



Research article

Cooking up Diversity: Culinary Narratives in Indian Children's Literature

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Abstract

Indian culture was initially introduced into children's literature predominantly through the use of mythology and folklore. These stories often had a didactic element attached to them, which at times compromised on the 'fun' or 'entertainment' aspect of stories. However, in recent times, certain publishing houses have ventured to mitigate this gap by coming up with stories that are more engaging and relatable to children and, at the same time, reflect Indian culture and values. Food, serving as a cultural symbol and representative of India's vast and diverse landscape, acts as a mediational signifier in food-based children's stories. This study examines how selected Indian children's literature uses culinary narratives to depict regional culture and gender performativity, serving as a form of resistance against colonial influence and Western capitalist expansion through the medium of children's literature. Drawing on Edward Said's notion that resistance is not just a reaction to colonialism but an alternative way of perceiving human history, this paper analyses works such as *Kozhukatta* (2017), *Thukpa for All* (2018), *Thatha's Pumpkin* (2020), *Paati's Rasam* (2021), and *My Grandmother Can't Cook* (2023). Through this analysis, the paper sheds light on the pivotal role of culinary narratives in promoting cultural diversity, fostering tolerance, and nurturing a sense of inclusivity among young readers.

Keywords: Indian Children's literature, Culinary narratives, Culture, Diversity, Post-colonialism, Gender

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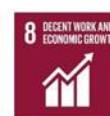
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1. Introduction

Children's stories serve as valuable tools to develop imagination and creativity among young children, but at the same time, they are not impervious to societal standards and cultural zeitgeist. Children's literature remains an untapped resource of historical insights and often serves as a window to prevailing cultural norms (Daniel, 2006). Stan (2011) asserts that "classics that are translated widely and are known by readers around the world have always either explicitly or implicitly conveyed the culture, history, and sensibilities of a discrete, albeit exclusivist, cultural or national population at a given time in history". This is evident from *Jataka Tales*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Arabian Nights*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, and *Panchatantra*, which were translated into several languages spoken across the world. Likewise, most of the earlier Indian stories that attained this kind of popularity as children's literature had a didactic tone in which culture was presented through mythologies and folklore. In the literature that followed too, "strong overtones of didacticism and moralising were welcomed as a means to keep the young reader rooted in 'Indian' traditions" (Rangachari, 2009). This can be read against the colonial sentiment where it was the sole responsibility of the coloniser to 'moralise' the colonised and make them morally 'upright' and 'civilised' (Boisen, 2012).

The persistent and deep impact of colonialism on the popular media, there was a lacuna for stories for Indian children, which was filled with Western fairytales and films for children. These stories were manifested in a variety of formats, from books to films, to television series, and to cartoons and comic books, which made them immensely popular; however, these predominantly featured Western content/thought. In the Indian context, the variety of languages within the country affects the volume of written literature produced (Sheoran, 1975). Indian children's literature in English is a fairly recent category, and the shift from didactic, Western-influenced tales to stories about contemporary India was gradual (Nayar, 2022). This shift is visible in characters, narratives, themes, and even in the settings chosen by recent Indian children's stories (Nayar, 2022). In recent times, few Indian writers of children's literature have ventured to present stories rooted in the social and cultural context of India; their works absorb and reflect the sociocultural heterogeneities of its people (Ghosal, 2018). Also, authors have now begun to feature marginalised people and communities as well as address topics that were previously considered a total taboo (Nayar, 2022). Publishing houses like Tota, Karadi Tales, Tulika, and a few others have recently started publishing stories that integrate 'inclusivity' and provide scope for engagement with the narrative, where Indian culture is represented in ways to ensure 'integration' and 'inclusivity'.

Food is a constantly recurring element in children's literature and both culinary narratives and food imagery in Indian children's literature are more than mere discourses about meals; they are nuanced stories that encode resistance against colonial and capitalist frameworks. The symbolic significance of culinary practices both influences and is influenced by broader socio-political structures as well as related cultural norms (Andrievskikh, 2014). In an attempt to understand the decolonising of texts for children from an Indian context, the study focuses on locating representations of cultural diversity and gender in the culinary narratives of selected Indian children's literature. However, the cultural understanding of food in India is more of an embodied experience which is very different from that of the West where they consider eating and thinking to be two opposites (Debnath, 2021). By presenting food as a cultural artefact, these stories offer

an alternative view of history, one that challenges Western hegemony and reclaims indigenous narratives (Said, 1993). For this purpose, the narrative and illustrations of selected picture books will be analysed to shed light on the pivotal role that culinary narratives play in promoting cultural diversity, fostering tolerance, and nurturing inclusivity among young readers in a multicultural nation. In saying so, the authors posit that recent literature on children is a vantage point for resisting the notion of a 'homogenised world' that agrees primarily with the Western worldview. As Said (1993) asserts, the charting of cultural territory also lies at the heart of decolonisation.

