

Wrinkles in writing: Exploring ageist narratives in select Indian children's literature

Swati Kumari

A PhD Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, India

E-mail address: swatiookr@gmail.com

Abstract

In Indian context, the historicity of children's books show that they have always been continuously shaping the emotional, psychological, moral, cultural and social perceiving skills and behaviour of children by didacticism. Later it shifted towards fun and entertainment but again noticing the need of the hour in the expeditiously transitioning and socially conscious culture, these books are focusing more on reality and relatable issues like gender disparity, LGBTQ, class, disability and racism. Arising from the status of entertainment these works have become the primary source of knowledge for children, specially for urban children usually living in nuclear families far from their grandparents, the traditional storyteller. Grandparents have always been a part of children's storytelling reflecting the Indian social family structure, yet the critical examination of their character depiction in the children's book, whether they promote positive ageing or normalise ageist stereotype, confines to the periphery of research. This study explores how aged characters, their ageing, identity, isolation, intergenerational knowledge preservation, intergenerational bonding and most significantly their character framing has been carried out in Indian Children's literature. Additionally, it also studies the agency of children as a narrator in co-creation of the ageing narratives and limitations of these texts in contemporary

society. Employing the theoretical idea, as a checklist, of Margaret Gulleter's decline narratives, the contrasting idea of Laslett's third age and also Estes' structural ageism as required - the selected works, *My Dadima Wears a Sari* (2007), *Monsoon Afternoon* (2008) *Nani's walk to the park* (2018), *Ammachi's Amazing Machine* (2021) and *Paati's Rasam* (2022) - will be explored and analysed. These theories, as a structure, will help in critically examining, comparing and concluding the aging narratives in Indian context with respect to children literature.

Keywords:

Children Literature; Decline Narratives; Gerontology; Third Age; Intergenerational Bonding

Introduction

Children's literature is not merely entertaining stories that foster imagination and creativity, but also a powerful tool for cognitive growth, emotional development, and social learning. These stories serve as important instruments for socialization, passing down cultural values and shaping young minds' understanding of identity (Adam & Harper, 2021). While many studies have brought how children's books portray race, gender, and social class (Nel, 2017; Klein, 2002), the representation of elderly characters and age-related narratives remains inconsistent and understudied, particularly through the perspective of critical gerontology - the study of how society views aging. This research draws on three key theories about aging. Margaret's (2004) concept of 'cultural aging' shows how stories shape our understanding of life stages, often presenting aging as a story of decline and Estes (2003) 'structural ageism' referring to the methodical ways in which discrimination against older persons and unfavorable age-based stereotypes are maintained by societal institutions, laws, and practices. In addition to personal bias, older people may be disadvantaged by institutional and systemic factors. In contrast, Peter Laslett's (1989) 'Third Age' theory offers a more positive view, suggesting that life after retirement can be a time of creativity and meaningful contribution.

Ageism - the stereotyping and discrimination against people based on their age - exists throughout society in both obvious and subtle ways. It appears in our gestures, attitudes, casual jokes, and everyday behavior. While increasingly recognized as harmful, this prejudice continues to separate older generations from society, affecting them both emotionally and physically. Indian society presents an interesting contradiction regarding aging. Traditionally, elders are highly respected, often placed on pedestals and treated with near-religious reverence. Yet this very respect often limits

them to ceremonial roles rather than allowing full participation in daily life. Gullette's theory (2004) helps explain this paradox - what appears as respect often becomes 'ceremonial veneration,' where elders are honored but not truly heard. Laslett would describe this as 'structured dependence,' where society seems to value elders while actually restricting their roles. This complex social attitude naturally reflects in Indian children's stories which typically show elders either as objects of respect or as figures separated by generational gaps, rarely addressing issues like marginalisation or lack of independence that older people face.

