

Nationalism, Genre and Childhood in Colonial Indian Children's Literature

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Though Childhood Studies has been gradually diversifying, children's literature of the Global South is still understudied. This has resulted in a normative understanding of the concept of 'multiple childhoods,' a concept that is gradually permeating the field in opposition to universalist global formulations of childhood which fail to account for both the history and the experiences of non-Western, marginalized childhoods. Postcolonial scholarship rarely addresses the role of children's literature in nationalist discourses. Moreover, the pre-existing literature on colonial childhoods is dominated by historical and sociological analyses, relegating the role of the literary, a highly prominent public sphere in anti-colonial debates, to a peripheral position.

My dissertation addresses this lacuna by arguing for the centrality of the literary and concept of childhood to the understanding of political autonomy in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial India and highlighting the primacy of age categories to colonial practices and postcolonial policies. It does so by approaching colonial childhood through the reception and consumption of nineteenth-century British literature and ideas of childhood in colonial India, and their impact on the production and publication of Indian children's literature, with a focus on Bengali texts. My goal is to track the role of the literary in the creation and circulation of conversations about childhood within the juvenile periphery in India and to trace its political import within the Indian nationalists' nascent visions of nationhood. My dissertation also demonstrates that within India, Bengal's position as a forerunner in both nationalist politics and colonial education uniquely situates works of Bengali children's literature as potent political

artifacts and signifiers of contemporary visions of nationhood. Examining colonial children's literature can lead to an epistemological alternative to "global, universal" ideals of childhood which originated in the 19th century in Europe. Ultimately, it radically challenges postcolonial scholarship's neglect of the role children's literature in nationalist discourses by demonstrating the processes by which the ontology of childhood determines transnational literary practices of colonialism and vice versa. Central to my argument lies the claim that analyzing conceptions of childhood is crucial to understanding the colonial enterprise. At the intersection of literary studies, colonial history, nationalist politics, and the history of the book, my project is positioned to investigate this claim.

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1.0 Introduction

“Books transported you always into the familiar solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable normality of real Girls and Boys who went a-sleighbing and built snowmen, ate potatoes, not rice, went about in socks and shoes from morning until night and called things by their proper names...Books transported you always into Reality and Rightness, which were to be found Abroad. Thus it was that I fashioned Helen, my double...No, she couldn’t be called my double. She was the Proper Me. And me, I was her shadow hovering about in incompleteness” (Hodge 89).

-Merle Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey*

Fantasizing about an ideal version of the Self is not an unusual thing to see in children. Children have been known to create imaginary friends or fantastic versions of their own selves, creating a split or an Other in order to imaginatively invest in a life they don’t often have access to. However, in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Cynthia Davis’s fantastic Other is not merely a result of her sense of inadequacy in comparison to a personal, individual ideal, but in fact, a reflection of a cultural and national identity marked and marred by the effects of colonialism. The “real Girls and Boys” whose “enviable normality” Cynthia is infatuated with are those who live in an Abroad where snowmen and sleighs abound and potatoes are the staple food (Hodge 89). These children wear shoes, like her double Helen, occupy houses with firesides, have strawberry jam and scones with their tea and spend their vacations in apple and pear orchards inhabited by chaffinches and blue tits, cowslips and honeysuckles (Hodge 90). Readers quickly recognize that Cynthia’s ideal child is an English child. And thus Helen, who is not an imaginary friend but an idealized Other, becomes the “Proper” Cynthia, not just by virtue of being imaginary and

malleable, but by virtue of her Englishness. This Englishness, which gradually becomes the “Reality and Rightness” of Cynthia’s existence, is not something she manages to internalize in its entirety, causing a schism in her self-identity, a hierarchized split in her sense of self, in which she emerges as an imperfect “shadow hovering about in incompleteness” (Hodge 90).

What was, and still is, amazing to me is that Cynthia’s childhood, which happened in Trinidad, is not an isolated phenomenon. Our school libraries in post-independence India were full of British and American children’s books and many hundreds of children like me (urban, middle class, and educated in an English medium school) devoured “the classics” in the form of an Anglo-American canon. When English is the language of both prestige and economic currency, knowing the very rich tradition of vernacular children’s literature which existed in India (esp. in Bengali) simultaneously became a secondary occupation; it was important to know “the classics” first. This fracture in the education of colonial children is something N’gugi Wa Thiong’o also writes about in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of language in African Literature*. In the chapter titled “The Language of African literature,” N’gugi systematically demonstrates how the break between the languages of a child’s domestic and familial conditioning and their formal education in which, he says, “English became *the* main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education... the official and the magic formula to colonial elitedom” (Thiong’o 11-12). He outlines his own his own colonial education mentioning, among others, Dickens, Thomas Hughes, Rider Haggard, R.L. Stevenson, Walter Scott, G.B. Shaw, Alan Paton, John Buchan, Captain W.E. Johns and a college education of “Chaucer to T.S. Eliot with a touch of Graham Greene” (Thiong’o 12). The experience of colonial education and its imposition of European languages, in his opinion, broke the harmony between written and spoken languages that comprises a child’s world, and led to a situation

where “Learning, for a colonial child, became a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience” (Thiong’o 16). This created a sense of cultural alienation, a disjuncture between the child’s identity and his/her natural and social environment, as well as a systematic undervaluing of the child’s native culture, leading to a sense of shame and denigration to be associated with African culture.

In a TED talk called “The Danger of the Single Story,” the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie tells a similar story when she talks about her earliest childhood reading, which comprised of British and American books. Thus, as a child, the characters in the stories she wrote were blue and white-eyed, played in the snow, ate apples and drank ginger beer. Kenya in the 1950s, Trinidad in the 1960s, Nigeria in the 1980s, India in the 1990s...all these individual childhood experiences were molded by the experience of British colonialism these countries had undergone. However, according to Mitzi Myers, “despite the theoretical bombardment to which we have long been subjected, despite the recognition that all texts (and interpretations) are historically and ideologically conditioned, despite the preoccupation with Difference, the Other, the Colonized, the Repressed, and the Marginal, it seldom occurs to the contemporary critical elite that works for, about, and/ or by children are ideal investigatory sites for posing questions about alterity and the dynamics between the metropolitan center and its peripheries” (Myers, “Colonizing Casablanca”). Even a perfunctory review of the fields of postcolonial studies and childhood studies immediately reveals two crucial things: firstly, that postcolonial studies has restricted engagement with discourses of childhood (beyond the children’s rights or human rights conversation) and even less so with children’s literature; and secondly, that children’s literature (maybe not childhood studies to the same degree), is not engaging very deeply with postcolonial children’s literature. The mutual engagement of these two fields in critical conversations has

been limited and has not led to any long form, sustainable conversations about colonial/postcolonial childhoods or children's literature.

“How has the discipline of ‘childhood studies’ intellectually engaged the diversity of children's lives across the globe, while keeping in mind the hegemonic circulation of the singular framing of an ideal childhood within global policy discourse?” asks Sarada Balagopalan, positioning her project on the connections between marginalized childhood, education and labour in postcolonial India in opposition to universalist formulations of childhood (Balagopalan 7). Emanating from a tendency to exemplify modern western childhood, these apparently global ideals of childhood fail to account for both the history and the lived realities of non-Western childhoods, especially of marginalized populations. This critique of the ethnocentric nature of the disciplines and discourses investigating global childhoods is now becoming increasingly common. Audra A. Diptee and David Trotman launch a similar critique in a special issue on “Childhood in the Global South” published by *Atlantic Studies*, pointing out that applying theoretical frameworks derived from the historiography and study of Western childhoods onto childhoods in the Global South would be to perpetuate colonial structures of epistemology. Modern postcolonial childhoods have been shaped by the legacies of colonialism, since the perpetuation of colonial structures and institutions over decades were dependent on the capacity, on the part of European powers, to negotiate and order the lives of succeeding generations of children and to shape colonial childhoods into yielding acquiescing, compliant native subjects. “In the simplest of terms, at the heart of the colonial enterprise, there was a battle of children and youth,” assert Diptee and Trotman, a claim which has not yet been fully explored by either the field of postcolonial studies, or childhood studies. The rest of *Atlantic Studies* issue go on to examine childhood in the Global South from various disciplinary approaches including history,

legal history, music studies, sociology and anthropology. In this multidisciplinary milieu of perspectives, the omission of the literary is significant, leading to the question of what role children's literature plays in the production, distribution and consumption of ideas of childhood within the Global South?

While Childhood Studies has been gradually diversifying to include the global south, children's literature of what Robert Young calls the "tricontinent" of Asia, Africa and Latin America is still neglected or understudied, resulting in a restricted and normative understanding of the concept of 'multiple childhoods' which has come to inform the field (Balagopalan 12). Many scholars have commented on the Eurocentrism, and particularly, the Anglo-American domination of the field. Emer O'Sullivan acknowledges this problem in her book *Comparative Children's Literature* when she says, "Most descriptive models are based on developments in the industrialized countries of north-west Europe, the birthplace of children's literature, and are often presented as universal rather than culture-specific accounts of - for instance - German-language, English-language or West European children's literature" (O'Sullivan 45). Thus, the values and virtues of Western childhood, if we can consider "Western" as a monolithic concept, has shaped twentieth century humanities and social science scholarship produced about children. Allison James and Alan Prout, in their book, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Studies of Childhood* have also noted that the older paradigm of childhood prevailing in childhood studies, is a particularly Western one, which has been elevated and projected at the level of the universal and global (James and Prout 7-35). Given the diverse colonial histories across global settings, the differences in childhood experiences can become important filters for understanding the various kinds of behavioral scripts available to, or provided to children, across geo-temporal locations, enabling us to

visualize an alternative non-Western epistemology of childhood, further problematizing the already troubled idea of a “universal childhood.”