For Said (1993), "culture" primarily refers to the practices that are mostly aesthetical and pleasure-inducing, such as "arts of description, communication, and representation" (p. xii), that seem to be relatively independent of political, social, and economic spheres. On a second level, it functions as "a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another" (p. xiii). Therefore, culture is neither neutral nor coincidental, and the political, social, and economic environment shapes cultural productions such as literature, music, and art. Colonial interpretations of Indian history, cuisine, and values were detached and contradictory to the actual realities of India (Said, 1993, p. 151). Interestingly, Zlotnick (1996) notes that some food items like 'curry', which originally belonged to India were appropriated by the colonisers and later redefined and also commodified and promoted by the West emphasizing their ideological undertones. This culinary integration by the imperialists also led to instances of cultural assimilation (Zlotnick, 1996). As a result, nineteenth-century domestic cookbooks from the West emerged as cultural narratives that aligned with and reinforced imperialist ideals (Zlotnick, 1996). In such contexts, multicultural food narratives serve as an act of resistance to power structures by creating alternative perspectives.

2. Literature Review and Primary Texts

Children's literature serves as a valuable tool for enabling young readers to develop literacy, acquire reading skills, gain familiarity with societal norms, comprehend historical contexts, and acquire essential coping mechanisms for times of adversity (Roehl, 2018). Picture books inspire children to re-imagine themselves as adults and aid them in understanding identities and developing preferences for people who resemble themselves (Guilfoyle, 2015). Creany et al. (1993) argues that both the illustrations and text are equally vital in conveying the story in picture books, they have the potential to influence the child's view of other cultures:

"The two media intertwine, complementing and extending each other in such a fashion that readers cannot understand the storyline by attending only to the text or only to the illustrations" (p. 189).

Studies have established that picture books play a vital role in transmitting family and community values about ethnicity, race, equality, and culture to children during their early years (Guilfoyle, 2015). The findings of a pivotal study on the effect of picture book reading on young children's use of an emotion regulation strategy indicate that young children are beginning to internalize complex ideas from picture books and apply it to their lives, fostering both their growth and mental health (Schoppmann et al., 2023). Research also notes that providing young children with culturally diverse literature helps to get rid of stereotypes and other misconceptions or prejudices

about gender, race, and culture (Adam & Harper, 2023). Therefore, multicultural picture books allow young children to identify themselves and also to understand people or communities that are outside their sociocultural reality. Through such books, learners can explore and confront issues like racism, gender equity, and religious beliefs, helping them grasp the more nuanced social issues related to cultural diversity (Ong, 2022).

In a seminal work delving into the relationship between food and children's literature, Gasperini (2022) notes that analysing food literature as a window into the history and culture of its creators has emerged as a prominent theoretical avenue in recent times. The same study points out that the interplay between food and childhood serves as a reflection of a society's gender roles, class distinctions, generational dynamics, and religious or political beliefs. Stephens (2013) notes that food plays a vital role in many types of children's stories, ranging from fairy tales to classic children's texts. Daniel (2006) states that cultural food rules and attitudes toward food and the eating body are transmitted via the subtexts of children's fiction and of their everyday lives" (p. 15). Partially agreeing with this perspective, Marshall says that while endorsing these rules, culinary children's stories can also subvert them through authentic representation. Thus, food fits into fictional narratives as a multifaceted and symbolic tool for authors to communicate cultural shifts and any form of societal change.

Older Indian English children's books like *A Flight of Pigeons* (1978) and *Room on the Roof* (1993) by Ruskin Bond contain numerous European traits in terms of the landscape, characters, and even food choices. Likewise, Rabindranath Tagore's stories, such as *Master Mashai* (1921), present characters and settings rooted in regional culture, painting a clear picture of local life in India. However, beneath this depiction lies an undercurrent of European influences which emerge ever so subtly throughout the narrative, often asserting a dominant tone over the plot. Said (1993) contends that when purportedly neutral cultural disciplines, such as literature and critical theory, come together and interpret the weaker or subordinate culture using narratives about territorial possession, ideas of unchanging non-European and European essences, and images of legitimacy and redemption, it results in a startling concealment of the power dynamics at the extent to which the stronger party's experience overlaps with and, oddly, depends on the weaker or subordinate culture (p. 193).

