



# Animated Vs Oral Mother Goose Songs in Developing A Relationship Between Mother and Child

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## Abstract

*With the pervasion of screened media in our present day lives, it has become inevitable to re-envision the mother goose songs through audiovisual media in form of animations. The objective of the study is to understand whether the ways through which these songs have been used in the past by the mothers to connect to their children in the oral traditions are the same for their animations of contemporary lives. The mother goose experiences of children have been explored through focus group of children and in-depth interviews of their mothers. Focus group children are divided into two sets: one is given oral treatment and other is given animated treatment. Study concludes that oral mother goose songs still retain their importance in bringing mothers closer to the child because of the feeling of intimacy they generate when mothers sing them for their kids. However, animated mother goose songs are a visual treat for children which keep them mesmerized for a longer period of time but they have actually failed in developing a relationship between mothers and children because of lack of involvement of mothers and resistance among kids to quit watching animated mother goose songs even after hours. Study recommends that mothers should encourage the habit of co-viewing, limit the screen time and set some rules for watching animated mother goose songs for getting better results. In short, oral mother goose songs are far better in developing a bond between mother and child as compared to animated mother goose songs.*

**Keywords:** *Animated mother goose songs, oral mother goose songs, oral treatment, animated treatment*

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## 1) INTRODUCTION

Mother goose songs are defined as short songs or verses meant for little children who sing them together or at younger ages these songs are sung to them (Galway, 2017, para. 1). This is an ambivalent form of literature that is well versed and timeless meant to tantalize the fascination of young children. They have legacy of enchantment behind them which is knitted across the boundaries of time and space. This benevolent tradition including mysteries, tales, riddles, tongue twisters and jingles is a valued heirloom that is passed from generations to generations (Stages Productions, n.d., p.1).

Mother goose songs have an equivocal ancestry and they are argued to be timeless, dateless, universal, ageless or classless because they give access to various human dilemmas spanning across different times, ages, classes, cultures and geographies (Harries, 2001, p. 3). Researchers believe that very few of them are created by educated or formally literate people as a vast majority is originated by peasants, fishermen, textile workers, domestic women and socially marginalized people who used to express the problem

This relevance of mother goose songs to the modern times has laid foundation for this study by developing an interest in understanding the phenomenon whether the digitalization of these songs have transformed or revolutionized the whole tradition of mother goose songs or not. What may be the possible differences in the reception of animated mother goose songs and oral mother goose songs? How does the role of oral mother goose songs on little children vary from oral to animated mother goose songs in terms of creating a feeling of intimacy between mother and child? The paper is an attempt to answer the above mentioned questions by conducting a focus group of little children and interviews of their mothers.

## 3) METHODOLOGY

For this study, two focus groups having ten participants each ranging from two to four years of age were devised. One group listened to the mother goose songs orally and the other one watched their animations on any digital medium like laptop or tablets. Participants were selected on the basis of snowball sampling to ensure the homogeneity of groups and to reach tech-friendly mothers because most of the educated mothers are not tech-prone and unable to operate devices on their own. Five sessions of each focus group were conducted with the fixed interval of seven days between every session. Moreover, in-depth interviews of the mothers of the children under study are also conducted to understand the difference these songs create in the personality of these children. Following is the list of the mother goose songs that are popular among kids:

Jack-n-Jill

Mistress Mary, quite contrary

Ring around the rosie

Ba Ba black sheep

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall

Ding dong bell

Johnny Johnny yes papa  
If you are happy and you know it  
Three blind mice  
Little Bo Peep  
Rock-a-bye baby  
Incy wincy spider  
London Bridge is falling down  
Yankee Doodle went to town  
It's raining, it's pouring  
Head, shoulders, knees and toes  
Old MacDonald had a farm  
A tooty ta ta  
Mary had a little lamb  
Rain, rain go away  
Little boy blue  
Peter, Peter pumpkin eater  
Finger family  
Hot cross buns  
Are you sleeping brother John  
The old woman who lived in a shoe  
Polly puts the kettle on  
Sing a song of six pence  
What are little boys made of?  
Little Miss Muffet

#### **4) OBSERVATIONS RECORDED DURING FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS OF MOTHERS**

The observations are derived from focus group sessions in which mother goose songs were recited to the children in oral and animated forms and in-depth interviews of mothers of respective children.

#### **5) BONDING BETWEEN MOTHER AND CHILD**

As mentioned earlier, focus groups were divided into two sets depending upon the treatment given to them; hence, the following data is obtained from focus group (oral) sessions and focus group (animated) sessions.

