing, ACK Media, *"Digitalization of Amar Chitra Katha was the next step towards making our comics available to the net savvy Gen Z. With the launch of the ACK Comics App, we can now reach out to millions of readers who can access the vast treasure of Indian storytelling on their fingertips."* The "ACK Comics app" is the official digital comic store of *ACK* titles in digital format hosted on *digital.amarchitrakatha.com* where a customer can instantly purchase, download and read hundreds of *ACK* digital comics. The "ACK Comics application" is available as a free download for *Windows 8* tablets and computers, *iPad* and *Android* tablets. The print comics are digitally remastered for this new format. There are two ways of reading comics on one's Tablets/Personal Computers: panel-by-panel views or full-page views. More than 200 comics are available in this digital format.

ACK Media has partnered with companies such as Tata Interactive to create animated shows, which were aired across kids' television channels such as Cartoon Network and Disney. *Chhota Bheem* on Pogo was a number one rated show. In addition, it launched online games and ventured into home videos. *Tripura* (running time 78mins) was ACK Media's first feature length television film production, produced in conjunction with Turner Entertainment Networks Asia and Animagic. Followed by *Sons of Ram* (running time 74mins) in 2012, it was advertised as "ACK Animation's most ambitious project yet in terms of creativity & storytelling. The epic story of the twins, Luv & Kush is told like never before with beautiful designs and art that is rarely seen in Indian animation."

ACK Media has embarked onto a multi-pronged approach at diversifying the *ACK* product in varied formats, widening its distribution channels, identifying different target audiences, holding promotional events and creating content that the current market wants. Strategically choosing titles with optimum sales potential, the company works at a higher level of marketing and brand promotion compared to its IBH predecessor. Shashidhar tells us that today ACK Media's distribution network extends to "2,500 stores and 22,000 vendors across 400 cities in India." She says the dream of Samir Patil, CEO, ACK Media "is to make ACK Media a Rs 1,000 crore company."

4.1.2. In Religious and Cultural Education

The *ACK* comic book series is a cultural phenomenon that was born out of a deeply felt need to educate young Hindu Indian children about their religious traditions. In an oft cited incident about Anant Pai who founded the series, it is reported that Pai was appalled that English educated Hindu boys were more familiar with Greek mythology

than with Hindu mythology. He had watched a television show in Delhi in 1967 where he saw a general knowledge quiz contest featuring elite-school English educated boys compete with one another. They could answer questions about Greek gods and goddesses with ease, but they were blank when asked the name of Ram's mother. "Anant Pai felt that the situation needed to be redressed. So he came out with … *Amar Chitra Katha* …published through the India Book House…Both the economic forces of demand and supply have worked towards the popularity of *Amar Chitra Katha*" (Debroy 34). Pai decided he would create an English language product that featured Hindu mythology in a child-friendly format. It would feature Hindu Scripture and philosophy in a simple, attractive format. In her study of pop culture in India, Asha Kasbekar writes that the *Amar Chitra Katha* series was conceived as a response to a perceived lacuna in the cultural and religious awareness of "large numbers of the urban, English-speaking, school-going Hindu population" who attended westernized Christian missionary schools. "The most important objective of the series was to educate Indian children about their classical and religious heritage….The Amar Chitra Katha responded primarily to the perceived need to educate these urban children on the glories of their own Hindu traditions" (95). The product was well accepted by the market for this very reason. Many Indian Hindu parents were willing to subscribe to an English language comic book that would both teach their children about their Hindu culture, and would give them practice in reading stories in English. McLain tells us in *India's Immortal Comic Books* that learning English was important for upwardly-mobile middle class Indians. For them, it was worth paying the higher fees of private English-medium schools for their children to have a chance to "move up in socio-economic status." Quoting an *ACK* reader from

Mumbai, McLain says, "'My mother bought the comics when I was at school as a way to learn English and [Indian] culture at the same time'" (7).

The concept of "Hindu" and "Indian" began to merge as the series grew and expanded its choice of featured titles. The comic book producers themselves were careful to avoid using the word "Hindu" mythology when promoting their product, preferring to call it "Indian" mythology. This positioning worked well with a multi-cultural audience as many parents and children purchased the products thinking that they were handling general stories from the Indian subcontinent. However, in the *ACK* series, the whole concept of being Indian is deeply connected with the idea of being a Hindu. The series has evolved into a popular version of India's history told from the perspective of a religious historiographer. Sylvie Guichard's *The Construction of History and Nationalism in India* discusses two "diverging conceptions of the Indian nation" and of its history, "One group defended a secular historiography and conception of the nation and the other a Hindu nationalist one." She proposes that the "secularist" historian and the "Hindu nationalist historian" compete with one another "to impose their conception as the official version of the past" (2). Chandra writes that the *ACK* series conflated "the Hindu with the national" and sought to evoke "the Hinduness" of the nation (2). She tells us that the entire corpus of *ACKs* uses the comic medium to deploy "its images, narratives and myths in order to make the transition from Hindu to national seem so natural" (2). This is conducive to suggesting to a Hindu reader that one's Hindu identity is the same as one's identity as an Indian. In this regard, McLain's comment in the *Oxford Bibliographies* entry on *ACK*, is pertinent, "Amar Chitra Katha is … an important cultural institution that has helped to define, for several generations of readers, what it means to be Hindu and

Indian." She tells us that the *ACK* series has been very popular with middle class readers in India and also with the global Indian diaspora, because for them "the comics in this series are not considered primarily an entertainment product" but "are regarded as foundational texts for the religious and national education of their young readers." Religious education and national education go hand-in-hand in the *ACK* series.

The *ACK* series has evolved into an authoritative narrative of several myths and philosophies from Hindu religious traditions in India. For example, the comic book *The Gita* (no.505) is a simplified version of *The Bhagavad Gita,* and explains the Hindu concepts of "Dharma" and reincarnation. *Dasha Avatar* (no. 10002) introduces us to the ten "avatars" of Vishnu and illustrates the concepts of "Yugas" in Hindu cosmology, where the universe is created and destroyed in cycles. *Dasharatha* (no. 570) tells the story of the father of Rama and illustrates the Hindu concept of "Karma" or the "Law of Cause & Effect." The mythological titles of the *ACK* series introduce us to a host of individual gods and goddesses and trace their origin stories. Ganesha (no. 509) describes the creation of Ganesha, and offers reasons for his importance among the gods venerated by Hindus. Tales of Durga (no.514) recounts exploits of the goddesses Durga and Kali who are venerated especially in Bengal. The stories about Hindu saints like Mirabai(no.535) and Ekanath (no.790) are beautiful illustrations of "Bhakti," the road to salvation through personal devotion to God. During the 1970s, Pai probably never realized just how important his product would eventually become as a *popular definition of Hinduism*.

The concept of "Hinduism" is difficult to define. W.Cantwell Smith explains that this is because there are numerous dissimilar regional religious traditions within India

that are grouped under the umbrella term "Hinduism." According to him, "the mass of religious phenomena" covered by the term are not a unified entity. Also, they do not aspire to be considered as one since Hindus "have gloried in diversity." Hindus believe that "there are as many aspects of the truth as there are persons to perceive it" (Smith 202). He also points out that when we try to define Hinduism, we must consider "the richness of what exists, in all its extravagant variety from century to century and from village to village" (203). He tells us that the empirical religious tradition of the Hindus has developed historically "in the minds and hearts and institutions and literature and societies of untold millions of actual people;" these lived realities are not a form and cannot be compressed into "any systematic intellectual pattern" (203). Robin Rinehart offers a similar view:

> *Hinduism* is the name given to the predominant religious tradition in India....*Hindu* was originally a geographic designation Persians used for the people who lived beyond the Sindh River in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent, but the term was gradually adopted as a way of distinguishing between practitioners of Islam and others in India. The English term *Hinduism* designating a particular religion did not come into usage until the time that the British ruled India….The religion now known as Hinduism encompasses a vast range of practices and beliefs. It has no one founder and no centralized organization. Hindus throughout history have expressed multiple perspectives on the nature of divinity or ultimate reality: monotheism, polytheism, monism, even henotheism (belief in one god without denying the existence of others). The richness and diversity of

> Hinduism mean that we cannot expect to find one list of specific beliefs or practices that would necessarily apply to all Hindus, nor one text that defines all of Hinduism. Generally, Hindus have tended to see diverse views as complementary rather than contradictory. (1-2)

It is important to remember that the *ACK* series offers its readers its own special version of Hinduism. Closely linked with Pai's personal worldview, Chandra says that the other editors and the rest of the creative staff had "internalized the larger logic of the ACK vision." She calls this view a "pseudo-scientific worldview imbued with an approach based on common sense" (36). Quoting Kamala Chandrakant, the influential *ACK* Associate Editor who scripted one third of the entire series, Chandra says that the producers of the comic book adopted "a non-religious posture" and stated that "Hinduism is a whole way of life":

> All three aspects of Hinduism—Philosophy, Mythology and Theology, all intertwined, have come to us in almost their pristine form down the centuries…. In scripting the ACKs, and editing or rewriting them, I made conscious attempts to keep out narrow religious bigotry and bring out the essence of the great perceptions captured in the vast body of our Sanskrit language and literature in a manner and a metaphor that would appeal to all thinking Indians, no matter what their religious persuasion….(36)

The producers were aware of the need to appeal to a wide market base, and so refrain from making the stories "preachy." They focus on good story-telling and beautiful illustrations and use the overabundance of available stories from India to win over a large

consumer base. The comics are both entertaining and full of variety. Most young readers are not bothered if the story has a moral or not, they are happy as long as the story is a good, spell-binding one. Not many children notice the faith-content encoded in the texts. As one Hindu girl told me, "Our home was anyways so full of prayers and stories about gods and goddesses that our parents told us…. I never ever noticed that the *ACK*s were teaching me."

4.1.3. In Academic Research

The *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book phenomenon has attracted the attention of researchers from around the world. Several journal articles have appeared over the years. There are also book-length studies on the comic book series. The four major research works that examine the emergence and continuance of the series from different perspectives are by Karline McLain, Norbert Victor Barth, Nandini Chandra and Deepa Sreenivas. I briefly outline the range of each of these studies.

Karline McLain doctoral research work on the *ACK* series *Whose Immortal Picture Stories?: Amar Chitra Katha and the Construction of Indian Identities* was submitted in 2005 to the University of Texas, Austin and was later published in 2009 as *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes*. It starts at the very beginning of the series and examines the production process of the comic series. McLain, who spent nine months in the comic book studios of *ACK*, provides a vivid account of the dynamics of the production studio: the debates, the different script and artistic contributors, the editors as regulatory power centers, and the importance of reader feedback to the continuous moulding of the 'tone and colour' of the series. Highlighting

the complex interplay of multiple creators, she offers reasons for some of the choices made by them in the creation of *ACK* as a product. She also examines the religious relevance of the series to its readers, and points out its unique contribution in the global comic book industry as a creator of 'Superheroes' with a religious dimension.

Norbert Victor Barth's 2007 research work *India Book House und die Comic-Serie Amar Chitra Katha (1970-2002): Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Medienanalyse* [which translates as, *India book House and the comic book series Amar Chitra Katha (1970-2002): A Cultural-Scientific Media Analysis*] was awarded a doctorate by the Julius Maximilians University of Würzburg, Germany. It is written in German and is freely available on the World Wide Web. In this study, Barth examines the making of the *Amar Chitra Katha* (*ACK*) series as a "cultural text". According to him, a media analysis of a cultural product is comprehensive when all five processes of the "Circuit of Culture" are considered: Production, Identity, Representation, Consumption and Regulation. He explains that the process "production" includes corporate decisions and responsibilities, as well as issues of staff recruitment. The process "identity" refers to the naming of the *Amar Chitra Katha* series, as well as how the employees, with their specific activities, contributed to the identity formation of the series. The operation "representation" is concerned with aspects such as how the *ACK* has been commented on by scientific researchers and also how it was portrayed in the media. The operation "consumption" takes into account the changing notions that the manufacturer had of their consumers and what impact it had on the development of the *ACK* series. The process includes regulatory issues, such as how the editors responded to the pressure and criticism of readers and consumers.

Nandini Chandra's 2008 book *The Classic Popular: Amar Chitra Katha, 1967–2007* is based on her M.Phil. dissertation. She argues that *ACK* is a "cultural product in a goods and services industry" which seeks "profit maximization" through "audience maximization" (15). Attempting a cultural biography of the *ACK* series from its inception till the year 2007, she examines how the series "contributed to the idea of an all-encompassing national religion" for Indians. She highlights the series' "ideology of nation as religion" and the elevation of Hinduism "to the status of a religion of religions" (vii). She points out the religious lines along which certain characters are made heroes and while others are demonized. She also examines the occasional divide between the narrative texts and their accompanying illustrations. Pointing out that the two had the potential to convey contradictory messages, she draws our attention to the subversive power of artistic illustrations to tell a more frank story than the verbal censors would allow in the verbal texts.

Deepa Sreenivas's doctoral project, *Sculpting the Middle Class: History, Masculinity and the Amar Chitra Katha*, is a discourse analysis of the *ACK* series; it was published by *Routledge* in 2010. "As a cultural project, ACK's aspiration was the rewriting of Nehruvian India. It has not only shaped dominant contemporary ideas about Indian history and tradition, brahminism and masculinity, it has also made a critical contribution in moulding many other present –day hegemonic articulations about merit, self-respect, self-improvement, hard work, and so on" (6). Locating the success of the *ACK* enterprise in the historical-cultural milieu of the 1970s and 1980s, she asserts that the series "moulded the self-image, character and imagination of hordes of middle-class children in the India of that period" (2). She examines the way the series articulated what

it means to be an 'Indian' and how the series portrays India as a tough, martial Hindu nation.

4.2. The Making of the *Amar Chitra Katha* Worldview

The *ACK* comic book series was first conceptualized by Anant Pai, scripted by several writers, illustrated by dissimilar artists and edited by another set of people. Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith define a comic book as "an art form… in which all aspects of the narrative are represented by pictorial and linguistic images encapsulated in a sequence of juxtaposed panels and pages" (4). Dialogue balloons and narrative text act in combination with the artwork and layout of the panels to communicate with the readers. Each *ACK* comic title had to pass through many hands: the scriptwriter, the artists, the sub-editors, the associate editors and Pai as Chief Editor. For example, comic no.750, *Rani Abbakka: The Queen Who Knew no Fear,* was scripted by Subba Rao, the text was illustrated by M. K. Basha, the cover was illustrated by Pratap Mulick and the comic was edited by Anant Pai. There were also many unnamed contributors who participated in the visualizing of each comic and the final result was the result of team-work. I cannot pinpoint any one author as the creator of the "worldview" in the comics, but I can certainly tell that some were more influential than others in stamping their vision on the product. Being in the comic book format, the artists played a dominant role in the image making process. There were different artists from different schools of art whose realist or stylized drawings affected the representations in the text. Chandra has discussed how each individual artist, Ram Waeerkar, Pratap Mulick, Souren Roy, Dilip Kadam and Yusuf Lien (later known as Yusuf Bangalorewalla) left their characteristic "signatures" on the images they painted. Chandra contends that sometimes the artists managed to

escape the editorial protocols because the artwork was more difficult to alter than the verbal texts (34). As production schedules are time-bound, dialogues were altered instead of some of the visual drafts.

Producing an *ACK* comic was a multi-layered process with Pai at the top of the hierarchy of control who acted as a series overseer, and remained the final arbiter of meaning making. From choice of which titles to feature in the series to the final editing of both the artwork and the scripts, Pai remained the "gatekeeper" for what was allowed or not allowed to appear in print. For example, Pai had devoted a larger number of the *ACK* titles to his personal deity Krishna than to any other Hindu deity, such as *Krishna* (no.11), *The Gita* (no.505), *Krishna & Rukmini* (no. 516), *Krishna & Jarasandha* (no. 518) and the "Special Issue" *Bhagawat - The Krishna Avatar* which consisted of reprints of nine earlier single comics. After the demise of Anant Pai in 2011, the ACK Media has produced the first two of a planned seven new titles based on Valmiki's *Ramayana: Ramayana - The Bala Kand (*Vol. 1, 2013) and *Ramayana - The Ayodhya Kand-part 1*(Special Issue, 2014) which plans to focus on the complete story of Rama by including smaller details and stories from the epic, they have also printed *Vaishno Devi* (no. 829) and *Stories of Creation* (no. 832) in 2011. These titles were on deities that Pai was reluctant to feature as solo comics.

I cannot generalize by saying "this" or "that" is the worldview in the whole series, but can point out to the particular "ways of seeing" that are present in a few titles. Though I wouldn't go so far as to agree with Frances W. Pritchett's view that because it was invented, developed and controlled by one editor, "ACK has ultimately a single vision behind it" (96), I do see a certain logic in the selection of the *ACK* canon of heroes

and heroines. Apart from featuring a very large amount of stories from the famous Hindu epics and sacred scriptures like the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Puranas, the series features tales from Indian history like *Rani of Jhansi* and *Chandra Shekhar Azad* to meet the demand for historical titles; the regional folktales like *Thugsen* and *Animal Tales from Arunachal Pradesh* were featured to give the series a pan-Indian flavour. There are also tales from Buddhist and Jain lore like *The Cowherd of Alawi* and *Shrenik* that have religious ideas amenable to Hinduism; adaptations of Sanskrit, Bengali and Tamil classics like *Devi Choudhurani* and *Kannagi* are included either because of the stoical, courageous women contained therein, or because they are important characters in Hindu mythology (for example, *Shakuntala* and *Ancestors of Rama*). There are also titles on Hindu religious saints and social reformers like *Dayananda,* especially titles on true devotees of Krishna: *Mirabai, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu*, *Tukaram, Narsinha Mehta* and *Tyagraja.* Finally, there are also titles on the founders of major world religions: *Buddha, Mahavira, Zarathushtra, Guru Nanak,* and *Jesus Christ* which are included to "accommodate the expectations of more than one group of readers" (Barth 269). The few titles on sportspersons and scientists are included to give the series a modern scientific appeal.

4.3. Textual Analysis: Worldview Elements in Selected *ACK* Comics

My selection of texts from the *ACK* series is limited to those with religious overtones. I have intentionally omitted the comics that feature folktales and historical-political personalities. This is because the aim of the following argument is to explain

how the religious *ACK* comics can be used for faith-instruction about various beliefs from Hinduism. The texts were originally designed for such a use.

4.3.1. The Concept of Hindu Cosmology

The Special Issue *Dasha Avatar* (*ACK* no. 10002) was published in 1978. In the *ACK* canon, the first date of publication is vital to identify the importance of the particular topic or hero featured. *Dasha Avatar* is the second special issue published by *ACK*. It has 96 pages and is a much larger volume than the usual 32 page comic book. It features all the ten "avatars"/earthly manifestations of Vishnu. It is a concise edition of some of the various comics based on different avatars of Vishnu that have already appeared in the earlier singles editions: *Krishna* (no.11, 1970), *Rama* (no.15, 1970), *Buddha* (no.22, 1971), *Prahlad* (no.38, 1973) and *Parashurama* (no. 42, 1973). The book cover features the image of Vishnu reclining in comfort in the centre of the coils of a five-headed snake in the middle of an ocean. His devoted wife is pressing his feet while the other gods (smaller in size) bow in reverence to him. The introduction on the inside flap of the comic gives us a direct lesson in Hindu cosmology and is an important passage that reveals the worldview of the comic book creators. To illustrate this fact, I quote this introduction extensively:

> The Avatar concept is the very cornerstone of Hindu theology. According to it, the Supreme Power manifests itself in animal or human forms on earth, with the divine mission of cleansing it of the periodically increasing evil. The Avatar concept is closely related to the measurement of time in Hindu theology which has its basis on one working day of Brahma.

> According to the Bhagwat Purana, Brahma, the creator, is the causal effect of the predetermined periodic creation and dissolution of the universe. Each creation or ***Kalpa*** is equal to one day and each dissolution or ***Pralaya*** is equal to one night in the life of Brahma. A Kalpa and a Pralaya last for 4,320 million human years each. Every Kalpa has 1000 cycles of 4 Yugas (ages). Each cycle of 4 ***Yugas*** is completed in 4,320,000 human years. The Yugas are called Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali.... The Avatars which are considered most significant are ten in number and they form the "Dasha Avatar". These ten avatars start with the form of a lowly fish and work up to the noble man, cast in the image of God.… The Avatars enable the common folk to speak of or listen to stories of divine doings which is a simple way of proceeding towards Godhead; particularly in our Kali Yuga with its 'sick hurry and divided aims'.

Dasha Avatar can be considered as a straightforward lesson in Vaishnava Hindu theology. The illustrations are vivid and the stories visualize the idea that Vishnu is the preserver of the universe and the cosmic order. Brahma is the creator who lives on mount Meru. At the end of his day's work he sleeps (1). Vishnu is the preserver: he preserves the Vedas from being robbed by the asura Hayagriva, and preserves devotees, animals and seeds from the great flood that submerges the "three worlds" (5-8). The gods (devas), Indra and Brahma pay obeisance to Vishnu, and take refuge in him (10). The comic book covers the history of the gods and asuras and their churning of the ocean to gain the nectar of immortality, the creation of the earth, the creation of man and woman (Swayambhuva Manu and Shatarupa) and the divine command to them from Brahma,

"keep your heart free from jealousy, beget many virtuous children and rule over the earth...." The comic covers all the ten avatars of Vishnu and ends with the promise of a restoration of all world order and peace at the end of the current cycle of Yugyas.

4.3.2. The Religious and Cultural Worldview in *Valmiki's Ramayana*

Valmiki's Ramayana (*ACK* Special issue no. 10001) was the first Special issue and was published in 1978. There is a predominant religious worldview in this comic. The people are portrayed as a highly religious people. They perform "Yagnas"(holy rituals) and receive supernatural boons from the heavenly powers/gods. The powerful King Dasharatha of Kosala had three queens, but no son, so he performs a Yagna. According to the text, from the blazing fire there emerged a divine form who says, "Take this payasa prepared by the gods and let your wives partake of it. Then they will bear sons"(1). The wives drink of this precious gift and all conceive and bear sons.

The "sages" (holy men) were revered by all, even by the very rich kings. The kings would do their best to fulfill a sage's wishes. It was considered dangerous to displease a sage and to incur his wrath or curses. When the Sage Vishwamitra came to visit King Dasharatha, the latter hurried out to receive the sage. He says, "Holy one! Tell me the purpose of your visit. Is there anything you desire? I'll carry out your orders without question" (3). He is sorry to hear the sage ask for the help of the young prince, Rama, to destroy the demons that obstruct the sage's fire sacrifices and defile the altar. The demons were stronger and more powerful than humans. But he dare not disobey the sage. Rama goes with the sage and defeats the terrible demons. Later, the sage rewards Rama's fearless services. Rama has his first major experience in restoring order in the

world he inhabits. According to the text, in the hierarchy of the universe, gods and demons were very powerful, but human actors played a role in their fortunes.

Deities were believed to guard and protect the cities. “When, at last, he (Hanuman) reached Lanka and was about to enter under cover of darkness, the guardian deity of the city barred the way” (65). Hanuman is said to be the son of the wind-god and this explains his supernatural powers of moving mountains and jumping over the ocean. He comes to the aid of the human Rama and helps him kill the powerful evil demon Ravana. Here we see a nice system of god helping man vanquish demon. Man is important in the whole scheme of things.

In *Valmiki's Ramayana*, Ravana has abducted Rama’s wife Sita. A war of epic proportions is imminent. Ravana holds a council to plan his strategy. One of his ministers offers him this advice, “A monarch should be on friendly terms with his equals, or with those who are stronger than himself. Return Sita to Rama and seek to make him an ally” (80). This sound military advice throws light on the politics of the day. Another scene is interesting, when Ravana is rendered unarmed by the rain of Rama’s arrows, Rama does not slay him. He lets him go saying, “I won’t kill you, Ravana, since you are tired and unarmed” (84). This shows a particular kind of honour on the battlefield. The enemy must be armed for the fight to be equal.

Sita is portrayed as an ideal woman and the perfect wife. She is beautiful, virtuous, loyal to her husband and brave. She is Rama’s ideal partner who follows him like a shadow. She is the heroine of the comic. Sita leaves the comfortable palace to join her husband who has been exiled by his father. She gets abducted by the demon-king

Ravana and lives in Lanka for many months till Rama finds her and rescues her. However, she has lived in another man's household and hence is not considered pure. She proved her purity by undergoing the Fire Ordeal. She remains unhurt by the flames because the fire god Agni protects her. Sita is shown as a model of spousal love and duty. She is the model of Stri –dharma who performs the duties of a woman perfectly.

However, in contrast to the perfect Sita is the dark, ugly monstrous Shrupanakha who tries unsuccessfully to woo the exiled brothers, Rama and Lakshman. She gets her nose chopped off by Lakshman for her boldness. In "Sita and Shrupanakha" McLain comments on this graphically portrayed incident, "In this episode of the comic book a message that may be received –whether it is intentional or not – is that it is okay, even morally justified, to physically harm an "other" woman. Indeed, the "other" woman often is perceived as deserving punishment because her sexuality is not controlled according to the criteria of the dominant group" (35). The ideal woman is a quiet, good woman. Shrupanakha is an example of what a woman should *not* be like.

4.3.3. The Concept of the Ideal Indian Woman: *Kannagi, Shakuntala,* and *Savitri*

A woman's purity, chastity and fidelity are important values according to the *ACK* worldview. *Kannagi, Shakuntala,* and *Savitri* are three comics which demonstrate Pai's insistence on offering his reading public (largely consisting of women and children) role models of dutiful, self-sacrificing wives as the "ideal" woman. The visuals and the verbal texts in the comics naturalize the ideology of female submission to male authority and patriarchal power structures.

Kannagi (*ACK* no.93) was published in 1975. This text was created early in the chronology of the *ACK* series. The first edition numbers are a clear indication of which titles got priority in being featured in the series. The script is by Lalitha Raghupati and the illustrations are by Varnam. The comic is based on the Tamil epic *Shilappadikāram* (*The Ankle Bracelet*) by the Jain poet-prince Ilango Adigal. The themes of this epic are: those who do not do their "Dharma" (appointed duty on earth) and give due justice where it is deserved will be punished with death; our lives are defined by "Karma," which means that the effects of the sins we have committed in our previous births will be felt in the current life on earth; and perfect wifely loyalty and chastity makes a woman worthy of being worshipped.

The story of *Kannagi* revolves round the young couple Kannagi and her merchant husband Kovalan who are happily married till Kovalan meets the beautiful and talented dancer Madhavi. Smitten by her charms, Kovalan deserts Kannagi and goes to live with Madhavi. He squanders his wealth patronizing the dancer, while his chaste wife, Kannagi lies at home crying. A woman advises her to eat her food. Kannagi replies, "For whom should I live? Kovalan never comes here." Another older woman tell her to send him away if he comes back because she is too good for him. Kannagi covers her ears and says, "No. Don't say that. My husband is my god" (8). One day, Kovalan realizes that Madhavi is yearning for someone else. Disillusioned, he walks away and returns to his faithful wife. Kannagi readily accepts him back and offers to sell her precious anklets to help him start his business all over again. To do so they travel to Madurai. At Madurai Kovalan takes one anklet to the marketplace to sell. Here he is falsely accused of stealing the queen's anklet and without holding any trial, the king orders Kovalan to be beheaded.