The traditional Indian joint family structure has historically helped bridge generational divides. In these families, grandparents frequently care for grandchildren while parents work, creating strong bonds across generations. Children grow up listening to their grandparents' stories, which serve as vital connections between young and old. However, as society changes and more families live in nuclear setups, children increasingly miss out on these natural relationships with elders. Without regular contact with grandparents, children form their understanding of aging mainly from parents' attitudes and children's books, often losing sensitivity toward older people. Even in joint families, while children may respect their grandparents, they often absorb subtle ageist attitudes that exist in everyday life. These hidden prejudices, though not intentionally hurtful, become normalized through constant exposure. As a result, children may only see older people in their family roles, failing to recognize them as complete individuals - especially when the older person isn't a relative. This makes children's literature particularly important. By presenting positive yet realistic portrayals of aging and separating it from negative stereotypes, these stories can help develop more inclusive and equal attitudes toward older people across all settings - urban, rural, or semi-urban.

While Indian children's literature in English has a relatively short history, it builds on ancient traditions of oral storytelling and mythology that have always carried cultural values. Indian children have grown up with these narratives, often hearing them from grandparents as naturally as breathing. Even Indian families abroad rely on these stories to maintain cultural connections. Historically, Indian children's literature, like Panchtantra and Jatak Tales, has depicted elders as wise guides, but these portrayals

often reduce them to passive figures rather than fully developed characters. Contemporary Indian children's literature has been moving from traditional moral tales to more modern stories (Nayar, 2022). This study will carefully examine selected children's books to understand how they portray aging. Specifically, it will look at whether these stories repeat traditional stereotypes about aging, challenge common age-related prejudices and present new, positive possibilities for later life as suggested by Laslett's 'Third Age' concept or not.

Theoretical framework, Literature Review and Primary Text

Children's literature serves as a powerful cultural mirror, reflecting and shaping societal attitudes toward aging. While extensive research exists on gender and racial representations in children's books (Adam & Harper, 2023), the portrayal of aging remains relatively underexplored, particularly in non-Western contexts. This review examines aging narratives in Indian children's literature through the lenses of critical gerontology Gulleto (2004), Estes (2003) and Laslett's (1987) Third Age theory, revealing both persistent stereotypes and emerging progressive representations.

Traditional Indian children's stories often depict elders within what Gulleto (2004) terms "decline narratives" - where aging is framed primarily as physical and mental deterioration. Grandparents appear as static wisdom figures, their roles limited to storytelling or moral instruction. Such portrayals align with what critical gerontology identifies as ageist constructions that reduce elderly individuals to symbolic functions rather than complex persons (Estes, 2003). The visual rhetoric reinforces this through stereotypical imagery - white hair, shawls, and passive postures that signify "old age" as a homogeneous category (Valentova, 2021).

However, contemporary Indian children's literature shows signs of challenging these narrow representations. Recent picture books increasingly feature grandparents engaging in contemporary activities - using technology, pursuing hobbies, or solving problems alongside younger characters (Crawford, 2021). These narratives resonate with Laslett's (1987) Third Age concept, which reconceptualizes post-retirement life as a period of growth and purposeful activity rather than decline. For instance, some stories depict grandfathers gardening or grandmothers starting small businesses, countering the passive elder stereotype (Beland & Mills, 2001). The Indian context presents unique tensions in aging portrayals. Traditional joint family systems venerated elders as

knowledge-keepers, resulting in children's stories where grandparents transmit cultural values (Bhat & Dhruvarajan, 2001). Yet urbanization and nuclear family trends have diminished intergenerational contact, creating what Laslett (1994) calls a "narrative vacuum" where children's books attempt to fill the gap between cultural respect and lived experience. This manifests in stories oscillating between nostalgic idealization of elders and their complete absence from modern urban settings.

Critical gerontology helps unpack these contradictions. Estes (2003) argues that aging representations never merely reflect reality but actively construct social perceptions. Indian children's books revealingly position elders either as "timeless tradition-bearers" or "outdated relics," rarely as individuals navigating contemporary life (Gullette, 2004). This binary reflects broader societal ambivalence where cultural reverence masks practical marginalization of the elderly. Illustrations prove particularly significant in conveying age ideologies. Research across cultures shows that picture books frequently employ visual shortcuts - canes, wrinkles, subdued colors - to signify old age (Geybels, 2023). Indian children's books replicate some of these tropes while also incorporating culturally specific markers like white saris or ritual objects that tie aging to religious roles. Such visual rhetoric teaches children to associate aging with fixed social positions rather than personal development.

