



## **YOUNG ADULT FICTION: A BAILIWICK IN RECENT FICTIONS OF INDIA**

**Dr. A. Padma Priya**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of English,  
SFR College for Women,  
Sivakasi.

### **Abstract**

Art develops by every new arrival. Humanities are a broad area where any genre of Art could excel. Being in a country like India every one of us would encounter the impact of multiculturalism. In recent years we people are more talking about issues of teenagers. They can be namely Young Adults. There is a category of novel for youngsters they are named as young adult novels (YAN). In order to understand them or in order to bring out young adults' essence of life these novels are to be read and to be experienced. It is not because for the label Young Adult Novels, these novels are to be read by them. It can be read by all. History says that these kinds are from West. This paper focuses on how Young Adult Novels could be a New Humanities and by the way it would give scope for youngsters to write novel of theirs. Similar to India's state of developing country, Young Adult Novels are also in the positive progress. YAN talks about youngsters'. The perspective and portrayal of characters made them popular among youngsters. Ravinder Singh's *I too had a Love Story* is one such. For, this is one of the examples of YAN in India. The actual pattern of YAN has to depict the youngsters' lives that are within. This paper tries to sketch how YAN can be a new humanities and its inclusiveness would be betterment in the field of Literature.

**Key Words:** Fiction, Young Adult Novels, India, Humanities, Inclusiveness.

### **Introduction**

Words of Carlsen will support to define exactly what young adult literature is:

Young adult literature is literature wherein the protagonist is either a teenager or one who approaches problems from a teenage perspective. Such novels are generally of moderate length and told from the first person. Typically, they describe initiation into the adult world. Though generally written for a teenage reader, such novels – like all fine literature – address the entire spectrum of life. (1980, 48)

Carlsen has given an overview on how young adult literature brings out their world to the readers. Though it portrays the life of young adults its readability reaches adults world too. Everyone who takes on young adult novel would definitely have an insight. This insight is a new perspective which young adult novels are known popularly. While taking note of its new



perspective, arguments are there on how this young adult literature / novels can be taken in the main stream. It is a belief that merely focusing on young adult does not have anything to do with the world. It gives more opportunity to talk only on romance and nothing else. Researcher Beth Younger says:

Young Adult Literature reflects societal stereotypes, and although literary critics often ignore this genre, it remains an important body of work that deserves our attention for not only whom it entertains, but also for what it says about the human condition. (Kaplan, 2003)

Though it receives a lot of criticism it has its own identity. Analysing the history of YAL would give its idealness. From Nilsen and Donelson its history should be focused from the early nineteenth century. It is necessary to know the history of this young adult literature, for it is the combination of how writers and publishers face a tough time to execute this genre of literature. Writers and publishers have additional responsibility on grasping the attention of readers. Young adults are the readers and so schools and libraries share the equal responsibility like the writers. When they introduce YAL they take much care on maintaining the interest of readers. There is a default phrase that Literature reflects life; however, most of the literatures came, took less space to bring out the minds of young adults. The information gained through Nilsen and Donelson's *Literature for Today's Young Adults* gives an overall view that how the transition in the world from the nineteenth century helps in the growth of YAL. The development of young adult literature is given as sections of certain period as follows: 1800-1900, 1900-1940, 1940-1960 and 1960-1980. The beginning of the nineteenth century is a period focused more on purity. Therefore whatever art which comes during this period reflects purity with it, which means it depicts more religious concepts. The literature which is written for the young adults also focuses on religion and spirituality. Haratio Alger and Lousia May Alcott are the two pioneers in young adult literature. Alcott's novels are known for harsh, honest and good reasonable representation. Alger's novels are known for broken homes and romantic fantasies. It is documented by several historians and specialists. During the early nineteenth century young adults are channelized to moral and virtues. Religious thoughts are made compulsory in their education. As a result there is a rise on Domestic and Dime novels. The arrival of these distinctive divisions in novels gives a different growth in young adult novels. Reading of novels are quite submission for young readers and the young adult fictions are prohibited. Even the publishers and some of the librarians are not there to support the young readers to read the novels. One of the librarians says, "The vicarious devouring of fiction commonly indulged in by patrons of the public library, especially the young, is extremely pernicious and mentally unwholesome" (Nilsen 50).