#### **6) FOCUS GROUP (ORAL) SESSIONS' DATA**

In oral focus group sessions, mother goose songs were sung for the children by the mothers of participants. Mothers reported that after the end of every session, children were really enthusiastic for the next one as they kept on talking about the songs listened during that session. This behavior of children is also supported by the literature as Mullen (2017) argues that mother goose songs have the capability of creating emotional bonds between people by mitigating the challenging situations and promoting children's early development (p. 42).

However, these sessions could not last for more than thirty to forty five minutes because of less children's concentration time. They started to lose concentration after first twenty minutes and it was very difficult to keep the momentum of the session constant. They wanted to have fun and involve in mischievous actions after first twenty minutes and researcher could hardly recite few more songs after that.

Most of the mothers told that their children have an ear for this traditional recitation of mother goose songs when they put them in their beds only. This means these songs have not been a part of their daily active routine that is why they do not enjoy them the most. It is true that throughout the history these songs have been used to soothe and calm the children at the time of sleep and this is the basic reason they foster emotional bonding between a mother and a child by making them feel secure and comfortable (Baker & Mackinlay, 2006; Mualem & Klein, 2012; Trehub, 2002).

To retain the concentration of children for a longer period of time, the mothers tried to sing the songs in chorus or by changing the rhythms and tunes. When songs were sung by multiple people in different rhythms and melodies they started enjoying it; hence, resulted in increased concentration time. Moreover, only singing the songs was not enough. So, children were also engaged in fun activities like moving in circles or performing on kids dance songs etc.

By doing so the whole sessions were transformed into singing and playing activities that brought smiles and endless entertainment. Wolfe (2018) argues that nothing can be better than developing a connection with children than with the help of songs and playing together (para. 4). In short, a lot of physical investment was needed by the researchers and mothers of the children for making focus group (oral) sessions a fun for children.

## **7) IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS OF MOTHERS OF CHILDREN OF FOCUS GROUP (ORAL) SESSIONS**

Mothers were asked to sing these songs for their children after the sessions too when they went back to their homes. The response of the mothers was amazing. They said that singing a song for their child not only fills them with a feeling of pleasure but the children also feels that there is no one else between them and their mother. Maria, a mother of two, told the researchers that:

“Whenever my son gets scared, I start singing mother goose songs for him. I do not know what sort of feelings he derived from these songs which put him to ease and comfort and he completely forgets all of his fears. He only knows that his mom is with him and he is protected.”

Her viewpoint strengthened the idea that hearing of soft lullabies generates a sense of security and calmness in young children. They are soporific in nature; hence, stimulates the foundation of parent-child attachment (Vrushali & Shefali, 2017). However, this does not mean these songs are sung to children when they are in

irritating mood but many mothers reported that they do sing these songs for their children even in tranquil moments. Amna is a mother of three and her younger daughter is a part of this focus group, told the researchers:

My daughter is very peaceful. Singing few of her favorite mother goose songs generates a strange feeling of reassurance and solace that brings us so close to each other that we overlook everything in our surroundings and it seems both of us are for each other only.

In a thesis, submitted by Margaret M. Pixely (2015) for Doctoral of philosophy degree in City University of New York, she has argued about the power of these songs in creating a spirit of reassurance. At times when mothers are physically tired or emotionally drained because nothing works in the crying moments of their kids, there is no better option than singing a song for them to express a feeling of reassurance (p. 43).

In short, most of the mothers agreed that mother goose songs have a power to connect them with their child especially on their bed times and in their crying moments. They argue when their kids become so peevish and looking for attention, these songs these songs work magically:

Many mothers said that their children are aggressive and irritable. They do not listen to them when something goes against their wish. Neither their beloved toy nor their favorite food makes them happy. At that time, mothers take help from mother goose songs for consoling their uncontrollable children.

Repeating these lively songs over and over helps the children in laugh and play and stimulates their cheerful behavior (World Health Organization, 2004, p.27). Asna, who is a mother of two and half years old boy and is a practicing physician, told the researchers that:

Singing mother goose songs for my child makes him calm like whenever we adults get upset, we sing for ourselves and it releases our tensions. Similarly, when I sing favorite songs of my child, it makes him happy especially when he is so peevish and irritable.

She further asserted:

It is not like that every song that I sing for my child has the power of making him happy. In fact, I have to develop an idea about his likings and disliking about the songs. At times, I have to repeat his preferred song for hundreds of time until he starts getting bore of it.