In this study, we have selected five varied children's picture books by Indian authors that centre on culinary narratives. *Kozhukatta* by Sumi Chandrasekharan, is a humorous story about a man who keeps forgetting everything, including the names of the dishes he ate. The following events narrate his amusing attempts to remember the name of a Kerala delicacy called *Kozhukatta* (which is a rice-flour-based dumpling filled with grated coconut and jaggery) so that he can ask his wife to make it for him at home. *Thatha's Pumpkin* by Lalita Iyer is a story about a grandfather who wants to make pumpkin *halwa* for his granddaughter's birthday out of the enormous pumpkin he harvested from his vegetable garden. *My Grandmother Can't Cook* by Indu Balachandran is a humorous story about a grandmother who doesn't know how to cook, unlike the image of the stereotypical desi grandmother. The story revolves around a boy named Neil, whose grandmother invites his friends over for his birthday party and ends up ordering pizza instead of cooking up disasters as feared by Neil. *Paati's Rasam, written* by Janaki Sabesh and Dhvani Sabesh, tells the story of a young girl called Malli who loved a dish called '*Rasam*' that her late grandmother (*Paati*) used to make for her. Rasam is a spicy South Indian soup-like dish that is usually served as a side

dish with rice, and the narrator's memories with her grandmother are incomplete without this dish, and it is also the same dish that she wants to recreate for a school presentation. However, her mother's attempt at making Paati's rasam fails, and Malli is devastated until she finds the original recipe written for her by Paati herself and kept safely in the folds of Paati's old saree. *Thukpa for All*, written by Praba Ram and Sheela Preuit, is the story of a blind boy named Tsering who ends up inviting the entire neighbourhood home to share his grandmother's noodle soup.

A common feature across these narratives is the replacement of the white characters, Western/European milieus, and Western food with the familiar Indian characters, settings, and cuisine. These stories also incorporate colloquial language, thereby emphasising the multifaceted nature of Indian culture. This can be viewed as an "ideological resistance" which is based on the "rediscovery and repatriation of what has been suppressed in the natives' past by the processes of imperialism" (Said, 1993, p. 268). Also, the use of regional terms in these stories reaffirms Said's notion of reaffirming the appeal to one's mind through the use of one's own language (Said, 1979). Furthermore, the illustrations in the selected books represent regional landscapes, attire, skin tone, and climates, serving not only to reduce alienation but also to familiarise children with the different cultural nuances of other regions in their country. Children are drawn to stories featuring characters, settings, and experiences familiar to them, and this also increases their level of reading enjoyment when the same is depicted through texts and illustrations (Koss, 2015). Children must encounter authentic portrayals of their own and other cultures in books that relate to real-life contexts in order to foster a sense of identity as well as a respectful understanding of others. Creany et al. (1993) notes that

"Children who will come of age in the twenty-first century need to see their reflections in the mirror provided by children's book illustrations. They need a validation of their own background and values. They also will benefit from a glimpse through the window provided by children's books into lives of people from another culture" (p. 193).

3. Cultural diversity through culinary depictions

Reading about children from different places and backgrounds opens a door for them to experience and learn about that culture (Roy, 2008). Representation of cuisines of different regions in children's literature can promote an understanding of the varied cultural identities functioning within the nation. Assumptions of cartographic separations and religious and racial otherings are a constant threat to the 'Indianness' that is crucial for the peaceful sustenance of the nation. In India, there are several food taboos as food is associated with the "moral and social status of individuals and groups" (Appadurai, 1988, p. 10). So, from childhood onwards, exposure to cultural differences can create an inquisitive spirit towards acknowledging and accepting the pluralistic nature of the country. Each ethnic group in India has recipes that are unique to their region. Fox & Short (2003) point to the need to ensure young readers have access to good-quality children's books that are culturally authentic and reliable. The works discussed in this article highlight multiculturalism in India by celebrating different states' food customs and practices.