The second session of 1900-1940 gives a variation in the development of young adult novels. It is a time where the Romance and the transition of Realism take place in young adult themes. The books of classical romances are given more importance to young adults. There



is another problem in choosing the books for reading. School and libraries bring confinement in the reading hours and books. It is not that there are restrictions in choosing books for reading, but the publishing rate of young adult books are few in number. Edward Stratemeyer, a writer and also a publisher, takes an initiative in publishing more works for young adults. He has dedicated Weekly namely *Good News* which is meant for young adults; it runs nearly to 2, 00,000 and this is one of the reasons that he is known among young adults. He is known popularly for his series of writing like soldiers of fortune, Lakeport series, Dave Porter series and Rover Boys. More than his style of writing, he becomes popular for his method of sales. Though he gets criticisms, he proves that the series books are inevitably moral and this is also one among the reasons that it becomes popular among young adults. He died during 1930 until then the books written for the young adults are not named with specific names. It is during 1933 on the arrival of Rose Wilder's Lane's *Let the Hurricane Roar*, the naming is done. This is the first work to initiate the term juvenile or junior novel. The plot revolves around David and Molly who are newly married. It tells how Molly fights with loneliness and gives courage to survive till David reaches her. Young adults are portrayed with all sophistication, but Lane portrays young adults' difficult setting. It shows that young adult writers are moving towards realistic writing. The success of this *Let the Hurricane Roar* is understood by its publication in twenty-six printing between 1933 and 1958. It is a good start and welcoming attitude for the juvenile fiction. Juvenile fiction is otherwise named as Teen fiction or young adult fiction. More books flourished in young adult genre after this great success.

The third session is between 1940 and 1960; it is the period where the young adult literature finds its place for growth. The growth of young adult literature is obvious through the criticism it faces. Since the period of World War II it has showed its effect all over the world. George W. Norvell gives an idea to kindle the reading interest among youngster and insists them to choose their own reading materials. As he says: "to increase skill, promote the reading habit, and produce a generation of book-lovers, there is no factor so powerful as interest" (Norvell Dec 1946, 536). Merely the interest would give a pleasurable experience for readers. Since this is the period where the young adult novels are in developing state, kindling their interest would give them more choices. Whenever young adults start reading they would find some attachment with plot or character or situations the character encounters. The situation may be entirely different but the readers would place them there to experience what the writers have written. Carlsen writes,

With the developing of their personality through adolescence, they come to a partially integrated picture of themselves as human beings. They want to test this picture of themselves in the many kinds of roles that it is possible for a human being to play and through testing to see what roles they may fit into and what roles are uncongenial. (Jan 1954, 8)

This is possible when a reader reads with interest. There is a possibility for young adults to undergo a therapeutic relief when they read certain young adult novels. The period between



1940 and 1960 depicts more a realistic way towards life. It brings young adults the realistic setting about life. The peculiar effect of this realistic approach is that it takes the young adults to situations which they have not encountered in their life. To say that one who loves reading young adult novels would definitely get a relief whenever one completes a novel. *Bibliotherapy* is the only world which would suit the readers who are interested in reading young adult novels. It is the word introduced by G.O. Ireland through his article:

The word *bibliotherapy* first appeared in 1930 in an article by G.O. Ireland. Another term applied to this type of therapy was *therapeutic reading*. In the United States, Drs. Will and Karl Menninger were among the first to foster an interest in this type of aid to healing (O'Brube and Complisa 1983, 162)

Young adult literature takes the privilege of giving this therapy to the readers; 1940s and 1950s are the stints which bring a change in the way of handling the subjects. Series books which come in Stratemeyer's writing have stereotype characters and plots; therefore there is a need of change to something which would be interesting for the readers. Some of the themes are not discussed in young adult literature, since it is considered as taboo subjects. For 1940s and 1950s are the same spell which brings the reasonable change through YAL. Stanley B. Kegler and Stephen Dunning say: "Books of acceptable quality have largely replaced poorly written and mediocre books" (1961, 369). Some of the authors like Kathleen Winsor, Grace Metalious, Margaret E. Bell, Vivian Break, Benedict, Nancy Freedom, and Elizabeth Goudge bring a great change in understanding various human emotions. The above novelists' works concentrate on love, young marriage, worried parents, passion, and adventures. By that way it reflects the change in the society. Particularly South African and African American Literature portray the society of Africa and the changes prevail in African society. It reflects the theme among the people there; it is not only the theme which prevails in African American countries, but also an universal theme. Young Adult Novels like Dan Wickenden's *Walk like a Mortal* (1940), Betty Smith's *A True Grows in Brooklyn* (1943), and, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1955), do not create a great impact among young adults, until J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). It is depicted as the real portrayal of young adult who suffers to find him in the extremes of childhood and maturity. Distort is not only for the young adult in the novel but also for everyone. This particular novel brings as Donelson and Nilsen says: "the hearts and minds of countless young adults as have no other book" (63). The graphical chart shows an immense progress in young adult literature after *The Catcher in the Rye*. Nilsen and Donelsen comments that:

