



Big Little  
Book  
award

# Atanu Roy

Illustrator

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Winner 2016



To Illustrate for Children  
one has to lock away  
his/her ego

## What role can awards play in the children's literature sector?

An award like this will go a long way in recognizing and accepting the idea that 'seeing is also learning'. It is important to know that in any picture book visuals are the basis for it rather than the text. Publishers here have always been text centric and sadly most of them are visually illiterate. This award will hopefully create a healthy competition among illustrators and publishers to come out with better visually rich books for children.

## How did you become a children's illustrator?

I studied in the Air Force Central School in Delhi where there was special emphasis on the arts, the pure joy of it. But the last thing I wanted was to be an art person. It was considered

a sort of a sissy thing in the late sixties. I had science and higher mathematics in school and was also the captain of the athletics team. It was my coach who advised me to follow my gift of art but be an athlete at heart – alone and competitive. When I got into Art College I decided to put everything into this totally alien milieu. Fortunately, I was ‘discovered’ by Rajpal & Sons, well known publishers of serious Hindi literature. The owner and the editor were both extremely art friendly and were instrumental in shaping my career as an illustrator. Meeting the authors was so thrilling and gave me an insight into the great minds like Amrita Pritam, Ageya, Vishnu Prabhakar, Nagarjun and others.

In the late eighties I did a book of alphabets for Frank Brothers. The success of this book opened the floodgates and I have never looked for work since then. My book Kaju and the Shoe won the Children’s Choice Award in 1989. By then I was doing full time illustration for children’s books including illustrating text books with cartoons all over the books in an attempt to provide some relief for the kids! Using humor, something that was a natural gift, in my picture books was a conscious effort to get away from the prevailing didactic and condescending attitude towards literature for children. Also, I realized early on that if one has to work for children one must safely lock away his/her ego and come down to the level of the child and create from his point of view.

### **What was the first story you did for children?**

I designed and illustrated ‘The History of Transport’ for Rajpal & Sons but it was never published. Kaju and the Shoe is therefore my first picture book.

### **Who are some of your favourite authors and why?**

It is very difficult to pick favorites with a huge number of illustrators around the world are doing simply outstanding work. I have always been in awe of Satyajit Ray. He is the only total art person who tried and excelled in all the possible mediums to illustrate. His illustrations, typography, story boards and attention to detail are superb. His movies are an extension of the stark b/w quality of his illustrations.

### **How can new talent be encouraged in this field?**

One thing I found during all my travels and workshops is that there is no dearth of talent in the country. Sadly a large number of them working as illustrators are not trained and lack the attitude. Most art colleges do not have illustration as a subject which must be revived. This has been a core concern of mine for many years. Just a handful of illustrators have been doing most of the work and the pressure of the work is far too much. I have on an average a backlog of about two years at any given time. To ease the pressure and do better work I started working on the idea of starting an academy exclusively for illustrators. It was three years of work that resulted in Riyaaz Academy for Illustrators. The first batch has been outstanding and making waves in the publishing world already.

### Is there any type of project you haven't done yet, but dream of doing?

Maybe yes. I have for some time now wanting to do tribal stories of India. Also there are so many stories from the oral and folk traditions which are gradually vanishing. It is going to be a mammoth task to search, select, translate, find the relevant references and illustrate. My dream is to gather a team and do this for the world market with really good production values.

Another dream is to do books of adapted mythological stories. The idea is to place the stories in the present time with our mythical characters as ordinary people wearing today's clothes .... !! I think this will be a good effort and will have a great market appeal too.

### If you had a piece of advice for aspiring authors, what would it be?

My piece of advice is a rather heavy one. Join the gang only if you are totally committed and prepared to work endless hours in isolation. You must have very high awareness levels besides being a child at heart. It is a very slow and exacting trade and deadlines are often deadly! One must be willing to upgrade skills.