When stories or ideas travel along paths determined by imperial processes, they evolve from artistic creations to powerful ideological and political artifacts. The children’s literature imported to and produced within the colonies influence the subjectivity and position of the colonial child. They carry with them concepts of childhood and ideas about children which can, in turn, lead to a culture of submission or resistance. In this context, Donnarae MacCann writes, “Colonialist children’s books are agents of art that help produce a colonial based socialization” (MacCann 186). The dispersal of people from the metropole to the rest of the colonies was accompanied by a movement of texts, ideas and ideologies. According to Jean Webb, “Wherever the world map was colored pink by the march of imperialism, so English children’s literature appeared. During their early histories, the colonies, which also for a time included America, were economically unable to produce their own books for children. Reading materials were imported from the home country, the seat of industrial power in the nineteenth century, and therefore the ideological forces derived from imperialist England were also carried along” (McGillis, 71).¹ And in a “colonial based socialization,” especially a conflicted and complex space like that of Bengal in the nineteenth century, the introduction, production, proliferation and transmission of texts for children become a matter of national importance.

¹ Books were not imported, but also printed by missionaries using printing presses donated by various societies such as the Society for the Production of Christian Knowledge. Obviously, these books were also heavily steeped in ideology, importing ideas about religion, childhood and education.

So why is there little or limited critical conversation about colonial and postcolonial children's literature? I say limited because some of these conversations do exist but they exhibit signs of veering off, that is to say, they start off doing something, or claiming to follow a certain postcolonial trajectory of thought, but end up tangentially doing something which may or not be in the vicinity of such an analysis. There are three main trends. Many of these conversations begin with a claim to postcolonialism, or at least internationalism, but eventually become about diversity or multiculturalism, mainly drawing their definitions from US racial politics. There are books which portray various cultures simultaneously but don't necessarily include cultures from the postcolonial world. So, for example, in Peter Hunt's *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (1996) all the articles on the theory, criticism, genres and context of children's literature are contributed by British, American, Australian and Canadian writers and the book itself is restricted to the English-speaking world. Even when non-first world contexts are touched upon, it is to give brief accounts of the works or a brief publication history of that area, ranging from a paragraph to two or three pages. Such an approach reveals a narrow engagement with internationalism as well as the colonial experience. There are many books about images of Africa or the Caribbean or India in English children's literature (Karen Sands O'Connor's *Soon Come Home to this Island* (2008) comes to mind), or about children's literature about the postcolonial world, but not many about children's literature emerging from the postcolonial world or about postcolonial childhoods. So, what begins with a claim to postcolonialism, still remains a Euro-centric gaze. The second trend is to treat world literature on a case-by-case basis and there are collections which do so, beginning with claims of postcoloniality but ultimately becoming an assortment of texts from various parts of the world, leaning heavily towards Europe, UK, USA, Australia and Canada, with a few token chapters on

books from other places. Cases in point would be Roderick McGillis's *Voices of the Others* (2013) and Christopher Kelen and Bjorn Sundmark's *The Nation in Children's Literature* (2013). There are also books dealing with individual countries as case studies, but the arguments made are limited in their connections between coloniality/postcoloniality and childhood.

Thirdly, there are books which do focus on colonialism and postcolonialism, but it's usually restricted to colonialism within Europe and settler colonies, like Clare Bradford's *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's literature* (2007), a comparative project which focuses on postcolonial readings of the indigenous literatures of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and USA. Or Mavis Reimer's *Home Words: Discourses of Children's Literature in Canada* (2008), dealing only with Canada, as the name suggests. What each of these trends misses is the whole world of military and plantation colonies that make up major parts of global colonial history. And what the entire critical conversation about postcolonial children's literature misses is something which Diptee and Trotman emphasize in their essay: that non-Western childhood cannot be studied on the same terms as the Euro-American canon, which dominates the field, since most of them have been developed to address Western concepts of childhood (if "Western childhood" can be regarded as a monolithic notion). Nevertheless, in the process of asserting so, I have been constantly reminded of the fact that "colonization was not "a single, coherent project,"" (Diptee and Trotman 439) and that any attempt to develop an alternative theoretical framework has to be rooted in an awareness of the multiplicity of historical contexts. Conversations about colonial or postcolonial childhoods should be skeptical not only about generalizations or "universalizations" about childhood, but also of the idea of a homogenous or ahistorical colonialism.

In this dissertation, I extend Diptee and Trotman's claims to explore formulations of childhood in the Global South and focusing on discourses of childhood in colonial India as a means of accessing alternative histories of childhood and children's literature, while simultaneously contributing to an expanded understanding of the discursive uses of multiple childhoods. Children's literature emerging from the former colonies can create or enable visions of power and hegemony that have the potential to replicate endlessly the colonial hierarchies of power by inculcating in young minds historical legacies of inequality. Or, these texts can move towards the decolonization and liberation of knowledge by enacting border thinking and decolonizing young minds. Engagement in such a project entails tracing how ideas about childhood and cultural commodities like children's literature travel along paths carved out by processes of imperialism and examining the relations between British children's literature and colonial and postcolonial children's literature. Specifically, childhood in India has to be considered as a product of Mary Louise Pratt terms as "the contact zone," constructed equally yet differently by those invested in colonial and nationalist projects, with colonial children, native children, princely children and Anglo-Indian children, all raised by people with varying political motivations and ideological alliances involved in an atmosphere of political and cultural conflict. Thus, my conceptualization of such a project is also necessarily as a comparative one, tracing the amalgamation of individual strains of British and Indian colonial cultures which formed discourses of childhood in pre-independence India.

The study of Indian childhoods in colonial era has been mostly restricted to historical, sociological and anthropological approaches. Balagopalan's claim that Western paradigms are inadequate to incorporate or account for the experiential authenticities of global multiplicities of childhood has been echoed by historian Satadru Sen, who indicates the unstable nature of

metropolitan assumptions of childhood in *Colonial Childhoods* and argues that, “When the normative model of childhood was taken into the colony, it was destabilized further” (Sen 1). The conflation of categories such as childhood and native subjectivity has been remarked on by historians other than Sen. Ashish Nandy asserts the inherent connection between childhood and colonialism in his essay on “Reconstructing Childhoods,” claiming that phrases such as “child-like” and “childish” were used to characterize native subjects as noble savages or to view them through the lens of rebellious primitivism. Viewed as distorted mirror images of metropolitan children, Indian colonial children occupied the oxymoronic and unstable category of “native childhood,” while being simultaneously mobilized for both colonial and nationalist projects as Sen claims. Sen goes on to expand on these formulations of childhood by exploring what he calls the “juvenile periphery of India,” “a shifting and productive zone at the edge of the modern — the colonial horizon of the metropolitan, the universal, the national, the middle class and the authoritative” an integral part of the nature of childhood, through institutions such as reformatories, colonial schools, prisons and homes (Sen *Colonial Childhoods* 4). In other words, the juvenile periphery, an unstable, marginalized and interdisciplinary site of production of discourses of childhood, mostly unnoticed and understudied by scholars, but a significant contributor to and constituent of the idea of nation. The noticeable absence in these conversations is the position of the literary in the juvenile periphery of colonial India.

Reading and writing, amidst a culture of nascent nationalism, takes on a political color and integrally informs the colonial experience. Imperialist expansion in India depended not only on the military might of the British, but also on the processes of cultural colonization. The acceptance of this cultural colonization by the people of the colonies, a result of the simultaneous sense of their own cultural inferiority along with the recognition of the colonizer’s culture as

superior, imbues the processes of colonization with a sense of permanence. The debates about education which flourished in India in the nineteenth century can be seen as evidence of the British recognition of the long-term cultural effects of colonization. Though the British, especially those with a more missionary bent of mind, were interested in providing education to Indians, their motives were primarily directed by their desire to win over the trust of the Indians and to create a class of ‘middle-men’, educated Indians who would benefit from British rule, and would thus remain loyal to their rulers. The content and medium of this education remained a matter for debates which continued over the first half of the nineteenth century, with the legislators unable to decide between a vernacular, traditionalist system of education, or a western, liberal one. Gradually, with the Charter Act of 1813, Mills Dispatch of 1817, The Education Act passed in 1835, and the Wood’s dispatch of 1854, the decision was made in favour of a Western, liberal, rationalist mode of education, to be imparted in English. Supriya Goswami, in her book *Colonial India in Children’s Literature*, quotes from Thomas Babington Macaulay’s infamous “Minutes” on Indian Education where he declares,

“I feel...that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern [-] a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave to refine the vernacular dialects of this country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for the conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.”²

² Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute recorded in the General Department by Thomas Babington Macaulay, law member of the governor-general’s council, dated 2 February 1835.” In Supriya Goswami, *Colonial India in*

Somewhat unexpectedly, given their aim, these educational reforms and the resultant increase in literacy were responsible, among other reasons, for the rise and proliferation of Bengali children's literature, in the nineteenth-century. Though literature for children did exist before that, they were either transmitted orally, during story-telling sessions by mothers or grandmothers, or were printed versions of the oral forms. These stories consisted of myths and ballads, rhymes and riddle, legends of heroes, folk tales, stories from the Indian epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, from the *Upanishads*, *Puranas* and the *Panchatantra*. In the early nineteenth century, as a result of the new educational policies and because of the Bengali Renaissance, books for children began to be published. The earliest children's literature mostly consisted of textbooks and children's periodicals, educational and didactic in nature. According to Goswami, "The early nineteenth-century colonial educational policies, supported by progressive Bengalis like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who wished to reform Bengali society through the medium of mass education, led to the establishment of schools and colleges, which in turn necessitated the publication of textbooks for use in these institutions, particularly at the primary level" (Goswami 139). Some of the texts she mentions are *Nitikatha [Conduct Tales]* (1818), Tarachand Datta's *Manoranjanetihas [Pleasurable History]* (1819), Raj Kamal Sen's *Hitopodesha [Counsel with Benevolence]* (1820), Radha Kanta Deb's *Bangla Shiksha Grantha [An Instructional Book of Bengali]* (1821), Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's *Varna Parichay [Know your Alphabet]* (1855) and Madan Mohan Tarkalankar's primer *Shishu Shikhya [Lessons for Children]* (1850-55). Apart from these publications, the late nineteenth century, especially 1870s onwards, witnessed the

Children's Literature (New York, Routledge, 2012), 119. For more on the introduction of English education in India, refer to Vishwanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition. New York and West Sussex: Columbia UP, 2014.

mushrooming of a large number of children's magazines, out of which some of the most famous ones were Keshab Chandra Sen's *Balak Bondhu [Friend of Children]* (1878), *Sakha [Friend]* (1884), *Balak [The Child]* (1885) and continuing into the twentieth century *Sandesh* (1913) by U.Ray, Sudhir Sarkar's *Mouchak* (1920) and Hemen Ray's *Rangmashal*. These magazines published a variety of essays, historical, as well as political, travelogues, short stories and poems.