Kannagi faints on hearing the news. When she revives she takes the remaining anklet and marches off to the king to prove that her husband has been wronged. The king is deeply grieved by his blunder and he falls dead when he realizes that he had not delivered justice to Kovalan. As a Kshatriya, the "dharma" of a king "is to protect his subjects and to do his duty carefully…it is not merely legal, it is also customary, moral, religious, and fitting the office he holds" (Rinehart 163-164). The Madurai king has not done his duty as befits his role as supreme appellate authority of the land. By failing in his role in life, by not doing what he *ought* to do, he has done a grievous moral wrong, and so he must pay a heavy penalty. His queen follows suit and dies by his side saying, "For a chaste woman there is no life after the death of her husband. I will follow him"(27).

Kannagi then curses the city and burns the city to ashes with her wrath. At this point the goddess of Madurai comes down from the sky and explains that it was due to Kovalan's sin in a previous birth that this tragedy had occurred. She tells Kannagi that at that time Kovalan was one of the Pandaya king's soldiers. He had brought about the death of an innocent man and the man's wife had cursed him, "If I am the pure wife of an innocent man, you and your wife shall know the pain that is now ours" (30). According to the doctrine of karma, "by the performance or nonperformance of duties and obligations, an individual not only produces consequences in the world for which he is held accountable but also gets an appropriate amount of moral merit or demerit for which he or she will receive a fitting happiness or unhappiness in a future life" (Rinehart 165). Kovalan's failure to do his appointed dharma in the previous birth has reaped its consequence in this life. As in the Hindu worldview life is cyclical, Kovalan cannot escape the consequences of his dereliction of duty: he must pay for his previous birth's

misdeeds in his current lifespan. The goddess blesses Kannagi and she is reunited with her husband and they go off to heaven, "free of all earthly pain and pleasures" (31). This refers to "moksha" or redemption from the cycle of births and deaths. Though the comic book does not specify it, we can presume that the merits of Kannagi's exemplary life have gained the couple the merit of freedom from future lives of pain and pleasure. The comic ends with a full page illustration of a statue of Kannagi installed in a big temple. The text tells us that to this day people worship the divinity of Kannagi.

The story of *Kannagi* is a moral story that easily explains the difficult concepts of karma and dharma to a child reader/ listener. Ideally, this philosophical content should be interpreted by an adult to a child. As the child reads more stories similar to this, these concepts will slowly become clearer to him. The three themes of the original story were exactly what Pai prized: dharma, karma and stoical wifely devotion.

Shakuntala (*Amar Chitra Katha* no.12) and *Savitri* (*Amar Chitra Katha* no.14), both published in 1970, were another two comics that deal with exemplary wives. From their priority numbers, we can see that Pai loved to feature such themes. In his personal worldview, it was a woman's duty to be loyal, faithful, chaste and devoted to her husband. Irrespective of how her husband behaved towards her, by doing her duty well, a woman would merit spiritual salvation. In the second comic book of the series, *Shakuntala,* Shankuntala is the young forest-dwelling beauty whom King Dushyanta had married in a simple consensual marriage ceremony in the forest. "Let us exchange garlands and marry as forest people do," he tells her (9). He promises to send a minister to bring her to the palace when he leaves the hermitage. However, he fails to do so. The now pregnant Shankuntala goes to the king's court but is disowned by him because he

had forgotten her. The king's loss of memory, we learn, is due to a curse placed on Shakuntala by the angry sage Durvasa when she failed to offer him proper hospitality. "You have forgotten to do your duty to a guest, so the person you're thinking of will also forget you," Durvasa had cursed (11). Durvasa later modified his curse and permits the king to remember his wife only when he sees a ring he had given her before he had left the forest. Since the ring is lost when Shakuntala drinks water from a river, she has no token by which she can make him remember her. This return of memory happens later on in the story when a fisherman discovers the ring in the body of a fish and returns it to the king, by which time Shakuntala's child has grown into a nice, brave little boy. Finally, the gods help them to reunite and Shakuntala takes the king back without any reproach. "Oh Dushyant, so you have come at last," she says in the comic book (30). There is an illustration of the king kneeling and asking her for pardon. Here it is interesting to note that Shakuntala does not reply to his apology, but turns to her son and says, "He is indeed your father, little one" (31). The next panel foregrounds the king holding hands with his wife and son. The successive panels also give greater visual prominence to the figure of the king, than to Shakuntala. The artists of the comic seem to think that the spotlight should now fall on the male actor in the scene.

In the comic book *Mahabharata 1: Veda Vyasa* (no. 329) first published in 1985, we see a different version of the Shakuntala story. In this version, there is no sage's curse and the king willfully disowns Shakuntala and the child she has borne. Shakuntala is more vocal and reproaches the neglectful king in no uncertain terms. She tells him that as his wife she deserves to be received with respect. The dialogue balloons show her saying, "Indeed I will go! For the company of men like you is best avoided" (15). When both

models of the mythological heroine were available to Pai, why did he choose to feature the meek and mild Shakuntala as his first heroine instead of the more robust version that he featured a good 15 years later? Obviously, in Pai's personal worldview, the meek version was the better one to hold up to Indian children as a model of ideal womanhood. McLain comments, "It is Kalidasa's Shakuntala—the modest, long-suffering, submissive version of the heroine—who has been remembered and celebrated over time, and it is this Shakuntala who featured as the first heroine of the *Amar Chitra Katha* series" (*India's Immortal* 55). She then asks, "How did such dutiful wives come to be the ideal Indian woman?" (61).

McLain explains that this image of ideal womanhood has been constructed by the media through widely disseminated paintings (notably lithographic copies of Ravi Varma's oil paintings), the theatre, film, film hoardings, advertisements, and other kinds of visual culture (71). She says that this visual image of the Indian feminine ideal compliments the image "being constructed by male novelists and socio-religious reformers in various textual media," right from the late nineteenth century:

> This ideal Indian woman could be identified through such external markers of femininity as her gestures and posture, jewelry and ornamentation, sari draping and hairstyle. And these external markers of femininity, once equated with the new visual template of mythological heroines such as Shakuntala, became equated with more internal markers of femininity: modesty, spirituality, and a self-sacrificing nature. The significance of this equation is that it was the combination of these internal and external markers of femininity that allowed the "spiritual" qualities of

> women to be publicly recognized, so that they could then enter into the public realm. (71)

Savitri is the story of the beautiful and learned princess (note that being beautiful *and* learned is a perfect combination according to *ACK* ideology) Savitri who chooses to marry a young hermit, Satyavan. Satyavan is actually the son of an exiled king, Dyumatsena .She learns that Satyavan is destined to die in exactly a year's time. She marries him none the same and goes to live a simple forest life with his family. She is a very devoted daughter-in-law and tends to the needs of her parents-in-law dutifully. As the year draws to a close, Savitri fasts and prepares for the impending death-knell. As predicted, Satyavan goes into an agony while cutting wood, and soon dies. Yama, the god of death comes to collect Satyavan's soul. In the comic we see a thought balloon where Savitri tells herself that since her husband is dead, there is nothing left for her to live for, so she decides to follow Yama. It should be noted that this idea of a new widow having nothing to live for after her husband's death reoccurs in several *ACK* comics. It is not a wholesome idea to appear in a children's text. As she keeps following Yama along the long path, he is pleased with her devotion to her dead husband and agrees to grants her anything but her husband's life. She asks that her father-in-law should regain his sight and that his kingdom may be restored to him. After he grants her this boon, Yama is surprised when Savitri continues to follow him and tells her to go back and arrange the funeral for her dead husband. Savitri tells Yama that she is wedded to Satyavan even in death, and so will not return to his lifeless corpse. Yama grants her more boons. She asks for a hundred sons. Yama grants her wish but soon realizes that in fact she has tricked him and has actually asked for her husband's life back, "How can I have sons if my

husband is dead?" she challenges him. Yama gives her back her husband's life and all ends well.

The story illustrates the devotion of a good wife even after death. Savitri is the epitome of the selfless, committed wife, who willingly followed her husband to the land of the dead. This is an ominous element that appears in some comics like *Ranak Devi* and *The Advent of the Kuru Princes* where the faithful wives voluntarily commit sati when their husbands die. In *Padmini*, the Hindu queen of Chittor leads her womenfolk into a huge pyre to avoid falling into the clutches of the conquering enemy, "in order to free her husband to fight on the battlefield without worry that, should he be defeated, she would be forced to succumb to the advances of the invading Muslim king" (McLain, *India's Immortal* 59). The comic eulogizes her as the "perfect model of ideal Indian womanhood."

In an interesting parallel to the devotion of an ideal wife to her husband, Pai featured several Hindu saints who were deeply devoted to their personal deities. Pai's choice of *ACK* saints and heroes are largely from the Vaishnava tradition. The Vaishnava tradition draws on the "writings of the eleventh-century theologian Ramanuja" and the teachings of "the sixteenth-century Bengali saint Chaitanya," says Rinehart, which "emphasizes devotion, or bhakti, to Krishna, regarded as the supreme incarnation of Vishnu" (393). The devotee must completely surrender his life to God. Chanting of hymns (kirtans) in honour of God is also important. From *Mirabai* to *Chokha Mela*, we can see that this is the model of religious orientation that Pai would like to offer to the world of Children's Literature. Pai endorsed such devotion/ *bhakti* even when the deity

was not Krishna or Rama, as in the comic *Kannappa* where the chosen deity is Shiva.To illustrate what Pai considered as a model of "bhakti," or deep personal devotion to God, I will discuss the worldview in the *Mirabai* comic book.

4.3.4. The Concept of Loving Deity-Devotee Relationship in *Mirabai*

Mirabai (no.36, 1972), the story of the most famous woman "bhakti" poet of medieval North India, was featured very early in the series. The subtitle of the comic is "She gave her heart to Krishna." Scripted by Kamala Chandrakant and illustrated by Yusuf Lien / Bangalorewala, *Mirabai*, is a wonderful illustration of the meaning of "Bhakti." The comic book begins the story with how the little five year old Mira gave her heart to Lord Krishna when her mother told her to consider him as her husband. Page 2 of the comic depicts how Mira's mother leads her little girl to an idol of Lord Krishna and tells her, "This is your husband! Gopala himself. Love him and serve him as a good wife would her husband." The narrative text tells us, "Mira took her mother seriously." The scene is illustrated with a picture of a little girl praying devoutly as her mother looks on. Mira speaks out, "From now Gopala is mine and I am his." She also makes a silent prayer, "From now on you must protect me, for I am your bride." The language echoes the biblical *The Song of Songs*, "My love is mine and I am his" (*New Jerusalem Bible* 2.16a). The comic book story goes on to show that Mira grows up loving Lord Krishna whom she considered her divine husband. She is totally devoted to the small idol she had dedicated herself to. Jean Holm and John Bowker explain that "for most Hindus the image is more than a symbol. Once the image of the deity is consecrated in a temple … it becomes sacred.…From then onwards, the image becomes the living presence of the

deity.…Worship involves seeing, touching, offering fruits, flowers and incense to the deity, and this helps the worshippers to develop a close relationship with their chosen deity. A deep yearning for the divine finds expression in bhakti, devotional literature" (110-111). In *Mirabai*, Mira's life is depicted as a daily communion with her Lord. She takes him as her divine husband and spends her days trying to please him by singing his praises and holding discourses about the joy of belonging to him. She entrusts her life to his protection.

The comic book tells us that when Mira grows up, she marries Prince Bhojraj of Chittor. She is an "ideal hindu wife," but after her "household duties were over, she would turn to her divine husband— her Gopala" (4)[1]. This is not approved of by her in-laws who lead her husband into believing that she is unfaithful to him. His suspicions seem right when he overhears Mira speaking inside the temple, "Why do you keep your Mira waiting? All she wants is to be able to love you? She yearns only for you" (pg. 6, panel no.2). These words of Mira have a parallel in the Biblical *Psalms*, "As a deer yearns for running streams, so I yearn for you, my God. I thirst for God, the living God; when shall I go to see the face of God?" (42.1-2). It expresses the yearning that a devotee has for the presence of God. This is the language of a love-relationship, and Mira's husband is naturally alarmed. He bursts into the temple only to find her alone before her deity's statue. Relieved, he decides to "humour her" and builds "a temple for her where she could worship her stone lover to her heart's content." The narrative text on pg. 7, panel 2 tells us, "The story of Mira's devotion to Lord Krishna by song, dance and discourses spread far and wide."

[1] The pages of this comic book are unnumbered. The numbers I have supplied are after counting the pages manually.

The narrative then goes on to tell us that Mira incurs the wrath of her husband when she allows his sworn enemy, the Mughal Emperor Akbar, to touch her feet in reverence for her inspiring, devotional singing. "Did you dare allow a Mughal cur to touch your feet, the feet of a Rajput princess? Did you dare allow him to enter your temple?" he bellows (10). Prince Bhojraj considers it a disgrace to the Rajput name and commands her to go drown herself in some river. She obediently goes off and is about to jump into a river "when a hand from behind grasped her. She turned around… and what should meet her but the heavenly smile of her beloved Lord! She fainted" (13). This is the highest point of her life where she meets her divine lover in real human form. The much-cited full-page illustration on page 12 is one of a life-sized Krishna gracefully holding her back from jumping into the river. At the bottom of the page is the small Krishna idol that Mira carried to every place she resided in. We are told that Krishna tells her that her life with her Rajput husband is now over, "Now you are mine." This text is crucial: it affirms her identity that she *belongs* to Krishna. And it ratifies her strong conviction that she is *his* dearly beloved. She is overwhelmed and can only respond in ecstasy, "My Lord, My Lord." The art work on pages12-13 depicts the encounter in the body language of gentle tenderness. John Stratton Hawley comments, "The scenes of amorous devotion in which Mira encounters Krishna are lavishly, delicately depicted" (118). This experience of being deeply loved by a real, living God sets her free. She discovers her identity as a lover of The Divine. This comic book narrative is a simple way of portraying to a child reader, the nature of what is essentially a mystical experience. A mystical experience, by its very nature, should defy compression into human language. The devotee can only use metaphors to convey it to others. Pai

employed the finest artist from the pool of *ACK* artists to illustrate this exquisite rendering of the mystical experience of Mirabai's encounter with her divine Lord. Yusuf Bangalorewala was a Muslim artist. Hawley recounts how the artist was deeply moved by the mystical experience he was illustrating, and how Yusuf Bangalorewala had his own personal inspiration for the concept of loving union with The Divine:

> Pai recalled the special care that Bangalorewala lavished on this volume by telling how he once visited him at his house...[and found]the artist in tears as he drew. Bangalorewala's explanation of how he could accomplish what for a Muslim ought to have been a feat of interreligious imagination was that he had the Muslim "saint" Rabia in the back of his mind much of the time. (Hawley 120)

Rabi'a Basri was a woman Sufi saint, a mystic. In her book *Muslim Women Mystics: The Life Work of Rabi'a Basri and Other Women Mystics in Islam*, Margaret Smith explains the Sufi concept of union with the Divine:

> The goal of the Sufi quest was union with the Divine, and the Sufi seeker after God, having renounced this world and its attractions, being purged of self and its desires, inflamed with a passion of love of God, journeyed ever onward, looking towards his final purpose, through the life of illumination, with its ecstasies and raptures, and the higher life of contemplation, until at last he achieved the heavenly gnosis and attained to the vision of God, in which the lover might become one with the Beloved, and abide in Him forever. (19)

So we can see how the artist had a parallel mystical devotee-divine union in his mind, albeit from another religious tradition, when he did the artwork for the *Mirabai* comic.

This idea of prayer being an intimate love-relationship has an interesting parallel in Mother Teresa's 1993 "Varanasi Letter" to her Missionaries of Charity Sisters, where she tried to explain the nature of the 10th September, 1946 mystical experience that changed her life. She wrote, "I worry some of you still have not really met Jesus – one to one – you and Jesus alone. We may spend time in chapel – but have you seen with the eyes of your soul how He looks at you with love? Do you really know the living Jesus – not from books but from being with Him in your heart? Have you heard the loving words He speaks to you?" (Langford, 54-55) She explained that a daily intimate contact with God as a real living person— not just an idea— is prayer… and just as the body *needs* to breathe air, we *need* to hear God say "I love you," everyday.

The *Mirabai* comic book goes on to narrate how Mira persists in her deep devotion to her Lord despite severe persecution and travails. The Lord protects her through it all and she survives several attempts on her life. She throws human conventions to the winds and fearlessly lives her life on her own terms. Throughout her life she maintains a daily routine of prayer, singing hymns of praise and dancing, as her way of worshipping her beloved Lord. She was energized by her daily communion with her divine husband and her joy overflowed into her hymns of praise. Mira finally dies in Dwarka, in the middle of a prayer meeting, while she was dancing and singing songs of worship. The last page of the comic depicts a tall image of Lord Krishna with an inset of Mira's face at the place of Lord Krishna's heart. The narrative text tells us, "And Mira at last became one with the Lord she had worshipped and yearned for, ever since she had

taken him for her bridegroom, at the tender age of five!!" The text-picture combine represent a final union between the devotee and deity.

In my opinion, the choice of regularly featuring the deity Krishna in the *ACK* oeuvre primarily came from a deep religious experience Pai had when he was young. Deepa Sreenivas tells us that Pai was orphaned at the age of three; the unhappiness of his childhood "was relieved through an interest in spiritual matters, namely the *Gita*…. The young Pai was often filled with longing for his parents. When he was around nine years old, lonely and unhappy, he stumbled upon a copy of the *Bhagavat Gita*. He recalls: 'I read it several times and was moved to tears'" (13). This personal encounter with the Divine was to imprint itself on the shape of many stories featured in the *ACK* canon. *Sudama, Tales of Vishnu, Tales of Shiva, Chokha Mela, Kannappa,* and *Narayana Guru* are a few titles that illustrate this worldview.

4.3.5. The Concept of the Importance of Devotion to God in *Sudama*, *Tales of Vishnu* and *Tales of Shiva*

Sudama (*ACK* no.31, 1972), *Tales of Vishnu* (*ACK* no. 160, 1978) and *Tales of Shiva* (*ACK* no. 164, 1978) are comics that model perfect devotion to one's deity. In *Sudama,* the poor Brahmin Sudama loves his childhood friend, Krishna, and he goes to visit him. Being poor, he takes a small gift to Krishna. However, Krishna sees how much Sudama loves him and he rewards Sudama's genuine love by bestowing enormous wealth on the poor man. *Tales of Vishnu* and *Tales of Shiva* demonstrate how the respective deities come to the rescue of their dedicated devotees. All the stories in these comics demonstrate the importance of being genuinely devoted to a particular deity. In "Shiva and Markandeya" from *Tales of Shiva,* the Sage Mrikandu prays to Shiva for a son. Shiva

appears before him and gives him the option of choosing either a long-lived son lacking in virtue or a short-lived virtuous son. Mrikandu chooses the latter. The promised child, Markandeya, grows up to be wise and virtuous, but when his sixteenth birthday approaches, his mother weeps because he is doomed to die. The boy says, "Don't cry, mother. I will not die. I will seek immortality through the grace of Shiva who is the conqueror of death" (27). The comic illustrates how the young boy prayers fervently to Shiva, and when Yama, the god of death comes to collect his soul, he asks for time to finish his worship session. The visual shows Yama slipping a noose round the boy's neck while the boy cries out, "Lord, protect me." Immediately, Shiva springs forth from the Shivalinga the boy was worshipping and kicks Yama on the chest. Shiva then grants immortality to Markandeya and the boy returns home to his joyful parents. This simply illustrated story is a clear message to children to trust in the protection of God. God can overcome the powers of death, and can change the course of one's destiny. A direct parallel to this story is the story of the young Prahlad in the 1973 *ACK Prahlad* (no.38). In this story, Vishnu comes to the aid of young Prahlad when he cries out to him for protection. Vishnu kills the evil Hiranyakashipu who has been trying to prevent Prahlad from worshipping him.

In "Ambarisha" in *Tales of Vishnu,* the righteous king Ambarisha spent three days fasting and worshipping his Lord Vishnu. As he is about to break his fast, Sage Durvasa comes by and delays his breaking of the fast. As an honored guest, Ambarisha is not allowed to partake of any food or water before his guest has finished his ritual bathing and has settled down to a meal. However, the auspicious hour of breaking the fast is getting over, and Sage Durvasa has not returned from his bath in the river. Ambarisha

takes a sip of water before the sage returns and incurs the sage's terrible wrath for it. "Not a drop of water should have been drunk before feeding the invited guest!" he roars (13). The sage flings a discus at Ambarish to destroy him. The spinning discus is destroyed by another discus that miraculously emerges from the sky. The illustration shows Vishnu sending his special weapon, the spinning "Sudarshana Chakra" to smash the sage's weapon. The Sudarshana Chakra then pursues the sage over fields and valleys, through tunnels and seas, as the sage flees for his life. These scenes are illustrated in separate panels. Finally the sage seeks refuge in Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu successively. He gets no relief from all of them. Brahma tells him that none can protect him since he has incurred the wrath of Vishnu by attempting to harm his devotee. Shiva tells him to seek the protection of Vishnu whose anger Durvasa has invited upon himself. Finally appealing to Vishnu and begging his pardon, the sage is told that anyone who employs his power to injure the virtuous invites evil upon himself. Vishnu tells him to return to Ambarisha and seek protection from him because "only Ambarisha has the power to save you." The sage appeals to Ambarisha. The king then prays to the weapon, "If Lord Vishnu has been pleased with my devotion, let sage Durvasa no longer be troubled by you" (20). The prayer is immediately answered. The last panel of the comic has the following dialogue:

> SAGE DURVASA. The discus of Vishnu which could not be controlled by either Shiva or Brahma, respects your words. What is the secret of your power?
>
> KING AMBARISHA. The love of Lord Vishnu. (20)

The dialogue shows King Ambarisha speaking right out of the panel to the reader. The final narrative text emphasizes the message, "Thus did Vishnu demonstrate his love for his devotees" (20). The religious message of the comic book is clear: Vishnu protects his true devotees.

4.3.6. The Concept of Deity Honoring Devotee *Chokha Mela*

Chokha Mela (*ACK* no. 292) is one of the very few comics that handles the real problem of social discrimination. This comic portrays how social discrimination can crush the human spirit and can even make a person despise himself. The hurts of life can make a person feel that it is impossible that one is worthwhile. The comic book *Chokha Mela* illustrates the idea that God loves each and every one, even when we don't feel worthy and when not accepted by others– God is the one who accepts and honours us.

Chokha Mela: The Boy Who Heard God was the 292nd title printed in the *ACK* series. It appeared in 1983, seven years after Pai "was taken to court by the Valmiki Sabha, a Dalit group, for depicting Valmiki, author of the earliest Sanskrit version of the Ramayana epic, whom they revere as god, as a dark-skinned dacoit in the *Valmiki* issue (no.46, 1973)" and whenever he printed an issue about a religious figure /"sensitive subjects" he would get them approved by various organizations (McLain *India's Immortal* 133-134). This comic is scripted by Pai's associate editor, Kamala Chandrakant, who was expert at writing comics devoted to Krishna. It is illustrated by Dilip Kadam, the artist who would later go on to illustrate all 42 titles of the mini-series on *The Mahabarata. Chokha Mela* is set "towards the close of the thirteenth century…at Mangalvedhe in Solapur district" (1). He is fair-skinned, but some of his playmates are dark-skinned. He hears the temple bells clanging at twilight and is drawn towards the

temple. His dark-skinned companion warns him, "You can't! You mustn't! You are a Mahar! Come back, Chokha, come back" (1). He pushes his way through the people praying and reaches the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, "the undisputed preserve of the highest caste and classes…" (3). He is unceremoniously thrown out and told that he is a "dirty fellow." He is puzzled, "Why do they call me dirty? I bathe every day and my clothes are as clean as theirs…" (5). But as he grows up the awareness of his caste status hits him, "I am a Mahar, an untouchable. Scrub my body as I might I cannot wash this fact away" (5). He yearns to enter the temple to catch a glimpse of God's glory but he is turned away. He goes to other temples outside his village, but the people turn him away. A trader's wife hurts his feelings by disallowing her husband to eat with Chokha because he could be of a lower caste than them. Humiliated by everyone he starts following a group of Varkaris, "a Vaishnava sect, who regularly make pilgrimages to Pandharpur"(footnote on pg.10). At Pandharpur he starts chanting the name of god, "Vithala! Vithala!" and finds a strange peace just chanting his name. At the gates of the temple he is humiliated by the temple priest, but he is unperturbed. Chokha tells the priest that if the sun does not forget to shine on a lotus raised in filth, then the Lord will not forget him. But the priest tells him, "If your faith is so great and if the Lord had even an iota of love for you, he would have taken you into the temple, wouldn't he?" (14-15). Chokha is crushed by this comment. He depreciates himself, "I am a lowly illiterate fool. I have not read the Vedas or the Puranas!" (15). He sits depressed wondering why he runs after god. Suddenly a voice speaks to him from within him, "No. No Chokha! Don't let your faith be shaken by the words of the priest. If you so desire, the Lord will take you into his temple now!" (17). The artwork shows a bright light shining from Chokha's

chest. The inner voice reminds him that it was the chanting of the name of the Lord that had first given him peace. The voice says, "What peace? Peace that could be taken away by any priest? …No! A peace because of which I am with you, Chokha" (17). The voice invites Chokha to come to him right away. The biblical echo is, "Do you not realise that you are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in you?" (1 Corinthians 3.16). Chokha walks towards the temple but hesitates to enter, lest he pollute the temple. The voice tells him, "If I could be polluted by you, I wouldn't be God. Why, I wouldn't have given you life and the power of yearning for me!" The voice urges him to enter the temple. Chokha does so and swoons after hugging the idol of Lord Vitala. In the morning, the temple priest berates him for polluting the temple, but Chokha is peaceful and tells him that God is above pollution, "I have seen him, spoken with him" (20). The priest orders him to leave Pandharpur. But the priest is perturbed that the Lord has appeared to Chokha, "Why hasn't he appeared before me? I have served him all these years and after all, I belong to the highest caste" (22). He sets out to get to the bottom of the matter. Finding that Chokha now lives on the opposite bank of the river, he goes and spies on him and hears the inner voice talking to Chokha. However, the priest thinks that it is Chokha talking to himself and he slaps Chokha, "Talking to yourself and telling us that you spoke to God!" (24). But Chokha doesn't get enraged, he only smiles at the priest. On his return to the temple, the priest is horrified to find the statue of Vithala with a swollen cheek and a smile that looks exactly like Chokha's. The priest is repentant and begs God to forgive him, "By persecuting Chokha I have persecuted God himself" (27). The temple priest goes back to Chokha and begs for forgiveness. He then takes him into the temple and finds the swelling on the idol's cheek has disappeared. The last narrative

text tells us that Chokha stayed on in Pandharpur and composed "Abhangs" on his experiences in the search for truth, for God, and that these hymns are still sung in Maharashtra today.

Chokha Mela is a story that shows the transforming power of a God-encounter to even the most discriminated-against human being. When God speaks to Chokha from within his heart, the illustration shows a bright light shining through his chest, nearer to his heart. His face takes on a serenity that shows that his dignity as a human being has been restored by God, even when humans around him fail. Chokha realizes that God dwells *within* him and that Chokha's heart is God's temple, "No Vithala! I have always had you and will always will…You dwelt in me all along and I like a fool looked for you outside…The universe is your house!...My heart your Temple!" (24). Chokha Mela is able to become free of the crushing weight of an unjust social system only when he realizes that God honours him and has come to live in his heart. A biblical parallel that echoes this idea of God honoring the prophet Isaiah, a person who was despised by his society, says, "I shall be honored in Yahweh's eyes, and my God has been my strength" (*New Jerusalem Bible*, Isa. 49.5b). Chokha Mela finds peace and dignity when he encounters God. He was deprived by society of entering the temple of God, so God took residence in Chokha's heart and raised him up from the depths of despair and lack of self-worth. The comic book *Chokha Mela* illustrates the transforming power of Chokha's encounter with God. However, the comic book does not comment on the fact that Chokha is still kept out of the temple by the rest of society. The last panel of the story illustrates a peaceful Chokha singing hymns on the river bank opposite the temple. The worldview presented by this comic is that the solution to a person's problems lies in a personal

devotion to a loving deity. To Pai, this deity was Krishna. As mentioned before, it was examples of the *bhakti* type of devotion to God that Pai laid before his readers. It is because the young hunter Kannappa loved God more than he loved himself that Pai featured this saintly devotee of Shiva in the comic series. Though the comic is no longer in print, it is, in my opinion, the most poignant ACK narrative of unselfish devotion to God.

