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***Firkee Bachchon Ki* — A Magazine for Early Grades**

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Children respond eagerly and readily to reading material and illustrations within their range of comprehension. Short poems and tales, picture stories and drawings have the magical quality of making children fly imaginatively to an altogether different time and place (Amar, 1943). In India, children's literature is about 150 years old; children's magazines lesser than that. Children's magazines is a relatively new genre that is slowly but surely catching up with the rest of the literary world. For very young children of Classes I and II, there is hardly any magazine of good quality and affordable range (Enciso et al., 2010). *Firkee Bachchon Ki* brought out by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) is one such magazine. Primarily meant for the children of Classes I and II, the contents of the magazine are diverse. It contains children's creative writings contextualised in their daily life experiences, with relevant and detailed illustrations supporting the

text. The themes of everyday life such as trees, family, food, pets and games constitute the main subject matter of the magazine. As such, the magazine provides children with appropriate and fascinating reading material in a simple format and more importantly, from a child's perspective. These enable children to understand and appreciate the myriad things around them: nature, their surroundings, the detailing of objects and so on. Initially therefore the magazine was launched to address the deeply felt need to provide children of government schools with supplementary reading material. Earlier, *Firkee Bachchon Ki* was brought out on a trial basis and was unpriced. Four issues later, and with growing demand, the magazine is now priced and soon to be registered.

In August 2014, the Government of India released the document *Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat*. The document reiterates the government's commitment to increase early literacy rates as a key strategy to help children

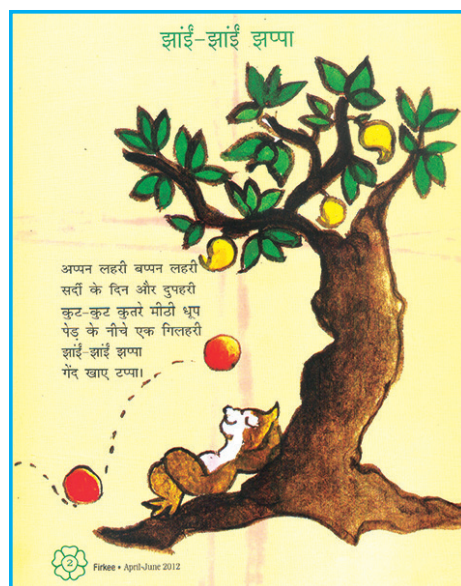
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realise academic goods and quality of life. Classes I and II, which are educationally extremely important since they introduce literacy to children, do not receive preparation act attention and funds. The consequences of this mindset is particularly dismal for school in rural and interior areas. In the light of these, the document *Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat* takes in enormous significance. Planned as a nationwide sub-programme to the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), one of the objectives of *Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat* is to improve language development by creating an enduring interest in reading and writing with comprehension. Providing a print-rich environment, with non-textual material and children's magazines are some of the ways in which this can be implemented.

Firkee Bachchon Ki is one such initiative taken up by the Early Literacy Programme at NCERT.

Illustrations is one of the major features of any children's magazine, particularly so when the target audience is quite young. The illustrations in *Firkee Bachchon Ki* are quite attractive, in four colour and are contributed by well-known illustrators. They help children to develop imagination as well as creativity. "Creativity is a combination of motivation, openness/flexibility, curiosity and autonomy as well as divergent thinking" (Mitchell, 2006, p. 6). As Hilda Jackman notes, play inspires imagination, imagination inspires creativity, and

creativity inspires explorations and so on (Jackman, 2009, p.23). *Firkee Bachchon Ki* is thus an initiative towards comprehensive and unhurried time and space for children to imagine, explore and create. Moreover, the numerous illustrations used in the magazine to depict different aspects of daily life and nature attract the attention of the children towards various concerns. The illustrations of the magazine are so much associated with children's thoughts that the children easily recognise the print as talk on paper and these also strengthen child's visual imagination and interpretation of pictures. Colourful illustrations of the magazine attract children, almost making the characters of the content pop off the page and into everyday life.



Firkee Bachchon Ki, April-June 2012, Cover II, Issue 4



Firkee Bachchon Ki, January–March 2012, Issue 3, p. 11 *Firkee Bachchon Ki, April–June 2012, Issue 4, p. 11*

The setting in most government schools continues to be dismal. In such a scenario, the magazine in general offers a different genre of reading material apart from that of the set course curriculum, which breaks the boredom of day-to-day studies.