My dissertation hopes to shift the peripheral position of colonial and postcolonial children's literature scholarship to a more prominent site within the field of children's literature. In the case of India, arguably, the most well-known book on colonial Indian children's literature is Shibaji Bandopadhyay's monograph *Gopal-Rakhal Dvandasamas: Upanibeshbad O Bangla Sishu Sahitya (The Gopal Rakhal Dialectic: Colonialism and Children's Literature in Bengal)* which combines literary theory, sociology, history, political psychological and semiotics to trace the binary of "good boy-bad boy" in Bengali children's literature and its function in Bengal's colonial history. Other notable works on colonial children's literature include Gauri Vishwanathan's history of English literary education in colonial India called *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, Supriya Goswami's work on Anglo-Indian childhood and Anglo-Indian childhood in colonial India called *Colonial India in Children's Literature*, and Nivedita Sen's *Family, School and Nation: The Child and Literary Constructions in 20th-Century Bengal*. Meenakshi Bharat's *The Ultimate Colony: The Child in Postcolonial Fiction*, and Michelle Superle's *Contemporary English-Language Indian Children's Literature: Representations of Nation, Culture, and the New Indian Girl* both deal with postcolonial childhoods and children's literature in India. Attempting to unite these disparate conversations, my dissertation asks how did Indian children's literature help construct and circulate conversations about children within the juvenile periphery in India? What role does the literary

play in formulating and framing conversations about childhood and nationhood in colonial India? Out of a variety of intersected childhoods, what idea of childhood is made available and circulated amongst reading children and what were the reading materials available to them? The importance of literature, especially in the vernacular, is attested by the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 and the Press Act of 1910, which were formulated with the aim of suppressing and controlling anti-colonial sentiment. In such an atmosphere, how did Indian children's literature formulate and disperse conversations about childhood and nationhood? If the juvenile periphery of India simultaneously resisted and perpetuated the colonial project, what stances were to be found in the children's literature of colonial India? How did British children's literature and ideas about childhood circulating in India impact the Bengali Children's literature and the children's literature publishing industry? And most importantly, responding to Diptee and Trotman's assertion, what role does childhood and children's literature play in the colonial enterprise that was India and the resulting national movement that emerged out of the political hotbed of the British Raj?

My project, *Nationalism, Genre, and Childhood in Colonial Indian children's literature* argues for the centrality of the literary and concepts of a "juvenile peripheral site" to the understanding of political autonomy in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial India. It also highlights the primacy of age categories to colonial practices and postcolonial policies. I examine the reception and consumption of different genres of British Golden Age children's literature such as fantasy, adventure stories, forms such as periodicals and constructs such as the Romantic child, demonstrate their influence on the production of Bengali children's literature and their transformation into potent political artifacts within India's struggle for decolonization. My choice of Bengal was dictated by its position as a forerunner in both children's literature and

nationalist politics, as well as my knowledge of the Bengali language which allowed me to study indigenous responses to British children's texts in their untranslated forms. The amalgamation of inherited ideological stances with indigenous textual transculturation and anti-colonial resistance situated childhood in colonial India within a "contact zone" as defined by Mary Louise Pratt. Tracing the individual strains of British and Indian culture as well as the transnational literary strands which have gone into the formation of discourses in pre-independence India has therefore necessarily been a comparative, bilingual project.

1.1 Method

One of the questions which is a constant driving force behind this project is "Why this strange veering off by children's literature scholars when writing about colonial encounters?" What are the methodological problems and the politics behind this underdevelopment in scholarship? Some of the problems arise from the difficult process of studying something that has been on the move, something that has traveled, in this case, epistemologies of childhood which purport to make universal claims about ontologies of childhood. And whether it is people, ideas, commodities or theories, as Said points out, "movement into a new environment is never unimpeded." In "Travel Theory," one of the essays in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Edward Said acknowledges the movement and circulation of ideas across contexts. Having established the "wordliness" or the socio-cultural situatedness of texts earlier on in the book, Said devotes this chapter to examining the processes of the circulation of ideas. Acknowledgement of the importance of movement of theory, according to him, is significant in infusing a fresh breath of life into the field of literary studies. He outlines a pattern of three or

four stages which determine the movement of ideas: a point of origin, the distance or the various contexts the idea moves through to arrive at a point of reception, the conditions of the point of reception which makes acceptance of the idea possible, and finally, the transformation of the idea into something new, functioning differently in a new site (Said 226).

The importance of having a methodology rooted in travel is also affirmed by James Clifford. In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, he not only critiques ethnographic methodology for prioritizing roots before routes, and dwelling over travel, he sees history itself as a “process of locating oneself in space and time. And a location, in the perspective of this book, is an itinerary rather than a bounded site--a series of encounters and translations” (*Routes* 10) He calls for a scholarly methodology of cultural studies which foregrounds moments of boundary crossings, movements both across geographical spaces and cultures. He sees culture operating in a fluid, shifting relative continuum caused by three connected global forces: the continuing legacies of empire, the effects of unprecedented world wars, and the global consequences of industrial capitalism's disruptive, restructuring activity (*Routes* 6). These cultural determinants have led to a whole range of circulation and movements--“movements in specific colonial, neocolonial, and postcolonial circuits, different diasporas, borderlands, exiles, detours and returns” (*Routes* 35). And in order to produce this kind of knowledge, according to him, “we need to listen to a whole range of “travel stories” (not “travel literature” in the bourgeois sense)” (*Routes* 38) The challenges of this methodology are evident from the get-go: linguistic barriers, and shifting determinants of what constitutes a field in any particular project of this sort. Though he delineates these problems from an ethnographic and anthropological perspective, they are quite applicable to other fields like literary and historical studies. The question my dissertation attempts to answer is: how does one carry out a literary

project comparing the colonial and literary histories of more than one nation without falling prey to superficiality and reductionism? Additionally, how does one trace the connections between local and global histories of childhood without falling into the trap of either replicating Western universals or overdetermining dichotomizations (i.e. Western notions of childhood have been elevated as the global ideal and thus subaltern, alternative epistemologies of childhood must be necessarily a conflicting or entirely oppositional concept)? These methodological issues are rendered starkly real by the evidence of publications such as the 2014 special issue on Global Childhoods by the journal *Atlantic Studies* whose range of articles span disciplines such as history and sociology, but omit the literary. How does one transport ethnographic or historical methods to provide a literary/textual account which is nonetheless inclusive and exhaustive? These are some of the reading problems thrown up by these larger methodological and disciplinary issues.

For the sake of pragmatism and controlling the scope of this project, reducing historical and cultural generalizations and avoiding scholarly anarchy, I have had to limit the geographical boundaries of my research. My choice of region, India, is partially determined by the logistics of access. However, India's position of significance within the British Empire, its long history of being indoctrinated into a colonial education system, along with its rich history and sources of children's literature all combine to optimally situate the country for a literary analysis of colonial childhood. The knowledge of vernacular that I bring to the project, due to my cultural background and nationality, enables me to explore the class and racial politics of language within the context of colonial India and specifically Bengal. The long history of English language and literary studies in India and its transformation from an "alternative medium of expressing one's thoughts" to "the language of power" led to a situation in which language and literature became a

central site for colonial conflict.³ Knowing Bengali allowed me to expand the range of texts, especially primary texts, I can study within the ambit of my dissertation, including both English and vernacular texts. Knowledge of English is an important class marker in India, and the target audiences for English texts and vernacular texts will be different (with differences in audiences being reflected across vernacular texts, as well as between English and vernacular texts). The inclusion of English allows for an exploration of the difference in representation caused by a difference in audience. Moreover, it is my knowledge of vernacular languages which led to my initial realization of the underrepresentation of certain parts of the world in the field of childhood studies and has shaped the politics of the project as it stands today. While I have used translations in cases that are indicated, I have undertaken most of the translation of primary texts.

Because my focus is on the function of children's literature within the Indian national movement and discourses of nationalism and sovereignty, my dates will span from the 1880s, which marks the establishment of the Indian National Congress to 1940. This dissertation is, in part, about the influence of popular British children's literature on discourses of colonial Indian nationhood and the nineteenth-century is a good moment to explore for answers to these questions, since the genre of children's literature came into its own in India in the nineteenth century, when the colonial powers undertook to oversee the education of the Indians. Starting with primers and school texts and spanning a range of genres including school stories, fantasy, mythology, adventure fiction, horror, as well as diverse forms such as novels, short stories, poetry, illustrations, serialized fiction, journals and magazines, children's literature became a robust market and drew attention to racialized and classed practices of reading and writing within the context of the political fabric of the moment. Thus, it is necessary to go back to the

³ *The Gopal Rakhal Dialectic: Colonialism and Children's Literature in Bengal*, pg 102.

nineteenth century in order to trace the political implications of the emergence, consumption and circulation of the genre and its concurrent industry.