4.3.7. The Concept of Love your God with All Your Heart in *Kannappa*

The 1979 *ACK* story *Kannappa* (*ACK* no. 190) about Kannappa Nayanar, the devotee of Shiva, is based on the *Periya Puranam* in Tamil and the Kannada prose work, *Ragale* by Harihara. "Like Buddhism and Jainism, the Bhakti movement advocated an egalitarian outlook, teaching that all those who worship the Lord are equal in His eyes. Both the Nayanars and the Alvars were simple-hearted devotees. They expressed their feelings in songs which are easy to comprehend and yet deeply moving," says the inside of the comic's front cover. The text is scripted by T.D. Rosario, illustrated by C.M.Vitankar, and edited by Anant Pai. The subheading of the title tells us that Kannappa was a devotee who offered his eyes to Lord Shiva. The front cover of the comic shows us a deeply compassionate look on the face of a hunter devotee as he looks on at the bleeding eye that has appeared on the Shivalingam[1] that he is worshipping. A big chunk of meat lies as an offering to his deity. This comic book is no longer in print, presumably because it could be offensive to orthodox purists who would not approve of the narrative where Kannappa spits water on the lingam, offers boar meat as an gift to Shiva, and places his leg on the stone to mark the spot where the bleeding eye is. This comic is one

of the most beautiful narratives in the *ACK* canon that illustrates the core of true worship. It is a pity that marketing considerations have taken it off the shelf.

The story is about a hunter, Kannappa, who is suddenly drawn towards a quiet temple on Kalahasti hill in Andhra Pradesh. He is overcome by feelings of devotion to the deity Shiva, and spends most of his time worshipping the Shivalingam. He only goes out to bring flowers, water and more roasted boar's meat. As a hunter, he brings his best gifts to offer to God. The temple priest arrives whenever Kannappa is out gathering these gifts, and is horrified at the meat offerings. The priest sets about "purifying" the shrine and doing all the rituals the proper way. This happens every day for five days. On the sixth day the priest notices that the lingam has open eyes on it. He is overjoyed at the miracle and thinks it is in appreciation of his faithful services. Suddenly one eye begins to bleed. The priest is aghast and takes to his heels, believing it to be a sign of impending disaster. When Kannappa arrives at the temple he tries his best to stop the bleeding using herbal medicines. However, when the medicines fail to stop the flow, he gouges out one of his own eyes and replaces the bleeding eye with his eye. The bleeding stops and Kannappa is happy. His joy is short-lived because soon the other eye on the Shivalingam starts to bleed. He decides to offer his second eye, and to mark the spot where the bleeding is occurring, he places his foot on the stone as he prepares to gouge out his second eye. Before he can do so, Lord Shiva appears to him and blesses him, "Many have prayed to me for sight. But only you have offered me your eyes" (31). Kannappa's sight is restored and Shiva takes him to Kailas to be ever at his side.

This comic is an unorthodox illustration of the essence of true devotion and real love for God. The priest does all the rituals in a perfect way, but in his heart he does not love his God as much as the simple hunter. In a panel on page 26 goddess Parvati had asked her husband Shiva, "Of the two, who is your favourite devotee, Lord? The holy Brahman who has faithfully worshipped you all his life—or the uncouth hunter?" Shiva's answer is illustrated in the unfolding of the story of Kannappa's willing sacrifice of his eyes. Kannappa is known as the "Eye-saint."

4.3.8. The Concept of One God for All in *Narayana Guru*

The comic book *Narayana Guru* (*ACK* no.403) was first published in 1988 (almost twenty years after the inception of the *ACK* series).This late addition to the ACK canon reflects a growing awareness of the publishers of the need to be "politically correct" by going beyond featuring predominantly high caste heroes and heroines. It is scripted by Gayatri M.Datt, illustrated by Ramanand Bhagat and edited by Anant Pai. The inside of the front cover gives us this introduction:

> It was a time when the evils of the caste system cast a malevolent shadow over Kerala. The 'avarnas', as the low castes were called, lived on the fringes of a society that found their very shadow, polluting. It was at such a time that Narayana was born. As a child he shocked his elders by questioning the system. As a guru he strove to educate people in the oneness of god, and the human race.

We are told that Narayana is a boy who questioned the Indian caste system. This comic is a progressive step for the *ACK* producers. Chandra comments that when *ACK* printed biographies of Hindu saints, the series suppressed their radical views about equality, "The

suppressing of the politically reformist content of the saint's teachings is evident in the accent on their personal transcendence and the sidelining of the saints' attack on the caste system" (22). Pritchett, however says that *ACK* devoted several titles to the Scheduled Castes. She mentions only three titles *Babasahib Ambedkar* (no.188), *Guru Ravidas* (no.350), *Narayana Guru* (no.403) and says that the *ACK* series generally defends their interests "in other titles when the opportunity offers" (92). I do not agree with Pritchett as I see no more than a token appeasement to the interests of the lower castes in the whole series. The series generally privileges middle-class, high caste values in its visuals and in its choice of whom to feature as heroic.

The comic book *Narayana Guru* narrates that Narayana's father was a gentleman farmer, respected for his knowledge of Sanskrit, Astrology and Ayurveda. Narayana's maternal uncle, Krishnan Vaidyar, taught Narayana the sacred scriptures. The one subject he particularly loved was Vedanta, "a subject that reveals the oneness of all creation" (10). Deeply troubled by the injustices of social life, he meditates on God and tries to find a solution to it. The narrative text tells us, "Slowly, the answer began to form" (17). The answer he gets is shown in a thought bubble, "Education, the raising of all downtrodden people from ignorance to enlightenment. They can avoid disease; they can seek respect from and equality with the higher castes only by observing strict inward and outward purity" (17). He begins wandering from place to place spreading his mission. He explains the Gita to people, "And so in the Gita, Krishna teaches us that we must do our work without any expectation of reward," and teaches them basic rules of hygiene and self-control (20). He gains many followers and inaugurates a succession of simple places of worship. He stressed on equality of all men and allowed all castes to worship together.

He taught his disciples to pray to "God," and "not to any particular deity" (24). Keeping religious ceremonies simple, he made worship easy for impoverished families (25). He begins to be addressed as "Narayana Guru." A footnote tells us that he advocated "Manava Dharma" which means "one religion for man." "Dharma is that which supports truth or reality common to all religions. It is therefore foolish to promote fundamental attitudes in any religion for all men are in the quest of their real nature which is happiness," says the footnote on pg 26. A panel illustrates an all-religious conference which was held at Alwaye Advaita Ashram where inter-religious dialogue was conducted. In a speech bubble he says, "All religions are the heritage of the world, each equally right. Whatever be the religion of an individual, what matters is that he is good" (26). The comic ends on page 27 with the words from a poem by Narayana Guru "Of One Kind, of One Faith, of One God is Man, of One Womb, of One Form, Here, Difference there is None." Pages 28 to 32 are filled with advertisements for *Tinkle* and *ACK* comics.

4.3.9. The Concepts of Dharma and Karma from the *Amar Chitra Kathas* based on the Epics

The epic Mahabharata has provided more than 70 story titles in that *ACK* series. Starting with the early single *Mahabharata* (*ACK* no.20) which was published in 1971, Pai used this body of literature as a ready source of interesting stories to narrate in the comic book format. The original epic was full of action and this especially lent itself to adaptation into the comic medium. Additionally, Krishna is the most important deity in this narrative, and this was an important consideration for Pai. *Mahabharata* (*ACK* no.20) gives the bare outline of the epic story and *Karna* (*ACK* no.26) published in 1972 tells the story from the angle of the unfortunate Karna. Karna is a tragic hero. Abandoned by his

unwed mother Kunti at birth, he is raised by a charioteer couple who shower him with love. However, he is considered of a low class and is denied all the social privileges that his biological siblings, the Pandavas, enjoy. He becomes an excellent archer and can be considered as a worthy rival to Arjuna. Insulted by society because of his "low" status, he is ever grateful to Duryodhana who comes to his rescue and gives him honour and respect. For this kindness, Karna remains faithful to the evil Duryodhana right till the bitter end of the Kurukshetra war. Even when he is told who he really is, he does not swerve from his duty to fight against his brothers. Both Krishna and his mother, Kunti, try to sway his firm resolve by appealing to fact that he should not be fighting his own brothers. In the moral dilemma that he faces, he stoically chooses to do his duty to his king, Duryodhana. For this he is exemplified as choosing dharma over filial loyalty. "Both the Mahabharata and Ramayana explore the challenge of following one's dharma in the face of apparent conflicts (such as family versus varna obligations)" (Rinehart 33). Karna also is a victim of the laws of karma. He had been cursed by his teacher, Parashurama, for pretending to be a Brahman, and later another man curses him when he rashly kills the man's helpless cow. Later on in the story, these curses come true and Karna is killed when he is helpless on the battlefield. In this way the reader learns lessons about moral dilemmas and these stories become a storehouse of models of right and wrong living.

The comics *Rama* (*ACK* no.15), *The Sons of Rama* (*ACK* no.18), and *The Lord of Lanka* (*ACK* no. 67) tell us the story of the epic Ramayana from four different perspectives, that of Dasharatha, Rama, his sons Luv and Kush, and of Ravana. Each story emphasizes the basic idea of Dharma. Rama is the supreme example of doing his

duty irrespective of the personal cost. He is the perfect model of right action. Luv and Kush are brave and show their potential for greatness when they battle against the forces of Rama. Rinehart tells us that "the epics illustrate dharma in practice and show some of the difficulties that arise when people do their best to follow all the dictates of dharma" (28). In contrast, Ravana is an example of what is wrong behaviour. He shows his evil nature when he repeatedly misuses his great might to force women into marrying him. The supernatural invincibility of the demon Ravana was due to a boon granted to him by Brahma. "Then let me not die at the hands of gods, demons, rakshasas, serpents and spirits. I am not afraid of mortals," says Ravana to Brahma. In the whole scheme of things, when Ravana becomes lawless, the deity Vishnu chooses to become human to circumvent the effects of the powerful boon. Only a human being could kill Ravana. This is like the proverbial Achilles' heel of Greek mythology[2]. He finally meets his end when he abducts Sita and is killed by her human husband Rama. I will now discuss how the concept of karma is demonstrated in the comic *Dasharatha.*

Dasharatha (*ACK* no. 105) is the story of Rama's father. The comic sets the tone for the lesson it wants its readers to learn by immediately introducing us to the incident where prince Dasharatha unintentionally kills a young hermit who was filling water in a pitcher from the river. Mistaking the sound he heard to be an elephant drinking water, he had shot his target with an arrow guided only by the sound. The bereaved old parents of the hermit are stunned with the news and the old man curses Dasharatha, "Your son too shall be parted from you. And you shall die grieving for him" (4). Years go by and Dasharatha becomes king, marries three young princesses, Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. Kaikeyi becomes his favourite queen after she saves him from death on a

battlefield. The three queens bear children and the children grow up nicely. As they reach maturity, Dasharatha decides to appoint Kausalya's son, Rama, as his heir apparent. Kaikeyi is egged on by her scheming maid to demand that Kaikeyi's son Bharata be installed instead. She reminds her husband that he had promised to give her two boons when she had saved him on the battlefield. She also asks that Rama be banished to the forest for fourteen years. King Dasharatha is heartbroken but keeps his word to his wife. Pining for Rama, Dasharatha grows ill and dies soon after Rama goes to the forest. Just before he dies he remembers the old man's curse. "A medley of past deeds raced across Dasharatha's befuddled mind…" He remembers that the curse had come true, "I die yearning for my son…" (32). This comic illustrates the concept of "karma." "The word karma literally refers to an act, and by extension it implies the effects or "fruits" of that action. The particular nature of an action, whether good or bad, determines whether the "fruits" of the action will ripen, or achieve fruition, in this or another lifetime" (Rinehart 20). Dasharatha had killed the young boy and now in his old age he has to bear the "fruits" of his action. He dies grieving for his favourite son just the way the old hermits had died grieving for their only son.

We must note that there is one major detail omitted in the *ACK* comic narrative which throws more light on why Dasharatha suffered so grievously. The ninth canto of Kalidasa "The Dynasty of Raghu" recounts that Dasharatha sinned when he shot the arrow:

> And in the stream he heard the water fill
> A jar; he heard it ripple clear and shrill,

And shot an arrow, thinking he had found
A trumpeting elephant, toward the gurgling sound

Such actions are forbidden to a king,
Yet Dasharatha sinned and did this thing;
For even the wise and learned man is minded
To go astray, by selfish passion blinded. (136)

In the article "The Tragedy of Dasharatha" we learn that King Dasharatha was an expert archer who begged his teacher, Bhargava, to teach him the skill of shooting an animal without seeing it, guided purely by sound. Bhargava was unwilling to teach him this skill because he was from the Kshatriya caste. The article tells us that Bhargava knew that though people from this caste are brave and determined, "they lack a disciplined life and sometimes fall victim to restlessness." Bhargava finally agrees to his plea but warns him not to misuse the skill lest he bring calamity on himself and his family. Dasharatha is happy and decides to test his skill one day when he is in the forest. In his eagerness to try out his knowledge, he commits the sin of improper use of the secret skill. By overstepping his appointed role according to his dharma, he causes the chain of pain that affects himself, family, and the innocent hermit's family. This was an ethically wrong thing for him to do. However, *ACK*'s *Dasharatha* doesn't bring this point to light. This is because the series chooses to paint their heroes without their blemishes. Hawley comments that by aiming to provide children with heroes as models for right living, the series resorts to hagiography, "the full-color portrayal of consistently, unerringly, and overwhelmingly exemplary lives" (Hawley 107). Hence, if the hero has to be portrayed

as faultless, it wouldn't be appropriate for the comic to show the sinful side of Dasharatha's act. However, as a series that seeks to impart serious faith lessons to its readers, *ACK*'s *Dasharatha* fails to point out the moral responsibility that Dasharatha had when he chose to use the special skill irresponsibly. The comic book implies that the death of the young hermit was just a mistake. This authorial shaping of the narrative could confuse a child into believing that the laws of karma are arbitrary and random. Das asserts, "In Sanskrit karma means "volitional action that is undertaken deliberately or knowingly"… Every person is responsible for his or her acts and thoughts, so each person's karma is entirely his or her own." It would be better from a religious point of view that the child be aware that Dasharatha's karma was a result of his own rash action, and not the result of an unintentional mistake.

4.3.10. The Concepts of Dharma and Reincarnation in *The Gita*

Anant Pai scripted not more than a handful of the 454 *ACK* singles titles, but *The Gita* (no. 127, 1977), was specially scripted by him. It is carefully crafted and Pai took pains to introduce and interpret the philosophical content of the original *The Bhagavad Gita* in a way that children may understand. The artwork is done by Pratap Mulick. In order to draw the child reader into the narrative, the first nine pages of the comic provide a dramatic background to the philosophical section. In *The Gita*, the brave Pandava, Arjuna, is poised to take up arms at the beginning of the famous Kurukshetra war of the Mahabharata. However, he suddenly loses his nerve and refuses to fight his own kinsmen, including his grandfather's brother Bheeshma, who are on the opposite side. Arjuna is confronted with a choice between his dharma and his love for his kinsfolk. It is a Hamlet-like "to-be-or-not-to-be" dilemma. Krishna, who is his charioteer, tells him that

as a warrior, it is his dharma, his duty, to fight for a righteous cause, "Whatever work you are called upon to do, by virtue of your station in life, that you must do; nay you must not fail to do." Refining the idea of the true meaning of "Dharma", Krishna explains the philosophy of God as the actual doer, and human as merely the instrument in his hands. He tells Arjuna to surrender his actions to God and to trust Him to work things out. "Arjuna, you grieve because you think you are the doer. Think of God as the doer. You are but an instrument in his hands. You are but carrying out his will. Resigning all your work to God, you must act" (14). Arjuna must fight the war without being worried about winning or losing. He must do his duty as a brave warrior and leave the consequences to God. Rinehart explains that Krishna advises Arjuna to fight the war, because Arjuna "as the commander-in-chief is duty-bound to fight in the war," by refusing to fight, he would be "guilty of dereliction of his dharma." Additionally, as the commander-in-chief, Arjuna is a role model for other soldiers, and for future generations who would look to him for an example of how to act in such a situation. "If Arjuna kills his enemies as a matter of duty, he will not incur sin," says Rinehart (174). This part of the comic explains the worldview element of right action, or axiology. The comic demonstrates the ethical problem Arjuna is faced with and shows us how he learns to resolve the dilemma.

Lord Krishna explains the meaning of Life to Arjuna. He says, "The soul in man is neither born nor does it die" (16). He explains that man's eternal soul is unchanging. Nothing can affect it, no weapons can harm it. Explaining the concept of "Reincarnation," Krishna tells Arjuna that the soul enters and leaves the body of successive people just as we change our clothes. The illustration on pg 16 visualizes the process vividly: There is a man who has changed into a new set of clothes, while the old

set of clothes are lying behind him. The narrative text says, “Just as a man discards old clothes and wears new ones…the Eternal Soul sheds a dead body…and enters another.” The corresponding illustrations for the verbal texts are that of an old dead man whose “soul” (visualized as white smoke) leaves his body. In the next panel we see a newborn baby surrounded by bright light. The verbal text and the illustrations work in tandem to convey the concept of reincarnation in a simple, graphic manner.

Krishna also explains that the mortal body and the immortal soul are two separate entities, and how the cycle of births and deaths (reincarnations) can be stopped by true detachment. Krishna explains to him that the enlightened man should view pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour, gain and loss as the same. He tells Arjuna that because of this attitude towards the results of one's work, one is never tense. One can thus excel in one's work with perfect equanimity. He also explains that a person can perceive the truth through knowledge, meditation, or the yoga of devotion. “Worship, adoration, prayer, surrendering yourself to the will of God—is the simplest way by which you can cut the ties that bind the soul to the body” (21). Krishna then reveals himself in his cosmic form to the awestruck Arjuna. Pritchett tells us that this cosmic Krishna is, “a full-page rendering suffused with radiant beams of light … This … is, as far as I know, the only illustration anywhere in the whole Amar Chitra Katha series that breaks out of its frame: the crest of Krishna’s headdress sweeps right on upward beyond the ruled border at the top of the page” (99). This personal encounter with Krishna in his divine form, transforms Arjuna, who goes on to fight the battle with great courage and skill. The point that I would like to highlight about this scene is that this personal encounter with the divine manifestation of Krishna happens at a moment of crisis. Arjuna needs to know

who he is, and what his role in life is. When he encounters Krishna in his awesomeness, his doubts are removed and he knows who he is and what he must do. He becomes aware that as a trained warrior, his duty is to fight, especially for the sake of justice. Krishna had explained to him that there would be chaos in society if people refused to do their duty.

This comic is one of the exceptionally philosophical comics in the whole series. Pai blames the comic medium for the limitations imposed on communicating lofty concepts, "The constraints of the comic medium are well-known, it is very difficult to explain certain basic truths, philosophies through the comics medium. Comic medium is good for the narration of a story, not narration of a philosophy, not narration of a theory, not narration of a scientific formula. It is not easy" (Barth 272). With the limitation of the comic format in mind, and remembering that the child reader would much rather read an action adventure than a sermon, let us consider the mythological comic *Sati and Shiva* where *ACK* focuses on the dramatic action rather than the philosophical import of the original texts on which the script was based.

4.4. Limitations of the Comic Medium: *Sati and Shiva*

The comic book *Sati and Shiva* (no.111) was created by the *ACK* team of script writer, Kamala Chandrakant and illustrator, P. B. Kavadi. They choose to focus on the violence and destruction that follows after Daksha, Sati's father, holds a great yagna and deliberately does not invite both his daughter and his son-in-law, Shiva. Sati insists on going to her father's house uninvited and is insulted by her father. Enraged at the dual insult to her and to her husband, Sati immolates herself in public telling her father, "You are vain and wicked. I am ashamed to call myself your daughter. I will cast off this body of mine as a worthless corpse." The violent battles that follow Sati's death are depicted

with graphic detail. Shiva's fury and the manifestation of his rage in the form of the creation of the powerful Virabhadra and the terrible Mahakali, the avenging battle and destruction of Daksh's guests and the tearing off of Daksha's head are all vividly rendered by the artist. Shiva's rage is fascinating. It is so destructive with its force and fury that even the all-powerful god Vishnu falls unconscious under its attack.

Given that the comic medium lends itself better to dramatic action, the jacket of this comic inaccurately promises to convey to us "in simple terms, the truth and beauty of a lofty Vedic concept." The words on the back cover of the comic *Sati and Shiva* are:

> The story of Shiva's marriage is symbolic of the perfect fusion of male and female principles. According to the Hindu view of life, they are the moving powers behind the Universe.
>
> Shiva (the male principle), the Supreme Consciousness, will acquire the power to create and destroy the elements only in conjunction with Shakti (the female principle). It is because of this that Vishnu and the rest are keen to see Shiva married.
>
> Though the word Shiva rarely occurs in the Vedas (it appears in the Yajurveda) there are adequate references to show Rudra (another name for Shiva) as the Supreme Consciousness. The Kenopanishad mentions Uma as the Maya or the Manifestation of the Supreme Consciousness.
>
> The story of Sati conveys to us in simple terms, the truth and beauty of a lofty Vedic concept.

This promise is hardly fulfilled as the focus is on the action panels (twelve out of thirty-two pages are filled with scenes of battle and destruction) and the simplest 'moral' that can be culled from the *Sati and Shiva* text is when Shiva tells Vishnu and Brahma, "Daksha allowed hate to become his master. If one hates another it will recoil on oneself" (30). The comic would have to be further mediated by an adult reader who would have to interpret the theological concept of Shiva as "the destroyer" and "Shakti" as the female principle for the child reader. On its own, the text does not make the principle clear.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter discusses the birth and development of the indigenous *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book series. It illustrates the importance the market played in the shape that the series took. The initial impetus of the series author of creating a faith-formation canon of heroes diversified as the series found markets in other publication niches, notably, history titles. Worldview dimensions of Hindu origin from 20 selected volumes from the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book series edited by Anant Pai have been highlighted to illustrate the user-friendliness of the comic book format in imparting serious philosophical concepts.

Concepts of Karma, Dharma, and Re-incarnation are illustrated in the selected stories. The strong Vaishnava interpretation of a loving deity-devotee relationship is shown to be the faith orientation that many comics in the series illustrate. The comics exemplify the importance of Man's faith in a particular deity for the success of all his endeavors. The discussion also highlights the personal interpretation that Anant Pai offers to the role of women in society. The series naturalizes images of beautiful, self-sacrificing Indian women. Finally, this chapter explores how the comic medium itself

served as a limitation to the authorial intentions of conveying serious, philosophical and theological concepts to its young consumers.

Notes

1. The stone Shivalingam is a symbol of the Ultimate Reality which the devotees of Shiva worship. It is held in great reverence in temples dedicated to Shiva.
2. Achilles, the Trojan hero, was invulnerable to weapons, except for a spot on his heel. This was because his goddess mother Thetis had held him by the heel during his infancy when she had dipped him in the river Styx to make his body invincible. She forgot that the part she was holding had remained unprotected and Achilles was finally killed by an arrow directed to this vulnerable spot.

CHAPTER V

SECULAR STORIES IN THE NOVEL FORMAT

5.1. Introduction: Secular Stories

So far we have examined three sets of texts with pronounced religious worldviews. The next three chapters deal with "secular" texts. I use the word "secular" in the sense that Tom Flynn uses in his comment on Zuckerman's online article "What Does "Secular" Mean?": "'I think the word "secular" as meaning "focused on this world, not the next.'" Secular concerns are about non-religious subjects, to things that are "not connected with spiritual or religious affairs," according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Hornby 1143). Secular worldviews are more eclectic than organized religious worldviews. Those who do not believe that God exists form their worldviews as they go along—working things out for themselves, and learning from other like-minded people. These worldviews do not have prescribed answers about existential issues or moral values based on tradition. We have to analyze the selected texts without expecting to find philosophical answers to cosmology or theology. What we do find is a certain taken-for-granted approach to the existence of things as they are in the present. The texts we study largely focus on the present moment, so beliefs about the origins and nature of the universe are not at the heart of the matter. Theology is not discussed, because God is not important in the scheme of things. What is important in these texts is axiology. The secular texts uphold standards for right-living and exhibit strong moral codes based on internalized principles of right and wrong. Socially appropriate behaviour is important to the characters in the texts. This is because cultural norms exercise a great influence on their worldviews. For example, middle-class values are common in Nesbit's novels. In

the next three chapters we will focus on the implicit values of personal ethics and socially appropriate behaviour that the texts reveal. We will study the influence of these worldviews "on the thinking and acting of people" (Van der Kooij, de Ruyter, and Miedema 214).

In the absence of religious powers in secular stories, fantasy is a tool to make magical things happen that do not follow the rules of pure science. Fantasy tales are common in modern Children's Literature. Fantasy can be considered a genre and a type of narrative that is not realistic: a book or movie that "tells a story about things that happen in an imaginary world" that is "far removed from normal reality" (*Merriam-Webster.com*). Maria Nikolajeva believes that fantasy literature is a product of modern times which originated due to Romanticism's "interest in folk tradition" and "its rejection of the previous, rational-age view of the world, and its idealization of the child" (139). She tells us that fantasy writing became an important tradition in the latter half of the nineteenth century due to the writings of Lewis Carroll, Charles Kingsley, and George Mac-Donald. E. Nesbit entered this literary tradition and contributed much to its growth. Nesbit's plot structures influenced later children's fiction writers like C.S. Lewis, Edward Eager and J.K. Rowling: four children stumble on a paranormal something that leads them into a series of fantastic adventures. These events help the children realize some important facts about the big issues of life. "At the turn of the twentieth century, Edith Nesbit, finding impulses from many predecessors, renewed and transformed the fantasy tradition, focusing on the clash between the magical and the ordinary, on the unexpected consequences of magic when introduced into everyday realistic life" (Nikolajeva 139). E. Nesbit could be considered as the creator of the modern children's fantasy book.

Unlike, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), her books have a down-to-earth feel, tempered by her practical sensibility about the real world and her ironic sense of humour. Her tone is witty and direct, as if she were taking the child reader into confidence. There is no condescending adult tone. The characters in her novels are realistic and are easy for juvenile readers to identify with. "Though Nesbit introduced elements of magic and fantasy into some of her stories, her children are psychologically real, and the situations they have to cope with, too, are real. For this reason Nesbit has been called 'the first modern writer for children'" (Penn and Garside).