Same sort of behavior has been reported by many mothers in previous studies. Corbeil, et al. (2013) have conducted a study which proves that infants have their own choices and preferences about the songs sung to them. They argued that children choose to listen to happier sounds because of their high emotional quality and these songs transmit positive affective characteristics such as love, tenderness and tranquility.

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## **8) FOCUS GROUP (ANIMATED) SESSIONS' DATA**

The focus group (animations) sessions were a fun at a superb level since their beginning. Researchers did not have to invest so much effort for making participants comfortable with them because visual imagery combined with music and rhythm took the children to a roller coaster ride full of fun and adventurous experiences. It was felt in the very first session that these songs are re-envisioned in this era of digital world to create a visual experience for little children that has resulted in more interactive sessions (Hammil, 2015, para. 13) and technological advancements specifically animated videos of mother goose songs have resulted in changed musical experiences for young children (Young, 2008).

It was interesting to note that the concentration span of the entire participants was too long to facilitate by the researchers. This response and behavior of children enforced that screened media is not only playing a pivotal role in the lives of adults but the adaptation of mother goose songs in form of animations have also been adopted by children as screened musical repertoire (Brooks, 2016, p. 83). However, it is ironical that these songs are unable to create a bond between mothers and children because the focus is on audiovisual media not the person operating it. The children have nothing to do who is playing these songs for them but their major concern is what they are watching on screens.

Although the effort was not needed to motivate children to watch animated mother goose songs; nonetheless, developing a bond between mother and children was not less than achieving a milestone. It was important for the researchers to make this experience as meaningful as they could and for that they drew some guidelines from the previous researchers. Many of the preceding researches concluded on the point that talking, dancing, playing, singing and communicating with the children while they are watching multimedia events is really important for making this experience worthy for their learning and development (Young, 2003).

Moreover, presence and involvement of adults in music experiences of young children is considered as a motivation that provides a generative potential for expressive and affect-rich musical experiences happening across time and space (Young, 2005, p. 297). So, researchers and mothers tried to gain the attention of children by using music-like performances within vocalizations along with dance-like movements while watching animations of mother goose songs.

Therefore, mothers should monitor, facilitate and assist the children when they are exposed to these songs to keep themselves attached with them. These musical interactions can only prove them fruitful in terms of creating an intimacy and positive relationship between a mother and a child when there is complete involvement of an adult (Creighton, 2014, p. 3).

## **9) IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS OF MOTHERS OF FOCUS GROUP (ANIMATED) SESSIONS**

Interestingly, the mothers of the children of focus group (animated) sessions were really happy with the level of amusement that their children had while watching the animations of these songs. Most of the mothers reported that their children can sit in front of these animations for hours and hours. They can manage their household so well by making their children busy with electronic gadgets.

However, researchers had to make them sure that the purpose of this activity is not to check the involvement of children or attractiveness of these animations. Instead, the study intends to explore the role of these songs in creating a bond between caregiver and child. So, to meet this objective, mothers have to stay with their children while watching animated mother goose songs and check whether these songs are fulfilling the purpose of bringing them closer to their little ones or not.

When the mothers started considering this aspect of animated mother goose songs, their observations were quite disappointing. They felt that these songs are taking their children away from them into another world of fascination where there is no space for a loving or caring mother. Ayesha, a mother of three children from whom the youngest was the part of this focus group, reported:

My son only comes to me only for the fulfillment of his physical needs like he has to go to washroom or he needs something to eat. Even, at times, I feel he is hungry but he doesn't demand food because he is not ready to quit watching these animations. Initially, I was happy that he is engaged in an activity that can retain his interest for a longer period of time but now I am quite concerned about his physical health as he neither eats properly nor takes rest.

She further elaborated the unconstructive role of these animations by adding: He used to get very excited when his elder sisters came back from their school. He still gets happy on their arrival but he does not wait for them to play with him. After giving a mere sign of excitement, he starts insisting for playing these animations. Her viewpoint got support from Naureen, mother of seven. Her youngest daughter is almost three years old and was a part of this study. She endorsed what Ayesha reported by saying:

My daughter Javeria has become so aloof and distant from the whole family. Her father and all of her siblings miss her welcoming note when they come back home. She has made her own world of these songs and it seems she is living in the world of these characters.

Almost similar observations were recorded by other mothers who felt that animated mother goose songs have become so important in the lives of their children that they have replaced the needs of human interaction and social participation. This means children are becoming more reliant on technologies and this has degraded the quality of family conversations (Drago, 2015, p. 16)).