If we recognize that the figure of “the child” is a construct and that there is no one formulation of childhood that all children adhere to, we must equally also admit that the figure of “Indian childhood” is a mere figuration with differing significances and serving diverse functions depending on the changes in the socio-political climate. The nuances of intersectionality become even more pronounced in a country like India where every state has its own language, its own culture, cuisine and costume. There is no one Indian childhood, and perspectives on childhood and reading, education, literacy and textual consumption vary across regions, states. However, since my study begins from the assumption that controlling and negotiating discourses of childhood were important for the perpetuity of empire, I will be referring to national conversations along with my specific focus on Bengal, while doing my best to keep such intersections in mind. While I acknowledge that there is a large body of texts that obliquely reference India, I am primarily focusing on texts written in Bengali, aimed at child and adult audiences, written by Indian authors, illuminating ideas about Indian childhoods and their representation in literature. However, since my project is essentially a comparative one analyzing both British and Indian literary histories of childhood, I will also consider British texts and genres which were popularly distributed and consumed in India. These authors are not my primary focus, however, and I will only be referring to them as I need to, as literary influences and market influences, or while referring to the reading habits of children or popular ideas about childhood. There is a substantial amount of scholarship already on writers, especially British writers, who wrote about parts of the Empire and with empire as one of their central concerns

and while my project will acknowledge them, its focus will be on representations from the peripheries of the Empire and not the metropole.

1.2 Chapter Breakdown

I have organized my chapters around the concept of genre to demonstrate how certain genres functioned at certain historical moments to directly or indirectly familiarize their readers with contemporary nationalist discourses and introduce them to nascent visions of sovereign nationhood. But they also trace a chronological literary history which was taking place simultaneously with the anti-colonialist independence movement as it unfurled in India. With the rise of nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth-century came the need for the creation of subjects who could inhabit a politically sovereign nation. Bengali children's literature, like its British counterpart, transitioned from being primarily informative and educational in nature, to incorporating the imaginative and playful elements found in forms such as fairytales, folk tales and fantasy. My first chapter, "Fantasy and Colonial Conflict," examines nineteenth-century writer Troilakyanath Mukhopadhyay's most famous novel, *Kankabati*, a text heavily inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, as well as Abanindranath Tagore's *Khatanchir Khata*, which owes its inspiration to J.M Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. *Kankabati* was published in 1892, shortly after the formulation of the Indian National Congress, when the demands for independence from the British were gradually and cautiously being articulated in the Moderate phase of the independence movement. I show how Mukhopadhyay appropriates a subversive text produced in England and critiquing English culture and repositions it as an anti-colonial critique in the Moderate nationalistic climate of colonial Bengal. He uses children's

fantasy to avoid charges of sedition for his espousal of anti-colonial views, but restricts them to Kankabati's dreamscape, thereby simultaneously distancing them from the realistic frame narrative and the actual political circumstances of colonial Bengal. Mukhopadhyay also uses satire in the realistic frame narrative of the novel to illustrate the need for social and women's reforms and criticize the Moderates methodology. On the other hand, the world-building inherent in the genre of fantasy provides for Tagore the basis for a swadeshi archive, an accumulation of descriptions and behavioural codes denoting what it means to be a child in colonial Bengal, which he builds upon a fantasy landscape of Kolkata. These comparisons demonstrate how ideas and literary texts travel across borders and cultures to emerge as powerful ideological and political artifacts. Considered within the context of cultural imperialism, this chapter also specifically demonstrates how British texts influenced and worked their way into a culture of nationalist resistance.

Many of the authors and thinkers who were invested in these discourses of childhood in colonial Bengal were part of an elite, upper-caste Bengali Hindu intelligentsia. They also wrote for children's periodicals, whose numbers had started rapidly increasing from the 1880s, around the same time as the first major political associations like the Indian National Congress were being formed. These periodicals functioned as epistemological alternatives to British children's periodicals circulating in India, like *The Boys' Own Paper*, and countered the colonial stereotypes about India contained in them. My second chapter extends the concept of behavioral codes to representations of political citizenship in two of the more popular children's periodicals of the 1880s, *Sakha* and *Balak*. Children's periodicals are crucial documents in accessing conversations about childhood since they provide a sense of instruction and delight in a very different mode from novels, and one of the questions this chapter deals with is how the popular

and continuous form of the periodical sets up its audience. I examine how the multi-genre address of the periodicals represented the cultural politics of early Indian nationalism in the Moderate era to their child readers, modeling the ideals of progressive citizenship while introducing visions of patriotic nationhood. These periodicals are a rich source for examining a text containing multiple genres since they include serialized fiction, short stories, visuals, poetry, sections on travel, science, sports, crosswords and riddles. I examine these periodicals collection for textual cues of representations of nationhood conveyed through the layering of multiple genres at a time when nationalism was in its nascent stage. Some of the questions I ask are: Which groups of children are being spoken to in these periodicals and how do they define who a child is (or in other words, how are they imagining their audience?)? How are the editors adapting an imported genre to the contemporary political climate? What are the markers of patriotism in these texts? What are the expectations and conditions of citizenship that are being imparted to these children?

Amongst these children's authors, the stalwart figure of Nobel Laureate **[Slide 5]** Rabindranath Tagore stands out like a beacon, both for his influential views on nationalism and his Romantic views of childhood. My third chapter, "Romanticism and the Colonial Child" focuses on representations of romanticism and the figure of the romantic child in Bengali through the works of Rabindranath Tagore. I trace the emergence and popularity of Romantic philosophy surrounding the native child in discourses of nationalism. Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, is considered by scholars to represent the pinnacle of Bengali Romanticism. Tagore was a prolific writer, writing in diverse genres such as novels, short stories, plays, dance dramas, poetry, essays as well as a painter and a musician. He was a devoted anti-nationalist with influential ideas about education and the place of nature and

imagination in childhood and pedagogy. While acknowledging the vast body of his work, this chapter will trace the confluence of nationalism and Romantic ideas about childhood and education in his literary works for children, such as his 1902 collection of poetry, *Shishu* (Child), and some stories such as *Postmaster*, *Kabuliwala* (*The Man from Kabul*), and *Atithi* (*Guest*), from his collection of short stories titled *Golpoguchcho* (1900-01 and 1908-09). Disillusioned by the increasing violence in nationalist politics in the first decade of the twentieth century, especially during the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, Tagore responded by throwing his energy into his work in rural reconstruction and more importantly, education. His belief in Romantic pedagogy and by extension a Romantic childhood formed the basis of his patriotic action and the core of his vision of political sovereignty.

Tagore's was certainly not a mainstream view, and especially not post-1915, which marked the entry of Gandhi and his populist style of anti-colonial politics, characterized by non-violent action and the direct involvement of broader swathes of society in political activism and protests. My fourth chapter, "Imagined Geographies and National Identity: The Adventure Stories of Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay and Hemendra Kumar Ray moves to adventure and the male child in the context of the more populist period of the Indian national movement through the adventure fiction of Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay and Hemendra Kumar Ray. These novels were published during the 1920s-40s, at a time when the Indian independence movement was moving into its most vigorous phase, which would gradually lead to the ousting of the British from India. I show how Ray and Bandopadhyay claim the genre of adventure fiction, well established in Britain as a genre implicated in the processes of imperialism, to establish a sense of national identity by placing the native child in a character-building exotic geographies. British adventure stories for juvenile boys were charged with the task of building a patriotic masculine

ethos necessary to the colonial project and valorized action and initiative. The depiction of both similarity and opposition between the Bengali rural countryside and the cruel, perilous African landscape, entirely gleaned from literary and fictional sources, reveals an imagined African geography that resided in the Indian imagination. Constructions of masculinity in Ray's novels, I argue, identify with what Basu and Bannerjee call an "Anglo-American hegemonic masculinity" and contribute to the rising confidence of a nationalist ethos, yet also perpetuate the pitfalls of patriarchy. Bandopadhyay, on the other hand, sets up a similarly heroic masculine ethos, but reclaims his boy heroes from hegemonic portrayals of masculinity, crucial at that critical moment of the national anti-colonial crusade. Thus, this chapter demonstrates how literary genres travel across cultures to become important tools in national identity creation by exploring the relationships between two colonized spaces through an imagined geography.

With this project, I hope to make a case for the inclusion of non-Euro-American trajectories within global histories of childhood and demonstrate the primacy of discourses of childhood in colonial and postcolonial imaginings of political nationhood. Thus, I shift gear from considerations of Euro-American texts to indigenous Bengali textual responses in order to show the global cultural consequences of the spread of British imperial culture. My focus on the transnational children's literary print culture and trade demonstrates the importance of children's texts in the circulation of colonial discourses, as well as the alternative epistemologies of childhood arising from "contact zones" in the Global South.