5.2. The Novels of E. Nesbit

E. Nesbit (1858–1924) is the pen-name of Edith Nesbit. She is one of the first modern writers for children and she gave us the children's adventure story. According to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, she was best known for her children's fiction, especially fantasy tales "in which children in everyday circumstances are confronted with an extraordinary character or event, and naturalistic comedies of juvenile behavior or childish misadventure…. Her children's books are marked by vivid characterizations, ingenious plots, and an easy, humorous narrative style." E. Nesbit wrote more than sixty books for children. She wrote for adults too but the books and poems never became as popular as her children's fiction. *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), *The Wouldbegoods* (1901), *The Revolt of the Toys, and What Comes of Quarreling* (1902), *Five Children and It* (1902), and *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) are some of her best known books. Born in the Victorian period, Nesbit was able to support her family with the publication of her stories serialized in popular magazines like the *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Girls' Own Paper*, and London's *Weekly Dispatch*. Many of these stories were later

collected and published as novels. She was a prolific writer: writing poetry, adult fiction, children's fiction and, jointly with her husband, editing the journal, *Today.* She was forced to take charge of providing for her children when her husband contracted smallpox. She wrote voluminously and was well received by the public.

The novel *Five Children and It* reflects some of the preoccupations of the Victorian and early Edwardian British environment in which Nesbit lived and wrote. Maintaining "respectability" and a routine of predictable domestic comfort are important. The children in the stories are very much concerned with good conduct and the niceties of the adult moral system, which they have already internalized to a large degree. In *The Railway Children* these themes reoccur, but the story is more realistic than *Five Children and It.* Both stories are family stories, but the stories always focus on the imaginative children, rather than their parents. The parents are either preoccupied or absent from the action. "E. Nesbit made her adults shadows in the wings while her child characters, centre stage, played out their fantasies.…In *The Railway Children* (1906) Father has been wrongly imprisoned, Mother writes feverishly to support them all, while the three children devise… practical schemes … to rescue the family fortunes" (Hunt and Ray 337). The worldview in the book is down-to-earth and concerned with life as it is here on earth; there are no other-worldly concerns of divine beings in the stories. If as Funk outlines, a worldview "is the set of beliefs about fundamental aspects of Reality that ground and influence all one's perceiving, thinking, knowing, and doing," then I think that the chief concerns in these novels are about non-religious matters, and thus could be called "secular" (Hornby 1143). Sibling relationships, domestic routines, honesty and care for others are central concerns in these novels. These concerns are not linked with

moral codes arising from any organized religion. They are codes of ethics that are more in line with a humanistic worldview.

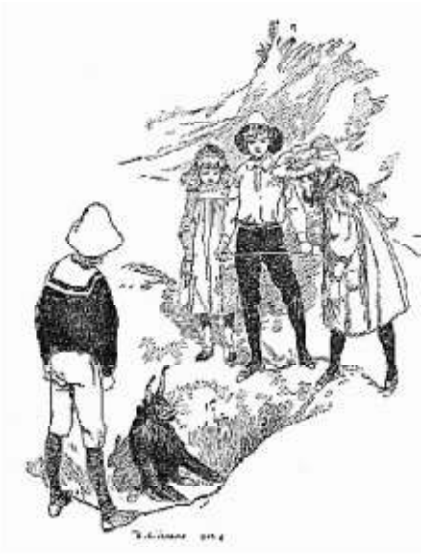
The *Merriam-Webster* defines humanism as "a system of values and beliefs that is based on the idea that people are basically good and that problems can be solved using reason instead of religion." The novels of E. Nesbit offer us a world where the children set out to solve their problems by using their own resources, and without appealing to God for help. For example, they appeal to a rich old gentleman to help them with some food and brandy for their mother when she is very ill. The old man kindly helps them. During the course of the novel *The Railway Children,* there is a tiny passage that refers to the mother's belief that perhaps God will make all things come out right in the end. This is not the dominant worldview in the novel and is just a brief comment; it is also qualified by the fact that the mother is not really sure that God will help them. This point is discussed later in this chapter.

I will first examine *Five Children and It*, a children's novel by Nesbit. Parts of this story had first appeared in the *Strand Magazine* under the title of "The Psammead." These stories were collected and published as a book in 1902. More than a hundred years later, Scholastic India Pvt. Ltd. has reprinted it in 2007. Why is the novel still in print for over a century? What did E. Nesbit contribute to the canon of children's fiction? Let us investigate.

5.3. Textual Analysis: Worldview in *Five Children and It*

In *Five Children and It* the story begins when a group of five children go off on a holiday to the countryside of Kent, away from the prison-like city life of London. Life in

the countryside is glamorized and the element of make-believe is innocuously introduced when the children accidentally stumble upon a 'sand-fairy' known as the Psammead. This grumpy, uncooperative, creature is described as having "eyes [that] were on long horns like a snail's eyes, and it could move them in and out like telescopes; it had ears like bat's ears, and its tubby body was shaped like a spider's and covered with thick soft fur; its legs and arms were furry too, and it had hands and feet like a monkey's" and had whiskers like a rat (see fig.1).



The Psammead

Fig. 2. The Children Discover the Wish-Giving Psammead in E. Nesbit, *The Five Children and It*, Illus. H.R. Millar (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1905. PDF file).

There is an air of realism in the discovery and, the ancient origin of the Psammead adds to its plausibility. The children find the sleeping Psammead buried in the sand while playing in an abandoned quarry. He tells them that he is the only one of his kind left behind. He explains that the Psammeads were around at the time of the dinosaurs and that

they granted wishes to people. However, the wishes would turn into stone at sunset if they were not used that day. The Psammead promises to grant a wish a day to the children. Excited about their discovery, the children go on to successively wish for beauty, unlimited money, that everyone would love their baby brother, wings, a castle under siege, that Robert would be bigger than the baker's boy, an encounter with Red Indians, and an assortment of simultaneous wishes relating to some stolen jewels. Though the children are thrilled with the unlimited possibilities of making a wish a day, they soon realize that the practical aspects of the realized wishes can be absurd, exasperating and even frightening. Fortunately, at sundown, the effect of their wishes disappears and life gets back to normal at the end of each day. The reader is able to heave a sigh of relief when the children are abruptly restored to their simple lives after a day full of misadventures.

The novel *Five Children and It* reflects some of the features of the Western world in which Edith Nesbit lived and wrote. In her book *In Search of Human Nature,* Mary Clark discusses the "atomistic" worldview of the Western world. She uses the metaphor of a billiard ball game to explain how in this vision of reality, human beings are assumed to be independent and individualistic, like billiard balls:

> One of the most basic images of reality on which the Western world view rests is that all entities in the universe are isolated, discrete objects that have distinct boundaries, much like we imagine atoms to be. Indeed, the "atomistic universe" would be a good label…. Human beings are

> imagined very much like independent, isolated, bounded objects having a variety of cause-and-effect "collisions" with each other**.** (6-8)

The world described in this novel is self-contained, middle class and comfortable. There is no engagement with real suffering. Pain is only a matter of daily annoyances. Problems get resolved in a day. It is a secular world with no trace of God. However, the supernatural element is introduced with the magical Psammead. Notwithstanding the creativity of her mind, many twentieth century attitudes to life are unconsciously reflected in her writings. Let us examine some of them.

5.3.1. Idea of beauty

The children wish that they would be transformed into good lookers and become "beautiful as the day." After the Psammead grants their first wish, Robert exclaims, "'Crikey! The wish has come off, after all. I say, am I as handsome as you are?'" (18). The children look around in amazement as they are transformed into very good looking children. Robert looks like "an Italian organ-grinder" with his new dark hair. They appear so different from their original selves that they cannot recognize one another. Soon they realize that they preferred their old appearances better than these new, unfamiliar manifestations. "'You two girls are like Christmas cards, then - that's all – silly Christmas cards,' said Robert angrily. 'And Jane's hair is simply carrots.' It was indeed of that Venetian tint so much admired by artists" (18).Their baby brother does not get transformed into a beautiful looking child, and looks the same as he always did. But now he does not recognize his siblings and starts howling when they try to approach him. No one from their home or from their neighborhood recognizes them and by the end of the

day they become hungry, tired and miserable. They lie down outdoors and go to sleep. They awake from a nap after sunset and find that they are all restored to their original forms. “And oh, Cyril,” says Anthea, “how nice and ugly you do look, with your old freckles and your brown hair and your little eyes. And so do you all!’” (23).

5.3. 2. Attitude towards Girls

The girls in the story, Anthea and Jane, are portrayed as more impetuous and foolish than their brothers. Anthea is nice and “feminine” wishing to be “as beautiful as the day,” a private wish of her own and Jane's which they had never told the boys. She knew the boys would not care about it. In contrast, the boys, Robert and Cyril, are stronger than them. They are naughty: “Robert had found the broken swing and tumbled out of it and got a lump on his head the size of an egg, and Cyril had nipped his finger in the door of a hutch that seemed made to keep rabbits in” (3).

The girls stereotypically choose to buy pretty things like a very beautiful hat, trimmed with pink roses and the blue breasts of peacocks. It was marked in the window, ‘Paris Model, three guineas.’ The boys choose to spend their money on more manly stuff. They set off to buy horses and a carriage. Robert is their spokesperson, “because in books it is always the gentlemen who buy horses, and not ladies” (41).

5.3. 3. Father-Child Distance

A typical Edwardian middle class English environment is pictured in the novel. Throughout the story, the children’s father is away from the nitty-gritty of daily life with his children. “Father had to go away suddenly on business,” is almost all we hear of him.

We never hear of him helping his children to have their baths or even to tie their shoe-laces. There is a kind of distance, even remoteness, between father and child. Many fathers were living abroad in the colonies established by the British; the absent father in this novel could be a portrayal of a very commonplace fact of life of many middle class English children of that period. The five children manage very well without their parents chiefly because of the reliability of their domestic workers. Here we also have echoes from Nesbit's own family life, where the home fires were kept burning chiefly by the womenfolk. Nesbit's father had died when she was only four years old and her mother had to manage life without his financial support. Additionally, in her marital home, Nesbit was the main breadwinner; she supported her large family with her writings. In *The Railway Children* the father is absent for most of the novel and only returns at the very end of the story. The financial situation of the family in this novel takes a very bad turn when their father is suddenly incarcerated due to his suspected involvement with espionage. The family has to downsize their lifestyle, and (like Nesbit herself) the mother of the children supports the family by writing stories. Noimann suggests that the absence of the father in the plots gives Nesbit a chance to demonstrate the superiority of matriarchy and the agency and resourcefulness of women, while presenting an opportunity for new social relations due to the father's absence from the domestic social unit (368-385).

5.3. 4. Domestic Workers and Household Activity

The novel mentions the motley crew that a typical Edwardian household could consist of: fathers and mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, tutors, governesses, and nurses. In

this story, all household activity that could also be done by waged labour (nannies, domestic servants, gardeners, etc.) is done by people other than the parents of the five children. The patriarchal system had an inherent belief in the natural inferiority of domestic work as compared with work outside the home. Domestic chores are left to the domestic workers. The parents have other things to keep them busy.

In the power relations within the family, housework and childrearing was left to the women in the family. However, the mother of the children in the story is freed from the daily duty of caring for her children in order to rush to take care of the ill grandmother. She is absent for the whole story and returns only in the last chapter of the book. Her position is ably managed by Martha. Martha is the chief house keeper and nursemaid. Under her authority are the Cook and Eliza, the housemaid. These domestic helpers are in-house, loyal aides to the family. They are often mentioned in the story and serve as an important backdrop to the activities of the home. Though the dividing line between employer and employee is clear, servants seem to have a good degree of dignity and are particularly trusted, unlike in a modern twenty-first century home. The whole setting is peaceful and servant and master slip into their roles with apparent ease. In the absence of the parents through most of the events, Martha is the mother-figure who takes charge of the five children with complete dedication and devotion. She treats them as if they were her very own children. When she goes off for a day to visit her relations in Rochester, she takes the youngest child, the baby, along with her. One of the older children wryly remarks, "'I expect they pretend that they're their own babies, and that they are not servants at all, but married to noble dukes of high degree, and they say the

babies are the little dukes and duchesses…. She'll enjoy herself most frightfully'" (27-28).

While the parents are at the top of the hierarchy of authority, the status of the domestic worker is considered inferior to that of the children. The children are the undisputed "little masters" who can reason things out at a higher level than the servants do. The children scoff at the folly of the dreams and fantasies of the domestics, "'Because…servants never dream anything but the things in the Dream-book, like snakes and oysters and going to a wedding—that means a funeral, and snakes are a false, female friend, and oysters are babies'" (27).

5.3. 5. Middle-Class Respectability

Victorian and early Edwardian literary fairy tales tend to have a conservative moral and political bias. The entire environment is permeated with the idea of maintaining "respectability". Sociologists say that this is a very important preoccupation of the "middle classes." The very rich and the very poor are relatively free from this compulsion because the very rich are not interested with "keeping up with the Joneses" because they themselves *are* the trend setters; others try to ape the style they set. The very poor, on the other hand, are too busy with the struggle of just keeping alive to be concerned with the trappings of petty "respectability". In *Five Children and It* there is an incident where the children's fresh clothes get wet with a bowl of goldfish water which their baby brother overturns. Jane has to change her frock. She has a limited choice: either to wear an old torn dress (after mending it) or her "best frock," presumably her "Sunday best." Both options are not attractive: mending her torn dress will delay their

outing, while her best clothes will get soiled with the day's romp. To solve the problem, her brother suggests she wear her best petticoat instead:

> It was white and soft and frilly, and trimmed with lace, and very, very pretty, quite as pretty as a frock, if not more so. Only it was NOT a frock, and Martha's word was law. She wouldn't let Jane wear her best frock, and she refused to listen for a moment to Robert's suggestion that Jane should wear her best petticoat and call it a dress. 'It's not respectable,' she said. And when people say that, it's no use anyone's saying anything. You will find this out for yourselves some day. So there was nothing for it but for Jane to mend her frock. (50)

The unwritten codes of middle class conduct are strictly observed by all. Respectability is more important than practicality. Martha is the hand exerting the subtle social pressure of appearing genteel under all circumstances. The children are middle class. This is obvious from the fact that Jane doesn't possess extra clothes to change into. Even the dress she had damaged the previous day had to be darned to be presentable enough to be worn in public.

Under the charming exterior of fantasy and fun, Victorian stories are basically kindly sermonizing in tone: adults know best; good, patient, and obedient little boys and girls are rewarded by the fairies, and naughty, assertive ones are punished. *Five Children and It* is no different. The children are indirectly punished for selfish and avaricious intentions but are rewarded for good nature and generosity.

Living in a world that had not yet been fragmented by two world wars, *Five Children and It* portrays a stable and peaceful world. The world is so peaceful and meals are so predictable that the children have to get into mischief to spice up their lives. The children are well trained in matters of obedience and their good manners reflect an English belief in stability won by exercising authority. Power relations are clear and everyone follows rules without revolting. In the microcosm of the novel we get a glimpse into the beliefs the adults clung to before the Great War shattered this complacency. There is no fear of the future, no worry about any danger. The clockwork precision of the ordered lives the children lead can only be upset by the Psammead's magical powers. What a cozy, comfortable world the middle class English child lead. Could the pains and sufferings of less fortunate children around the world have ever entered the threshold of his imagination? With no television to enlighten him the early twentieth century child lived with a narrow outlook on life: an insulated world of nannies, games of make-believe, and regular meals of mashed potatoes and minced meat. The literature of the age reflects the preoccupations of a generation of adults living in staid, unruffled, Georgian world. If make-believe could spice up the lives of the children, the adults of the time were sitting on the brink of a War that would end all their boredom.

5.4. Textual Analysis: Worldview in *The Railway Children*

The Railway Children is different from *Five Children and It.* It is not a fantasy novel, but presents the story in a very realistic setting. *The Railway Children* is the story of three British children, Roberta (Bobbie), Peter and Phyllis, their unnamed mother, and a father who is not present for most of the book, but whose absence hangs over the story

like a dark, ominous background. The father is whisked away by some government officials right at the beginning of the novel, and their mother keeps his whereabouts a secret from everybody. At the end of the novel we learn that he has been unfairly imprisoned for supposedly selling State secrets to the Russians. In the tenth chapter of the book, Bobbie stumbles upon an old newspaper where she finds the report of his trial and conviction. For the rest of the novel, she and her mother carry the heavy burden of this secret together.

Let us examine two elements in this novel that demonstrate the worldview of the characters portrayed and also hint at the preoccupations of the author and her society: middle-class respectability and a worldview privileging courage and compassion. The novel has a down-to-earth outlook towards life.

5.4. 1. Middle-Class Respectability in *The Railway Children*

The narrative perspective in *The Railway Children* continually shifts between an omniscient authorial narrator, who seems to be confiding in the reader about the unfolding domestic story, and the perspective of the sensible Bobbie whose internal monologues show how she is analyzing the events as they unfold. Bobbie sensitively understands that her mother has a secret sorrow. She is keen to be of help to her mother and is constantly trying to shoulder some of the burden her mother has to bear. She tries to get the local doctor to charge them less fees just the way he charged poor people. She also writes letters asking the rich old gentleman for help for her mother, for the poor Russian man who needs to find his family, and for assistance in securing the release of her father. She takes the initiative in asking for help, and her mother is upset that they

have revealed their poverty to others. With a typical middle-class attitude of keeping up appearances, the mother admonishes her daughter, ""Now, listen," said Mother; "it's quite true that we're poor, but we have enough to live on. You mustn't go telling everyone about our affairs—it's not right. And you must never, never, never ask strangers to give you things. Now always remember that—won't you?"" (49-50).

At the start of the novel we are told that they are a reasonably well-to-do family living in a red-brick-fronted villa in the suburbs of London, whose leisure trips to the city include visiting big stores, Madame Tussauds wax museum, the zoo and the Pantomine. "These three children always had everything they needed: pretty clothes, good fires, a lovely nursery with heaps of toys, and a Mother Goose wall-paper" (7-8). They had plenty of servants: a nursemaid, a parlour-maid, a cook and a housemaid. Their house was well-furnished and had all the modern conveniences available in the early twentieth century: "a bath-room with hot and cold water," gas, electricity, etc. Their mother was a cheerful homemaker who did not waste her time socializing with "dull ladies" but played with her children, helped them with their homework, read stories to them, wrote stories for them and even composed poems for their birthdays and special occasions (7). The father too is a perfect father, "never cross, never unjust, and always ready for a game" when he was free (8). He was involved with the activities of his children and helped them to fix their broken toys. Nesbit paints an idyllic picture of domestic life and then contrasts it with the kind of life the family is forced to live when their father is sent to prison. "The dreadful change came quite suddenly," she tells us (8). All at once the children have to move to cheaper lodgings in the countryside, they have no servants, they eat less extravagantly ("Jam OR butter, dear—not jam AND butter. We can't afford that sort of

reckless luxury nowadays," says the mother), and they stop going to school (28). They also cannot afford to buy enough coal to heat up the house all round the year, and they shiver during a "very, very cold" spell in June. This prompts Peter to venture into stealing some coal from the railway station nearby, but is caught red-handed. When the Station Master asks him why he did it he says that he didn't think he was stealing because the pile of coal was so big. He confesses, "You know that wet day? Well, Mother said we were too poor to have a fire. We always had fires when it was cold at our other house, and—" (32). The author stresses the contrast between the lives they were used to and the lives they are forced to live because of poverty. Their mother supports them by working day and night writing fiction. This focus on the importance of maintaining a comfortable lifestyle is a middle-class preoccupation. The children are acutely aware of the expected roles of their class, and the people they meet expect the same from them. When the Station Master discovers that it is Peter and his sisters who have been stealing coal, he exclaims in astonishment, ""Why," said he, "you're the children from the Three Chimneys up yonder. So nicely dressed, too. Tell me now, what made you do such a thing? Haven't you ever been to church or learned your catechism or anything, not to know it's wicked to steal?"" (32). This statement reveals the social attitudes circulating about the appropriate behaviour of such "decent children." The statement cannot be taken literally because the story never indicates that the children go to church or learn catechism. Their lives are perfectly secular.

5.4. 2. A Secular Worldview Privileging Courage and Compassion

A worldview of secular activities and concerns permeates the novel. In fact, prayer is mentioned only as a means of last recourse. A dialogue between mother and daughter illustrates this fact. When Bobbie discovers the truth about her father's disappearance, she questions her mother about the details. The mother tells Bobbie that her father has been framed by a jealous junior in his office who had planted evidence in her father's desk. Bobbie protests that they need to explain this to some authority. The mother replies bitterly, ""Nobody will listen…nobody at all. Do you suppose I've not tried everything? No, my dearest, there's nothing to be done. All we can do, you and I and Daddy, is to be brave, and patient, and—" she spoke very softly—"to pray, Bobbie, dear"" (144). The mother had run from pillar to post trying to secure the release of her husband, but to no avail. She prays as a last resort, even though she isn't quite convinced that God actually exists or cares about her problem. Her faith in God is not what keeps her going, it is her stoical attitude and sheer courage that is the mainstay of her efforts to provide for her family. The novel portrays her never-say-die attitude as she slogs away till she is exhausted, deprives herself of comforts and nourishing food even when she is ill, and never lets down her guard or expresses her predicament to the children. The mother is the real heroine of the story as she bravely cares for her family. The mother is not really sure that God hears prayers. She wants to believe that He does, but she struggles with her doubts about faith in God. There is a passage where she expresses this to her children. Peter, her son, has been telling her to imagine that they were all in a book and that *she was the author* who could "make all sorts of jolly things happen…make Jim's legs get well…and Father come home soon… Wouldn't you like to be writing that book with us all in it, Mother, and make Daddy come home soon?" (174). The novel is

self-reflexive as it plays with the fictionality of the unfolding story. The mother senses her son's insecurity and pain and she hugs him in silence. To comfort him she offers him another fictional idea:

> 'Don't you think it's rather nice to think that we're in a book that God's writing? If I were writing the book, I might make mistakes. But God knows how to make the story end just right—in the way that's best for us.'
> 'Do you really believe that, Mother?' Peter asked quietly.
> 'Yes,' she said, 'I do believe it—almost always—except when I'm so sad that I can't believe anything. But even when I can't believe it, I know it's true—and I try to believe. You don't know how I try, Peter. Now take the letters to the post, and don't let's be sad any more. Courage, courage! That's the finest of all the virtues!....'(175).

The passage reveals that the mother thinks the whole concept of God being in charge of their lives is a fictional one. She really wants to believe that it is true, and she tries her best to do so, but deep in her heart she thinks that God is just a figment of imagination. The phrase "you don't know how I try" best reveals her struggle with her belief in God. The value that the mother finally upholds as most worthwhile is that they must be brave at all costs. She tells her son to cheer up and to have courage. This is the most ideologically revealing incident in the novel which, I imagine, Nesbit wrote drawing from her own life-experience.

Nesbit's father had died before she was four years old. This affected their fortunes seriously. They travelled to different places and then lived for a few years in a house in Kent. Nesbit and her brothers used to play in the countryside near the railway station.

This time in her youth is said to be the inspiration of the novel *The Railway Children.* She watched her mother struggle to raise them, just as Bobbie watches her mother struggle. When Nesbit married Hubert Bland, she raised their own children along with his other illegitimate children from other women; she then had to work hard to make money to support them all when ill heath and business failure affected Bland. I believe that she managed to do so because she was a courageous, hardworking woman. She was also quite unconventional for her day and age. She smoked, sported a short haircut, had strong political views on socialism and was one of the founding members of the Fabian Society along with Bland. Gardner tells us that Nesbit had a love relationship with the young Bernard Shaw, whose novel Candida is "about a woman torn between her husband and her poet lover." She also mentions that Shaw wrote an unfinished novel that presented Nesbit's marriage in an unflattering light.

Nesbit's real-life unconventional behaviour is reflected in the way the mother of *The Railway Children* befriends and looks after the poor Russian novelist, Mr. Szezcpansky, who has escaped from penal servitude in Siberia and is very ill. She nurses him back to health and goes out of her way to be kind to him. She probably treats him so kindly because she thinks she is vicariously caring for her incarcerated husband. The fact that she lends him her husband's clothes and lets him sleep in her own bedroom (which she vacates for him) also suggests this. The children realize that their mother is feeling very sorry for the poor Russian who has come to England in search of his lost wife and child. When Phyllis comments that she can see how sorry her mother seems to be for him, the mother just says, "Yes." She is silent for a while and then says, "Dears, when you say your prayers, I think you might ask God to show His pity upon all prisoners and

captives" (75). Bobbie clarifies, "upon all prisoners and captives. Is that right, Mother?" The mother replies in the affirmative, stressing that they must pray for *all* prisoners and captives. The children are, at this point in the narrative, unaware that their father is in prison. The mother's statement is aimed at making the children feel sorry for prisoners, without quite revealing that their father is one. It is the way older people hide shameful secrets from children— by making general statement that vaguely hint at the situation without revealing that the condition actually applies to them. This reference to pray for prisoners is not religious, per se. It should be considered as a Victorian way of expressing concern for the less-fortunate. The phrase "say your prayers" shows that prayer was a ritual, and not an expression of deep faith and trust in God. Gardner suggests that Mr. Szezcpansky "was inspired by the Russian exile Sergi Stepniak" who was friends with Bland and Nesbit. This adds to the autobiographical elements in the novel.

5.5. Conclusion

I see an essentially secular outlook in both the Nesbit novels discussed above. The novels focus on activities and concerns that are very down-to-earth. Even the magical Psammead is no more than a device to create a fantasy novel. These two children's novels reflect some of the prevailing non-religious worldviews of the early twentieth century. The chief concerns are about being good, just and honourable in the domestic universe described in the novels.

CHAPTER VI

SECULAR STORIES IN THE COMIC BOOK FORMAT

6.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the enormously popular *The Adventures of Tintin* European-origin comic book series. From 1929 to 1976, Hergé spent a lifetime writing and drawing *The Adventures of Tintin* which presents heroes in a mould quite different from American comic book superheroes. The fast-paced action and slap-stick humour are part of the literary devices of the medium that he employed. However, taken as whole, the twenty-three completed comics in the series offer European modernist worldview concerns: Rationalism, politics, a scientific outlook, and justice are the focus of the stories. The series also presents women in negative stereotypes. This is done humorously, but, there are no positive female role models in the entire series that could off-set the negative portrayals. The comics have a totally secular view of life. The characters in the texts view life and its problems from the worldview of scientific rationality. The "civilized" Europeans do not believe in the mumbo-jumbo of "uncivilized" tribes. For example, the latter are petrified that the gods are angry with them when the sky darkens during mid-day, however, the former *know* that it is only a solar eclipse (*The Adventures of Tintin: Prisoners of the Sun*). I will try to explain some of the different ways in which the growing secularism of Europe was codified in children's stories that were circulated in the twentieth century. The *Adventures of Tintin* comic series is one such example where a worldview privileging the Individual and the importance of Science and Technology is reflected.

These stories are exceptionally entertaining and have a charm that beats plain prose texts. Hergé did both the artwork and created the text of each story. This is very rare for a comic book creator. Most comic books are the product of a team of collaborators. For example, at their peak, the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics were produced one comic every fortnight. Each comic was scripted, illustrated, lettered, coloured and edited by different people. This helped the producers maintain a schedule of production and the number of published titles ran into several hundreds of issues. In contrast, Hergé did most of the creative work for the comics by writing the scripts and making drawings to match. He was a perfectionist for detail. He only managed to produce two dozen comic issues over a span of half a century (the last one was not completed before he died). Yet, his work has an enduring charm that has outlived its creator.