This put researchers into serious trouble because physical and psychological health of children cannot be compromised for the sake of study; hence setting few rules for watching mother goose songs:

No mother will leave her child alone when he will be watching animations of mother goose songs. The adult will work as facilitator and monitor the behavior of child. Time limit of two hours per day was decided for children as excessive screen time may damage their physical health. Child was not allowed to watch the animations for more than one hour in one sitting.

First rule was welcomed by the children whole heartedly as they felt the attention of their mother when they were watching these animations. However, it was very difficult to abide by the second rule because many children get unmanageable when mothers tried to turn off the animations. Different mothers applied different tactics to handle their children. Tehseen, mother of two young children who were the part of this study, reported:

It was very difficult to take the mobile from the hand of my children to turn off the animations. They get out of my control whenever I try to take the cell phone from them. Now, I turn off the internet device and animations automatically stop running on the phone. After that, I say to my kids that your cartoons are tired now and they want to take some sleep. Only then, I am able to get my phone back from my children peacefully.

Anum is a mother of three and her younger two are a part of this study. She said: I usually do not give any electronic gadget in the hands of children because their light is extremely dangerous to the eyesight. I prefer to make them watch these animations on my LCD and my technique is to set the timer on LCD on which it automatically turns off and I say to my children due to some problem in electricity supply, we have our power out.

However, in certain other cases, mothers reported a positive behavior of children about the rules of this study. Qurat-ul-Ain is a mother of one little daughter and she is very happy with her new schedule of watching animated mother goose songs because it gives her immense pleasure to see her daughter enjoying. Whenever I turn on my laptop for my own work, she starts crying but when I engage her with me to watch animations, she sits so quietly with me and asks little questions about the things she watch on screen.

Maryam is another mother who said that spending peaceful time with kids is really difficult for her but she feels these animations have made it easier:

My sons are really hyperactive and give me tough time in managing my household chores. At times, I get so annoyed of all the mess they create because it seems I am busy all the time in floor pick-ups. If I sit with them to watch mother goose songs, they work magically by providing them a peaceful leisure time at least for an hour. This shows that many of the negative effects that are a result of media exposure can be controlled simply by parental monitoring. Many of the pediatricians and child



psychologists encourage careful parental involvement in children's media time to make it healthy for them (Gentile, et al., 2014).

However, the role of these animations in creating a bonding between mothers and child is still questionable because many of the mothers argued it to be an interesting way of making children's leisure time fruitful but they do not consider them even closer to the impact of oral mother goose songs in terms of creating a bond with their child. Almost all the mothers have shown an agreement on the point that:

They do enjoy watching animations on mother goose songs but we do not think that these animations can generate the feeling of intimacy between us and our children. When we orally sing these songs, it creates a feeling that interaction of two individuals is directed by the immediacy of the living moments unlike watching animations which have no room for live interaction.

Mothers added further:

Singing orally for the children is dynamic in nature because we can change the songs depending upon the moods of our children. We can adjust the pitch of our voice and tone of the song according to the liking of our children. The response of the children is the heart of infant directed oral singing.

They believe oral singing is more interactive because it depends upon moods and choices of mother and child both. Animated mother goose songs cannot replace the power of spoken words because the emotions that are associated with oral singing have not disappeared yet even in twenty first century. The settings have changed but the power and use of oral singing has remained same because the oral songs breathe with the breath of singer (Bruchac, 2010, para. 5).

## **10) RESULTS**

The study started with few broad based questions mentioned in the introduction and data is collected by above mentioned methods to get the answers of these questions. First question was whether the digitalization of mother goose songs have transformed or revolutionized the whole tradition of mother goose songs or not. The study found that overall oral tradition of storytelling, singing folk songs and ballads and kids songs is endangered because of growing usage of technology. Kids are watching cartoons, movies and also playing digital games on mobile phones. They neither enjoy nor have they time to listen to oral mother goose songs. Therefore, animations of mother goose songs have given life to this endangered species of children literature by making it entertaining and vibrant.

Second question was what may be the possible differences in the reception of animated mother goose songs and oral mother goose songs? It is found that there is a difference between patterns of reception of oral and animated mother goose songs and first one is found to be interactive but not engaging for a longer period of time. However, later one is able to retain the attention of kids for hours and hours. Oral mother goose songs are less attractive whereas animated mother goose songs are lucrative, colorful and amusing. This is why when kids listen to former ones, they

start getting bore after forty to forty five minutes. However, in case of animations, mothers need to put a lot of effort in turning off their gadgets. Hence, there is a drastic difference between reception of these songs as oral are merely utilizing their auditory sense whereas animated mother goose songs are utilizing their visual and auditory senses both.