2.0 Chapter One: Children's Fantasy and Colonial Conflict

The world of textuality in nineteenth century Bengal was a chaotic and colorful one. In the aftermath of the introduction of the colonial education system and the rise in literacy, education and professional aspirations among the Indians, educators, both Indian and foreign, felt the increasing need for textual material more suited to the needs of the Indian population.⁴ The resulting rise in the import of European books took place simultaneously with the growth and formation of the domestic publishing industry. Although textbooks and educational materials, genres of nonfiction such as magazines, newsletters, journals and books on a variety of topics such as history, travel, philosophy, politics, health and sanitation, mathematics, physical sciences, natural sciences were popular for the benefits of social mobility they conferred upon their possessors, a large part of readerly attention was occupied by the delights of more imaginative forms of literature.⁵ This chapter explores the symbolic and functional advantages imaginative fiction, especially the genre of children's fantasy, presented to authors in colonial Bengal. I argue that the ideological and formal conveniences offered by children's fantasy made the genre an ideal one for representing the patriotic possibility of decolonization as well as the reformatory and self-critiquing measures needed to be a liberal and self-determining society. In this chapter, I examine Bengali writer Troilokyanath Mukhopadhyay's adaptation of Lewis

⁴ For a full account of the establishment of the colonial education system, see my introduction. Also, Vishwanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York and West Sussex: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition, Columbia UP, 2014. Accessed via Proquest EBrary.

⁵ Joshi, Priya. *In Another Country*. Columbia University Press, 2002.

Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), called *Kankabati* (1892), and Abanindranath Tagore's *Khatanchir Khata* (*The Accountants Notebook*) (1921), a loose retelling of J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1907). I show how these texts appropriate their popular Victorian Golden Era counterparts and use them for anti-colonial purposes by relocating them in the socio-political climate of colonial Bengal. While Mukhopadhyay's use of children's fantasy allows him to safely articulate anti-colonial views and mount a simultaneous critique against the Moderate Nationalists and their restrained methods and limited political aims, Tagore is much more concerned about the functions of an imaginative childhood in determining the trajectory to independence. He uses his text to create a catalogue of native childhood experiences that performs the political function of acquainting children with the rich variety of swadeshi children's culture, simultaneously making a connection between imaginative reading, textuality and patriotic action.

The function of imaginative processes in the gradual rise and eventual establishment of colonial control over India is probably a truism: that colonial control was achieved as much through cultural control as it was through military might is a well-documented fact. Literary scholars and historians alike have noted the cultural foundations of the colonial project. In the foreword to Bernard Cohn's *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, Nicholas Dirks states that "Colonialism was made possible, and then sustained and strengthened, as much by cultural technologies of rule as it was by the more obvious and brutal modes of conquest that first established power on foreign shores" (Cohn, ix). As a "cultural project of control" colonial rule embedded itself within Indian society through the investigation of various cultural modalities surrounding people's lives, including local histories and customs, national and regional legal traditions, artistic and archeological artifacts, anthropological and official knowledge about the

land and the people (consisting of “the reports and investigations of commissions, the compilation, storage, and publication of statistical data on finance, trade, health, demography, crime, education, transportation, agriculture, and industry”) and indigenous literary and textual history (Cohn 3). Both literature and literacy, in fact, negotiated the dynamics of control in particularly impactful ways. The resultant transportation of literary genres with its repercussions has been recorded by Said, who illustrates the perpetuation of colonial mentality through a commitment, “above and beyond profit” to the “constant circulation and recirculation” of various literary forms and including, specifically, the novel (Said 10). Additionally, the gradual establishing of the colonial education system affirms British awareness of the colonial project as a “battle over childhood and youth” (Diptee and Trotman).

“The novel,” Priya Joshi writes, “came to India more than two hundred years ago in the massive steamer trunks that accompanied the British there” (Joshi 11). Amidst the flurry of textual material that flooded the Indian cultural marketplace, the novel, more than any other genre, captured the imaginations of people who preferred it for their leisure reading, often over both other foreign and indigenous literary forms. It was sought after in shops and libraries, discussed in literary circles, reviewed in newspapers, read in private and out aloud in homes, gifted and awarded in schools, read, translated and appropriated (Joshi 33). By the middle of the nineteenth century, according to Supriya Chaudhuri in “The Bengali Novel,” the market was flooded with titles such as “Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Johnson’s *Rasselas* and Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the novels and historical romances of Scott, Dickens and Disraeli, the sensational fiction of G. W. M. Reynolds, which created the genre of *rahasya* (mystery) genre” (Chaudhuri, 104). These British texts and literary forms were accepted, read, re-read, appropriated and adapted in order to interrogate and engage with the

contemporary political atmosphere and socio-economic conditions which were, partially, engendered by, and rendered more complicated by the fact of colonization. While the novel was initially popular among natives as a way of gaining insight into the culture of the colonial ruler, and among the British as a means of creating a compliant body of native subjects well versed in the mores of anglicization, it “paradoxically emerged in India as one of the most effective vehicles for voicing anticolonial and nationalist claims in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries” (Joshi 12). While Joshi’s argument on “narrative indigenization, a process by which first Indian readers and then writers transmuted an imported and alien form into local needs that inspired and sustained them across many decades” explores mainly the significance of the early Indian Anglophone novel, this chapter explores how these processes of narrative indigenization also takes place in the world of vernacular children’s literature in colonial Bengal, laying the foundations of cultural patriotism among the young. (Joshi xviii).

As the need for texts specifically targeting a child arose in the process and aftermath of the establishment of an education system imparting European forms of knowledge, various groups emerged in the nineteenth century to meet this demand. Noteworthy among them were the Calcutta School Book Society, Christian Vernacular Education Society, Christian Knowledge Society, Christian Tract and Book Society, Calcutta Christian Book Society, Calcutta Tract Society, Vernacular Literature Committee, Brahmo Samaj, and Gauriyo Samaj (Mitra 73-107). Indian children in colonial Bengal not only had access to British authored, Victorian literature which were imported in order to further a colonial education system designed to impress the values of the ruling culture upon the indigenous sections of society, there were also children’s texts produced for them, in vernacular, by Indian authors. The sudden proliferation of children’s literature was followed by the gradual inclusion of themes such as the nation, nationalism and

patriotism.⁶ This politicization of children's texts was also accompanied by the increasing interest in folklore, fairy stories and fantasy. As mentioned in the introduction, in the post-Vidyasagar decades when fictional texts were published along with educational texts and children's books comprised mainly of excerpts from English texts began to be supplanted in popularity by original composition by Indian authors, the importance of fantasy and imaginative play began to be keenly felt.⁷ Some of the genres of traditional folk narratives in Bengali literature included roopkatha (fairy tales), bratakatha, upakatha, gitika and various chawras (verses and folk songs). Supriya Goswami attributes the late nineteenth century interest in Indian folklore to "the Foucaultian idea of acquiring knowledge and exercising power through incessant classification and documentation," analogous to the efforts of the Brothers Grimm in Europe (Goswami, 120). Others like historian Gautam Chando Roy associate the interest in the world of indigenous fantasy and fiction with the adult's increasing desire to render the experience of reading more rewarding for children, "In a colonial situation where children appeared to be the most vulnerable of all, it is only natural that grownups should take the initiative to infuse the element of fun in their lives. In all probability, it also gave the elders the pleasure of challenging their rulers by creating a make-believe world that the aliens could hardly hope to control" (Roy

⁶ More on Nationalism in children's literature, see Roy, Gautam Chando. "Childhood Conditions: Moral education in Early Twentieth Century." *Journal of the Department of History, Brahman University* Vol.7, no. 1 (2005). Print. Also, Sen, Satadru. "A Juvenile Periphery: The Geographies of Literary Childhood in Colonial Bengal." *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* Vol. 5, no.1 (USA: John Hopkins UP, 2004), via Project Muse. Web.

⁷ For more details on the history of Bengali Children's Literature see my introduction, Mitra, Khagendranath. *Shatabdi'r Shishu Shahitya*. Kolkata: Bidyodoy Library Private Limited, 1958, Bandopadhyay, Shibaji. *Gopal-Rakhal Dwandoshomash-Upanibeshbad o Bangla Shishushahitya*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1991, Dey, Provash Ranjan. *Children's Literature of Bengal*. Kolkata: Academy for Documentation & Research on Children's Literature, 1978.

“Swadesh” 139).⁸ Fantasy and Carrollian nonsense became popular as a form of literary political protest in the early twentieth century when the “pleasure of challenging their rulers by creating a make-believe world” reached its zenith in the works of Upendrakishore Ray, his son Satyajit Ray, and in the famous collection of folk/fairytales published by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar called *Thakurma'r Jhuli (Grandmother's Bag)*. However, it is in fact in the late nineteenth century that the beginnings of this literary trend become evident in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Yogindranath Sarkar, Troilokyanath Mukhopadhyay, Abanindranath Tagore and many others.⁹ It is in this politically charged continuum of conversation about literary forms, cultural indigenization and imaginative play as a form of learning and resistance that we must place children's fantasy texts.