6.2. Hergé and *The Adventures of Tintin* Comic Series

Hergé was the pen name of Georges Prosper Rémi (the initials G. R. in the reverse order, pronounced in French as Hergé.) He was born on 22 May, 1907 in Etterbeek, a suburb of Brussels, in Belgium. After leaving school, he worked for the Catholic Belgian daily newspaper, *Le Vingtième Siècle* (the 20th century). He was responsible for the section of the newspaper designed for children, *Le Petit Vingtième*. Butler tells us that Nobert Wallez, his boss, wanted him to create an inspiring hero as a role model for children, someone with a Boy Scout code of ethics. *The Adventures of Tintin,* a series of comic pages in which Tintin was the main character, was introduced on January 10, 1929 in a story entitled *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets.* Every issue featured two pages of the story. Farr says that *Casterman* started publishing the series in book

form towards the end of the Second World War (8). Hergé started off as a lone artist, but later, in the 1950s, he hired a few assistants who helped him with the backgrounds and coloring. After *Le Vingtième Siècle ended,* he moved the serialization of the stories first to the children's supplement of the newspaper *Le Soir* in 1940, and finally in 1946 to his own *Tintin* magazine (Kannenberg 834). The character Tintin is a journalist who goes round the world investigating crimes but soon he gets involved in the action and we don't hear much about his newspaper reporting. He becomes an investigator, rather than an investigative reporter. At the beginning of the first book, *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, we learn that he is reporting for the newspaper *Le Petit Vingtième*. Snowy, a white fox terrier, is Tintin's faithful friend and companion. They regularly save each other from dangerous situations. In the later adventures, Tintin is joined by the short-tempered Captain Haddock and some other interesting minor characters. The whole comic series was set in realistic twentieth century surroundings; some children of the time even believed that Tintin was a real human being The "thoroughly convincing settings, mirrored the world as seen by Hergé and his public," says Farr; he identifies that "high quality drawing and compelling narrative" with stories "anchored firmly in fact" and "a topicality of subject… which did not date" have kept the series popular right from 1929 to the new millennium (8-9).

The Adventures of Tintin fascinated several generations before the advent of television cartoons. Hergé created fast moving plots with kidnappings, shootings, trickery, chases and gangsters. Killers lurk in the alleys and dangers spring up from all around the protagonists. There are alligators to ward off, evil men to outwit and bombs that explode in their faces. Several hair-raising episodes later, Tintin emerges relatively

unscathed to wrap up the mystery in a demystifying, logical end. The series was a great success and led to the collection and printing of each completed serialised story in the famous 62-page album-format. The comic series was extremely popular in mid-twentieth century Europe. It is now estimated that 230 million copies of these comics have been sold and that they have been translated into eighty languages (Dunnett 583). They were marketed and reprinted all over Europe and retained their popularity for several generations. Some of these books were adapted for the small screen including *The Crab with the Golden Claws*, *Red Rackham's Treasure, Black Island, Destination Moon* and *The Calculus Affair*. From1929 to 1976, Hergé spent a lifetime writing and drawing *The Adventures of Tintin*. He died in Brussels on 3 March 1983. At the time of his death, he was working on *Tintin and the Alpha-Art*, which was published posthumously in an unfinished form. The recent Stephen Spielberg movie in 2011, *Tintin: the Secret of the Unicorn,* is a clear sign that the stories Hergé created still have the power to entertain the children of today, albeit in a different media format.

Several European preoccupations and outlooks are revealed in a close study of the texts: discourses of colonialism, European superiority and anti-Americanism. Dunnett believes that European ideologies are at the center of the worldview in the books. As the creator of both the artwork and the verbal text, Hergé created an integrated narrative that helped the reader make sense of the world around him/her. Hergé created a symbolic reality, a kind of mapping of received impressions/experiences by endorsing existing power structures and upholding values of justice and good sense in his stories. Further, the narratives were rich with realistic details from the real world: busy streets, interesting characters, detailed drawings of cars, ships and spaceships. These artistic details helped

to ground the fictional narrative in a believable universe and made the stories "believable." By mapping an ordered universe in his books, Hergé offered a dignified world-view to a twentieth century world that was increasingly unpredictable and unsettling. A reader could begin to believe that the universe around him was comprehensible.

6.3. Twentieth Century European Worldviews Depicted in the Tintin Stories

The Economist article "Tintin: A Very European Hero" comments, "All societies reveal themselves through their children's books. Europe's love affair with Tintin is more revealing than most…." In the first half of the twentieth century, Europe was ravaged by two World Wars. Urbanization, politics, business, science and technology had more influence on the individual than religion and community life. Life for everyone was changing at a rapid pace. According to Heylighen, Joslyn**,** and Turchin, one of the biggest problems of present society is that we don't seem able to cope with the unpredictable change and growing complexity of life. There is stress, uncertainty and frustration as our minds grapple with an overload of information even while values are being eroded. To the children of a generation of Europeans whose lives were being rocked by wars, Hergé offered an alternate world of make-believe: a world that was exciting yet stable, rational and explainable. In The *Adventures of Tintin,* Tintin gets into endless difficult situations but always manages to escape death and disaster through good fortune, witty solutions or help from devoted friends. Tintin was an example of the virtue of surviving on one's own. He epitomized the Age of the Individual. Adults and children alike were fascinated by the narratives. Like the Indian Amitabh Bachchan movies of the 1970s, everything always had a good solution at the end. The stories wrap up to a logical, coherent

conclusion. Tintin reflects the attitudes, expectations and preoccupations of several Europeans in a changing world. De Ruijter - Eader says that the story themes range from Colonialism through Anti-Imperialism and the Second World War to the introduction of New Media - like the Radio and the Television - to the Occult and telepathy. The ironical part is that the last unfinished book of the Tintin series, *Tintin and Alph-Art,* ends in the middle of the action with Tintin trapped in a work of art…coming closest to an absurd ending. This was because the author died before the story was completed. Perhaps it was the best way to end a series that historians now consider a great contribution to the world of Children's Literature. A series that helped children make sense of the world surrounding them. A series that offered the hope that good does triumph over evil, and that mystery can be demystified by science and rational thinking.

6.3.1. Upholding Traditional "Good Values"

Hergé was encouraged by his mentor, Nobert Wallez, to create positive stories that would influence young Belgian children of the first half of the twentieth century. Tintin, a young boy with great courage and ingenuity, was created as a model of good values. He is not a coward; he never lies and is never lazy. He crusades against organized crime, theft and injustice. He has a good set of survival skills: he knows how to box, how to sail, to drive racing cars, pilot planes and ride horses. He embodies the ideals that European adults would wish to inculcate in young boys: pluck, fair play, good manners, restrained violence and no sex. Unlike James Bond, he has few chances to rescue girls, moving in an almost entirely male world, but he is quick to defend small helpless boys from unearned beatings/bullying. Tintin's "good boy" values appealed to adults and children of the 20th century. He had a code of conduct: to relentlessly seek the truth and expose the

wrongdoers (a journalist's motto) and he hated bullies and fiercely resists them. “Tintin's slightly priggish character fitted the times. His simple ethical code—seek the truth, protect the weak and stand up to bullies—appealed to a continent waking up from the shame of war… Hergé always said the Catholic boy-scout movement rescued him from a “grey” childhood in lower middle-class Brussels” (“Tintin: A Very European Hero”). Tintin is the perfect “Boy Scout.” In *King Ottokar's Sceptre,* Tintin finds a briefcase on a bench in a public place/park and immediately tries to find the owner to return it to him. He hesitates to open it but since there is no name on the outside, he checks inside for some clue to identify the owner. Finding a name and address, he promptly sets off to return it. He has an upright, goody-goody look on his face, like a boy who knows he's being a “good boy.” Later, on pg 53, we find Tintin heroically walking for miles and miles without eating any food for more than 24 hours… all because he has a mission to complete.

Tintin is brave but sensible. He is no *Superman.* He cannot change the laws of Nature, nor can he bash up people stronger than himself. However, Tintin is a very quick-witted little guy who manages to get out of several tricky situations by the use of his wits. He doesn't hesitate to head-butt his assailants and box his way to freedom. He is a clever little guy who outsmarts big bullies. Tintin's bravery works within limits: he rescues friends, and foils plots; however, he can do nothing to end broader problems like dictatorships and foreign occupation. Unlike the American creations, *Superman* and *Batman*, Tintin does not have the power to change events, and inflict total defeat on the wicked. Set in a realistic twentieth century world, Tintin is less unrealistic than the American superheroes. However, he does have an amazing mobility and travels all round

the world (and Outer Space) with the ease of a rich adult. Often, he gets out of extreme misfortunes by sheer strokes of good luck. In certain aspects, Tintin's activities require a "willing suspension of disbelief."

6.3.2. The Value of Standing Up for Justice.

In many of the comic books we see several episodes where Hergé sides with the powerless against the powerful. He conveys to a child reader the *injustice* of bullying. In *The Blue Lotus,* which is set in China, we have a scene where a well-to-do white man, Mr. Gibbons, steps onto the road without looking where he is going and is hit by a passing Chinese rickshaw puller. Mr. Gibbons blames the hapless poor Chinese man (who is obviously of a lower income group than him) and is about to hit him with his cane when Tintin intervenes and breaks the white man's cane. Chastising him for his disgraceful conduct, Tintin stands up to the insolence of the white man and takes up for the exploited Chinese man. As a social equal, Tintin can point out how wrong the white man's attitude is to a social "inferior." It does not matter of what rank the Chinese rickshaw puller is in the hierarchy of social stratification: the accident was Mr. Gibbon's fault and it was his duty to be sorry for causing it. The child reader is quick to absorb how Tintin stands up for justice. It is a value that will reappear several times in the Tintin stories. In *Tintin in America* Hergé reduced the American people to caricatures because of his limited knowledge of America. However, he showed his basic humanism in the way he championed the cause of the American Indians. His panels offer a clear social criticism of the unfairness involved in depriving the American Indian of their ancestral land by the greedy and powerful American businessmen.

6.3. 3. Politics and Maintaining the Established Order.

When Tintin catches a villain, he hands him over to the police. Tintin defends monarchs against revolutionaries (earning a knighthood in *King Ottokar's Sceptre*). The scepter is a symbol of the right to office, without which a king would lose the right to rule. The story revolves round a group of political enemies of Borduria, the neighbouring state, trying to wrest power from King Ottokar by first making his sceptre disappear. The next stage in the planned coup involved fomenting politically sensitive incidents, seizure of the Klow State Radio, and an invasion of Syldavian territory by Bordurian troops. We can see echoes of current events of that period, as Hergé was writing this episode during the World War II years when struggles for power were paramount in world events. Tintin helps King Ottokar find his sceptre and uncovers the traitors in his ministry.

Hergé's final complete adventure, the 1976 *Tintin and the Picaros*, expresses his attitude of neutrality to political situations that were too difficult to remedy**.** Tintin is summoned to rescue old friends from a civil war between two Latin American warlords. Tintin does not take political sides. He contents himself by backing the rebel general in exchange for his friends' freedom, and a pledge that the revolution will be bloodless, with no executions or reprisals. There is no talk of promoting democracy, or even regime change.

6.3. 4. A Rationalist Attitude to Mystery, Magic and the Supernatural

Hergé's comics reflect a cogent, pragmatic outlook about the mysteries of life. There is a rational, scientific explanation for almost everything. According to Bruno Lecigne, the ideological efficacy of Hergé's clear-line style of art, the *ligne claire*, lies

not in what is chosen for depiction, but in the idea that *the world is legible.* Tintin relentlessly pursues mysteries to their logical conclusion.

In the first comic, *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, Tintin enters an abandoned house which seems to be haunted. There are skulls in a cooking vessel and a skeleton pops out of the clock. A spooky voice comes from under the floor saying, "Your last hour has come ... when you enter this house..." Tintin rips up the floorboards to reveal a gramophone playing out the scary recording. He says, "Very modern ghosts! They put their voices on gramophone records." Hergé demystifies the belief in ghosts. Earlier in the same story we see Tintin and Snowy dress themselves up in bed sheets, pretending to be ghosts to frighten off their attackers. Tintin says, "Begone, miserable humans…or I shall carry you off to the land of shadows… Tremble, mortals! Retribution is at hand!..." A child reader knows that it is only Tintin in disguise and is delighted to see the intruders flee saying, "Help!...Help!...Save me!... Ghosts!...Ghosts!..." To continue the humour, Tintin trips on the bed sheets and falls into a sewer because he cannot find the eyeholes in the bed sheet. This portrayal makes us think that ghosts are actually nonexistent.

Nevertheless, as Hergé developed as an artist and storyteller, he introduced elements of the supernatural and the occult which do not have "logical" explanations. He involves the occult in *The Seven Crystal Balls* and *The Prisoners of the Sun* and portrays a levitating mystic who goes into trances and can give answers to problems in *Tintin in Tibet.* A gypsy fortune-teller foretells the theft of jewels in *The Castafiore Emerald.* Hergé suspended the need for absolutely "scientific" explanations for strange occurrences: he presented them as *facts*: as a *given*, for the reader to believe. "Reality"

becomes a *matter-of-fact* thing: where visual evidence becomes proof of the existence of paranormal phenomena.

Tintin and friends are never rescued by 'God.' In place of the miraculous powers of God, Hergé introduces a flying saucer with aliens aboard who come in the nick of time to save Tintin and friends from an erupting volcano in the comic book *The Adventures of Tintin Flight 714.* Neither Tintin nor Professor Calculus (the thinkers) realize what has happened. All the human beings in the story are hypnotized by Mik Kranrokitoff, the link man between earth and another planet. He uses telepathy to communicate with the extra-terrestrials on board the "astroship" and also to guide the whole group of humans out of danger and into the hovering craft. The extra-terrestrials rescue all of them from the erupting volcano. They then lower the hypnotized humans into a rubber dinghy where they wake up without any memory of their trip on the flying saucer. The strange extra-terrestrial "astroship" that comes to save the hypnotized Tintin and friends from an erupting volcano is made plausible by Snowy's clear-headed comment, "I could tell them a thing or two!... But no one would believe me!" (see fig. 1).

Fig.1. Only Snowy Knows the Truth in Hergé, *The Adventures of Tintin: Flight 714* Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975; print; 62).

Snowy is the only witness who was not hypnotized during the whole rescue operation. In support of Snowy's awareness of the facts of the case is the photograph of a flying saucer taken by "an amateur in Cairo" which the television anchor shows the interviewee, Professor Calculus on his return from his strange adventure. He asks him, "Would you say that this machine is of extra-terrestrial origin?" Hergé colludes with his reader in the unstated assumption that facts are indisputable evidence of reality… even if no one else will believe them. The author and reader are "in the know" of the reality concerning the unidentified flying object. The unbelievable is made believable in the face of the general disbelief that such a story receives from the "uninformed" public. There are images on page 61 of a scoffing Jolyon Wagg who is watching the interview on television. He is convinced that Professor Calculus has gone crazy when he talks about the extra-terrestrial object he has discovered in his pocket after his strange adventure. The child reader is drawn into the world of make-belief and easily believes that what is depicted visually is REAL. He feels a sense of superiority that he knows more than "those disbelieving adults." Hergé uses this technique of making the mysterious acceptable. Here, the most *sensible* attitude is a "willing suspension of disbelief".

The story of *The Adventures of Tintin: The Seven Crystal Balls* revolves around the strange things that happen to the seven Sanders-Hardiman Ethnographic Expedition members who one by one fall into a strange coma on their return to Europe after a two-year trip to Bolivia and Peru. The comic book opens with a prosaic scene from daily life: Tintin is talking with a fellow passenger in a train on the subject of a newspaper report about the return of the Sanders-Hardiman Ethnographic Expedition that returned to Europe after a two-year trip through Peru and Bolivia. The seven members of the

expedition had discovered several Inca tombs and had brought back to Europe a mummy of the Inca *Rascar Capac* (translated as "he-who-unleashes-the-fire-of-heaven") which was still wearing a crown of solid gold. The mysterious is introduced in an inconspicuous manner when Tintin's fellow passenger remarks that strange deaths await these men who have "violated" the ancient Inca's burial chamber, "Think of all those Egyptologists, dying in mysterious circumstances after they'd opened the tomb of the Pharaoh… You wait, the same will happen to those busybodies, violating the Inca's burial chamber."

Later, on page 7, we have a sari-clad lady clairvoyant, Yamilah, telling the audience of a stage-show that Mr. Clarkson, a photographer, and one of the seven members of the Sanders-Hardiman Expedition, has taken seriously ill and is under the curse of the Sun God. An eerie feeling descends upon everyone when soon after her vision, a public announcement tells an incredulous Mrs. Clarkson (who is in the audience) to return home because her husband has suddenly fallen very ill. He is one of the seven members of the Sanders-Hardiman Ethnographic Expedition. There is a slow build up of plot tension.

Professor Hercules Tarragon, one of the expedition scientists, is all "modern and scientific" in his beliefs and on page 28 proudly shows his visitors, Tintin, Captain Haddock and Professor Calculus, the shriveled mummy of the Inca. He tells them about the paper he has written on the occult practices of ancient Peru. He reads a portion of the funerary inscription found on the walls of the Inca Rascar Capac's tomb, "After many moons will come seven strangers with pale faces; they will profane the sacred dwellings of he-who-unleashes-the –fire-of-heaven. These vandals will carry the body of the Inca to their own far country. But the curse of the gods will be as their shadow and pursue them

over land and sea…" He obviously doesn't believe in anything beyond the rational pursuits of Science. Hergé deliberately contrasts attitudes of Scientific Rationalism with the *fact* of Mysterious Occurrences, to make the supernatural believable. As mentioned earlier, it serves as a device to make the reader suspend his natural disbelief.

Hergé builds up an atmosphere of foreboding when a terrible storm brews in the background even as Professor Hercules is talking. There is thunder and lightning and through the chimney a ball of fire enters the sedate sitting room, spins round the room, shreds Professor Hercules' clothes and smashes the glass of the case enclosing the Inca mummy. The mummy vanishes into thin air and only leaves behind the heavy gold ornaments it was wearing. A visibly shaken Professor Hercules continues with the tomb inscription, "There will come a day when Rascar Capac will bring down upon himself the cleansing fire. In one moment of flame he will return to his true element; on that day will punishment descend upon the desecrators." The mystery increases when, on pages 32 and 33, Tintin, Professor Calculus and Captain Haddock all simultaneously experience nightmares of the missing Inca mummy coming in through their respective bedroom windows and hurling a huge crystal ball at them. The prophecy seems come true when later that night Professor Hercules falls into a coma after a small smashed crystal ball is found in his bedroom. After a while he starts screaming for mercy and shouts, "They're coming back! ... I can see them! They're going to smother me! Keep away, you devils! They'll tear me to pieces!" and then slumps back into a stupor.

On page 49, we see the seven explorers lying unconscious in a hospital ward. Suddenly at 10.30 a.m. all of them simultaneously start experiencing terrible seizures. They go into some sort of a trance and writhe in bed looking petrified. They are tied to

their beds to prevent them falling off. Nurses try to pacify them to no avail. One patient is portrayed with his feet up in the air, another cowering with fright and clinging to his pillow. All are in agony for some time and then all slump back into quiet stupor.

It is only on page 60 of the next comic book *The Adventures of Tintin*: *Prisoners of the Sun* that the reader is given an explanation about the strange crystal balls and the victims who are in a coma, "The crystal balls contained a mystic liquid, obtained from coca, which plunged the victims into a deep sleep. The High Priest cast his spell over them…and could use them as he willed." Tintin has stumbled upon people who practice witchcraft. Tintin is appalled but is forced to *believe what he sees*: seven images of the beleaguered seven scientists stuck with pins all over their bodies… "Each of these images represents one of the men for whom you plead.[1] Here in this chamber, by our hidden powers, we have tortured them. It is here that we will release them from their punishment," says the South American Inca Prince of the Sun. That these "primitive" occult practices have power over even the most "advanced" European scientists is presented as the truth of the matter. Tintin is the innocent faced European who pleads with the regal Inca Prince of the Sun for the release of his fellow Europeans who are under the Inca spell, "In my country there are seven learned men who are still…enduring terrible torture because of you. By some means you have them in your power. I beg you to end their suffering." The Prince explains that the European explorers deserved the punishment they got for violating sacred Inca tombs and plundering their treasures. The inexplicable agonies of the scientists have been caused by the power of the occult. Tintin realizes that each time the Inca High Priest, Huaco, tortured the wax images in the Peruvian Sun Temple, the seven comatose explorers suffered terrible agonies far away in

a hospital in Europe. Tintin exclaims, "Now I see it all!" in an 'eureka' moment, the jigsaw puzzle in his mind is solved. To the reader, this seems a "logical" explanation. The power of magic/ the occult is presented as a rational *fact*. The reader is drawn into the "logic" of the self-contained world of Tintin.

6.3. 5. A Worldview that Privileged Science and Technology

Hergé kept himself updated about recent scientific activities. He read the *National Geographic Magazine* and based many of his realistic drawings on details he found in it. Towle points out that "his exquisite closed-line renderings of scenes" are often based on photos in the magazine, "a temple in Kathmandu, a street scene in Shanghai…these drawings show great skill and attention to detail; if one sees a car in Tintin, one can be sure that, right down to the very tail lights and chrome details, it is some particular make, year and model." The space exploration details in *Destination Moon* and *Explorers on the Moon* were extremely well-informed. The drawings too have a great attention to detail.

The comic book *The Adventures of Tintin*: *Prisoners of the Sun* was released just after the end of World War II. The European public was tired of aggression. Hergé offers a palatable excuse for European trespass on foreign soil. The explorers did not go to plunder and kill… they went to find out about "strange people" and their customs. With a child-like innocence, Tintin tells the south American Inca Sun Prince that the Europeans did not come to plunder "Their sole purpose was to make known to the world your ancient customs and the splendors of your civilization." As an advocate of the generous intentions of European explorers, Tintin expresses a worldview where meddling in

someone else's business was fine as long as it was in the name of Science and Knowledge. "In the name of Science" was the new mantra. Perhaps it did not occur to the "white-men" that they should ask for permission from the "coloured" men before they arbitrarily started documenting the different tribes and their customs. Did the tribals *want* to be documented? Didn't they value their privacy? However, Hergé does offer a hint of looking at things from the Inca's point of view right at the beginning of the comic book when Tintin's fellow traveler in the train opines that the dead should be left in peace and that "busybodies" have no right to go digging up other people's tombs. To make Tintin realize how outrageous ethnographic scientific expeditions were he comments, "What'd we say if the Egyptians or the Peruvians came over here and started digging up our kings?"

6.3. 6. Colonialist Ideology

Early Tintin comics have an ethnocentric worldview. In the compressed format of a 62-page comic book novelette, Hergé often relied upon stereotypes, to evoke character. The first Tintin book, *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, had a strong anti-totalitarian theme aimed against the Soviet regime. Hergé's source was *Moscou sans voiles* ("Moscow without veils"), a book written in 1928 by Joseph Douillet, former consul of Belgium in the USSR. In this book, Douillet denounced the communist system for producing poverty, famine, and terror. There was a general belief that the Bolsheviks were a danger to the democratic countries. Hergé portrays them in an over-simplified way—as cruel, uncivilized and thirsty for power. There is a scene in the book where the Russian peasants are forced to vote at gun point for the communist list of candidates. *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* portrayed the ill effects of communism and showed how

the secret police, the OGPU, terrorized the common people. Evil communist leaders hoarded up grain and wealth for themselves while the common people starved. The comic book showed how the communists used propaganda to persuade the world outside Russia that the economy was booming. Though the comic book is a terribly biased portrayal of the 'Land of the Communists,' in the light of the fall of the U.S.S.R. several years later, we find that Hergé's exaggerations had many truths!

The second book, the 1930 story *Tintin in the Congo* has been criticized as presenting the Africans as naïve and primitive: small men with wide eyes and bloated lips who prostrate themselves before Tintin (as well as Snowy his dog), after he shows off such magic as an electromagnet or quinine pills for malaria. According to Sadoul, *Tintin in the Congo* reflected the dominant colonialist ideology at that time. In the 1930 edition, Tintin is shown at a blackboard addressing a class of African children. "Mes chers amis," he says, "je vais vous parler aujourd'hui de votre patrie: La Belgique" ("My dear friends, I am going to talk to you today about your fatherland: Belgium"). Hergé redrew this in 1946 to show a lesson in mathematics. Hergé later admitted, "This was in 1930. All I knew about the Congo was what people were saying about it at the time: 'The Negroes are big children, it's fortunate for them that we're there, etc,'" says the *Wikipedia* article "Ideology of Tintin." Hergé's mentor, Abbe Norbert Wallez had asked him to draw a book about the Belgian colony in Congo and the Belgian missionaries in the Congo are portrayed as benign benefactors to an unenlightened race. The current *Egmont* edition of the book comes with a warning that the comic features "bourgeois, paternalistic stereotypes of the period—an interpretation some readers may find offensive." Hergé continued to revise his books after their first publication, and admitted embarrassment

over some of the views they expressed ("Ideology of Tintin.")

As Hergé's own views on colonialism changed, his comic books began to poke fun at the very ideas with which white men justified their presence in the colonies. In *The Blue Lotus,* after Tintin has just defended a local Chinese man against the insolence and injustice of the European, Mr. Gibbons, we have a very funny panel where Mr. Gibbons complains to his powerful friends at the "Occidental Private Club" that some European kid had the nerve to back up a rickshaw boy who had knocked him on the road. He complains that it was intolerable that someone should stop him from beating a native. Mr. Gibbons gesticulates wildly while boasting of the "manners" of the "superb western civilization" and, accidently, knocks over a tray of drinks. He displays utter coarseness when handling the innocent Chinese waiter whom he unjustly blames for dropping the tray of drinks that he himself had knocked over. The artwork on page 7 depicts this scene in an ironic way. Hergé was inspired by his real life friend, Chang Chong-Jen who helped him to see the importance of looking at things from the point of view of the native "other."

This heightened sensitivity and awareness of the "other" was definitely an important development in Hergé as an artist. Also, the effect on the child reader was one where the breaking of mental stereotypes helped enrich his/her understanding of people at the receiving end of social injustices.

6.3. 7. European Snobbery about New Money and Old Money

> Tintin is grandly uninterested in money…European snobbery about money permeates the books. Villains are frequently showy arrivistes. Old money

> is good. A gift (as opposed to gainful employment) allows his best friend, Captain Haddock, to buy back his family's ancestral mansion. The captain takes to castle life with relish. Enriched by a treasure find, he swaps his seaman's uniform for an increasingly Wodehousian wardrobe involving cravats, tweeds and at one point a monocle. ("Tintin: A Very European Hero")

In the early twentieth century, Europeans commonly displayed disdain for the "flashy" wealth of the *nouveaux riche* American. "Old Wealth" that had been handed down from generations in Europe was considered superior to the "New Wealth" created by American entrepreneurs. Reflecting this societal snobbery about "New Wealth," Tintin, the character, is uninterested in "making money." He is indifferent when he is offered large sums of money when he catches several wanted criminals. In the 1931 *Tintin in America*, Hergé pokes fun at the unscrupulous ways of American businessmen. Tintin discovers an oil well, "Great snakes!... OIL!... A liquid fortune, and no one to harness it!" (29). American businessmen swoop down and try to out-bid each other offering Tintin up to $100,000 for it. But Tintin is upright, he honestly tells the men that the oil well isn't <u>his</u> to sell... that territory belongs to the Blackfoot Red Indians. The approach of the Americans alters immediately, they give the native Red Indian Chief twenty-five dollars and tell him that he and his tribe have to pack their belongings and get out of that area within half an hour. Hergé takes a dig at Americans who were commonly perceived as unprincipled business mongers: a sure way to stimulate laughter in his European reader. According to Vessels, it is revealing to understand why an audience laughs at a joke or not. He says that to understand why an audience laughs at a joke is to

understand their culture. Quoting the American historian, Thomas Milton Kemnitz, he says, "'Joke cartoons—and their modern offspring, the comic strip and comic book offer intriguing possibilities to historians beyond the evidence of social attitudes… they will provide a rich lode of evidence when historians approach humor as an important and revealing facet of society'" (8). The humour in the comics reveals European snobbery and disdain for the American value of "self-made wealth." In *Tintin in America,* you have policemen saluting bank robbers and gangsters owning factories. The biased social comment is clear. However, Hergé was merely echoing widespread biases of the time (Sterckx and Soupart).