the development from this period that has had the most direct effect on young adult literature was the popularization of the *bildungsroman*, a novel about the initiation, maturation, and education of a young adult. Most *bildungsroman* was originally published for adults but soon read by teenagers. (2009, 63)

Though young adult literature proves its stand to a certain level, according to critics it could not find its exact distinguished form from adult literature. As it is mentioned earlier,



bibliotherapy occupies its place in most of the educational journals on insisting how the involvement in reading would aid a person to attain the effect of catharsis. Through journals and through most of the possible medium the importance of this therapy is made clear:

One clear and easy application of bibliotherapy was the free reading program (sometimes too clear and too easy for the inept psychologist / English teacher who, finding a new book in which the protagonist had acne, sought the acne – ridden bid in class and handed over the book saying, “You must read this – it’s about you!”). (2009, 60)

Though young adult novels share certain similarities with adult novels, through the theme which is discussed above, it stands unique. Young adults could relate them in the above-mentioned themes. In that way each and every novel would be a therapy for young adults.

The fourth session between 1960 and 1980 portrays the turbulence of YAL. It is a spell where associations, articles, journals have emerged in the name of young adult literature. During this stage the grade literature attains is a great height by reading and moving towards literature: “People realized that students could not learn math and science if they did not know how to read, and so the educational focus was broadened to include the language arts and to advance the education of all young people” (65). The arrival of YALSA – Young Adult Library Service Association; ALA – American Library Association; VOYA – Voice of Youth Advocates; JAAL – Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy; ALAN – Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE; YASD – Young Adult Services Division has created a firm platform for young adult Literature. After J.D Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, it is S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967) which resonates among young adults:

In 1967 when S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* was published, critics rejoiced because Hinton’s novel was a giant step forward for the young adult novel. It’s gritty realism and its willingness to take on a hitherto topic like class differences in the teenager’s world made. *The Outsiders* a hit with critics and young readers. YA books had reached the top. (Nilsen 2009,72)

Similar to Hinton, novelists like: Robert Lipsyte, Paul Zindel, M.E.Kerr, Robert Cormier, Judy Blume, Richard Peck, Anne Mc Caffrey, Lois Duncan, and Ursula K. Le Guin have won the award and become popular by creating a wave through their novels. Praises and criticisms are equally there for YA novels. Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* received an appreciation that it is a true young adult novel which depicts realism. While it also received a criticism that Cormier should have avoided using unnecessary realism. During the mid of 70s critics condemn the usage of violent themes in Young Adult Novels which portray the young adults in a negative form. Donelson and Nilsen quote a comment published in *Top of the News* in 1975:

And what happened? All too many of those same people who had been asking for an honest story about teenage problems began protesting: language like that in a book



for young people? Are rape, abortion, homosexuality, unwed mothers, suicide, drugs, unsympathetic portrayal of parents, and violence appropriate for junior novels? Are young people ready for such explicit realism? (73)

There are stable criticisms till 1980s, but at the same time, the growth of young adult novels is high during this period. It is a golden period for young adult novels; new ways and new platforms are laid. All these criticisms lead to the arrival of problem novels and new realism in young adult literature. Young adult novels focus more on presenting new themes to young adults; the novels start concentrating more on some serious issues. The novels in 1980s and 1990s bring the fantasy horror and mystery to the world, and the novels in the 21<sup>st</sup> century create trendsetting and experimental novels to the young adult society.