The ideological conveniences were multiplied by the other advantages enabled by the formal characteristics of the genre. In a political atmosphere rife with increasing conflict and suspicions of sedition, the dangers of the novel and the need to regulate the form was acknowledged in the authorization of the Press and Registrations of Books Act (1876), the Vernacular Press Act (1878) and the Press Act (1910). Besides carving a path towards political sovereignty and decolonization, the early novels were also vehicles for domestic and social reform. The special capacity for imaginative displacement embedded in the structure of fantasy allowed for the articulation of both political and social commentary which might have otherwise resulted in imprisonment for sedition, or at the very least, hefty fines for provoking

⁸ Roy, Gautam Chando. “Swadesh: A Land of One's Own-Themes of Nationality in Children's Literature of Late 19th and Early 20th Century Bengal” in *Life and Culture in Bengal: Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences*, ed. A. Samanta, S.T. Nasreen and A.Dhar, (Progressive Publishers: Kolkata, 2011). Pp 128-152

⁹ Abanindranath Tagore is credited with the authorship of the first original fairy tale in Bengali, *Khurer Putul*.

dissatisfaction and dissent. Authors who wrote about the radical and the impossible taking place in a fictional space which was, realistically and legally, not Bengal or India, could not be penalized for their political daring. Nor could the guardians of social conservatism censure them for their visions of social progress. Many Bengali writers of the period were also engaged in creating adaptations and translation of Western children's books, like Madhusudan Mukhopadhyay's *Katha Taranga* based on Day's *Sandford and Merton*, Kuladaranjan Ray's translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Abanindranath Tagore's *Buro Angla*, based on Selma Lagerloff's *Adventures of Nils*, and *Khatanchir Khata* based on *Peter Pan*, Rabindranath Tagore's 'Ichchapuran' based on Anstey's *Vice Versa*, etc.¹⁰ Adaptations of children's fantasy allowed authors to explore the fantasies of liberty, social justice, reform, victory, the pleasures of escape and eventual return to a restored and healed world order in the popular but culturally distanced stories, and demonstrate their enactment in more familiar terrains reducing the hierarchies between the cultures of the colonizers and the indigenous people. The simultaneous existence of geographical distance and imaginative proximity in adaptations of British fantasy enabled the bridging of distances between the cultures' and enhanced the possibilities for self-determining action. In his 1859 *Report on the Native Press of Bengal* Rev. James Long records "the love of orientals for works of imagination" (xxvii), with little apparent notion of what precisely the imagination did with these beloved works" (Joshi 80). Whatever Rev. Long's perceptions of readerly awareness may be, it is evident that children's authors were extremely conscious of the opportunities fantasy presented of reimagining native agency and presenting

¹⁰ Sen, Nivedita. *Family, School and Nation: The Child and Literary Constructions in 20th Century Bengal*. Delhi: Routledge, 2015.

both friends and foes alike in forms which were carefully and symbolically transposed to render them legally benign. Retribution and results were both firmly located within the realms of representational possibility through the genre of fantasy. In children's texts, these "indigenized" fantastic stories had the additional function of imparting a sense of cautious hope and possibility for the nation's future to its young readers. Adaptations evoked recognition, by the local community of readers, of deeds realized and quests completed by those perceived to be culturally superior, yet allowed for the possibility of imitating them in a familiar context and thereby eradicating the real or imagined inequalities and oppressions visited upon them. In adapting stories already established as successful and canonical in the metropole of the empire, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter and Wendy*, Mukhopadhyay and Tagore thus respectively signal and legitimize the patriotic potential of indigenous children's literature.

2.1 A 'Moderately' Bengali Alice: Tracing Moderate Nationalism in Troilokyanath

Mukhopadhyay's *Kankabati*

We have all *heard* the Kankabati tale as children. Kankabati's brother bought a mango. Keeping the fruit in the safety of his room, he warned one and all—"Let no one touch my mango. Remember, I will marry the one who consumes it." A mere child, Kankabati couldn't gauge the implications, and ended up eating that very fruit! So her brother declared: "I will marry Kankabati!" Parents and acquaintances went blue in the face trying to convince them that this was not the proper thing to do! . . . The brother, however, refused to pay heed. . . . Kankabati

was abashed beyond measure! She made a boat and set herself afloat on a river, winding away just behind her house, left with no other recourse. She was out of her brother's reach, and beyond his determination to marry her.

—Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, *Kankabati*, translated by Nandini Bhattacharya

This *pracheen kawtha*, or ancient tale of the Kankabati “myth” at the beginning of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay’s most well-known novel, *Kankabati*, foreshadows many of the concerns of female identity and agency that dog his eponymous heroine, while simultaneously establishing a difference between old folklore and contemporary colonial reality. He ends this little prologue with the words, “is it possible to believe such a tale? Is it probable that a brother would insist on marrying his sister for the sake of a mere fruit? This is patently impossible! I will narrate a tale that lies within the realm of probability” (Mukhopadhyay 3). While the story of Mukhopadhyay’s *Kankabati* might not contain the incestuous and phallic overtones of a brother and his mango, it does have similarly arbitrary and superstitious authority figures and speaks of a world where women continue to be oppressed by irrational patriarchal codes. Further, the tale he goes on to narrate is a fantastic one that recalls Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* stories: a central female protagonist slips into a dreamscape where she encounters the strange and the wondrous; has adventures in unfamiliar and somewhat exotic settings; meets a variety of curious and fantastic anthropomorphic creatures and finally, returns to the realm of reality. If Mukhopadhyay seeks to highlight the contrast between the ancient folk tale and his own modern tale, why call our attention to similarities through his prologue? If he did want a *probable* tale (as opposed to the patently impossible ancient folktale that he recounts), why would he adapt Lewis Carroll’s fantastic setting? By turning to the temporal and geographical intersection of the text’s publication, i.e., late-nineteenth-century colonial Bengal, which was permeated by increasing literacy and the rise of early anticolonial political events, we can answer both questions. As a text

of a very particular historical moment, *Kankabati* portrays the early stirrings of nationalism (also known as Moderate nationalism) and a social discourse best represented by a fluid movement between the old and the new, reality and fantasy, between the possibilities and improbabilities of contemporary Bengali society. By framing his novel in the context of both an ancient Bengali fairy tale and Carroll's *Alice* stories, Mukhopadhyay calls attention to the changing political time and advocates for necessary domestic social reforms, while simultaneously voicing anticolonial sentiments.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is a paradigmatic text of the Golden Age of children's literature.¹¹ Combining the genres of fantasy, adventure stories, the dream narrative and that of nonsense fiction, Carroll launches into a satire of Victorian society and its rigid codes of conduct. Mukhopadhyay, in his colonial reworking of the text, combined the genres of fantasy, adventure, the Bengali roopkatha (fairy tale), and nonsense fiction with the motivation of impressing upon his young readers the necessity for social reform, as well as to continuing in the mode of politically charged imaginative fiction that his contemporaries were engaged in. The story is a reworking of the 'Kankabati' myth and depicts the dreams of a young girl while she is in a coma caused by the pressures of a social system which didn't afford much advantages to women.¹² While in the dream, she escapes on a magic boat, goes underwater and is crowned the Queen of fishes. Then she emerges back to land to marry the man of her choice, only to lose him to a female demon, as the result of a curse. The rest of the story details her adventures as she tries to rescue her husband from the clutches of the evil female demon. The story comes to an end when

¹¹ The coinage of this term is widely attributed to Roger Lancelyn Green's "The Golden Age of Children's Literature," published in 1962.

¹² Nandini Bhattacharya, in the introduction to her translation of *Kankabati*, notes that "the original tale, narrating the plight of the princess Kankabati (escaping on a magic boat to avoid an incestuous brother), came to Trailokyanath from various oral sources" (Bhattacharya, xi).

Kankabati emerges from her comatose state to realize that she was dreaming and that a comedic resolution of her real problems has occurred, indicating a ‘happily ever after’ for her.

However, the similarities between the texts are striking. In both books, the central female protagonist slips into a dreamscape, in which they encounter the strange and the wondrous, have adventures in unfamiliar and somewhat exotic settings, meet a variety of curious and fantastic creatures and finally, return to the realm of reality. One can observe a similar lack of geographical markers, with the forests in their respective Wonderlands becoming a space of the nostalgic, the fantastic and the lost, where Alice and Kankabati lose their sense of time, as well as space. Both the dreamscapes have an air of macabre and evoke a simultaneous sense of relief when one returns to the real world. The two texts also make use of nonsense rhymes and anthropomorphic animals and are both social satires using the mode of nonsense, though differing in the issues they satirize due to their location in vastly different geo-temporal and social settings. Though there is no documented evidence of Mukhopadhyay having read *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, it would not be a far stretch of the imagination to assume his having done so, as an educated and well-known civil servant and author. Apart from the structural similarities, the characters in Kankabati’s dreamscape reveal equivalences to Carroll’s creatures as well, a degree of “indigenization” of Carroll’s Wonderland which elevates the absurdity and heightens the pleasure of the text. The Nakeshwari Rakkhoshi, a female demon with the desire to devour Kankabati’s husband Khetu, is an Indianized version of the bloodthirsty Queen of Hearts. Khorbur, the magical dwarf man to whom the Mosquito and Kankabati go to ask for help in recovering Khetu’s soul (the quest she carries out in this novel’s magical Wonderland), is an Indian and somewhat saner version of the Mad Hatter. His irrational antipathy and hostility towards the Moon is reminiscent of the Mad Hatter’s equally irrational quarrel with Time. The

Moon, who tries to hide from Kankabati for fear of being kidnapped, is like Humpty Dumpty in Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* and Durdanto Sepai, the soldier made from the leaves of the palm tree who is also the alleged protector of the Moon, runs away from Kankabati, a behavior strongly reminiscent of the cowardly Card soldiers. In *Wonderland*, time and time again Alice asks for directions and guidance from the adults/animals she meets, but is frustrated at every moment by the logic of *Wonderland*, which she cannot comprehend. None of the animals, including the Caterpillar and Cheshire Cat, provide her with any concrete sense of the direction in which she should travel. Kankabati is similarly frustrated by the Frog, Mister Gomiz who is so engrossed in looking for his money i.e. his 'byanger adhuli', and is so enraged at being called a frog that he initially refuses to give her directions to the nearest human habitat.¹³ Finally, the directions he gives her are measured in terms of frog leaps, and are therefore useless to the human Kankabati. This constant oscillation between the familiarity of a foreign text and its alienness when transposed on to local, recognizable surroundings adds to the pleasure of text. However, the biggest piece of evidence that provides a glimpse into the motivations framing colonial authorial choices are the illustrations accompanying the texts (See figs. 1,2 and 3). Both texts use wood cut illustrations and a comparison of *Kankabati*'s illustrations with Tenniel's is convincing enough to infer that Mukhopadhyay's choice of *Alice* was a deliberate choice of a specific text, best calculated to subversively express his social critique and anti-colonial stance and not merely the imitation of a generic mode. Robert Polhemus describes *Alice* as fiction dealing with "the crisis of authority in modern life" and as an "anti-authoritarian carnivalesque

¹³ An idiomatic expression which means an insignificant amount hoarded very cautiously and proudly by an extremely poor person. Byang means frog, while adhuli is half a coin.

literary comedy” which “strips away both personal and social convention and prejudices” through the figure of the child and “holds them up to ridicule and sets loose possibilities for imagining the unthinkable” (Polhemus 343-344). Mukhopadhyay takes advantage of this function of “imagining the unthinkable” to describe the crises of imperial authoritative rule in nineteenth-century Bengal in his own anti-authoritarian creation.