6.4. A Worldview Privileging Men

Hergé's comic books create a world full of boys and men. Except for the random appearances of the singer, Bianca Castafiore, there is a marked absence of significant women characters in the comic series. Women appear in small roles of servile housekeepers and maids. They serve, as it were, as the 'background' to the intensely male-dominated action. The resultant impression is that action, drama, adventure and dangers happen only in a man's world: an implicit privileging of males over females. "To be sure, Hergé also had vehement detractors.... The accusations leveled at Hergé are many but almost always play on the same themes. His hero is accused of misogyny: indeed, women are almost totally absent from his work" (Apostolides 1). As the *Tintin* series grew and developed, Hergé matured as a story-teller. The last few comics of the series are an exception to the rule of excluding women from the comic narratives. In *The Castafiore Emerald* and *Tintin and the Picaros* we have vivid negative portrayals of domineering women who are humorously caricatured to excite laughter. This section

discusses the two strong women characters that Hergé delineates in *The Castafiore Emerald* and *Tintin and the Picaros,* and highlights the negative female stereotypes they portray.

6.4.1. Bianca Castafiore

The comic character, Bianca Castafiore, is a world famous opera singer from Milan. She is wealthy, independent, professionally successful and sure of herself. Though her clothes and lifestyle clearly place her above the social strata of the journalist Tintin and the sailor Captain Haddock, she befriends and treats them as equals. According to Apostolidès, "Tintin is the first character to meet Castafiore in *King Ottokar's Scepter*, when he stops at the Hotel Crown, he meets the diva on her way to Klow with Mr. Wagner, her accompanist. Tintin asks if he can share their car, and they agree. En route, Bianca Castafiore tells him that she is an opera singer and makes him an apparently generous offer: "Would you like to hear me now?"" (227). This is an ominous beginning to her standard showpiece song, 'The Jewel Song' from *Faust.* She sings it at such a high decibel level that it makes all the characters shudder. Captain Haddock even hallucinates her singing it in the comic book *Flight 714.* In *The Castafiore Emerald* she plays the role of a female "disaster" descending on the peaceful world of male camaraderie.

In *The Castafiore Emerald*, Bianca Castafiore invites herself over to Captain Haddock's large manor, Marlinspike Hall without so much as asking for permission. Captain Haddock is terrified at having to share his living space with the overbearing Bianca and tries desperately to flee before she arrives. Raising an alarm at the impending 'disaster', Captain Haddock says frantically, "All hands on deck! Abandon ship! Every

man for himself! I'm off!" He appears to be a complete misogynist, but as the story unfolds we begin to see that his fears are not unfounded. Unlike the hair-raising physical dangers that the chief characters encounter in the usual *The Adventures of Tintin*, the story of *The Castafiore Emerald* revolves around their inescapable encounters with Bianca Castafiore and her entourage: Irma, the maid, Mr. Wagner, the pianist, and Iago, the talking parrot. Castafiore and entourage become 'the enemy'! They burst into Captain Haddock's life with very little warning. Bianca Castafiore enters the house without even ringing the doorbell. She glibly tells her host that her retinue *always* travels with her. The talking parrot is a gift for the captain but it makes his life miserable by first biting his finger and then interrupting his conversations on the telephone with, "Hello! I can hear you!" (14). Poor Captain Haddock is unable to escape from his house as he sprains his leg after falling down the stairs and is forced to rest for a fortnight with a plaster round his foot.

Hergé humorously pokes fun at several 'silly' traits of Bianca Castafiore which are stereotypically 'feminine.' Bianca hides the key to the drawer where her precious jewels are kept in a nearby vase. When the lights go off during a television recording of her singing in Captain Haddock's hall, she yells, "Irma, my jewels! Upstairs! Run!" (34).With the house full of strangers from the television crew, this is a stupid thing to do as she clearly indicates to any prospective thief where the jewels are. We see a car quickly pulling out of the driveway and our worst fears are confirmed when Irma reports that the jewels are all gone. Bianca screams and promptly faints. The maid too faints and when she recovers she starts wailing, "I knew it would happen!.... Boo-hoo…hooo! I knew it would happen!" (36). Hergé portrays the stereotypical response of a woman to

disaster: fainting and tears. Bianca sobs and lies weakly on the sofa while the police try to piece together the sequence of events before the disappearance of the jewels (working logically, like 'men do.') Suddenly she perks up, all energy restored, when she remembers that she herself had placed her jewel case on the very sofa on which she is lying. Flinging the cushions in the air she discovers the jewels safe and sound and blithely tells the men around, "I'm a real feather-brain! ...I completely forgot…" (39). Laughing it off, she forgets the chaos that she had irresponsibly created. The implication is that women can be irresponsible and enjoy making a big tearful scene during a crisis, but they quickly recover when the crisis has blown over. The men take some time to recover from their exasperation at female folly. We see the two inspectors going off distractedly and tripping over the television cables. I am reminded of the lyrics of the song 'A Hymn to Him' sung by the misogynist Professor Higgins in the film *My Fair Lady*, "Women are irrational, that's all there is to that! … They're nothing but exasperating, irritating, vacillating, calculating, agitating, maddening and infuriating hags! … Why can't a woman be more like a man?" Professor Higgins cannot understand why his lady student Eliza Doolittle doesn't assess a situation in the 'logical' way men do, and instead gets terribly upset after returning home from the ball where she had just been hailed as a beautiful princess by one and all.

6.4.2. Peggy Alcazar

In the *Adventures of Tintin and the Picaros,* we find Peggy, a tough, crude, domineering woman. She is the wife of General Alcazar, former President of the Republic of San Theodoros, who is planning a revolution with the help of his loyal guerrillas to wrest political power back from his rival, General Tapioca. General Alcazar

and his men are hiding in the forest after his government was toppled by General Tapioca. Peggy henpecks her husband and forces The General to do all the housework at their forest dwelling. She gives him orders and he is scared of her. Peggy is an unattractive, red-haired woman. On page 41 we see her with curlers in her hair, wearing spectacles with blue frames, a yellow shirt, pink trousers and blue sports shoes. She smokes a cigar and marches around showing everyone that it is she who makes the rules at home. She yells at her husband, "You promised me to be home the same night! ...And you've been gone three whole days!" The cringing General Alcazar makes weak excuses to his wife. Turning to his guests he excuses her behaviour, "she seems a little…er…brisk…on first acquaintance, but she has a heart of gold…" A polite Captain Haddock pats The General and says, "Of course, General, one sees it immediately…" The humour of the piece continues when the hard-of-hearing Professor Calculus treats the 'tough' woman like a 'fragile lady.' He doffs his cap and kisses her hand saying, "That a weak woman should share the hardships and… dangers of guerrilla life, commands not only our utmost respect but our profound admiration!"(41). But Peggy is no weak woman; she is unconcerned about her husband's welfare and complains that her dwelling place is a "lousy mud hut…crawling with bugs and roaches instead of a palace." The irony is that Professor Calculus' conventional gentlemanly behaviour is completely misplaced; she is no stereotypical feminine 'helpless lady' and, instead, behaves rudely and in a typically 'manly', authoritarian, fashion. General Alcazar meekly follows her with shoulders drooping. In the second last panel on page 41 Professor Calculus comments, "What a delightful lady! So graceful...such exquisite femininity!" Here, Hergé plays with the humour of the dialogue and contrasts it with the image of the tough, self-

assured woman: Peggy is artistically depicted as neither graceful, nor "exquisitely feminine."

Being the last completed comic Hergé wrote, it came after his own marriage to Germaine Kieckens had broken down. Perhaps he was having fun portraying a 'beastly wife.' On the last page of *Adventures of Tintin and the Picaros* we see that General Alcazar has regained control of his state and now has a posh palace to live in. The palace is huge with long corridors and beautiful chandeliers. He tells his wife, "As for you, my dove… I promised you a palace. Bueno, I keep my word. This is all yours, from now on." The ever-complaining wife retorts with a scowl, "Fine and dandy! ... Anyone can see it isn't you who's expected to keep this dump clean… So for a start, stop dropping cigar ash all over the place! ...You get me?"(62). Here, Hergé depicts a classic case of 'female ingratitude'; we remember that she had been complaining only a few days earlier about having to live in a "lousy mud hut…crawling with bugs and roaches instead of a palace" (41).

We gain an insight into the reason for the lack of positive women characters in his comics from Numa Sadoul's interviews with Hergé. Hergé himself denied being a misogynist, saying, "For me, women have nothing to do in a world like Tintin's, which is the realm of male friendship"…. He told Sadoul that he believed that the Tintin stories were mainly about men getting into all sorts of "misadventures rather than adventures" … and he felt that a man slipping on a banana skin was much funnier than if it happened to a woman (93). We cannot tell if Hergé was merely justifying his biases; however, being a "comic" book creator, a major motive was, undeniably, to make people laugh. The negative female stereotypes are obvious exaggerations designed to be 'funny' in a

slap-stick manner. Such humour is especially effective with pre-adolescent boys, who were the main target audience of these comics. By creating a world of action and adventure, which traditionally had been the material of stories for boys, he was only keeping with his times in privileging men and excluding women from the narratives. It is a pity that the two major women characters that appear in the series are mere caricatures. He could have portrayed Bianca Castafiore as a talented professional and a "self-made woman" worth emulation, while Peggy Alcazar could have been represented as a resilient woman, whom her husband relied on for strength. Instead, his artwork and verbal texts highlight ridiculous quirks of their characters. One can only wonder at the subtle effects of the perpetuation of these negative models of womanhood on the psyches of millions of people who have enjoyed the stories in their youth.

6.5. Captain Haddock: an Instrument of Subversion

Captain Archibald Haddock is an enriching addition to the Tintin adventures. He is Tintin's best friend and saves him in many episodes. Captain Haddock is brash, blustering, irritable and sarcastic. He speaks out his mind without hesitation. He serves as a perfect foil to Tintin's idealistic and adventurous streak and is the voice of reason and common sense. On the second panel of page 10 of *Adventures of Tintin: Destination Moon* Captain Haddock tells Professor Calculus that on no account will he join him on his first trip to the moon in the new nuclear powered rocket invented by the professor. Far from a polite refusal of such a great honour of being asked to be one of the first men to land on the moon, Captain Haddock expresses his instinctive apprehension about the viability of such a ground breaking experiment, "Me?…On the moon!...With you?...

Blistering barnacles! Your brain's gone radioactive!...I'll never set foot in your infernal rocket, d' you hear me? …Never!" Captain Haddock is down-to-earth and practical and sees things realistically. He doesn't get swayed either by lofty ideals or by great scientific inventions. He has a rustic grounding in reality and prefers safety to rash adventure.

Hergé seems to have delighted in subverting the 'goody-goody' themes and unrealistic idealism of his Tintin stories with the introduction of Captain Haddock into the didactic narratives. Subverting the avowed intention of creating Tintin as a role-model for young children, Captain Haddock emerges as a more interesting and loveable character than Tintin. If Tintin embodies pluck, fair play, good manners, and restrained violence, Captain Haddock is quite different: uninterested in digging up adventure and chasing crooks, his dialogue is full of colourful swear words (as colourful as a Captain aboard a ship.) Though Captain Haddock is loyal and brave and comes to the rescue of his friends, he never minds his language. Never obscene, his expletives are plenty: "billions of blue blistering barnacles," "ten thousand thundering typhoons," "sea gherkin," "pickled herrings," "parasites," pock mark," "bashi-bazook," etc. He swears freely and the ensuing verbal and pictorial humour makes us forget that swearing is not really a polite thing. Young readers love repeating his colourful insults which are pronounced with the force of a man swearing. I have personally witnessed two generations of children use Captain Haddock's swear-vocabulary when playing with one another. Bowdlerized words are safe for children to use to escape adult censure, and I think that Hergé happily subverts the "role-model" agenda of the character Tintin with the free-drinking, full-swearing character of Captain Haddock. Captain Haddock is more

well developed and endearing than Tintin because Tintin is too perfect while Captain Haddock is very imperfect and full of human frailty.

The Captain loves to drink rum and Loch Lomond whiskey. Being a seasoned seafarer, he can stomach large quantities of hard drinks without losing complete control of his senses. His love for hard drinks is used humorously in several episodes. In *Adventures of Tintin: Tintin and the Picaros*, Captain Haddock finds a bottle of Loch Lomond whiskey in the middle of a South American tropical forest. Amazed at finding such a "treasure" in such a strange location, he opens it to have a sip. His companion traveler, General Alcazar, grabs it from him saying, "Stop! Don't drink that!" The ensuing dialogue is funny:

CAPTAIN HADDOCK. I was only going to taste it…

GENERAL ALCAZAR. They all say that and swig the lot! (*flings bottle away*) …The next thing is a splitting headache!

CAPTAIN HADDOCK. A headache? … From Loch Lomond? … Never! (30)

Yet, by the end of the story we find that Captain Haddock is completely cured of his drinking habit by Professor Calculus who invents anti-alcohol tablets that produce a sense of revulsion for alcohol. He secretly administers them to Captain Haddock who is perplexed why he cannot stand liquor anymore. When he realizes the reason, he is furious with the professor for testing the new tablets on him. He protests vehemently, "It's a disgrace!… A scandal! A monstrous attack upon personal freedom of the individual!"

Hergé's own attitude to life seems to be more accurately articulated by Captain Haddock than by the "perfect" Tintin. I am of the opinion that Captain Haddock is an instrument of subversion of the mores of middle class respectability. Unable to hide behind socially appropriate polite manners, he is not "refined" and tells people plainly what he thinks of them and is as free with his praise as with his censure. He exemplifies the exercise of freedom of an individual. When Professor Calculus "cures" him of his alcohol addiction, he is indignant that someone else should interfere in his personal choice of whether to drink or not. Under the overarching moralistic narratives, Hergé subtly promotes the individual's right to "sin" or not. The reason why Captain Haddock is such a popular character with kids is precisely his lack of restraint and his ability to do away with "expected" good behaviour. There is much humour in the clash of socially appropriate behaviour versus Captain Haddock's unfettered responses to events. For example, in *Adventures of Tintin: Prisoners of the Sun,* Captain Haddock gets spat at by a couple of irritable llamas in the early part of the story. Finally at the end of the book he gets a chance to pay back for the insults the llamas have meted out to him, by spitting a mouthful of water at them. There is a kind of juvenile justice about the Captain's undignified behaviour. The child reader is delighted!

6.6. Conclusion

Hergé employed the comic medium to tell his stories in the dual language of word and image. With his dry sense of humour and his natural ear for authentic dialogue, the comics are entertaining even when we read them in their translated version. The comics offer a strongly optimistic worldview of the capacity of man to solve his own problems, and to help others to solve theirs. The series offers role models of courage, wit and

presence of mind to young boys and girls who read these texts. Captain Haddock is the one character who is much loved by young and old. His straight-forward honesty and "unrefined" manners liberates him from having to be a goody-goody role model.

I now move on to examine a text in the popular animated film format. The current proliferation of animated films specifically targeted at worldwide audiences (consisting of both parents and children) is a phenomenon that is an important site for literary and cultural studies. The many–layered complexity of the product and the worldwide distribution of the films indicate that no major study of Children's Literature would be complete without a discussion of this phenomenon.

Notes

1. This form of witchcraft is also practiced in India: usually a black cloth doll is used for the purpose.

CHAPTER VII

SECULAR STORYTELLING IN THE ANIMATED FILM FORMAT

7.1. Introduction to DreamWorks' *The Prince of Egypt*

If chapter three discussed how simple everyday stories can be narrated with a faith-dimension, this chapter discusses *how a story from a religious tradition can be narrated in a secular fashion*. This chapter discusses *how* the 1998 DreamWorks animated film *The Prince of Egypt* retells the famous Moses story from the book of Exodus of the Bible with a focus on non-religious matters. The reasons for selecting this film for study are as follows: First, the DreamWorks animated film *The Prince of Egypt* marked the beginning of a string of highly successful animated films made by their studios. Being their first offering to the market, it was carefully made, with all their creative goals clearly executed. Second, the film was released in 1998 at the end of twentieth century. This fitted in nicely with the list of texts I have studied which were published or produced within the time span of the last century—from E. Nesbit's *Five Children and It* which was first published in 1902 to *The Prince of Egypt* in 1998. Third, the traditional hand drawn animation style used in the film was an evolved form of comic book narrative style. Thus it seemed logical to progress from a discussion of *The Adventures of Tintin* comics to the next level of children's entertainment, the world of animated films. Fourth, the CGI (Computer Generated Images) technique introduced in the film for special effects pointed to where animation films would evolve in twenty-first century. The spectacular supernatural episodes in this film used a different form of

animation from the regular two-dimension (2D) animation in order to artistically portray another dimension to reality. Fifth, the film has engaging characters and a good narrative style, appealing to both children and adults. And sixth, the film is in the dramatic form.

Our discussion has so far considered print and visual narratives. Into what category can one place an animated film— is it a prose narrative, a visual narrative or a dramatic action sequence? The fact of the case is that animation is a form of narrative that includes all these three dimensions. The story outline is first scripted (narrative form), then the artists draw the graphics in a sequence (visual narrative), and finally the visuals are animated ("given movement") and the film is created adding sound and special effects. The final product is a dramatic narrative. Animated films are part of the super-abundance of audio-visual dramatic media that permeates the cultural landscape of current Children's Literature. Gary Westfahl's website *Sfsite.com* explains what an animated movie is:

> An animated movie, as opposed to a cartoon, is an animated narrative that includes (or at least aspires to include) all six of Aristotle's elements of drama: a true plot, fully developed characters, a theme or message, language, songs and music, and visual spectacle…. one could posit that if the ancient Greeks returned to Earth today, they would find something like *Beauty and the Beast* or *The Prince of Egypt* far more like their ancient evenings at the theatre than the other films at the multiplexes. Thus, far from being something to belittle, the animated movie could be valorized as something archetypal, a return to ancient principles of drama, a visual

narrative that is more complete and more satisfying than any of the others now available to modern filmgoers.

It is only fitting that as the last topic of discussion I analyze a children's animated film as a pointer to future research in the world of multi-media Children's Literature.

The Prince of Egypt is a Hollywood animated musical drama film, produced by DreamWorks SKG in 1998. Directed by Brenda Chapman, Simon Wells and Steve Hickner, it featured original songs written by Stephen Schwartz and a musical score composed by Hans Zimmer. The animation technique used was a mixture of traditional hand-drawn cel animation (animation in which artwork is painted on see-through sheets of plastic called a cel which are superimposed over a fixed backdrop and then filmed) and some use of CGI. Entertainment, not religious instruction, was the aim. Conventional moralistic Bible films are usually made by religious groups with modest budgets, so they use elementary animation techniques. For example, the videodisc film *The Story of Moses: Mighty Moses* by Spillum et al., is an animated version of the same story. Used by Sunday school teachers or by parents who want their children to know the basic 'Story of Moses', these films use simple animation and basic background music and are just an advanced version of the print versions of the same texts. In contrast, *The Prince of Egypt* was an entertainment product with an estimated budget of $70 million (according to *imdb.com*), sold for millions of movie-goers and home-video consumers. Being a children's film, the comic element and action sequences were prominent. The primary aim of the producers was to use this formula to attract a large audience of children to this form of entertainment. According to *boxofficemojo.com*, the film grossed $101,413,188

in the U.S. domestic market and earned an additional $117,200,000 from foreign countries.

In 1994 DreamWorks SKG was a newly founded company trying to establish a distinct identity in opposition to the well-established animation giant Disney, and *The Prince of Egypt* was to be their debut animation film in 1998 (although, according to Burrows, eventually the company hastily released the animated insect story *Antz* before *The Prince of Egypt* in order to reach the market earlier than the similarly themed Pixar movie *A Bug's Life* was released). I now examine some of the background issues associated with the production of the textual artifact. This is to throw light on certain dimensions of the text that can only be understood within the context of its origin. "Analysis of the production of news and information, as well as entertainment, sheds important light on the origins and context of the emergence of cultural texts which contributes to understanding their meaning and effects" (Kellner 199).

7.2. Background: Authors, Product, Distribution

In this section I first explore the question "Who authored *The Prince of Egypt*?" As a complex textual artifact, the final animated film was the handiwork of numerous creative heads. I then examine the material and cultural setting of the film production and its distribution.

7.2.1. Authors of *The Prince of Egypt*

Who authored *The Prince of Egypt*? An animated film has not *one* author but *many* authors of the text. Britta Pollmüller and Martin Sercombe explain that there are three stages in the creation of an animated film text, each with a large number of

personnel: Pre-production, Production, and Post-production. This is followed by the marketing and distribution of the film by another big department. The activities at the Pre-production stage include framing an idea, raising funds for the project, preparation of a schedule for the team, writing of a script, creating a storyboard (line-drawings, like in an action sequence of a comic book, showing the flow of the story), designing characters, making characters and sets, allocating production roles, and organizing the needed equipment. During the next stage, the Production team engages with the setting up of equipment, lights and sets, film shooting (based on the script and storyboard), reshooting shots where necessary, recording the narration, dialogue and sound effects, and composing and recording the music for the film. The Post-production team is in charge of editing the animation files with specialized software, editing the narration and dialogue to synchronize with the visuals, editing the music and sound effects, adding of titles, graphics and end credits. They make the Master copy and make copies onto videotape or DVD. The marketing and distribution section plans and stages the film launch, screening, distribution etc. (Pollmüller and Sercombe n.pag.). Consequently, it is only natural that the animated film *The Prince of Egypt* should list a multitude of names in its final credits.

A host of collaborators are listed in the film credits for the making of *The Prince of Egypt*: three directors, one executive producer, two producers and one associate producer, a lyricist, two art directors, a production designer, a supervising editor, a production manager and a supervising production manager. These are at the top of the pyramid of the team. Next there are the supervisors: two artistic supervisors each for the story, the background, visual effects, and animation final check, and one artistic

supervisor each for the layout, scene planning, colour models, scanning, digital paint, music, casting, and costume design. The people responsible for writing the story and creating the characters are a story writer and several story artists, three character designers and other contributors. The filmmaking process is so complex that the film has nine visual development and design people, twenty character animators with separate supervising animators for each character, crowd animators (people who make the crowds in a visual frame appear to have life), with several additional animators and assistant animators. To plan the background and layouts of each scene there was the layout department with supervisors and artists, scene planners and background. Then there was a final line animation department and important animators for special effects in major scenes like the chariot race, burning bush, plagues and parting of the Red Sea. Digital painters and colorists, editors and sound editors, sound design and supervision, and recording personnel also contributed to the filmmaking. For production, research, music and post production there were the executives and production management team and their staff, researchers (including an archaeologist and four religious consultants), the music team of editors, supervisors, mixers, orchestration vocalists, and post production sound professionals. To add to the film's public appeal, the film used the voices of famous actors for the animated characters. Working tirelessly behind the scenes was a large software and hardware technology section that handled the software and sophisticated machines on which the film was developed. We can see from this list that the whole process of making an animation film involves a huge budget, lots of creative minds, and high-end computerized processes. The sheer magnitude of the operation is eons ahead of the technology used to print a novel.

Given the huge list of artists and collaborators in the making of the film, it would be impossible to single out the contribution of each and every creative mind in the complex artifact that we are examining. Bayles tells us that "many artists object to the idea of one or two people being credited as screenwriters on an animated feature, arguing that the entire story crew actually 'writes' the film." Significantly, the myriad creators of this animated film were extremely talented and famous artists in their respective fields. Nedd singles out some of the significant contributors to the making of the film: the screenplay is written by Philip LaZebnik (writer for Disney's *Pocahontas* and *Mulan*); one of the directors is the woman Brenda Chapman (who later directed the famous Pixar film *Brave*); Hans Zimmer (renowned soundtrack composer of *The Lion King*, *The Pirates of the Caribbean* series, *Gladiator*, *The Last Samurai*, *The Dark Knight* films, *Inception*, *Man of Steel* etc.) composed the soundtrack; the songs/lyrics were written by Stephen Schwartz (song writer for the famed musicals *Wicked, Godspell* and *Pippin*); the voice cast of the animated characters includes well-known actors Sandra Bullock, Michelle Pfeiffer, Steve Martin, Helen Mirren, Ralph Fiennes, Danny Glover, Patrick Stewart, Martin Short, Jeff Goldblum, and Val Kilmer in a double role as Moses and God. The entire team seems to be a "dream team." Looking at this army of people, can we dare to discern any "authorial intentions" in this multi-authored textual artifact? Surprisingly, yes — I do see an overarching influence of the DreamWorks SKG Executive Producer, Jeffrey Katzenberg, on the meanings the textual artifact encodes. According to Berardinelli, *The Prince of Egypt* marked "Dreamworks SKG's entrance into the field of glossy, big budget animation," it was to be a worthwhile starting point of

DreamWorks' challenge to "Disney's reign as the King of Animation". This is why there was a decided authorial intent behind the movie.

I read *The Prince of Egypt* as a text produced by DreamWorks SKG, creatively used by Jeffrey Katzenberg, to gain public support and approval for the launch of their new studios which were to compete with Disney. *To this end, he used the images and cultural resonance of the Exodus story as a metaphor for the escape from the power structures of the Disney Corporation to the promised land of a new film-making enterprise.* Russell offers the same interpretation of the film, he "looks at the film as an allegory, and relates the story of Moses to the struggles of DreamWorks' co-founder, and Head of Animation, Jeffrey Katzenberg" (234). Russell tells us that Katzenberg had had a bitter break with Disney when Disney's CEO, Michael Eisner, refused to promote him to the newly vacant position of chairman (former Disney chairman Frank Wells, had died in a skiing accident in April 1993). During his tenure at Disney, Katzenberg had been responsible for making Disney's animation department a success and three of Disney's biggest hits (including *The Little Mermaid* and *The Lion King*) were due to his management. He threatened to quit if he was not promoted. However, instead of bowing to pressure, Eisner forced Katzenberg to quit. Katzenberg promptly worked on forming the rival animation company, DreamWorks SKG (247-248).

The choice of the Jewish Moses as the hero of *The Prince of Egypt* was no accident. Moses is a cultural symbol of a true liberator. According to Russell's reading of the film, "*The Prince of Egypt* is not only about Moses, it is also about Jeffrey Katzenberg… the oppressive Egyptian regime is Disney, and the monuments that the Hebrews labour on are movies." The film presented "the foundation of DreamWorks in

mythic terms…" it implied that Katzenberg "could lead the filmmaking community to a promised land of unparalleled creative freedom" (250). It is pertinent to note that the film ends at the point where the Israelites have just crossed the Red Sea and have escaped their former Egyptian masters. Moses looks over the sea to the lone figure of Pharaoh Rameses alone on a rock on the other side of the sea. Rameses calls out in anguish, "Moses! Moses!" There is a look of pain as Moses says, "Goodbye brother," sighs and turns his back on the figure of Pharaoh. It could be that Katzenberg felt the same feelings of partial regret that the wonderful relationship had been broken when he bid goodbye to his former CEO, Michael Eisner. In the last sequence of the film we are shown Moses descend from a mountain with two tablets of stone on which are engraved the laws by which their community would live in future. This could be a metaphor for the newly created agreement between the three DreamWorks SKG partners for a company run by better principles than that of the former Disney regime. The last image the audience has is of the figure of Moses foregrounded as he looks down at the huge camp of Israelites down in the valley. I read this as a symbol of Katzenberg envisioning the future of DreamWorks SKG. Quoting Thomas Elsaesser, Russell says, "DreamWorks, the name that Spielberg, David Geffen and Jeffrey Katzenberg have chosen for their new studio is brilliantly and nonchalantly candid: the manufacture of dreams that 'work'" (234).