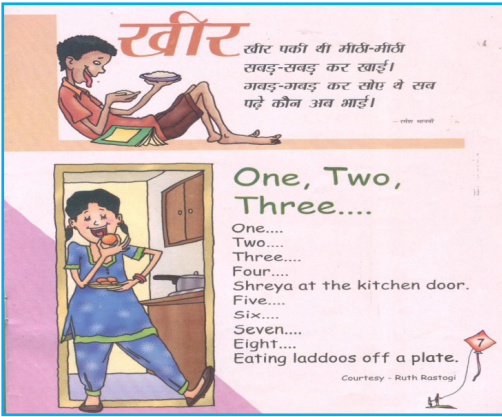


Firkee Bachchon Ki, October–December 2011, Issue 2, p. 9

The school curriculum normally generates monotonous schedule for children. Also, the schools nowadays have insufficient time or opportunity to engage in informal play. A brochure on 'Firkee' has been developed for wider dissemination. The brochure states that the magazine proffers children with plenty of reading materials in the form of rhymes, short stories and narratives, as well as language and numeracy based activities. All these reading materials are linked to issues familiar to the children and are age-appropriate. This in turn generates their interest in the magazine. Firkee in this way keeps hold of children's curiosity and fascination and lead them towards reading. Children's creativity accordingly gets a boost with crafts and activities of the magazine.



Firkee Bachchon Ki, January–March 2012, Issue 3, p. 8



Firkee Bachchon Ki, January–March 2011

Moreover, the magazine is bilingual in nature. As highlighted in the Concept Note on Children Magazine (NCERT) this enables the children to broaden their understanding in Hindi and English languages by exposing them to both. It also led to an unconscious



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awareness of different scripts among young children. The bilingual nature of the magazine also increases the children’s mental ability to acquire knowledge and understanding through thought, senses and imagination. However, while the magazine is, in theory, bilingual, it does not give readers the ‘feel’ of a bilingual work. The cover page is to all practical purposes Hindi: the title, the short poem/narrative, even the subtitle.

The magazine also highlights children’s expressions and creativity by giving place to their drawings and writings. This encourages children to learn by doing through experimentation, imagination and explorations. This section of the magazine encourages the children to



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become writers and illustrators in a very broad sense by prompting self-expression, stimulating creativity, and build feelings of competence and self-worth. Thus such space provided to children enables them to experience the feeling of ownership and also recognises the child as a reader.

In a nutshell, *Firkee* has a mix of reading levels. The magazine is an effort to provide utter joy and pleasure, help develop children's imagination, offer a child time to envisage on experiences and happenings that have to do with real life. It is essential to support children to appreciate writing and illustrations, give children an awareness and recognition of fellow beings and sensitivity to flora and fauna. Hillman (1976) experiences with the contents of the magazine and with its language. Besides developing imagination and creativity, the contents of the magazine generate new ideas and cultivate interests in many things. In keeping with the Early Literacy approach (as enunciated in the Brochure on Early Literacy), in the process children learn more

about the world and the people and things around. It also increases the children's vocabulary and language skills. The magazine is a wonderful opportunity for the young children to cultivate a lifelong interest in literature and reading. As per the Concept Note on Early Literacy States, a child can learn in countless ways, so relying only on the set curriculum of learning can prove to be a setback. Thus, *Firkee* is one such initiative where a child can develop a sense of involvement as a reader, boost his/her creativity and a platform that offers a child unhurried time and opportunity for children to imagine, explore and create.

Firkee Bachchon Ki brought out by NCERT has also begun to inspire clones at regional/state levels. One such attempt is *Chirput*, a children's magazine in Konkani, brought out by Konkani Bhasa Mandal, Goa. Four issues have been published so far. *Chirput* is an example of the continuous academic support and guidance being provided to States/UTs for their Early Grade Reading Programmes.



Conclusion

While the publication is lauded, its dissemination remains a matter of concern. The latest issue of the magazine is distributed among teachers and teacher educators at workshops and training programmes; displayed in NCERT stalls and book fairs and

distributed in schools through state initiatives and SSA funds. Now that the magazine is priced, a subscription form inserted in its pages would facilitate dissemination; however, for that to happen, it needs to be registered. It would be a pity indeed if non-registration leads to children losing out on the delightful magazine.

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