Figure 1 The Frog Footman in Carroll's *Alice*

ব্যাঙ-সাহেব



Figure 2 Mr. Gomiz in Mukhopadhyay's *Kankabati*



Figure 3 The Jabberwocky

খোক্কোশ-শাবক



Figure 4 The Khokkhosh



Figure 5 Humpty Dumpty in *Alice*



Figure 6 The Moon in *Kankabati*

In addition to the literary history provided earlier in the chapter, the next section of this chapter will outline the immediate political context framing the text, the Moderate phase of the Indian independence movement, which is necessary to understand the critique Mukhopadhyay directs towards the Nationalists. The social conditions in nineteenth century colonial Bengal which provide the immediate context of the story will be explored in close relation to the analytical reading of the actual story itself.

2.1.1 *Kankabati*, the Context: *Alice*, *Alice* and the Moderate Nationals

Kankabati was published in 1892, shortly after the formulation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, when the demands for political autonomy were gradually and cautiously being articulated in the Moderate phase of the Indian Independence movement.¹⁴ The Moderate phase is understood as the earliest phase of the Indian Nationalist movement, roughly spanning a

¹⁴ For more information on Moderate Nationalism, see Nanda; Seth; and Chandra.

period between 1870 and 1905. The Revolt of 1857 had resulted in the British crown tightening its political grip on India by acquiring control of the Indian colonies from the East India Company, which had previously held the trade monopoly. Meanwhile, Western-educated Indians, who had risen in number due to the educational reforms set in motion in the earlier half of the nineteenth century, had begun to demand a greater involvement in running their own country. This early phase was known as such because of both the moderate nature of the demands made and the moderate measures taken to accomplish those demands, though these efforts paved the way for the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885.¹⁵ The Moderate leaders were convinced that while self-rule was a possibility for India sometime in the future, this was not practical at the current moment. The demands were still very *moderate*, merely focusing on “bureaucratic, administrative, judicial, and economic reforms that would be beneficial—rather than burdensome—to the Indian population” (Goswami 120). The Moderates also distanced themselves from the extremist views of militant nationalists and prided themselves

¹⁵ Seth, in “Rewriting Histories,” explains why this period of actions limited in scope is still termed as a nationalist phase and outlines three uses of the term “moderate”: [T]he description of the various activities directed at securing political and economic reform in the period 1870–1905 as “nationalist” is frequently qualified; usually, this is designated as the period of “moderate nationalism.” The term “moderate” is used in one of three ways. It can signify the historians’ adoption of a term commonly used at the time. Rendered in uppercase, “Moderate” serves to distinguish and contrast this nationalism from its “Extremist” competitor and critic. A second use of the term occurs where what is being stressed is the ambiguous or two-sided nature of the phenomenon—that it was nationalist but in a very qualified fashion, because its demands were modest and were accompanied by loyalty to crown and empire. Almost all uses of the phrase “moderate nationalism” fall into this category, although they may fall into the other categories as well. A third use is one that incorporates the second, but where additionally this “ambiguity” is seen as a “lack,” as incompleteness. (98)

on their restrained and constitutional measures. The reason for choosing a more gradual pace was the conviction that the British wouldn't grant immediate political autonomy and that it had to be earned, as well as the belief that all Indians needed to prosper was to experience the good and just side of British colonial rule. Thus, during the period from 1870 to 1905, the movement for independence had not yet resorted to the active mobilization of thousands of people that was the hallmark of its later methods. The main political goals were to create political awareness through propaganda and education, and to propagate nationalist ideology through reports, petitions, and appeals (Chandra 102). The British Indian government's response to these demands was to question the Indians' capability for increased political representation based on the social conditions of the country, which, according to them, were characterized by superstition, corruption, and ignorance. Consequently, a crucial part of the Moderate agenda also consisted of attempts to spread awareness about the need for social reforms among the native and Anglo-Indian populations, as well as efforts to convince the British government of the improving scenario. The improvement of women's social conditions was considered particularly urgent since "the British had long made the position and treatment of women central to their criticisms of Indian society" (Metcalf and Metcalf 146). Some of the more pressing issues were sati, female literacy, the age of marriage, widow remarriage, and the practice of polygamy.¹⁶ However, there remained a considerable portion of the population who were resistant to social reforms, perceiving in them an attack on their religion, and this perspective was supported by some

¹⁶ Sati is an Indian social practice whereby a widow immolates herself on her deceased husband's funeral pyre. This inhuman and, in many cases, compulsory practice was one of the first against which the Indian reformers, among them Raja Ram Mohan Roy, protested. Sati was abolished in 1829 by the British government.

Moderate politicians.¹⁷ Writing in this historical moment, Mukhopadhyay makes use of a female protagonist both to articulate the need for women's reforms and to lampoon some of the inconsistent and hypocritical ways in which people practiced said reforms.

Reviewing *Kankabati* in 1892, Rabindranath Tagore explicitly makes the connection with *Alice*:

While reading this book, I am reminded of an English book called *Alice in the Wonderland* [sic]. That book also depicts the impossible, unreal, humor-inducing dream of a girl-child. But, in that story, reality and un-reality are not as closely related as in this one. And that one (Carroll's book) is just as incoherent, changeable and enjoyable as a dream. (Preface)¹⁸

In 1934, Hemendra Kumar Ray makes the same connection in the prefatory note to his adaptation of *Alice* called *Ajob Deshe Amola*, stating that *Kankabati* was influenced by what he calls "the Alice phenomenon" (7).¹⁹ The contemporary recognition of the similarities points to the fact that Mukhopadhyay's choice of reworking the Alice text was probably a deliberate one, maybe because it allowed him to covertly articulate anti-colonialist sentiment and nationalist critique in a politically rife atmosphere. Carroll's *Alice* texts are known for their satirical

¹⁷ For more on the split between anti- and pro-reformers, especially in the Deccan area, see Nanda. In her book *Masks of Conquest*, Viswanathan indicates that the paranoia of religious conversion went so deep that the British introduced English literature as a way of spreading British values while avoiding evangelism.

¹⁸ Originally published as Rabindranath Tagore, rev. of *Kankabati*, by Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhana*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1892.

¹⁹ "One can hear many echoes of Alice's Wonderland in the late Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's famous children's novel, *Kankabati*. The late Sukumar Ray, while writing *Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La*, was inspired by the author of *Alice* at every step" (Ray 7).

treatment of contemporary societal manners and institutions such as law, education, and industry. Alice herself, as Donald Rackin points out, is considered by modern readers as “a naive champion of the doomed human quest for ultimate meaning and lost Edenic order” (Rackin 327). Although Mukhopadhyay was one of the earliest masters of Bengali satire, and, like Carroll, used the novel as a setting for broad social critique, his satirical espousing of anticolonial sentiments and of the need for reforms seems provocative yet cautious. This choice is a result of the historical positioning of the novel, situated as it is in a moment when the nationalist struggle for independence is still in its Moderate phase. Unlike Alice, Kankabati is less a doomed questor for meaning and more a desperate hunter of the domesticity she has suddenly lost. While Alice’s search for a return to domestic familiarity is regarded as a site of nostalgia for childhood by the adults around her, Kankabati’s return to her social position as a child-bride represents a shutting down of possibilities. What is remarkable about Mukhopadhyay’s use of Carroll’s text is its anticolonial positioning. The Alice texts have generally been considered by scholars as an example of Victorian Eurocentrism, with Alice representing British mores and manners and attempting to impose them on the indigenous people of Wonderland.²⁰ Mukhopadhyay’s rendering of an anticolonial *Alice* demonstrates how indigenization of imported children’s literature can transform these texts into potent political artifacts within the process of decolonization. *Kankabati* also simultaneously critiques and espouses the Moderate Nationalists’ agenda. The support of the Moderate Nationalists’ cause is expressed by an emphasis on the need for social reforms, which was a significant aspect of the Moderate’s agenda, while the critique is primarily of their limited methods. Carroll’s ambivalence toward the issue of children’s agency, which is manifested in the limited independence granted to Alice, becomes a limited

²⁰ For more on this, see Graner.

verbalization of the need for women's reforms in the case of *Kankabati*.²¹ The critique of the British Indian government is restricted to Kankabati's dreamscape, thereby distancing it from the realistic frame narrative and the actual political circumstances of colonial Bengal. This cautiousness in Mukhopadhyay's articulation of anticolonial sentiments reflected the nationalists' moderate demands for limited independence and also protected him against the danger of being charged with sedition. On the other hand, the use of satire in the realistic frame narrative as well as in the dreamscape provides a shield against the ire of antireform Indians and signaled the potential for a wider readership.