The picture book *Kozhukatta* is set in a village in Kerala. In addition to presenting ethnic food, it also shows the landscape, autorickshaws, *thulasi thara* (which is a sacred stone platform in front

of traditional Kerala houses on which the holy basil plant is grown), coconut trees, a man rowing a boat on the lake, mundu-clad men, and saree-draped women—indices that suggest the social and cultural milieu of the place. Apart from Kozhukatta, the author also introduces South Indian snacks, such as *chivda* (a snack mix made with flattened rice and spices), *chikki* (a traditional sweet brittle made out of nuts and jaggery/sugar), and *murukku* (a savoury snack that derives its name from its twisted shape). In an attempt to remember the term '*kozhukatta*', Ponnu associates it with words similar to it, thus introducing a few Malayalam terms humorously, "K-K-K- Kozhicurry?... Kattukozhi K-K-K? Cheh! WHAT WAS THAT WORD?" (Chandrasekharan, 2017, p. 16). Here, *Kozhicurry* is the Malayalam term for chicken curry, and *Kattukozhi* refers to the grey junglefowl in Malayalam. Thus, this book brings in ethnic landscape, language, food, and culture, thereby promoting multicultural values in young readers. Children are thus exposed to not just food but also culture and regions that defy the norm of classical children's literature of authors like Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, Lewis Carroll, or J.K. Rowling. While such authors talk about English snacks like sandwiches, sponge cakes and jam tarts, Chandrasekharan introduces regional delicacies, thus re-establishing ethnic roots. While stories are used by explorers to exoticize a region, they also become the tool for colonised people to "assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (Said, 2003, p. xii). The 'desperate desire' to taste food encountered in such Western children's stories like 'ginger beer' years after reading about it also shows the vulnerability and impressionability of young readers who consume such literature (Adichie, 2009). In this light, *Kozhukatta* takes up the role of a counter-story where minoritised communities tell stories that reflect their own experiences and knowledge.

In *Thatha's Pumpkin*, through the course of the story, apart from the pumpkin halwa that Thatha wants to make, a lot of Indian pumpkin delicacies are portrayed along with the joy of sharing harvests in the community which is a part of Indian culture. While Shanta Aunty uses the pumpkin to make sambar, Gulu decides to make pumpkin fritters, and Khushru thinks of dhansak, which is a Parsi dish made by cooking mutton with vegetables and lentils. Here, the author demonstrates inclusivity by incorporating food categories aligned with vegan, organic, and gluten-free choices, recognising individuals who opt for such dietary preferences. The endeavour to prepare traditional delicacies may stem from a nostalgic desire to preserve the past. The author also brings out the latent Western food fantasies and the cross-cultural food habits that are a part of post-colonial India, where characters like Zoey still 'dreams' about pumpkin pies. While this picture book caters to regional and cultural diversities through how pumpkins are used differently by different people, it also depicts Western cultural influences in modern Indian society.

In *My Grandmother Can't Cook*, the grandmother in the story is referred to as 'Paati', which is Tamil for old women or grandmothers. The story also introduces many other grandmothers from various states of India who cook delicacies specific to their region, thus introducing the diversity of Indian food to young readers. And so, we have a *Dadi* from Surat who makes Dhoklas (which is a savoury, spongy dish made out of fermented batter), *Ammama* from Kochi who cooks *appam* (which is a type of thin South Indian pancake made out of fermented rice batter) and stew, *Aita* from Guwahati who serves momos, *Naani* from Lucknow who is an expert in kebabs, *Thakuma* from Kolkata who makes a Bengali potato curry called *aloo potol* and also *Ajji* from Hubli who makes a spicy, rice-based Karnataka dish called *bisi bele baat*. It must be noted that the author uses the term for 'grandmother' in the language used in those specific regional localities. Here,

English has a diminished presence where the regional terms take front seat and English is reduced to a “low, uninteresting and attenuated level” (Said, 1993, p. 306). In *My Grandmother Can't Cook*, the young reader is introduced not only to diversity in food but also to language and culture, which is represented by the difference in the attire and pieces of jewellery worn by the grandmothers in the accompanying illustrations in the book.

Through Malli's desire to recreate the rasam that her grandmother used to cook for her, *Paati's Rasam* addresses the need to safeguard certain cultural aspects in the fast-changing world. It attempts to introduce the readers to rasam which is considered by the author as the ‘underdog’ amidst the popular South Indian cuisine such as idlis, chutney, and dosas. It provides a recipe for Malli's rasam and portrays Tamil culture through attire, utensils (particularly the tin vessel that is traditionally used for making rasam called the *eeyachombu*), and jewellery. Each detail depicted in the illustrations portrays strong ethnic roots that further help in reaffirming the regional identity. At the same time, it serves as a backlash to the typical Western illustrations that dominate classical children's picture books.