7.2.2. Creating a Product that Would Sell

A lot of money goes into the making of a Hollywood film. It is imperative that the film should 'sell' to justify the huge costs involved in its making. Disney's *The Lion King* released in 1994 had a production budget of 62 million US dollars. It went on to gross 783.8 million US dollars worldwide, similarly, Pixar's *Toy Story 2* released in 1999 was

produced with 90 million US dollars, and grossed 485 million US dollars in its total box office collections (Yoon and Malecki 251). The animated film has become a cultural product that is developed by big film studios for mass consumption and high profits. Though the plot of *The Prince of Egypt* is located in religious traditions, the animation techniques used and the marketing strategies of the distributors locate the film in a modern market culture. The producers knew they had a market for this entertainment product; as a large section of potential consumers for the film in the U.S.A. had Jewish and Christian roots, they would be familiar with the biblical outline of the story; therefore, the film had only to draw on the collective unconscious of these communities. Accordingly, the film opens with a solemn claim, "The motion picture you are about to see is an adaptation of the Exodus story. While artistic and historical license has been taken, we believe that this film is true to the essence, values and integrity of a story that is a cornerstone of faith for millions of people worldwide." The key word is "worldwide." The target audience was not a narrow local one but a large worldwide audience. The product was created for mass consumption and attempted to reach out to as many buyers/viewers as possible.

Additionally, the movie targeted a dual audience: adults and children. Earlier animated films by major companies Disney and Pixar had primarily targeted children with stories about princesses and cute little animals. Russell sees this movie emphasizing familial conflicts as the main theme of the story; brotherly love and parental love were the heart of the story (245). These themes would resonate with grownups too. The story was aimed at a family audience and thus widened its appeal. It was a clever idea to create a product that would satisfy the tastes of both adults and children, as adults have to

accompany their children when they visit film theatres. Katzenberg had frequently stressed in his publicity "that the studio had produced a serious historical epic which would appeal to adults as much as it did children" (Russell 244). Eight months before the film was released in 1998, Wallace wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* that many movie industry insiders were "watching the project with a mixture of skepticism and awe" because DreamWorks was attempting to change the rules of the game of the formula for successful animation films. She considered it hugely daunting that the movie was attempting to "change the movie going habits of American adults, many of whom see animation as kids' stuff." It was clear that the studio was taking a huge risk with the project, also since the movie had a religious plot line. "DreamWorks must convince grown-ups that animation can be serious without being preachy," she had warned.

The film was released a week before Christmas and drew in the holiday crowd of school children and their families. Eller and Bates noted that *The Prince of Egypt* was released simultaneously in the U.S. and overseas; this was an unusual strategy for that time as "most U.S. films launch[ed] first at home before opening internationally." They believed that "DreamWorks' decision to release the film worldwide was motivated by its desire to grab headlines with a big initial gross;" however, DreamWorks' distribution chief, Jim Tharp, clarified that this worldwide release was timed with the Christmas holidays during which worldwide audiences are easily available. It is clear that Katzenberg left no stone unturned to make this movie's launch a huge success. *The Prince of Egypt* was to be the launch of his career as the brain behind the animation section of DreamWorks SKG, and the launch of Disney's biggest competitor in this film genre. Commenting on the generous spending on the film's launch, Eller and Bates said

in 1998, “The level of spending to market the movie stems in part from the fact that DreamWorks is launching not just a movie but a business.”

7.2.3. Distribution of the Product

Film studios need a strong distribution network to deliver their products to theatres. Film production is a high-cost venture and distribution monopolies keep the major film production studios ‘major.’ DreamWorks chose to create its own infrastructure to distribute their films in America, but arranged with Universal to distribute their films overseas. This production-distribution system that DreamWorks invested “at least several hundred million dollars” in was the secret of their success, since “distribution is the engine that drives movie production…Once an infrastructure…has been established it needs to be in almost constant use in order to turn a profit” (Russell 236). DreamWorks was wise in investing in this network as their production would have been affected if competing studios had to block the delivery of the films to theatres around the country. This shows us how the animation industry is situated in a market economy with “cultural products” created for wide distribution and sales.

My own encounter with the film was roughly in the year 2000 through a home video which a Goan ship-engineer purchased during one of his overseas trips when the video was released in the U.S. This was one of the few ways that the “latest films” traveled to Goa before the slow distribution network brought the films to the local screens; and I do not recall this particular film ever being released in Indian theatres. Moreover, the distribution of Hollywood animated film home video CDs reached the Indian markets a few years after they were released in the U.S. This was the film product

distribution scenario in the twentieth century when digital file sharing and simultaneous multiplex film-release screenings were not a regular feature of public life. My family enjoyed this movie as much as the other later offerings from DreamWorks SKG studios because of the comic action, character-interactions, music and action-filled plots— all of which are not specifically religious elements. Of the 30 animated feature films released so far by DreamWorks listed on the Internet Movie Database *Imdb.com,* the ones that children in India are most familiar with are: *Shrek* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004), *Shark Tale* (2004), *Madagascar* (2005), *Shrek the Third* (2007), *Bee Movie* (2007), *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* (2008), *Monsters vs. Aliens* (2009), *How to Train your Dragon* (2010), *Shrek forever After* (2010), *Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011), *Puss in Boots* (2011), *Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted* (2012), *The Croods* (2013), *How to Train Your Dragon 2* (2014) and *Penguins of Madagascar* (2014). These films have been consumed both in theatres and on home videos, including cable television telecasts of some of the popular films that are not newly released in theatres. The most popular films from this list are *Shrek* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004), *Madagascar* (2005), *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), *How to Train your Dragon* (2010), *Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011), and *How to Train Your Dragon 2* (2014). It is worthwhile noting that the trend of producing sequels to popular films show that the film producers are aware that if a film has found favour with the marketplace, consumers are likely to return to watch the sequels (either in theatre-screenings or by buying home videos). This marketing strategy can be seen by the future entertainment products planned by the studio: *King Fu Panda 3* to be released in 2016, and *How to Train Your Dragon 3* in 2018. In the next section I do a textual analysis of

the film to try to unearth the particularized “ways of seeing” explicitly and implicitly structured within the texts.

7.3. Worldview: Explicit and Implicit Elements

The Prince of Egypt is a Hollywood retelling of the religious story of Moses found in the Bible. Stories from religious traditions from around the world regularly feature in the corpus of Children's Literature circulating in the book market and in films for children. Stories from religious texts like the Bible and the Mahabharata are very popular with parents who choose the books their children read and the films they watch. This is primarily because the interesting characters and exciting episodes in these texts make good material for entertaining story-telling. The story of Moses has all these ingredients and is of epic proportions because it deals with the history of the entire Israelite people. The way the stories are told can influence the whole significance of the particular account. According to Stanton, the rise of scientific thinking has led to a change in the way religious stories are retold. In an increasingly secular society, the demand for secular versions of religious stories has led to a host of books where authors and illustrators avoid difficult theological questions. Major stories are retold for educational value so that children may recognize biblical and other mythological allusions when they meet them within other literatures. Stanton believes that this could seriously distort the intention of the original material. Taken out of the context of a faith-education exercise the religious story of Moses was ‘told’ for pure secular entertainment in *The Prince of Egypt*. However, the Judeo-Christian audiences around the globe would be deeply (consciously or subconsciously) aware of the faith dimension of the biblical story, and their encounter with the new animated text would resonate against this

culturally shared frame of reference. To understand this implicit ideological background it is important that we first examine the worldview orientation of the narrative in the primary source for the film, the Bible.

7.3.1. The Worldview Orientation of the Original Biblical Moses Story

The book of Exodus from the Bible is devoted to the story of Moses' role in God's powerful intervention in their political history as a sign that He was protecting and caring for them. The Bible tells us that the Israelites were God's chosen people. More than 3000 years ago, they had migrated to Egypt during a famine in Canaan. They had prospered there under the patronage of Joseph the Governor of Egypt, an Israelite. Over the years, their numbers grew and the Egyptian rulers were afraid that the Israelites might overthrow them by sheer strength of numbers. So they enslaved the Israelites and forced them to build the Egyptian towns of Pithom and Rameses. Harsh treatment did not help to decrease their numbers so the Egyptian king, the Pharaoh, ordered, "Every infant boy born to the Hebrews must be thrown into the Nile, but let every girl live" (*The New Community Bible,* Exod. 1.22). Moses' mother managed to save her baby boy from this massacre by hiding him in a small basket which she lined with tar and kept floating in the Nile. The daughter of Pharaoh discovered this basket and felt sorry for the poor Hebrew child. She adopted Moses as her son. She paid Moses' mother to nurse the baby till he was big enough to come to the palace. There are no biblical details about Moses life at the palace. After the adoption episode we are told, "After a fairly long time, Moses, by now a grown-up man went out to meet his fellow Hebrews. He noticed how heavily they were burdened and he saw an Egyptian striking one of his own people" (Exod. 2.11).

Thinking no one was around, he murdered the Egyptian bully. But he had been observed by some Hebrews. Moses had to flee from Egypt to escape Pharaoh's death penalty.

Moses goes to Midian and lives with the family of the priest of Midian, Jethro. He marries Tzipporah, the priest's daughter, and has children. Moses settles down to a domestic life pasturing his father-in-law's sheep. One day, he has an encounter with God who speaks to him from a burning bush. God tells him, "I have seen the humiliation of my people in Egypt and I have heard their cry against their taskmasters. I am aware of their suffering" (Exod. 3.7). God commissions Moses to lead His people out of slavery into "a beautiful and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3.8). The story progresses with Moses returning to Egypt and his confrontation with Pharaoh. He tells Pharaoh that the God of Israel tells him to allow the Hebrew slaves to travel three days to the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Pharaoh refuses permission and heaps more work on the slaves. God then uses Moses' intervention to convince Pharaoh to relent with a succession of ten plagues (the Nile water turns to blood, an invasion of frogs, tormenting mosquitoes, an attack of swarms of horseflies, death of the livestock of the Egyptians, festering boils, hail, destructive locusts, darkness for three days and finally, the death of the firstborn of all the Egyptians and their animals.) In contrast, none of these plagues affect the Israelites and their livestock. Exasperated with the plagues and in despair after the death of his first-born son, the Pharaoh allows the huge multitude of Hebrew slaves to depart from Egypt. After their departure, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued them with his army. However, God protects the Israelites and parts the Red Sea so that they may escape the pursuing soldiers of the Pharaoh. The soldiers follow them but are killed when the waters come rushing back after the Israelites have crossed

over. At this point in the biblical narrative, the narrator says, "On that day the Lord delivered Israel from the power of the Egyptians…they understood what wonders the Lord had done for them against Egypt and the people feared the Lord. They believed in the Lord and in Moses, his servant" (Exod.14.30-31). This is the moral of the original biblical story: God delivered the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians, and the people believed in Him. The focus is on God. Moses is merely a servant of God. The worldview positioning of teller and listener (the original Moses stories were all oral tradition) was that of a people grateful to a mighty God; a God who was concerned about their welfare and who always intervened in the course of history to protect and save them.

The intentions of the original Jewish biblical story tellers were didactic, designed to educate people in a particular faith tradition. They were to help frame the identity of the ancient Hebrew people where these stories were initially circulated:

> Religious story has authority within the community to which it belongs and helps to create and maintain a taken-for-granted view of the world and promote the values by which the community lives. …Individual religious stories form part of a metanarrative, an overall story which has a theological purpose and tells of the meaning and significance of life and the human response to the mystery of existence (Stanton 602-603).

The religious significance of the Book of Exodus is the power of divine intervention in the history of a nation and the protection God gives people who are under His care. In later times, the biblical story of Moses has been used by Christians as a metaphor for the way God rescues those who call to Him from the slavery of sin. In this

reading, the Exodus story visualizes the pathetic condition of a person enslaved by some bad sinful habit by drawing parallels to the situation of the groaning Hebrew slaves tortured by their mean Egyptian masters. The Egyptian masters, in turn, symbolize the forces of evil that delight in making life miserable for those under their power. Drug addiction is an example of this kind of enslavement. Christians believe that Jesus came to rescue those who are unable to break out of the clutches of habitual sin, and like Moses, to lead them to a life of true freedom, lived with proper human dignity. Basing his study on the Bibles' New Testament book, The Letter to the Hebrews, Scott draws three parallels between Jesus and Moses, "Moses delivered the Israelites from the bondage of slavery and Egypt, while Jesus delivered all believers from the bondage of sin and damnation (2:14–15). Through Moses, God constituted the Israelites as the people of God, while Jesus constitutes all believers as the sons of God (2:10)," and that Moses was the mediator for the Old Covenant bond between God and his people, "whereas Jesus brings all believers into the New Covenant, establishing a greater access to God for them" which earlier had been exclusively for Israelites only (206). This shows us that the original Exodus story was a serious religious story used to educate people about the saving power of God. In contrast, the filmic version of the story in *The Prince of Egypt* has a totally different emphasis. Details of the plot were changed and many elements were added to the original biblical text. The focus of the original text was shifted and new themes and motifs were explored

7.3.2. The Secular Worldview Orientation of the New Animated Moses Story

The Prince of Egypt has a paradigmatic shift in focus from the ancient story and locates it in a framework of modern concerns. The biblical Exodus story served as a bare

plot which was modified in many places and had several new elements woven into it. DreamWorks SKG was a professional player in the entertainment industry. They retold the ancient religious story with an emphasis on humanism, liberty and brotherhood. These were values which any non-religious-minded person could identify with. The film's appeal lies in its modern relevance to global audiences. Murray and Heumann opine that the film "updates the story of Moses…to address this contemporary audience," and the film could be read as "a human rights film against oppression" (186). One of the implicit messages of the film is the dream of establishing a world free from oppression, a world where people can be "free" and happy. As Ostriker tells us, "The animated film *The Prince of Egypt*, arriving in a post-Cold War, post-feminist, multi-cultural America, is a hymn to political correctness in a kinder, gentler version of ancient-Israel-as-prototype-America." The theme of one brave leader leading a nation out of political oppression/slavery to freedom would definitely echo in myriad ways to different people around the world. The film's narrative focuses on certain elements to the exclusion of others, and these themes and representations offer a model to emphasize what is important in life to the adult-and-child audience. While the religious framework of the plot could serve to edify staunchly religious-minded audience members, faith-instruction is not the primary concern of the filmic narrative. The more important themes of the film include a focus on the individual rather than the community, a struggle for human rights, plot and characterization that draw on modern superhero conventions, the relationship between two loving brothers who become enemies, and the theme of a harsh father who expects too much from his son.

7.3.2.1. Focus on the Individual

We see the spotlight of the film shift from a focus on the Israelites as a community to a focus on Moses as an individual. There is also more of an emphasis on the relationship between the two brothers than an emphasis on God's salvation of His chosen people. In the biblical Exodus story, Moses is not looked upon as an independent individual but as one of the important men in the Israelite community. God has a special relationship with the Israelites and it is God who protects and delivers them from slavery. Moses is the chosen instrument of God and Moses cooperates with God and leads the Israelites out of bondage. Rohrer-Walsh opines that *The Prince of Egypt* is a coming-of-age story which "traces Moses' life from his childhood river journey, through his adolescent sibling rivalry, to his adult leadership" (78). According to her, DreamWorks focuses on Moses. It appears to be Moses, not the Yahweh of Exodus who delivers the Israelites out of bondage, "The film concludes with a long shot of Moses alone with his staff on the mountains, close to the heavens… The song "Deliver us!" fades out. The song commands Moses, not God, to deliver. DreamWorks has prepared the audience for God's replacement….Moses, not God, dominates the movie (96). Quoting Bernard Brandon Scott, she says that God is prominent in only three scenes: the burning bush, the night vapour, and the parting of the Red Sea. In fact God is more a computer-generated graphic image than a character. Moses, the hero, dominates the movie, she thinks.

The Prince of Egypt movie makers were well aware of the importance of the Moses story in the religious heritage of Jews, Christians and Muslims. After the final credits of the film finish rolling, the screen presents quotes from the three communities' religious books: The Hebrew Bible, The New Testament and The Qur'an-Surah that drive

home the point that Moses was a very important prophet. Moreover, DreamWorks SKG was founded in 1994 by Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen, who all have Jewish heritage. Quoting Donald A. Hagner, Scott says, "'To the Jews, Moses was "the greatest person who ever lived: it was through Moses that God delivered Israel from Egypt, constituted Israel as a nation, and brought Israel the Law'"(203).

7.3.2.2. Focus on Human Rights

The plot of *The Prince of Egypt* fits in with the established conventions of Hollywood films that uphold the virtue of humble human beings struggling against powerful people or institutions and winning against all odds. For example, in Danny Boyle's film *Slumdog Millionaire*, the street child Jamal Malik, who has no education and works in a call center serving tea, goes on to win 20 million rupees on a tough quiz contest in order to save his ladylove from the clutches of evil and powerful men. Up against huge odds, he wins in the end. In the same tradition, *The Prince of Egypt* stresses the victory of the oppressed Hebrew slaves against their all-powerful Egyptian rulers, the Pharaohs. The Pharaohs were to ancient times what the President of the U.S.A. is to modern times: executives of huge power structures. The Pharaohs were proud, mighty rulers who used the cheap labour of the Hebrews slaves to build the massive Egyptian monuments. Filled with their self-importance, the Pharaohs used the slaves to build mammoth pyramids, temples and other monuments to glorify themselves. Unmindful of the pain and suffering of the exploited Hebrews, the Egyptian rulers lord it over them. The slaves are whipped and forced to carry heavy loads and to work for long hours. Hope seems impossible in the face of such exploitation. The power-structures seem to be too entrenched to be defeated. Against the backdrop of huge construction work, *The Prince*

of Egypt opens with a scene of Egyptian supervisors ill-treating the Hebrew slaves: whipping them and hurrying them to work faster. There are large statues and unfinished monuments in the background and the slaves are depicted like long lines of insects carrying loads on their backs. The camera shots foreground the power of the arrogant Egyptians looking down on the Hebrew slaves. While the setting of the story unfolds before our eyes, the song "Deliver Us" plays in the background: "Can you hear your people cry? ...helps us now... deliver us... there's a land you promised us... deliver us to the Promised Land." The biblical reference is impalpably introduced. Jews or Christians in the theater will instantly recognize the cry, "deliver us to the Promised Land." The story continues with the life of Moses as the central actor who redeems the exploited Hebrews. As the film progresses we will see Miriam tell Moses, "*You* are our deliverer!" The narration of *The Prince of Egypt* focuses on Moses as a great hero. 'Heroes' are a common cultural commodity fashioned by the media: be it in the press, the electronic media, or in films. People like to look up to someone larger than life, or someone who triumphs against oppression.

7.3.2.3. Superhero Image Overshadows Epic Hero Image

The figure of Moses as the hero of the American film must be examined against the background of the modern American comic book superhero. American comic book superheroes (who are a visible presence in superhero films too) like *Superman* and *Spiderman* follow established superhero conventions. In the *Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels,* Coogan identifies three conventions of the superhero genre: Superpowers (extraordinary physical and/or mental powers, including mystical abilities), a selfless, pro-social Mission (not intended to benefit or further himself), and a specific

Superhero Identity (with codename and iconic costume). He calls these three elements MPI—Mission, Powers, and Identity (607). Reynolds expands the list of genre elements to include lost parents, a devotion to Justice, and "the theme of the superhero wrestling with his conscience over which order should be followed— moral or political, temporal or divine" (12-16). Consumers of these superhero stories are familiar with these elements. The characterization of Moses in *The Prince of Egypt* has incorporated many of these elements, superimposing the superhero image on the epic/mythic biblical image of Moses. Firstly, using the convention of lost parents, Moses, like Superman, is separated from his natural parents when he is a baby. Secondly, like Superman, Moses has a secret identity. Moses is a Hebrew living in Egypt as an Egyptian prince. Only his adoptive parents (Pharaoh Seti and his wife) know his Hebrew identity. Later in the narrative, we see that Miriam and Aaron, the poor Hebrew slaves, are also aware of Moses' real identity. For half the film, Moses is unaware of his secret identity.

A third superhero element is Moses' devotion to Justice. Just as Superman is devoted to 'those in need' and comes to the help of those victimized by a State that is blind to its own injustices, Moses too comes to the aid of the Hebrew slaves who are victimized by the Egyptian rulers who are blind and deaf to the Hebrew's sufferings and cries for justice. In the scene where Moses is witness to the unreasonable behaviour of the Egyptian foreman who is lashing an old Hebrew slave and telling him to work faster, the sense of injustice is clearly portrayed. Moses is appalled and when Miriam cries out, "Stop it...somebody's got to stop this!" it acts as a trigger to his feelings. Moses lunges forward trying to stop the Egyptian, and the foreman loses his balance and falls to his death several feet below the construction site. In this scene, Moses clearly sides with

“Justice” over Egyptian power relations. "The hero's devotion to justice overrides even his devotion to the law" (Reynolds 16).

Superman has superpowers: he can lift cars and stop trains, run faster than a train, jump off buildings and remain unhurt. A fourth superhero dimension of Moses’ character is that he acquires miraculous powers after his encounter with God in the burning bush scene. Moses uses his staff to turn the Nile's waters to blood and to part the waters of the Red Sea, and he is instrumental in calling down ten terrible environmental plagues on the Egyptians. It looks like Moses has been given superpowers by God that makes him control the forces of nature. Children would thrill to this dimension of his character. To a child it would seem that Moses is a superhero with fantastic powers. "The [superhero] stories are mythical and use science and magic indiscriminately to create a sense of wonder" (Reynolds 16). We also see Moses wrestling with his conscience whether to follow his natural love for Rameses or to obey divine instructions and effect the terrible destruction on the Egyptian nation when Pharaoh Rameses stubbornly refuses to relent and “let his people go.”

Finally, just like a conventional superhero, Moses has a mission to fulfill. While a Prince of Egypt, Moses had a carefree life of fun and games. But when he learns of his true identity and murders the Egyptian foreman, Moses runs away from Egypt. He throws away all his princely finery and only keeps the ring Rameses had given him. This is symbolic of a complete break with his past identity as an Egyptian. In the next section of the film we see a complete transformation of the nature of Moses. He becomes sober and settles down to a simple domestic life. He now wears traditional Hebrew clothing and when the breeze blows, his outer red cloak resembles a superhero’s cape. His mission of

liberating his countrymen is divinely ordained and the rest of the film charts out the difficulties he faces in accomplishing the task. The film ends with triumphant scenes of jubilation after Moses succeeds in leading the whole nation out of the clutches of their slave masters. At the end of the film, Tzipporah says to Moses, "Look, look at your people Moses…they are free!" Her piercing eyes look out of the screen straight at the audience and her message seems to be directed to the audience too. Our attention is directed to the fact that Moses has succeeded in accomplishing his mission.

7.3.2.4. Theme of the Hero Discovering his True Identity

In the plot of the film there are variations from the biblical original. In the film when Pharaoh commands all male Hebrew babies to be killed, Moses' biological mother sets her baby afloat in a basket down the Nile. The basket is found by the Egyptian Queen and she adopts Moses and brings him up as a brother to her son Rameses. In the biblical version, Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, not by his wife. This twist to the plot is probably added to explore the relationship between the two siblings as Pharaoh's sons. Furthermore, in the film version, Moses does not meet his biological mother again, while in the biblical version, on the princess' orders, his real mother takes him back home and nurses him and looks after him till he is old enough to go to the palace. This detail is deliberately left out in the film and Moses has to discover who he really is. Many Hollywood films deal with identity issues of the hero. The hero has to discover his true identity before he can embark on his mission. He has an identity crisis when he realizes that he is an adopted son and the scene between him and his adoptive mother is stirring. He is bitter that everything he knew "was a lie". She soothes his feelings with an embrace and tells him, "When the gods send you a blessing, you do not ask why it was sent." She

sings him a beautiful song, "This is Your Home," and tells him that they love him. This is another interpretative element that the filmmakers have introduced into the narrative It would resound with anyone in the audience who has experienced the pain of discovering that his parents are not his biological parents. It adds to 'human interest' element of the film.

When Moses learns of his true origins he is shocked. All he ever knew and had ever wanted had been the Egyptian way of life (the song "All I Ever Wanted" highlights this point). Suddenly he realizes that he is actually the son of a slave, not a true Egyptian prince. He now begins to see the grandeur of the Egyptian empire in a new light. He realizes that all the great pyramids, temples and monuments are being built by exploiting the slaves. The film animates this beautifully in the scene where Rameses explains his grandiose plans of not just restoring the temple but of making it grander than any other temple of Egypt. While Rameses boasts of his big plans, the camera focuses on Moses looking around at the laboring slaves, he "see" and "hears" their groans as they heave heavy sacks and he winces when the supervisors lash them as they stumble as they walk. The chatter of Rameses continues in the background but it grows audibly fainter as the sounds of the surrounding construction activities grow louder. Rameses is oblivious to the activities of the harsh supervisors, but Moses grows more and more horrified at what he is beginning to see. Learning that he is Hebrew has changed the way Moses looks at things. He realizes that empire building involves massive exploitation. By identifying with the "subaltern", Moses sheds his illusions about the exploitative relations between the Egyptian masters and their Hebrew slaves. He now "sees" life from the perspective of the oppressed subaltern, not the oppressor. From being blind to the sufferings of the

slaves, Moses now begins to feel with them and gets enraged when they are unjustly abused. His restraint snaps and Moses murders an Egyptian supervisor who was whipping a weak old Hebrew slave. Desperately confused about his divided loyalty to his Egyptian brethren and to now to his slave blood relatives, Moses runs away from the palace into the desert wilderness. He tramps through the desert and is almost buried in a sandstorm. Luckily he is saved by a stray passing camel and he reaches a human settlement by hanging onto the strap of a waterskin bag tied to the camel. A good man, Jethro, offers him hospitality and makes him his son-in-law. As in the original biblical version, he marries Tzipporah, Jethro's daughter. Moses settles down to a domestic life pasturing the sheep of his father-in-law. But not for long. In an unusual encounter with God, who speaks to him from a "burning bush" (which does not get burnt up), Moses is instructed to go back to Egypt to free the Hebrews and to lead them to the 'Promised Land' where they will be free-people. Moses' identity as a Hebrew is affirmed with his encounter with God. Knowing who he really is becomes the turning point in Moses' career. His confirmed Hebrew identity makes him take up the challenge of going back to Egypt to redeem his own people. It is at this point in the narrative that the common coming-of-age theme of Hollywood movies is visible. Moses has outgrown his adolescent capers, has become responsible, and is entrusted with an important mission. The hero has discovered his true identity and purpose in life.

