

# 'Society needs to imbibe reading habit among kids'

Sarang Mohapatra

Jugal Kishore Mohapatra, a 78-year-old children's writer, who received Sahitya Akademi's Bal Sahitya Purashkar for 2023, has been promoting book reading habits among children for the last two decades. Mohapatra, who has written over 30 books in Odia and Koshali, suggested steps to promote children's literature in an chat with Minati Singha



will surely motivate me in continuing my work.

■ **Don't you think that reading habits of children has reduced substantially?**

Yes, it has. I have noticed this change among children some years ago and decided to make some efforts to bring some change. I with a few other volunteers adopted three gram panchayats in Titilagarh block where we went to school with story books and distributed them among children. We failed in two gram panchayats and but in one we became successful. Kids in those villages are not only reading books but have also started writing.

■ **What needs to be done to bring children closer to books?**

We cannot blame children alone. Parents, teachers and society play a vital role in imbibing reading habit among them. We must take books to them and also read with them.

■ **What your stories are about?**

I write about moral values, environment protection, science in everyday life. I select my characters from what children see around them and try to give them some lesson in each of the stories. Even fruits and vegetables are characters in my stories.

■ **When a lot of content is available for children in**

**the internet, will story books be of help?**

Despite so many challenges, there is a silver lining. Many individuals I know have taken up this challenge seriously and started mobile libraries and reaching out to children in rural areas. Like every drop counts in making the ocean, these efforts will not go in vain. If a few children get motivated and get moral values from story books then our mission is successful.

■ **What would you suggest to children writers?**

We have been promoting reading habit among children and discussing different issues of children literature. My advice to young writers wo-

uld be to continue reading and writing, get involved in associations, do research, and remain committed to your work.

■ **What do you expect from the state government?**

We have told in different forums that there should be a separate akademi for children's literature like it is in Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Rajasthan. The akademi will support the writers,



who have been creating valuable content for children. Besides, my major concern is after my death what will happen to so many manuscripts that I could not publish due to financial constraint and books I have collected in my life. They must not go waste.

■ **How do you feel after getting the Bal Sahitya Purashkar from the Sahitya Akademi?**

I am happy. I love children a lot and devoted my life to children's literature. With this award I feel the efforts I have made for so many years has been recognised. Though I did not expect the award, it