The Third Age framework illuminates alternative possibilities. Laslett's (1987) concept encourages viewing post-working life as potentially the "crown of life" - a period of creativity and contribution. Some progressive Indian children's books embody this through narratives where grandparents learn new skills, mentor youth in modern contexts, or maintain romantic relationships (Crawford, 2021). These stories resist what Gullette (2004) critiques as the "cultural aging script" that equates later life with irrelevance.

Intergenerational dynamics in Indian children's literature needs particular attention. Where traditional stories showed grandparents as primary caregivers and educators, contemporary works increasingly depict reciprocal relationships where children and elders learn from each other (Crawford, 2021). This accords with critical gerontology's emphasis on aging as relational rather than a solitary decline (Estes, 2003).

Significant gaps remain in understanding how child readers interpret these representations. While studies like Beland and Mills (2001) demonstrate that positive elder portrayals can improve children's attitudes, little research exists on Indian children's responses. Additionally, regional language books may portray aging differently than English-language publications dominant in academic studies. The theoretical tension between critical gerontology's focus on structural ageism and Third Age's emphasis on agency proves productive for analysis. Indian children's literature reveals both forces at work - societal constraints limiting elder representations, alongside authors pushing boundaries to show aging as multidimensional (Gullette, 2004; Laslett, 1987).

As India's elderly population grows, children's literature faces both challenge and opportunity - to move beyond nostalgic tropes and didactic functions, instead presenting aging as what critical gerontology insists it is - a socially constructed, culturally variable, but universally human experience full of contradictions and possibilities. The most compelling stories may be those that, as Laslett (1987) envisioned, treat the Third Age not as life's epilogue but as another evolving chapter.

In this study five Indian children's literature in English, foregrounding older or aged characters, have been selected. *My Dadima Wears a Sari* (2007) by Kashmira Sheth, illustrated by Yoshika Jaeggi, is a sweet story of two American granddaughters and an Indian grandmother exploring the cultural meaning of traditional clothing. The granddaughters are asking her grandmother why she wears sari and then the grandmother introduces them to the cultural significance and identity symbolism of sari. *Monsoon Afternoon* (2008) by Kashmira Seth is beautifully illustrated story of an intergenerational bonding, the grandfather is reliving his childhood moments with the grandson during a monsoon afternoon. They do mischief together like getting drenched in the rain and making paper boats. *Nani's walk to the park* (2018) by Deepa Balsavar follows the story of a little boy Venki, his Nani (maternal grandmother) and Nani's special neighborhood friends. One day Venki decides to go with her and the day turns into an adventure. Nani takes him through the lane of treasure, lane of beauty, lane of happiness, lane of friendship, lane of dreams and finally through the lane of magic. *Ammachi's Amazing Machine* (2021) is a beautifully illustrated book by Rajiv Eipe. The story is about Ammachi (grandmother) and her grandson Sooraj making coconut barfi

together. They make the barfi by using the traditional equipment of grandmother. She makes Sooraj learn the recipe by helping her in the process. *Paati's Rasam* (2022) by Janaki Sabesh and Dhawani Sabesh narrates the story of a late older woman, Paati (grandmother), of Mali. She used to make rasam for Mali and without that memory Mali's memories of her grandmother are incomplete. Mali discovers the rasam recipe in her saree and recreates it for her school project.

A connecting thread among all these books is that they subvert common tropes of aging, like frailty, passivity and irrelevance, by portraying elders as active, playful, skilled and innovative. All these depictions counter Gullette's 'decline narratives' by showing a period of agency and creativity thus affirming the idea of 'third age.' These books also highlight the intergenerational reciprocity. Unlike hierarchical 'wisdom dispenser' roles, these stories focus on collaboration and by rejecting one way knowledge transfer, promotes egalitarian relationships that resist age-based power imbalances (Laslett 1987). These stories project aging, not isolated from daily life, but culturally embedded (Estes 2003) which counters the idea of 'narrative vacuum' in urban settings. Furthermore, these tales adapt cultural roles to contemporary contexts. They reject the binary that associates traditional with rigid vs modern with rootless by showing elders as flexible yet culturally grounded. Adding to all these, the most important is illustration which leaves a deep impact on children's psyche. As Bishop (1990) famously observed, children's books serve as 'windows' into diverse social realities, enabling young readers to develop emotional intelligence and egalitarian perspectives through realistic visualizations of aging, this visual rhetoric helps normalize elder dynamism (Valentova 2021) by combating invisible ageism in the media and surrounding.