From the perspective of a blind boy named Tsering, *Thukpa for All* introduces the culture of Ladakh through its gompa, prayer flags, and Abi's soup, Thukpa. Thukpa is a “noodle soup that is a staple in the Northern Himalayan regions of Tibet, Ladakh, and Nepal with many variations” (Ram & Preuit, 2018). In *Thukpa for All*, the electricity goes off while cooking the soup, and while everyone around him struggles in the dark, Tsering effortlessly shapes the dough into noodles and hands over the spices that *Abi* (grandmother) cannot make out in the dark. Later, when the electricity returns, the noodle soup with vegetables and dough shared by their guests is ready to serve. The story ends with a note on Ladakh and some of the terms common in Ladakhi language which are also used in the story, along with a recipe for the Ladakhian special noodle soup called Thukpa. The authors and illustrator of this picture book introduce the Ladakhian language, food, and landscape, and also take the initiative to deliberate disability discourses in children's literature. Portraying disability in children's literature can help to broaden discussions on it and also help young readers resonate with the issue (Saunders, 2004). These types of inclusive picture books can positively affect perceptions of race and ethnicity. Research indicates that there is a growing necessity for multicultural texts that authentically represent different cultures to increase awareness and tolerance of having access to one another's culture. Multicultural literature can serve as “windows, mirror, and sliding glass doors,” allowing readers to either look into the lives of others, see reflections of themselves, or engage in a new cultural experience (Bishop, 1990, p. 1).

4. Evolving perceptions of gender performativity in children's literature

Both postcolonialism and gender theories originate from political movements and intellectual discussions. Definitions of ‘good’ versus ‘deviant’ gender norms in colonial times and the precolonial dynamics between men and women are shaped by neoliberal capitalist systems and humanitarian initiatives that strive for new normative identities for individuals (Lamoureaux & Rottenburg, 2021). Therefore, even the depictions of gender in Indian children's literature will be shadowed by earlier colonial gender representations in literature. This emphasises the need to adopt a postcolonial lens in representations of gender in children's books.

Previous studies have pointed to the existence of gender stereotypes in popular children's literature (Lynch, 2016; Gazda, 2015; Hillman, 1974). Also, the single, unified story that the West puts forward of the colonized creates negative stereotypes that people tend to accept as the 'only story' about them denying any possibility of varying, positive, and real views of the colonized (Adichie, 2009). Diekman and Murnen (2004) observe the impact of children's books on their perception:

"In addition to lessons about morality, friendship, and other important values, books teach children about gender roles. As many classic experimental studies have established, these stories change children's ideas about the world" (p. 373).

Research indicates that gender development is a crucial aspect of young children's foundational learning experiences and is essential to educational policies aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Adam and Harper, 2023). The constructivism theory posits that children cultivate beliefs about the world around them based on their understanding of observations or experiences; hence, viewing or reading stereotyped depictions of gender roles will influence their ideas about gender (Milestone, 2011). Introducing picture books that include diverse gender representations can also initiate classroom discussions about gender, diversity, and social justice (Elorza, 2023). Also, illustrated books, specifically, have a notable impact on the gender development of children (Gooden & Gooden, 2001).

In *Kozhukatta*, gender stereotypes are portrayed in the story where the central character, Ponnu, expects his wife to treat him almost like a man-child. He keeps forgetting the names of dishes he ate but expects his wife to figure them out and cook them for him, and so we find him saying 'Janaki, can you please make um..er...the thing I ate the other day called uh..mmm.' (Chandrasekharan, 2017, p. 4). Ponnu also expects her to understand what he is talking about by just giving her vague descriptions of the dish like "Round, soft, white... and... nice?" (Chandrasekharan, 2017, p. 17). However, towards the end of the story, we see the author breaking these gender role stereotypes when the story ends with the following statement: "And the next time, he made them as well as Janaki did, served up with hot and frothy coffee" (Chandrasekharan, 2017, p. 20).