7.3.2.5. Theme of the Relationship between Brothers

The original story of the Exodus is about God's relationship with His chosen people. In contrast, the film's central theme is the relationship between Moses and Rameses. The first part of the film focuses on the happy phase of the relationship

between Moses and Rameses. They grow up as friends and brothers, having great fun as companions. This makes the eventual confrontation between them all the more difficult. Rameses, Pharaoh's son, was the heir to the throne and his first official act when invested with authority is to declare Moses as 'A Prince of Egypt'. He gives him a ring with a blue stone on it. We see the ring again when Moses returns it to Rameses when, in the second half of the film, he comes back to Egypt to ask him for the release of the Hebrew slaves. I see this as a metaphor of Katzenberg submitting his resignation to Michael Eisner in Disney. What is important is that the film focuses on the hardening of Rameses' heart towards Moses and his people when this ring is returned. It is as if when this token of friendship and brotherly love is rejected by Moses, Rameses rejects Moses and his people in return.

Rameses becomes cruel to Moses' people and heaps more work on them. Moses warns Rameses that plagues will come to Egypt if he doesn't free the Hebrews, but Rameses doesn't listen. He pooh-poohs Moses' warnings of coming disasters and Moses is shown feeling deeply sorry for all the disasters he is forced to call upon Rameses. Before the last and final plague Moses tries to warn him, but Rameses refuses to relent. Moses sadly tells him, "You bring this upon yourself." After Rameses' little son dies, Moses is shown as heartbroken as Rameses. He staggers out of the palace and breaks down sobbing in deep grief.

The focus on the relationship between Moses and Rameses continues throughout the film. The first rift between them is when Moses realizes who he really is and runs away from city into the desert. Rameses tries to call him back, "Moses, *Moses*!" but Moses runs off. We hear an echo of the same cry "Moses, *Moses*!" when at the end of the

film all the Egyptian soldiers are killed by the waves of the Red Sea and only Rameses is spared. He had been hurled upon a rock by the waves, and having lost everything, he keeps screaming Moses' name in anguish. Moses is on the opposite shore and he goes to the water's edge and hears his brother. He sighs a heavy sigh, bids his brother goodbye one last time, and reluctantly turns back to lead his Hebrew people to Mount Sinai. The movie ends on a note of regret: of what *might have been* if only Rameses had heeded Moses' advice.

7.3.2.6. Theme of the Harsh Father

Pharaoh Seti was not amused by the reckless behaviour of the two princes when they destroyed parts of the under-construction Egyptian monuments during their chariot race at the start of the film. "Why do the gods torment me with such reckless, destructive, blasphemous sons!" he exclaims. He warns Rameses that he is heir to the ancient traditions of their empire and that he should not be a weak link in the mighty dynasty of Egyptian rulers. Moses admits responsibility for starting the chariot race, but Pharaoh will not let Rameses off lightly. The scene is well crafted and any youngster who has been hauled up for irresponsible behaviour will be able to identify with Rameses. Rameses tries to explain himself but his father just cuts him off and dismisses him. Moses stays behind and pleads with Pharaoh that all Rameses cares about is his father's approval, and that Rameses would live up to his father's expectations if only he were given the opportunity. Pharaoh replies that Moses would never have to bear the responsibility of the crown and hence Rameses must learn not to be led astray by Moses' irresponsible suggestions. In Shakespeare's play *Henry IV,* we have a similar lesson; young Prince Hal, the crown prince, must learn to shake off the influence of his

companion, the happy-go-lucky Falstaff. This insult about being a 'weak link' remains with Rameses even when he becomes an adult and his cruelty and hardness of heart can be traced to his trying to prove that he was a greater ruler and empire builder than his father ever was. According to Brian Britt, this scene is a new element that the filmmakers have added to the plot. He opines that Rameses is driven by the hunger for approval from his stern father and grows up to be a pharaoh blinded by anger toward his dead father, "The theme of the bully starved for fatherly approval was already a staple of films in the 1980s such as *Breakfast Club* and *Parenthood*…. *The Prince of Egypt* thus affirms the motif of the love-deprived bully, with its sentimental lessons on the need for fathers to show love for their sons, as an icon of American culture" (55). During the course of the film, at the point when Moses returns to Egypt and asks Rameses, who is now the Pharaoh, for the release of the Hebrew slaves, there is a brief camera shot that shows the silhouette of a monument built by Rameses' father overshadowed by the bigger monument built by Rameses. The filmmakers suggest through this addition to the biblical story that Rameses was struggling to prove to the world how powerful he was, and it all stemmed from a poor self-image created by an unloving father.

7.4. The Medium is the Message: The Animated Musical Film

The medium is the message is Marshal McLuhan's idea that "new forms of media transform our experience of ourselves and our society, and this influence is ultimately more important than the content of specific messages" (Baran et al. 231). Let us examine the format of the musical animation film to see how the media form affects the messages transmitted and received. Animation is a story-telling technique; coupled with "The Musical" (a dramatic narrative), we have the animated musical film.

Animation is a procedure that allows an artist/technologist to create characters that appear to walk, talk, express emotions, make gestures, and interact with other characters and things around them. The Merriam-Webster defines *animation* as "a way of making a movie by using a series of drawings, computer graphics, or photographs of objects (such as puppets or models) that are slightly different from one another and that when viewed quickly one after another create the appearance of movement." Cartoons are also made this way. The animation industry relies on artists and animators to *construct* characters and to "bring them to life" by creating a sense of motion by showing a sequence of images in quick succession. The "moving image" is an illusion of perception that is used as a basic principle in all film-making. Yoon and Malecki tell us that film animation "requires a combination of artistic talent and technical skills" (240). Film animation is of three basic types: One using flat two-dimensional (2D) drawings, the next uses "the animation of three-dimensional (3D) objects such as puppets or clay figures," and the third technique is computer animation (Beck). Animation is drama, storytelling, and visual art all rolled into one. Westfahl defines an animated film as any animated narrative lasting over half an hour, as opposed to cartoons which are within half an hour in length. Secondly, it should be presented in a theatre as a feature film or sold as a DVD or videocassette. It should have a proper plot, "a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end… with dynamics like rising action leading to a climax, a narrative that may have subplots, double plots, or other complications." The animated movie should have characters that "audiences can relate to as genuine personalities, often with some degree of depth or complexity….An animated movie, unlike a cartoon, always tries to do more than merely entertain viewers or make them laugh; its story is designed to

communicate some potentially important statement about the human … condition." It should have a message or a theme. There should be narration and dialogues; generally the majority of such movies have music and songs too. The movie's soundtrack is "closely tied to plot developments, making music at least seem like an essential element of the animated film." Finally, an animated movie strives for a bit of spectacle: at least one sequence that is designed to be a visually stunning set piece. Westfahl's definition of the animation genre is based on Aristotle's elements of drama. Unlike print comic books, an animated film has several new dimensions that all add up to make it a fitting vehicle for dramatizing a story. Moreover, this representational format can stretch all boundaries of creativity. Lee Artz explains:

> Animation has considerably more representational latitude than non-animated film: Image, size, movement, colour, lighting and continuity are easily altered with the stroke of a pen or key….Animation 'real-ises' visual metaphors by enlivening illustrated representations of fictional characters and settings through motion and sound….Animated motion attracts our attention, mitigating its graphic fiction. Children are particularly attuned to animation because it visually stimulates their emotions. (118-119)

In *The Prince of Egypt,* the metamorphosis of the biblical story into an animated film version added several new dimensions that were non-existent in the original biblical text. "A feature film has to make audio-visually explicit what is frequently only implicit within the sacred text. It has to fill in the usually taken-for-granted textual gaps, and thus make concrete what may only be abstract, implied or hinted at within the Bible. … The Bible is silent on so many facts that a film must recreate on-screen" (Kozlovic, "Film-

Faith Dialogue" 4-5). The animation, music, lyrics and special effects play a dominant role in interpreting events for the viewer. *The medium does become a vital part of the message.* The format uses many elements in the process of meaning making: sequential narrative, comic art, computer generated imagery, music, lyrics, and special effects. There are established conventions in this genre: fast-paced action, slap-stick comedy, catchy songs and background music, colourful visuals, and the use of cinematic techniques like long-shots, close-ups and flashbacks, borrowed from mainstream cinema. Music and lyrics have contributed a great deal to the narrative of this film as *The Prince of Egypt* belongs to the genre of a musical drama. A musical drama organically integrates music, song, and dance with a detailed plot. Several new ideas and details have been introduced into this fresh retelling of the old Bible story.

The dramatic narrative of *The Prince of Egypt* is paced like conventional animated films of the late twentieth century (and continue to the twenty-first century). The first scene portraying the plight of the Hebrew slaves is of somber tones. However, within five minutes of the solemn opening of the film, the action picks up pace when Moses' mother places her son in a basket and sets him adrift on the river. The basket is shown to drift downstream, narrowly missing several dangers including a crocodile, some big mouthed hippopotamuses, fishermen's nets, the paddles of Egyptian rowing boats, and the keel of a ship. The accompanying music and sound effects are suitably dramatic, even while the character on screen, Moses' sister, little Miriam, gasps in horror as she runs on the riverbank witnessing the fate of the basket carrying her brother. This action sequence lasts for about a minute but it draws the viewer into the narrative by this edge-of-your-seat escape-from-perils scene. This scene changes to a calmer one where the

Egyptian queen discovers the basket as it drifts near her palace. The music is soft and soothing as she picks the baby up and decides to adopt him. The narrative is seen through Miriam's eyes as she sings a song in the background wishing her brother goodbye. She remains hidden behind a curtain and her parting line is "Grow baby brother, come back someday, come and deliver us too." The background music increases in texture and volume and the theme of the movie is re-emphasized by a visual of the monumental Egyptian constructions in progress, and by a chorus singing, " Deliver us, send a shepherd to shepherd us…deliver us to the promised land…" No sooner does this scene fade out when the action scene of the chariot race between the now grown up Moses and his brother, Rameses (the biological son of Pharoah Seti), bursts onto the screen.

The comic element, so familiar in children's animated films, is introduced in this chariot race scene. This sequence is very funny and full of verbal and action humour. The scene is a throwback to the famous chariot race in the famous 1959 live-action film *Ben-Hur*. The audience in America would have recognized this reference immediately. Charlton Heston had played the lead role in both *Ben-Hur* and Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 film on Moses, *The Ten Commandments.* These films were an integral part of the culture of Hollywood films on religious characters. These two action scenes: the perilous basket floating downstream sequence and the chariot race scene are introduced into the narrative as pure artistic license, and have no links with any text in the original biblical narrative. These scenes are typical of children's animated films and are elements that add to the fun and suspense of the dramatic narrative. In this film sequence, the high-spirited Moses and Rameses recklessly destroy a part of the monuments being built by tearing around the construction site with their two-horsed chariots. In the race, Moses outwits Rameses and

the viewers will enjoy the light-hearted sport. “In Hollywood cartoons, slapstick routinely gives way to song, to spectacle, to terror, to tragedy, to slapstick again” (Osmond 164). Commenting on the film’s animation technique for this chariot race, Case says that young Moses and Rameses and their horses “are traditional hand-drawn animation…while the chariots are 3-D props. As the cameras follow the rushing chariots, the walls of the city, another traditionally hand painted element, seem to fly by. Using rapid cutting and constantly shifting angles, the cameras continue to keep pace with Moses and Rameses as they careen through the streets and alleys onto a scaffolding, which collapses. The young men narrowly miss being crushed by a huge stone nose that breaks off a statue, only to be swept away by a river of sand when the embankment they are on gives way. This sequence required a combination of complex camera work and the marriage of 3-D computer generated elements (the scaffolding, the chariots, the sand and the nose) with traditional 2-D elements (the princes, their horses, some clouds of dust and the painted backgrounds).” He says the exposure tool created by DreamWorks and Silicon Graphics Inc. facilitated “the seamless integration of 2-D and 3-D elements in a scene.” In her *The New York Times* book review of *The Prince of Egypt: a New Vision in Animation* by Charles Solomon, Bayles tells us that the book explains how *The Prince of Egypt* “integrates the handmade images of traditional animation with the highly flexible and mobile images generated by computer.” *Amazon.com* also tells us that this book discusses how *The Prince of Egypt* “establishes a new standard in animated feature films… It represents a daring effort on the part of the founders of DreamWorks SKG … to pioneer cinematic animation that is as versatile as live-action filmmaking.”

7.5. Consumption, Response, Uses of the Textual Artifact

This section discusses how the reception and consumption of the textual artifact is dependent on how the reader "responds" to the messages contained within the film. Different reactions and responses to the film show us how the text has meaning outside itself, how readers create their own meaning depending on the worldview frames they *bring* to the movie screening. *The Prince of Egypt* is an artifact that is in the middle of the "communication cycle." We have examined the background and "authorial intention" of the film, we have surveyed the text itself, and now let us examine the variety of responses *to* the text.

Maslin's *The New York Times* film review of *The Prince of Egypt* in December 1998, gives us a good idea of how the film was received at that time: "What it meant to achieve, a new breakthrough for the animator's art and a sacrosanct yet frisky entertainment for viewers large and small, may have been as impossible as it sounds. But "The Prince of Egypt" is a well-made work with much to recommend it… The film's strenuous efforts to deliver entertainment value are jarring at first. (Will baby Moses, floating through the bulrushes toward the flimsily clad Egyptian princess destined to adopt him, be struck by an oar en route?) But they give way to an intriguing if highly abbreviated translation of the Book of Exodus into the realm of animation." This review has a tone of incredulity. Maslin is intrigued by the insertion of a religious story into a "frisky entertainment" format.

The Prince of Egypt functions like an open text: the viewer takes what he or she wants from it. A child viewer will enjoy the colourful animation, the comedy, the fast

paced action, and the music. If there is a didactic message in the movie, it will probably be lost on the young viewer, unless some adult points it out to him. My children enjoyed the movie when they were young; especially the comic scenes and the songs. Thirteen years later when they overheard me watching the same movie, they reacted first to the music, "Hey, I recognize that song," said one; another remembered the chariot race and laughed again at the horse-play, while the third said, "There was so much we didn't understand in the movie when we were small!" My children had viewed the film years ago purely for its entertainment value. No attempt was made to direct their attention to any extra-textual references.

Another indication that convinced me that the film is open to interpretation according to the worldview of the viewer is the different responses its' screening elicited in different people. For example, Roland Thomas, suggests using the film as a starting point to evangelize people from other faiths, "The animated movie, *The Prince of Egypt*, was an incredible success … it was one of the 5 most popular movies in the world last year! No doubt many Christians viewed the movie but I wonder how many of them realized the opportunity it affords us for showing unbelievers that God is Savior and Redeemer" (43). He also points out the film's links with the story of the Exodus as recorded in the Qur'an, "Many secular minded people find it difficult to believe that God miraculously saved the Israelites from Egypt but Muslims have no problem believing this because it is clearly taught in their Qur'an" (48). It seems funny that a popular culture product with a secular outlook should be used for evangelical purposes. It just goes to prove that the reader/viewer can use a product according to his own purposes, and not stick to the general intentions of the "author." How could a preacher use an animated film

like *The Prince of Egypt* to explain a religious worldview, when the dominant worldview in the movie is secular? To answer this question, I watched the film carefully to note if it could be used for such a purpose. What I found was surprising: the film has an "open-to-personal-interpretation" nature, and I see it as deliberately so. The film is a cultural product to be sold. The more people it could appeal to the better the profits. The lyrics of the song "When You Believe" are a case in point. They can be interpreted as being about the power of faith in God, or about the power of faith in oneself. "When You Believe" is sung by Miriam and Tzipporah, and the whole company of Israelites as they move out of Egypt, out of bondage to a life of freedom in the Promised Land. Moses has just secured permission from Pharaoh Rameses to take his people and "Go!" Pharaoh Rameses can take the strain of the plagues no more, and the death of his firstborn son makes his spirit snap. He grants Moses his longstanding demand of freedom for the Israelites. The lyrics of "When You Believe" by Schwartz are:

> Many nights we've prayed, with no proof anyone could hear,
> In our hearts a hopeful song, we barely understood.
> Now we are not afraid
> Although we know there's much to fear
> We were moving mountains long before we knew we could
>
> There can be miracles, when you believe
> Though hope is frail, it's hard to kill
> Who knows what miracles, you can achieve
> When you believe?

Schwartz claimed that he was asked to change the lyrics he had originally written from "You can work miracles when you believe" to "There can be miracles when you believe." Some religious advisors to DreamWorks objected that "only God can work miracles." So he changed the line to "*There* can be miracles." Schwartz didn't see his works as promulgating any particular religious philosophy and he opined that "using art to proselytize… tends to make for bad art" ("Stephen Schwartz Comments about Religion"). Here we can see how a secular worldview got influenced by religious ideology and the final product (the song) became an ambivalent product appropriable by both secular-minded viewers as well as religious-minded viewers. Schwartz was originally trying to emphasize the importance of believing in oneself, "*You* can work miracles when you believe," before one can embark on any major project. However, the words, "*There* can be miracles," can be interpreted as you like it. "When You Believe" was awarded the Academy Award for Best Original Song in 1999. According to Schwartz in the book *Through Heaven's Eyes*, "the story of Moses and the liberation of the Hebrew people from slavery, contains themes and ideas that are important to all people: the responsibility we each have to be true to ourselves, to treat others with respect and decency, and to do what we know is right — no matter how dangerous or difficult." He said that to him these values are "the essence of morality," and that he expresses these ideas in the words of the songs in the film. The lyrics of the song "Through Heaven's Eyes" are a bit more amenable to religious interpretation, even though they don't specifically mention the word "God." The song is sung at the point in the narrative when Moses has run away from Egypt and has come to live in Jethro's family. He is quiet and withdrawn and finds it difficult to come to terms with his past. He cannot participate in the community

festivities going on around him. Jethro welcomes Moses and tells the assembled people that they must be grateful for Moses' arrival in their midst. Moses is embarrassed and says that he has done nothing in his life that he can be proud of. He feels like a failure and is in low spirits. Jethro affirms Moses' worth and commends him for being a brave man. He thanks Moses for first rescuing Tzipporah in Egypt, and then for defending his younger daughters from brigands who had interfered with them when they were drawing water from the community well. He tells Moses, "It seems you do not know what is worthy of honour." Jethro then sings this song to explain his idea:

A single thread in a tapestry-

Though its color brightly shine-

Can never see its purpose

In the pattern of the grand design.

And the stone that sits on the very top

Of the mountain's mighty face-

Does it think it's more important

Than the stones that form the base?

So how can you see what your life is worth

Or where your value lies?

You can never see through the eyes of man

You must look at your life,

> Look at your life through heaven's eyes (Schwartz, "Through Heaven's Eyes").

The song is a beautiful “pep-up” song and can be interpreted either from a purely non-religious perspective or from a religious one. The lyrics offer the philosophy that one can only see what one’s life is worth when one looks at it from afar, from a distance (“through heaven's eyes”). It takes a dig at the bosses at the top of a mighty organization’s pyramid, who consider themselves as more important than the employees who form the base of the organizational structure. Probably a reference to the Disney company. Jethro asks if it is better to measure the worth of a man in the wealth, strength or size he has gained, or to judge him by how much he gave/contributed to the whole design. (Katzenberg had been responsible for spearheading the success of the animation department at the Disney studios; in fact, it was he who converted it into a profitable venture.) “You must learn to join the dance,” says Jethro, encouraging Moses to leave his past behind and to throw himself into his new life. This could very much be read as an encouragement to Katzenberg for his new venture, DreamWorks SKG.

M. Keith Booker, in *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children’s Films,* opines that he has reservations about *The Prince of Egypt* being a good children’s film. He says that primarily, the source material was not intended for children. Secondly, as it is so closely tied to one particular religious perspective, it dissatisfies two kinds of parents: Secular parents (like himself) who do not share the religious perspective find it awkward to explain to children that some people take this fictional story seriously; while religious minded parents “might fear that the placement of this narrative within the context of a children’s film might lead children to assume that it is a mere fiction” (144).

This double bind is due to the choice of a story from a religious tradition. *The Prince of Egypt* ironically affirms Judeo-Christian religious heritage, albeit on a totally secular platform. According to Brian Britt, by making Moses the central hero, secular narratives unwittingly affirm religious traditions.

Even when a narrator is secular-minded rather than religious-minded, his cultural background could influence his creation of meaning within the text. In the making of the film *The Prince of Egypt,* there were several collaborators whose cultural background was Jewish: Jeffrey Katzenberg, Stephen Schwartz and a host of other contributors. More importantly, DreamWorks SKG was founded by Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen, who have Jewish roots. This movie could have had special appeal to people of Jewish heritage because Jews honour Moses as one of the greatest Biblical characters: the man who led their ancestors out of centuries of slavery into the 'Promised Land'. They believe in an all-powerful God who directly intervenes in their history as a race of 'chosen people'. This God takes their side and fights their battles for them. In *A History of the Jews* Johnson reflects:

> Is history merely a series of events whose sum is meaningless? Is there no fundamental moral difference between the history of the human race and the history, say, of ants? Or is there a providential plan of which we are, however humbly, the agents? No people has ever insisted more firmly than the Jews that history has a purpose and humanity a destiny. At a very early stage in their collective existence they believe they had detected a divine

> scheme for the human race, of which their own society was to be a pilot (2).

This Jewish sense of privilege could offer a religious reading to the lyrics of Schwartz's "Through Heaven's Eyes." We could read a metaphysical dimension into the course of Moses' life in the film. Looked through heaven's eyes, Moses' life could be considered as an acting out of a providential plan. He had escaped peril at birth, he had escaped death by thirst in the desert, and now, in Jethro's family he was to start a new life and learn to be a responsible shepherd in preparation for his future role as leader of the Israelites. Additionally, what is not obvious to an English-speaking audience is the meaning of the Hebrew lyrics in a section of the song "When You Believe" sung by the Hebrew children. "A-shir-ra la-do-nai ki ga-oh ga-ah" translates as "I will sing to the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously," "Mi-cha-mo-cha ba-e-lim adonai" means "Who is like You, oh Lord, among the celestials," "Mi-cha-mo-cha ne-dar-ba-ko-desh" translates as "Who is like You, majestic in holiness," and "Na-chi-tah v'-chas-d'-cha am zu ga-al-ta" means "In Your love, You lead the people You redeemed." This is the only direct reference to the power of God in the whole movie. The lyrics would resonate with anyone of Hebrew origin who could understand the meaning of the words. For the rest of the viewers, this faith-dimension does not intrude upon the enjoyment of a secular product made for a worldwide audience.

The Prince of Egypt was not universally applauded; it received negative reactions in some countries. According to a news article in January 1999, "Malaysia bans Spielberg's Prince," some Muslim dominated countries like the Maldives and Malaysia

banned the film. The article tells us that "the film had been banned so as not to offend the country's majority Muslim population." The Malaysian film censorship board found it "insensitive for religious and moral reasons." Religion is a sensitive issue in Malaysia. In the Maldives, the film was banned because the portrayal of Moses was seen as offensive to Islam. Moses is considered as a prophet by the Muslims and the graphic depiction of Islamic prophets is forbidden in Islam. The portrayal of Moses was seen as irreverence. The movie was also banned as offensive by Egypt.

Finally, it is not the product itself that is the most important but what uses the consumer can put it to. If, according to *Kalimpongnews.net,* Punjabi "lassi" stall owners can use washing machines to churn large quantities of buttermilk for sale, there is no stopping the unusual uses one can put a product to. There is a case of a theology professor using *The Prince of Egypt* to teach scripture. LaReau reports that Chris Fuller, a theology professor at Carroll College in Montana, uses movies in his scripture classes. He uses the film *The Prince of Egypt* to provoke discussions about how students have come to know the Bible, and from where they have got their information. The movie helps him to illustrate the difference between what the students think there is in the Bible, and what the biblical text actually contains. This is an interesting use of popular culture to teach Holy Scripture. Students are likely to love the imaginative way Fuller introduces his subject.

I would like to conclude with my own reception of the film. I enjoyed the narrative, the visuals and most of all the beautiful music. The music is what, I believe, raises the film to a higher level than the other animated films I surveyed. This element adds poignancy to the narrative; it works on the unconscious levels of viewers. The film

is a worthwhile artifact for scholarly examination because of the multiple contributors to the creation of the film, the different layers of meaning encountered in the film-format, and the unrestricted possibilities of reception and usage of the text by a worldwide consumer base.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

A few significant conclusions of this study titled "Different Worldviews in Children's Literature" are outlined below. My initial hypothesis that there *are* different worldviews embedded in the children's texts that circulate in the market proved to be right. From the wide spectrum of texts and formats examined, I can safely assert that Children's Literature is a valuable site where adults encode their own values and worldviews. In the seemingly innocuous stories passed on to children, serious philosophies about the existence or non-existence of God, right and wrong, and what's worth living for are encoded.

The different texts scrutinized contained different worldviews and frames of reference. Each text emphasized different values for life, and offered different paradigms for evaluating the importance of various dimensions of life. Different literatures place different emphases on values of power and domination, individualism, cooperation, sympathy-for and empathy-with other beings. All the religious faith-stories surveyed were aimed at directing a child's attention to the omnipotence of God and the importance of depending on Him for one's needs. The children's Bible stories emphasized how a strong faith in God is necessary to see one through disaster and pain. In contrast, *The Adventures of Tintin* comics upheld the value of standing up for one's rights, of maintaining political order in the nation, and of acting uprightly. E.Nesbit's stories too exhibited a strong moral code that was not related to any religious worldview. *The Prince of Egypt* dealt with sibling rivalry and individual heroic behaviour. We realize that

Children's Literature constitutes rich material for a child to frame ideas about himself, his place in this world, his ambitions and his awareness of the needs of others.

I found that the explicit worldview elements in the religious stories examined were more obvious to an adult reader than to a child reader. However, if the texts are mediated by a More-Knowledgeable-Other, the receiving child can switch from following just the plot dimension to following the *significance* of the events. This shows the role of a fourth dimension to the author-text-receiver relationship. We have seen in chapter 3 that even stories about simple everyday situations can be imbued with faith-dimensions by an adult narrating the story to a child. Left to themselves, children get engaged in a narrative if a story is well told, the characters are interesting, and the plot is fast moving.

An adult could explain elements of karma and dharma to a child reading an *ACK* comic. These elements may become clearer as a child grows up. The *ACKs* are a good resource for anyone wanting to learn about the Hindu faith, especially about faith in any of the ten avatars of Vishnu. The series focuses on the importance of a loving deity-devotee relationship.

Several positive role models as well as negative stereotypes are available in the texts examined. These fictional "constructs" can influence a child's view of himself/herself and others. The particular personal worldview of the author/s is always more embedded in a text than any "organized worldview." In many ways, a text becomes a mixture of different informing influences including conscious and non-conscious socio-political, economic, religious and cultural elements. If the authors of a particular text are many, the final text has several contributors to the final statement it makes about life.

The dimension of marketing of the text, including the choice of product, the quality of production, the distribution networks, and the pricing of the particular texts all affects the texts available to the consumer. DreamWorks SKG was able to offer stiff competition to animation giant Disney because it had invested in a strong distribution network for its products.

The creative techniques used by the text-creators help the reader/audience to focus on certain aspects of reality. The particular formats used and the quality of the production all contribute to meaning making. The plain prose text novels were able to convey nuances of the characters' feelings and the finer points of their moral doubts than the texts that had a combination of visual and pictorial narrative. However, the picture-text combine is much appreciated by children who find it much easier to "read" the text than if it is in lengthy prose. Animated films are the next level of meaning making. The texts are "heard" in the form of music, dialogue, and sound effects and the colourful pictorial visuals have an additional advantage of movement. The animated film format takes cartooning to a new level. There is much need for research in this latest narrative format as children love watching cartoons and animated feature films. Interactive media like video-gaming and the smart-phone are new sites for future exploration.

It is important for scholars to give Children's Literature adequate critical attention. The field is very vast and has adequate material for cultural studies into the production, distribution and consumption of these texts. I hope this study sparks more enquiries into this rich and varied field.

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