The third question was how does the role of oral mother goose songs on little children vary from oral to animated mother goose songs in terms of creating a feeling of intimacy between mother and child? The study found the role of oral mother goose songs in developing a linkage between mother and children is remarkable whereas animated mother goose songs have failed to develop this bondage because kids do not pay attention to their mothers instead they get lost in the fantasy of the virtual world. Most of the mother sings mother goose songs orally at the time of putting their kids to bed and this time is exclusively mother-child time which give child a feeling of intimacy by bringing him/her closer to the mother. However, animated mother goose songs are a part of active routine of kids and mothers are also busy in doing their household chores; thus widening the bridge between mother and child.

## **11) DISCUSSION**

Qualitative descriptive analysis of the findings have revealed that the purpose of singing these songs to children is to establish a connection between mother and child, regulate the emotional experiences of early lives of children, to express the feelings and handle a peevish child while dealing with little children. There are certain secondary objectives that are met automatically by these songs like development of language in infants, understanding of cultural practices and connecting to the past memories (Pixley, 2015, p.65).

Study finds out that children feel secure, comfortable and intimate when mothers sing mother goose songs for them. On the contrary, animated mother goose songs were a fabulous learning and entertaining experience but their impact is found to be negative in terms of creating mother child bondage. Mothers have to invest a lot of effort to make the children feel their presence but they failed almost every time because the children gets spell bound by animated mother goose songs.

Animated mother goose songs lack the feeling of warmth, serenity and affection which oral singing has because while listening to the voice of mother child clings to her physically and may feels her emotions, vibrations, spinning, bouncing of vital organs of her body; hence, oral singing is multidimensional and multisensory (Young, 1995, p. 51). This is why oral mother goose songs facilitate a deeper understanding of the emotions related to mother hood and response of children towards feelings of their mothers: thus, making it a sentimental experience (Baker & Mackinlay, 2006, p. 147).

Therefore, oral mother goose songs are bringing the bridges between mother and child whereas animated mother geese songs are resulting in detachment of child from mother. Moreover, oral singing is specific for a child, however these animations are meant for a broader audience and this visible difference between the

receivers of these songs has also transformed their function too. Oral mother goose songs work while putting the babies to their bed but animated mother goose songs are used to handle irritable and peevish children (Brooks, 2016, p. 94).

However, certain other factors also come to the light by this study that adults have to make their presence feel by getting involved with children to foster a healthy relation between them and their children through these songs. Moreover, how a child responds to these songs also depends upon his nature and personality traits. Children vary in their habits, characteristics and behaviors. Few of them are very aggressive and obstinate whereas some are polite and flexible. It depends upon the mothers to handle them according to their personalities. This is especially very important in case of animated mother geese songs because technology is not a blessing or a curse in itself; it is its usage which makes it either.

## **12) CONCLUSION**

Establishment of bonding between caregiver and child is the basic concern of this study and it is found that children display more positive behavior towards their caregivers when they sing for them orally because by doing so they can adjust the tone, pitch and style of the song according to the demands and needs of child. Moreover, physical closeness is also another element that helps in creating a feeling of serenity and protection between child and caregiver.

On the contrary, study concluded that role of animated mother goose songs in bridging the gaps between child and caregiver is quite disappointing. They can help the mothers in handling their children but the way they make children isolated and detached from their family makes the decision of exposing them to these songs highly poignant and at times, the poignancy of the situation becomes inescapable for mothers especially.

## **13) LIMITATIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES**

The study would have been better if it was conducted in natural settings through field observation method. But keeping in mind the difficulties of dealing with the little children in natural settings, researchers chose to conduct focus group and in-depth interviews of mothers or caregivers.

For this study, the similarity in demographics of participants was ensured. All of them belong to educated families of upper middle class. Children of broken families or single parents were deliberately avoided by the researchers to ensure the unanimity of the focus group participants. The diverse range of children belonging to different demographics may vary in their psychographics too and any study incorporating children belonging to different backgrounds may generate a different understanding of this phenomenon.

## 14) FUTURE DIRECTIONS

For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct a longitudinal study because it is such an intense topic that cannot be covered completely within a limited time frame. If children will be kept under observation for a longer period of time, many other valuable observations may be recorded.

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