The characteristics of young adult novels stand distinct which is one of the reasons for its popularity. Herz ratiocinates the point for its popularity as follows:

YAL authors incorporated into their books the same elements as those in adult novels: a consistent point of view, a significant setting, a well-delineated although relatively simple plot, vivid characterization, realistic and lively dialogue and an attractive style. (1996, 8)

It may appear to be presenting the strategies of adult novels but the changes which show a novel as young adult novel give the answer for why young adults stick on to these novels. The characteristics which are given in the article of Robert C. Small present its uniqueness:

the main character is a teenager; events and problems in the plot are related to teenagers; the main character is the center of the plot; dialogue reflects teenage speech, including slang; the point of view presents an adolescents interrelation of events and people; the teenage main character is usually perceptive, sensitive, intelligent, mature and independent; the novel is short, rarely more than 200 pages; the actions and decisions of the main characters are major factors in the outcome of the conflict. (282-283)

All these characteristics would definitely attract a young adult to read the novels. In fact a reader will not analyze these qualities before reading a novel. But definitely young adults would suggest a young adult novel by highlighting these characteristics after reading. Owen Mary quoted Metz's words as: "YAL involves a teenage protagonist as the central character often reflects and interprets their views. One way to attract YA readers is to write through their eyes or to have a young narrator tell their version of a story, even if the story belongs to someone else" (March 2003, 120). So far the characteristics of the young adult novels would give a map of how are the novels actually. The portrayal of teenage protagonist as the central character and involving the central character to narrate the story, in the language which young adult would understand is the special attention young adult novels have gained. Therefore to young readers, reading such novels will be a time spent worth fully. Young adult novels also focus on some of the important themes which are essential for young adults. Contemporary young adult novels give a space for young adults to involve themselves to face





the realities of life. It is a known fact that changes take place once in a decade. Apart from the other developments the technological sources show its progress. Whenever there is a technological development the accessibility of human becomes less. Just the newspapers and knowing the current issues do not upturn a person. One should experience it or be compassionate to a situation. Contemporary young adult novels would give the readers a new path to know the other part of their own life which may be their identity. Bean and Moni sum up: "in recent years this rugged individualist stance has been challenged by a postmodern view, almost Marxist in its orientation, that says that power is the driving force in shaping identity" (2003, 49).

Ravinder Singh's *I too had a Love Story* portrays the characteristics of Young Adult Novels (YAN). YAN has the theme of friendship, love, parental, familial problems. Young Adult Novels emerge in India too, since it is believed that YAN is from West. Singh's novel is one such. It is a very simple plot, which focuses on the love life of Ravin the protagonist. He has a good and a few personal friends. In a casual talk his friends let him know about the matrimonial site. He got a curiosity and checked it. An Infosys guy comes across a girl Kushi through a matrimonial site. They come to know each other and the rest of their liking eventually goes on. Their common liking leads them to be in the comfort zone. They get introduced with their families. As usual love stories they are not encountered with a lot of problems. It's a gradual understanding while they got to know. Ravin has to move to U.S for a project and there their love bonding. There is no disturbance in their love life yet in the story. There arise a question that what or who could be the antagonist of the plot? They decided to get engaged. The protagonist comes to know that the girl meets with a drastic accident before their engagement. He rushed to the spot. He stayed with her and her family. It was major accident. That she was in need of blood and that is the clue that she might lose her life. He was with her from the begging, for he could not be with her in the last minutes. After receiving the news from her dad he reached the hospital. He started living his life without her. This is the crux of the story. Singh's *I Too had a Love Story* is an apt plot to be included in Young Adult Novels. It fulfils most of the norms: revolves around the life of young adult; has the theme related to young adults; comprehensible language. The plot was not build on with any moral intension, for it just goes among young adult only of their themes. Few incidents can be quoted from the novels that it is the plot of contemporary young adults. Chatting in social networks and in messages; it talks about friendship and the protagonist is surrounded by friends- these are the norms for a novel to be young adult novel.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up *I Too had a Love Story* is a fine example for YAN. These kinds of novels are a boon and it brings a daring theme for the readers. The introduction of Young Adult Novels not only talks about the usual love and friendship themes. They speak in their (young adult) language, comprehensible language with not of verbose words, and speak for them. This



paper is not expanding the novel; it prevailed as a tool to highlight the importance of Young Adult Literature. Novelists have launched such an area which has to be inscribed in order to bring out its inclusiveness. Unquestionably YAN is a New Humanities which could a pathway not only for the readers but also for the budding writers. Particularly in India it is has been a trend that popular authors are from professional field. Surprisingly in India YAN novelists are young writers, for there is no constraint as such. With a ray of hope let the field of literature generates more Young Adult Novels.

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