Picture books that are inclusive of all genders frequently depict male characters in roles that deviate from typical gender norms, as we can see in Iyer's *Thatha's Pumpkin*. Here, it is the narrator's grandfather who yearns to cook pumpkin halwa for his granddaughter's birthday. The grandmother in the story only plays the role of getting rid of the huge pumpkin, while the grandfather does the gardening, harvesting, and cooking of the harvested vegetable for a change. In addition, many male characters in the story are excited to get their share of the pumpkin and have plans to cook them into delicacies. So, we have Gulu, who wants to turn the pumpkin slice into pumpkin fritters, and Khushru, who thinks the pumpkin slice is perfect for his 'dhansak.' According to psychologists and liberation group leaders, the portrayal of gender stereotypes in children's books has adverse effects on children's understanding of women's societal roles (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). Thus, even though gender role reversals are an obvious way of breaking gender stereotypes, they still play a key role in shaping the perception of young readers.

In *My Grandmother Can't Cook*, the author breaks gender stereotypes by introducing a grandmother who can't cook and who would rather order pizzas for parties for her grandchildren

and friends. For the first time in an Indian-authored children's book, we have a grandmother who cooks burnt dosas, funny-shaped rotis, failed omelettes, and undercooked cakes, breaking the general stereotype of women naturally being good cooks, especially grandmothers in Indian culture. The story very deftly breaks the stereotypical notion "All grandmothers can cook..." (Balachandran, 2023) when Neil blurted out that his grandmother could not cook. Neil's grandmother, unashamed of her lack of culinary expertise, instead showcases her cooking mishaps in an ostentatious and imaginative fashion. Through this humoristic description of her failed attempts, the author ingeniously broke the gender stereotypes that children may hold or may otherwise be exposed to. So, we have her serving up failed omelettes as 'super-scrambled delights', unbaked cakes as 'gooey choco-puddings', and burnt dosas as 'smoky Cinderella pancakes'. A critical examination of these phrases reveals that the names that the character assigns for her culinary mishaps have an underlying Western influence in them. Moreover, the reference to 'Cinderella' further draws attention to the persistent impact of Western narratives, highlighting their continued resonance in the contemporary postcolonial context. The power of the domination of Western culture and its impact on daily lives is reflected here (Said, 1979, p. 25).

In *Thukpa for All*, it is Tsering who shapes the noodles from the dough and helps Abi make the Thukpa amid the power cut. Here, the power cut acts as an equalising element, establishing parity between characters with disability and without. Similarly, in *Paati's Rasam*, we have Malli's father, Appa, in an attempt to recreate Paati's 'good' rasam. Therefore, these narratives not only offer children more nuanced characters but also prompt them to reflect on the gendered messages in the stories that they may have previously disregarded. *My Grandmother Can't Cook* portrays a non-stereotypical feminine role while we have positive masculine roles in *Kozhukatta*, *Thukpa for All*, *Thatha's Pumpkin*, and *Paati's Rasam*.

5. Conclusion

Beneath the apparent simplicity, children's literature is a cultural work that reveals the intricate power dynamics working within a society. Children's books within a culture both echo and reinforce the established social order (Diekman and Murnen, 2004). The works discussed in this study have significantly contributed to the presentation of various cultures through the description of ethnic characters, food, landscapes, and attire in different states. The incorporation of culinary narratives into Indian children's literature represents a significant shift in the way cultural values and social issues are communicated to young readers. These authors address the need to promote multiculturalism in the contemporary period, where representations of marginalised groups and racial identities are focused on in the stories. This process of representing Indian food, characters, and culture can be seen as a response to colonial influence and Western capitalistic expansion using children's literature. Indigenous culture can only be preserved through writing and text if the intellectual space is freed from Western influence (Pal, 2023). At the same time, these books still hold some stereotypical representations of gender and race, which is evident in the illustrations and the presence of a female character as the central figure in the kitchens in these stories. This reasserts the findings of a study that purports that male characters were seen to occupy outdoor spaces slightly more than female characters among children's picture books and that women continue to have lesser visibility in jobs outside the

home, leading to more confined employment options (Hamilton et al., 2006). If scrutinised carefully, one can observe that the skewed portrayal of gender and race may not be explicitly stated in the text, but are consistently present in the illustrations. Given the implications of this finding, there is further scope for research in this area, particularly to delve deeper into the presence of subtle representations of stereotypes, even in the literature that deliberately attempts to break away from them. It is essential to incorporate indigenous narratives and allusions into native literature to create a new sensibility of native culture, distinct from the colonial perspective. It is also crucial to restructure some of the existing stories to emphasise racial, cultural, and gender equality, aligning them with the values and demands of contemporary society, and in doing so avoid creating more archetypes.

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