Ageing : Period of Decline or development

Picture books, predominantly the foundation for bedtime stories, literacy acquisition, and early literary explorations, are a prevalent and particularly significant form of media in the lives of young children. These books give young readers the chance to create meaning through the interaction of print-based plots and visual pictures. Researchers and educators can gain a deeper understanding of the textual invitations

that youngsters are frequently given through the methodical examination of picture books. According to research, societal constructs of what it means to be an adult member of society begin to form in very young children. Students in preschool and primary school frequently seem to have age-related prejudices and make biased remarks about older persons. As Crawford states, in order to confront and mitigate these biases, it is crucial to determine their possible causes. Being one of the foremost sources of children's learning is their exposure to picture books, the projection of aging and aged people in these illustrations and writing shape their perceiving skills therefore reflect and impact their contemporary perceptions of aging (Crawford, 2013).

The story *My Dadima Wears a Sari* unfolds in a cozy, diasporic, Indian-American multigenerational household, where Dadima serves as a living bridge between tradition and modernity asserting Laslett's (1987) idea of framing ageing as a period of cultural transmission and creative engagement. Dadima always carries sari as her attire, making herself the cultural bearer, which contrasts her westernized daughter in law and granddaughters. It subtly critiques ageist assumptions that equate modernity with youth. Her insistence on wearing saris in America shows her resistance towards assimilationist pressure and assertion of elder agency in preserving identity. Her pink sari worn on the plane to America which symbolizes the migration narratives rarely centred on older women. The lush and vibrant illustrations of saris as bright yellow, shimmering reds, pink and others associate her with joy and cultural richness rejecting the narratives of frail elders. The versatility of saris as umbrella bandage, hug reminder metaphorically mirrors her resourcefulness and caregiveness. Her saris weave together utility and tradition, challenging the myth of elders as obsolete. The mirror scene where both generations are wrapped in saris reflect cyclical time which visually assert that ageing doesn't erase relevance. The playfulness of Dadima reframes ageing as dynamic and imaginative instead of rigid. Her saris are a gerontological tapestry where each knot reflects a generational binding. In the contemporary world which often silences older voices, her attire speaks volumes: aging is not a fraying edge but the golden thread of continuity.

Monsoon Afternoon is set in a rural Indian home and surrounded by a natural environment during monsoon season. The monsoon - a cyclical, renewing force - shows Dadaji's role as a keeper of traditions. Sailing boats and swinging on banyan trees

projects him as carrying the continuity and proves to be the counter narrative to Gullette's (2004) idea of decline. The aesthetic strokes of watercolour illustrating rain and greenery symbolises his liveliness. His visual of lifting the boy and swinging on roots emphasize the physicality and playful agency. Close-up visuals of him and his grandson interacting like sharing tea or whispering contrast with isolated portrayals of aged people. The other older person of the story, Dadima, reflects the traditional matriarchal authority, while Dadaji's mischief and physical strength subverts stereotypical serious older image. The banyan tree scene is a silent image of legacies, it visually connects Dadaji's past- "Did you swing like me?" - to the boy's future- "Will monsoons come when I'm a dadaji?" To sum up, the monsoon in this story is symbolism of a gerontological act of resilience and resistance. In this story ageing is not a time of fading but the soil from which new memories regenerate.

