BOOKS FOR CHILDREN IN NEPAL

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Introduction

The world is celebrating 1972 as the International Book Year under the slogan of "Books for All." This is of special significance for developing countries like Nepal where "book shortages are particularly acute but demand is increasing steadily as the frontiers of illiteracy recede and access to education widens." This provides an opportunity to make an assessment of what has already been done and what can further be done, to make the books available to "all."

Progress of Education

The speed at which the progress of education is making headway and the frontiers of illiteracy is receding in Nepal can be seen from the following table:

Education Level	No. of Schools			No. of Students		
	1951	1961	1970	1951	1961	1970
Primary	321	4,001	7,250	8,505	182,533	449,141
Secondary	11	156	1,063	1,689	21,115	102,704
Higher	2	33	49	250	5,143	17,200

Progress of Publication

But the speed at which the general reading materials have been growing is far behind the track to cope with the situation. This is evident also from the sampling survey of some of the publishing houses, the result of which is as follows:

☆An eminent author and poet of Nepal,

Publishing House	No. of Publications			No. of General Reading Materials		
	1968	1969	1970	1968	1969	1970
Ratna Pustak Bhandar	273	433	535	14	109	124
Sajha Prakashan	252	266	307	64	90	182
Pustak Sansar	80	111	107	30	38	33
Jagagdamba Prakashan	Not	Available	79	Not	Available	70
Education Enterprise	Not	Available	86	Not	Available	16

Childrens' Books

The situation appears far more grim when we look at the state of the children's books which is as follows:

Publishing House	No. of General Reading Materials			Books for Children		
	1968	1969	1970	1968	1969	1970
Ratna Pustak Bhandar	14	109	127	7	7	7
Sajha Prakashan	64	90	182	4	1	6
Pustak Sansar	30	38	33	x	x	2
Jagagdamba Prakashan	Not	Available	70	Not	Available	x
Education Enterprise	Not	Available	16	Not	Available	4

The figure does not include text-books.

Papers and Journals

If we make a survey of the papers and journals, we find *not a single column devoted to the child-readers*. Some attempts were indeed made in the past to provide literature to the children through the publication of periodicals like '*Ankha*' (Eye), '*Changa*' (Kite), '*Balak*' (Child) and '*Kopila*' (Bud). The '*Ankha*' (monthly) and the '*Changa*' (quarterly) proved after a passage of time only sporadic efforts on the parts of some pioneering educational institutions in Kathmandu to inculcate the habit of reading and writing among the school children in a local scale. They could in no way serve the purpose of children's literature in the true sense of the term for a number of reasons including the lack of proper illustrations and psychological approaches. Amalgamated into one in 1968 and named as '*Balak*' (Child) the latter two monthlies have been trying their best on a national scale to make use of the psychological as well as illustrative methods. But they are still far behind the goal of becoming the guide, companion and teacher of the children.

Need of Book Policy

This shows there is an urgent need of "*national book policies* which give real recognition to the importance of the printed word in the transmission of knowledge and the stimulation of ideas."

Not to be Confused with Education Policy

One should not, however, confuse, in this context, the national book policy with the national education one. The National Education Policy, as envisaged in the National Education System plan for 1971-76, introduced recently in the country, has rightly laid down the national goals as "to produce citizens who will conduct themselves in accordance with the *Panchayat system* and to meet the manpower requirements of the development through the speed of scientific and technical education."

There is no denying the fact that "the paramount task in education is development of creative faculties and intellect, as in most occupations mental and creative activity has a tendency to grow, and to grow at an accelerated pace."

Importance of Children's Literature

But "education, as UNESCO has come to use the term, no longer refers to a period spent outside society absorbing facts, but a continuous process which starts with being born and ends, ideally, with death,"

As such it is essential that children are provided with general reading materials, outside their curriculum, in their native tongue, that may divert them even for a while, so that they may go back to their lessons fresh and invigorated as ever before. Then only the children can be expected to grow strong and healthy.

Contributions from Respective Quarters

It is heartening, in this context, to note that the *Sajha Prakashan* has come forward to launch a three year plan for publishing general reading materials directed towards broadening the outlook and strengthening the moral character of the children. Although the thirty titles planned to be published under this venture for three different groups between the ages of seven and fourteen are of no great count against the background of the steadily increasing demand of books, it is indeed a great venture with admirable gesture as it also plans to give due consideration to proper representation. Similar sorts of ventures on the part of concerned quarters and co-operative attitude on that of teachers, parents and writers will undoubtedly go a long way to bring about sound and healthy growth of intellect as well as creative faculties of the children.

Conclusion

Concerted efforts of this sort, all coordinated under a national plan or policy will, it is evident, not only materialise, for children, the slogan of "books for all," but also provide mentally sound and healthy manpower for the country.

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