

A Report of the Two Day National Seminar - Multiple Childhoods in India - Voices of the Subaltern (23-24 October 2019)

Multiple Childhoods in India: Voices of the Subaltern - A two day UGC sponsored National Seminar by the Department of Elementary Education of Jesus and Mary College was inaugurated by Sister Rosily, the principal of the college and a faculty member of the Department of Elementary Education. Referring to the central role of the college to empower women Sister Rosily warmly invited the participants and guests to challenge singular notions and imageries of childhood.

Ms. Mansi Aneja shared the Concept note of the National Seminar and helped set the tone for the National Seminar.

Dr. Sona Andrew, the convenor of the National Seminar introduced the Key Note Speaker - Prof. Namita Ranganathan, Dept of Education, University of Delhi.

Prof. Namita Ranganathan through her five compelling stories from Kashmir to Tamil Nadu, included accounts from Odisha, Delhi and Rann of Kutch - explored the social-cultural position that stressed the interface between literacy, play, work and gender of the child and the cultures of home, community, and the school. Examining children from these diverse perspectives provided a multidimensional view that deepens understanding and opens up new avenues for research and educational practice.

Too often, in reflecting the value of child-initiated activities, education sets the stage for the growth and development of children and yet hesitates to intervene in that play for fear that to intervene is to create a developmentally inappropriate set of educational practices, yet one is led to wonder whether the lack of intervention may contribute to limiting the educational outcomes of the child's growth.

Dr. Nandita Chaudhary invited us to examine forms and limits of human inquiry. Human beings she said, unlike atoms or molecules, are endowed with cognitive agency. Our grasp of the world, and of ourselves, are not merely responses to external stimuli; they are reflective and reflexive products of human inquiry. She invited us to explore various subaltern concepts and viewpoints, like subtractive knowledge, cultural wisdom and indigenous knowledge frameworks.

The Panel Discussion on Childhood in Conflict Zones, chaired by Dr. Asha Singh with discussants - Dr. Anandini Dar, Dr. Sarbani Sharma and Doctoral Scholar Parul Malik brought together studies, research syntheses, and critical commentaries that examined conflict-child relationships from cognitive, ecological, and cultural perspectives. The focus of the commentaries was to hold research on Childhood and Children and literacy up to scrutiny in terms of scientific significance, methodology, and utility for practice.

In Prof. Sinha's address on 'Children's Literature' we were led to confront an adult discomfort over the multifaceted dimensions of the emotive appeal of literature, as she encouraged adults both to support children's desires to experience in imagination the limits of life and death, and to travel with children on their transformational journeys into unknown territory.

The Panel Discussion on 'Representation of Childhood in Children's Literature', chaired by Dr. Suneeta Mishra with discussants- Dr. Prachi Kalra and Dr. Sonika Kaushik focussed on the

representation of childhood and that of complexities of growing up years in literature. While Dr. Kaushik discussed the representation of childhood through various illustrations, Dr. Prachi discussed the literature for young adults and their representation within novels. The focus of the panel was to discuss the need for representing the worldview of children and young adults within the literature published for them.

Ms. Geeta Dharmarajan, in her address on 'Those Magical Years: Interweaving Childhood and narratives', looked at how literature based on contextual experiences of underprivileged children directs them towards a participatory growth. The session further emphasised the need for collaboration of academia and the organisations working with the children from different socio-economic groups in order to create literature for children that has sound theoretical underpinnings.

This National Seminar provided teachers and learners, researchers and students with a sound theoretical framework for re-conceptualising significant aspects of childhood. Its many practical thought provoking vignettes of the disruptive make this a compelling and provocative experience for any student willing to glimpse the fascinating life and times of the Child.