Nani's Walk to the Park develops in a lively Indian urban neighborhood, likely a middle-class area with markets, schools and parks. The visualisation of the book is very detailed. Each lane is minutely illustrated, market stalls, playing children and bookshelves which metaphorically represents Nani's multisensory experience of ageing. This bustling of market lanes, quilting women, and playful animals demonstrates Nani's social surroundings, emphasizing her embeddedness in community life. Nani's age is signalled only through silver hair and Venki's respect, absence of conventional cues in this type of settings, like canes or benches, imprints positive ageing narratives. The visual narration of Nani's systematic action shows her control over time and space. Her upright posture rejects the 'frail elder' notion. She is always in motion - walking, pointing, hugging- mirrors her confidence. Again her poetic labeling of lanes like lane of happiness, lane of dreams and others reflect her agency in actively narrativizing the environment challenging the idea of elders as passive observers. Moreover, the warm colour and earthy tones dominate the eyes, associating Nani with vitality and continuity and at the same time denying the frail aging stereotypes. The story unfolds in a vibrant, interconnected urban community, where Nani's daily walk becomes a social and sensory ritual. This asserts the idea of aging as a period of social engagement and purposeful

activity, and contrasts the Guellett's idea where urban ageing is often associated with isolation, withdrawal and invisibility.

Ammachi's Amazing Machine unfolds in a rural semi rural south Indian home. The rural or semi rural backdrop passes a gerontological statement; statement of rurality as a space of elder agency and rejection of Urban decline tropes. Usually in urban narratives elders are sidelined, in contrast to that Ammachi's environment is empowering her. Open kitchens and manual tools are metaphorically expressing the extensions of her domain expertise. Reflecting the theory of 'third age' idea explaining aging as a period of productivity and mentorship not withdrawal. Challenging Gallette's 'decline narratives' where aging in cities is often associated with loneliness and obsolescence, Ammachi's rural setting frames her as self-reliant and culturally anchored. The illustration of her character actively challenges ageism through body language composition, facial expressions, colour and symbolism. Visual illustration of Ammachi's physicality and stooped but strong, for instance, cracking coconuts, grating, climbing tree by pulley, is rejecting the impression of frail elders. Her active postures signal functional ability, not decay. She and Sooraj are often projected equally at the same eye level and sharing tasks, which avoids the 'grandparent-as-prop' visual. Ammachi's laughing expression as "hee, hee, hee!" and playful interactions humanise beyond the cliched meaning of "wise but stern old woman". The use of warm colours like golden yellow and earthy greens evoke a sense of vitality and tradition, tying her to life-sustaining knowledge about food and nature. The visuals of this picture book normalise elder elder-child collaboration bond, by countering the general binary of burden versus caregiving. Overall, the story is a gerontological counter-narrative, a space where aging is synonymous with capability, laughter, and intergenerational synergy, weaponised by the illustrations which dismantle decline narratives, portraying rurality not as a relic but a realm of elder empowerment.

The Paati's Rasam also evolves in a multigenerational South Indian house centred around the *eeyachombu* and Pati's apartment where her absence transforms the home into a space of collision between grief and tradition. This aligns with critical gerontology which examines how ageing and death are socially constructed. Even after her death, her agency persists through objects like sari, vessel, recipe, challenging the 'disappearing elder' tropes. The focus on her dish - a culinary tradition- challenges Gullette's decline

narratives by framing her legacy as active and nourishing, after death. Her dish embodies her love language, transcending its culinary role to become a tool for coping with loss for the next generation. The recipe's discovery in her sari shows how elder knowledge often surfaces posthumously, urging readers to value intergenerational bonds before loss. The illustration of the text evokes subversion of ageist narrative. Use of colours like yellow and oranges for Paati dominate the scenes associating her with vitality and comfort. The contrast with muted colours after her death visually emphasize her granddaughter's grief, but the final return to vibrant hues reinforces her enduring presence. In her granddaughter's hands, the *eeyachombu* becomes a time machine, its tangy steam carrying the whispers of a love that outlives the body. Evolution of the sequential action of story, from loss to search then hunt and ultimately to renewal shows the gerontological idea of legacy as active reconstruction. The entire story is a gerontological revolt- an illustrated protest against the idea that aging ends with death. These narratives collectively challenge the ageist stereotypes by portraying elders as active, creative, innovative and culturally rooted. Collectively, dismantling ageism through agency, material culture and visual or textual subversion, all these texts offer a cohesive counter narrative to Gullett's (2004) decline model of ageing. Also through intergenerational reciprocity these Indian narratives reframe ageing as creative continuity, offering a counter to declining narrative in global children literature.

Limitations of Ageing Narratives and Child Agency in Co-creation

Although the vibrant elders in selected primary texts in this study demonstrate how modern Indian children's literature has made progress in challenging ageist cliches, a keen observation reveals persistent limitations. This include urban-rural differences, binary stereotypes, and a dearth of intersectional narratives that devalue seniors outside of middle class, able-bodied and uppercaste frameworks. Based on Estes (2003) structural ageism and Gullette's (2004) critique of decline narratives, this section examines how even progressive texts unintentionally perpetuate societal ambivalence toward ageing by ignoring marginalized elder identities while disregarding topics like gendered stereotypes, urban rural division, intersectional exclusion, grief and disability.

My Dadima Wears a Sari, *Paati's Rasam* and *Ammachi's Amazing Machine* challenge some ageist stereotypes but also reinforces traditional gender roles limiting their progressive potential. Dadima's expertise is shown only limited to clothing and home-making like sari draping, story telling and nurturing but no engagement in roles outside the domestic sphere. Her knowledge is cultural and emotional rather than intellectual or political, reinforcing the stereotypes of women as passive tradition bearers. Similarly Patti and Ammachi are also confined to feminine roles like cooking and caregiving. The emotional and physical work of cooking is romanticised rather than critiqued. There is no mention of exhaustion or desire for rest and no grandfather figure sharing kitchen duties, implying domestic labour is inherently feminine. In the book *Monsoon Afternoon*, grandfather is playful but again grandmother is stereotypically disciplinary and confined to home. None of these stories feature working class grandmother or breaking gender norms which shows unintentional upholding of sexist stereotypes by limiting women to domesticity in old age too.

The urban versus rural dichotomy in context of Indian ageing is very significant and interesting which is also underexplored and sidelined. These selected texts present aging in a way that reinforces a sanitized image of rural ageing often romanticising rural life while marginalising their issues and oversimplifying urban elders, and without showing the comparative challenges of both the places. In *Monsoon Afternoon*, the visualisation of dadaji's bond with nature shows a picture perfect life but ignores the challenges like climate vulnerability and healthcare which disproportionately affect rural elders. Similarly in *Ammachi's Amazing Machine*, shows Ammachi as a resourceful village grandmother ignoring the economic hardship and health challenges. *Nani's Walk to The Park* is an exception in evoking an urban elder's social ties but most books erase urban elders, for example, there is no indication about older people in apartments struggling with loneliness or intergenerational conflicts. Nani is one of the few urban elders depicted as socially connected, in most cases urban elders in Indian children literature are invisible and passive limited to the apartments. In *My Dadima Wears a Sari*, Dadima's sari adapts to a foreign city, but her world is limited to home, she has no engagement with urban communities or challenges like loneliness or fast-paced life. Her sari shows the cultural transmission through grandma but in due course fails to show her personal complexities like her struggles with aging specially in foreign land.

These books do not even address structural barriers creating lack of intersectionality. The vivid and breathing illustration of the backdrop like, house, clothes and other objects show that all protagonists are upper class or middle class, the lower-strata elderly have not been given attention. Apart from this, disabled elders using health supportive medical equipment, dealing with their chronic pain and fear of death have gotten no space. These books maintain a kind of silence over discussion of mortality. Paati's Rasam highlights the absence of a demised grandmother but reduces grief to a recipe for rediscovery; doesn't show child's anger, emotion or confusion about death. In short it sentimentalises loss without foregrounding grief (Laslett, 1987). Furthermore, none of these stories present elders dealing with technology or contemporary careers or underlining their individual emotions. Thus in a way or other, these texts engage in ideal depiction of elders rather than realistic. In the process of foregrounding only positive aging, they undermine the realistic portrayal.

While intergenerational bonding is a recurring theme in Indian children literature, few texts position children as active co-creators of aging narratives. It is necessary to critically examine how child agency remains limited to passive reverence than reciprocal learning- a gap that inadvertently reinforces Gullette's (2004) decline narrative by sidelining youthful challenges to ageist stereotypes can be understood. Traditional tales like the Panchatantra and Jatak Katha often reduce children to silent recipients of elder wisdom (Nayar, 2022) giving them a passive role, however some contemporary works have shown a tentative shift towards active agency. In the text *Monsoon Afternoon* and Ammachi's *Amazing Machine* the grandsons' request to sail the boat or make the coconut barfi initiates the shared play, suggesting agency. But again in the illustration of *Nani's Walk to The Park* it can be seen that child and elder through eye level is visually equalised (Valentova, 2021) but the child's role remains observational limiting to passiveness. These present ambivalence shows that the active agency moments have been circumferenced to exceptions rather than norms.

In *My Dadima Wears a Sari* the granddaughters are allowed to question the cultural practices of their grandmother but don't explicitly depict the intergenerational debate. As Adam (2021) asserts that such 'safe' dialogues avoid confronting deeper ageist

assumptions prevalent in Indian society . None of the selected primary text shows children correcting ageist remarks and this absence again shows the findings in Adam's (2021) cross-cultural study, where Asian children's books rarely depict youth challenging elder stereotypes, unlike their western counterparts. All these things reveal a critical gap where these stories offer mirrors of cultural aspects but fail to provide windows into child-led redefinitions of ageing (Bishop, 1990). While selected texts like *Monsoon Afternoon* and *Ammachi's Amazing Machine* hint at child agency, Indian children literature must transcend token collaboration to fully embody Laslett's (1987) visions of ageing as a shared and dynamic process. Integrating child protagonists who actively questions, teach and co-create with elders - rather than merely revere them- could dismantle ageist hierarchies more effectively than ceremonial veneration. As Adichi (2009) cautions, these single stories of passive elders and obedient children not only flatten intergenerational ageism but also perpetuate structural ageism (Estes, 2003).

Conclusions

Picture books for children are a gateway to the psyche of children which explore their emotional, mental and ideological development; and for the children a door towards the socio- cultural understanding and realities of their surroundings. These selected texts, through the lively, active and cheerful characters like *Ammachi*, *Dadima*, *Dada Ji* and others assert the study's objectives by challenging the stereotypical ageism and showcasing third age potentials. Applying the selected theoretical formula of Gullette, Estes and Laslett on these characters and their action it can be derived that the ageist narrative in Indian children literature are reconfigured. Comparison of Gullette and Estes' gerontological concepts with Laslett's key idea gives a different perspective in Indian ageist discourse; these selected texts show that age dynamics in Indian children literature resonates more with Laslett's concept of third age than Gullette and Estes critical gerontology and structural ageism respectively. These texts also promote intergenerational reciprocity and its role in shaping the creative continuity and at the same time contradicting the decline narratives. Additionally, the vivid and lush illustration creates equal socio-literary space for the elders leaving an impactful imprint in the mind of the child reader and their colourful and active images complement the purpose of writing by helping the reader in framing and rebutting the decline discourse. Yet these progressive portrayals remain constrained by unresolved limitations. They do

not involve the children in shaping and countering the ageist norms, instead they deliver the preconceived mindset through the illustrations, actions and dialogues of the older people. These picture books require more refining where aging doesn't get limited to footnote but a continuing adventure in which children and elders embark on together; it will just not include them but empower them too across all life domains. Thus, milking the main argument and the selected text, this study concludes that while Indian children literature is restructuring aging narratives, moving beyond 'decline' and 'ceremonial veneration' to portray elders as agents, archives and allies in intergenerational solidarity, their structural inequities while dismantling aging remains constant.

Further research in this area is required to get a better understanding of aging from children's perceptions in which examination of child-led storytelling will be crucial. Moreover, intersectional portrayals of ageing, including disabled, working class and queer elders need in depth scrutiny. Comparative study of global children literature with indigenous narrative, urban realism with rural romanticization and the normalisation of mortality is also recommended to explore. By bridging these gaps, Indian children's literature can evolve from countering stereotypes to redefining aging itself—as a multifaceted experience shaped by culture, space, and identity, yet universally resonant in its humanity.

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Author's bio-note

Swati Kumari is a Research Scholar in the Department of English at the Central University of South Bihar. Her research interests include contemporary literary studies, cultural theory, and interdisciplinary approaches within English literature.