2.1.2 The Story: Women's Agency and Social Reform

The story is divided into two main sections with a long realistic frame narrative encompassing the second half of the novel, Kankabati's dreamscape. In his rendering of the *Alice* texts, Mukhopadhyay takes advantage of the realistic framing and uses a satirical tone to mount a systematic critique of the corruption, oppressive caste system, religious superstition, and violence that abounded even in the late nineteenth-century Bengali countryside, while safely giving voice to anticolonial sentiments within the dreamscape. The tale is set earlier in the nineteenth century in a Bengali village called Kusumghati, which is run on the dictates of Tanu Roy, Kankabati's father, Janardhan Chowdhury, the local *zamindar* (landowner), and Gobardhan Shiromoni, who together represent the orthodox, patriarchal, Hindu village elders common to contemporary rural life in India. They also embody the critique of Moderate anti-reformists and the hypocrisy of those who supported reforms only for their own social and financial gains. The

²¹ For more on Carroll's conflicted response to issues of children's agency, see Gubar.

main plotline of the realistic framework revolves around Tanu Roy's decision to organize Kankabati's marriage to the rich and elderly Janardhan Chowdhury, and its consequent events. Tanu Roy is a Kulin and Bangshaja Brahmin who is ostensibly faithful to the *shastras* (ancient religious texts), but, in reality, twists the religious and social doctrines for his own pecuniary benefit and only pays lip service to all the social reforms he professes to uphold. The Kulins were an old, elite Brahmin caste who believed that the bridegroom must be from a higher subcaste. Given the scarcity of men from higher subcastes, Kulin men ended up marrying many Kulin girls. The surplus of unmarried girls and the religious dictated that girls should be married before puberty meant that parents were eager to get their daughters married at very young ages. For the Kulin men, marriage itself became a lucrative profession, with even septuagenarians or octogenarians marrying hundreds of women, resulting in large numbers of child marriages and child widows. The Kulin system in Bengal had long been an issue for social reformers for these reasons as well as for the perpetuation of polygamy and the dowry system. These brides were not financially supported by their husbands or welcomed by their paternal families and were regarded as burdens on society. Many social reformers, including Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, fought against this system of polygamy. The Bangshaja are/were a "fallen" subcaste who accepted a dowry from the groom, and this set them apart from the rest of the Kulin Brahmins who took a dowry from the bride.

As someone who had worked at a wide range of positions at both the grassroots and the administrative level, first as a rural teacher, then as a sub-inspector, an editor of a newspaper, a clerk, and later as assistant director within different departments in the British Indian government, Mukhopadhyay was aware of the fate of reforms, from legislation to implementation. While he supported Moderate agendas for social amelioration, he was aware of

the gap between the political discourse in the upper echelons of Indian politics and the on-the-ground realities that emerged once these ideas percolated to the bulk of the Indian population. In the realistic frame narrative, Mukhopadhyay satirizes Tanu Roy's religious hypocrisy of using the Bangshaja-Kulin system to make profits. In this glimpse we're allowed of his interiority, he rationalizes that,

[s]ince God has created me as a kulin brahmin, to protect the kulin faith is my duty. If I commit the sin of not doing so, I will have to go to hell for insulting the Gods. And what is the kulin creed? The kulin creed is that I perform the rite of kanyadaan and collect wealth from a groom. If I do not fulfill this, then I will be an outcaste, in accordance with the scriptures.²² (Mukhopadhyay 3)

In combination with his Kulin and Bangshaja status, this rationale provides an excuse for him to marry off his daughters to the highest bidders he can find, usually old men: "Old men take better care of their wives" (Mukhopadhyay 4). When his daughters are widowed and back in his house, he attributes his inhumane treatment of his widowed daughters to his scriptural fidelity, since being a young widow was considered a punishment for a sinful life. Thus, his support of the widow remarriage movement of nineteenth-century social reformers like Vidyasagar extends mainly to collecting multiple dowries for each daughter. He allows Kankabati to acquire education, adding to the rising numbers in women's literacy, but only because an educated daughter would fetch a higher dowry. In detailing this rupture between legislation and execution, Mukhopadhyay provides a rare insight into the conflicts of nationalist and decolonizing discourse.

²² Kanyadaan is the ritual of giving the bride away to the bridegroom, which is traditionally performed by the father of the bride

The extended realism framing the dreamscape details the restrictions Kankabati faces, and it allows Mukhopadhyay to attribute them to systemic causes rather than portraying them as incidental events in an individual life. In doing so, though, he enfeebles the already tenuous control Kankabati maintains on her choices in the rest of the novel, a move that is structurally similar to Carroll's treatment of Alice in his text. The beginning and end of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* have confounded critics such as Jennifer Geer, who points out that the realistic framing of the novel seems to be at odds with the central dream narrative. After Alice is woken up and sent off to tea, her sister spends a few moments imagining Alice's future, placing her in a setting of domestic bliss, surrounded by many children, yet retaining a lingering sense of innocence, the memory of her childhood. Geer suggests that "the contrast between frames and adventures in the *Alice* books implies that the frames' idealized visions of Alice are themselves constructed narratives, as fantastic in their own way as the dream-tales they so radically reinterpret" (Geer 1). In other words, she goes on to say, this deliberately constructed realistic framing undercuts the agency granted to Alice during her adventures in Wonderland, thus affirming that while Lewis Carroll may have exposed the illogic of fairy tales and femininity, he does not actually reject those ideals but instead "remains deeply committed to their emotional power" (Geer 2). While Alice's deliberately nostalgic framing is given a marginal position in Carroll's book, in *Kankabati*, the entire first section of the book is taken up by the elaborate realistic framework, operating in a similar yet localized fashion. Although the realistic part of the narrative enables the vocalization of the need for women's reforms, albeit in a satirical manner, it also undercuts whatever little agency is granted to Kankabati in the dream narrative.

Alice is granted far more authority and power in her Wonderland than Kankabati is in her dreamworld, and the restricted nature of her agency highlights the limitations of the Moderate

Nationalists' stance on domestic reforms. In "Magical Growth and Moral Lessons; or, How the Conduct Book Informed Victorian and Edwardian Children's Fantasy," Elaine Ostry points out that Carroll "satirizes the adult world in general, and the adult guide in particular. As a result of this use of satirical fantasy, Carroll's heroine develops greater independence of thought than her predecessors and paves the way for later independent heroes and heroines" (35).²³ This independence of thought has received conflicting critical response, with scholars like Nina Auerbach and James Kincaid acknowledging Alice's agency but perceiving her using it negatively. According to Kincaid, Alice exercises her will by refusing the joyful play Wonderland has to offer, while Auerbach describes her as a monstrosity consumptive child, whose instinct is to devour and destroy those around her, simultaneously invading and being invaded (Kincaid 331–32; Auerbach 40–42). Even postcolonial analyses of Alice have generally seen her as having power and control over the natives of Wonderland, and more harmful to them than they are to her.²⁴ On the other hand, Marah Gubar sees Carroll granting Alice a limited amount of agency and frames her as a collaborator, a child who is able to work with adults, creatively and behaviorally, to coproduce or even subvert adult scripts about childhood. Alice accomplishes that, according to Gubar, through the act of reciprocal aggression, by denying or refusing to meet the demands made of her by the Wonderland adults (93–124).

²³ Because girls were not allowed to play a significant role in the adventure stories, stories of empire-building and voyages of exploration which abounded in the Golden Age, the dream fantasy is one of the few spaces where the feminine can acquire agency (apart from the domestic stories written by authors such as Alcott, Montgomery, and Burnett).

²⁴ For more on this, see Graner.

Alice may be an invader, or a child restricted to collaboration, but even this limited agency is denied to Kankabati. Historian Bipan Chandra enumerates the “unprecedented mental agony and untold domestic and social tension” brought about by even the smallest of steps taken to ameliorate the position of women in society (89). Through Kankabati’s helplessness and dependence on others, Mukhopadhyay reflects the Moderate tendency of asking for limited independence. Although he acknowledges that changes needed to be wrought in the living conditions for women, he either is careful not to offend his adult readers’ sensibilities by being too radical or is unable to envision a world where women are fully emancipated. The realistic plot encounters its crisis when Tanu Roy reneges on his promise to marry Kankabati to the virtuous Khetu and is instead seduced by the bride dowry offered by Janardhan Chowdhury, the seventy-five-year-old zamindar of the village. Although Khetu and Niranjana Kabiratna, his mentor and teacher, try to dissuade the trio of Tanu Roy, Chowdhury, and Shiromani from seeing this marriage through, they fail and are consequently ostracized by the rest of the village. Kankabati’s fear and grief cause her to become comatose close to the date of her marriage, and readers unknowingly enter the dreamscape with her. Mukhopadhyay’s critique of social customs is clearly evident and, as the plot progresses, he oscillates between satire and heartfelt earnestness. The audience is not informed about her comatose state until the end of the book, and we are made to believe that Kankabati runs away from home and encounters the world of magic. Her magical adventures begin when she goes underwater and is made the Queen of Fishes. As the dream narrative continues, she eventually leaves her fishy kingdom to return to the landbound world above and continues her quest to be with Khetu.

Repeated attention is drawn to the restrictive boundaries of Kankabati’s agency, even as her adventures are enumerated. In Carroll’s text, Alice’s maturation and growth are not linked to

the internalization of a moral code but instead to the attainment of power and control. For example, at the end of her adventures in Wonderland, Alice can control her own size during the mock trial, something she had failed to do earlier at various points of time in the text. In contrast, Kankabati's limited maturity and growth are associated with her increasing adherence to established moral codes. Unlike Alice, Kankabati occupies a liminal position—her age makes her a child; her social status defines her as a woman of marriageable age. In the dream, after returning from the fish kingdom, she marries Khetu and carries out her marital duties and responsibilities to the best of her capabilities. When she blames herself for Khetu's death in the magical palace, she is ready to perform her duty of sati for her husband despite being forbidden to do so by her friends and family. Although this might appear to be a moment in which she exercises her authority, in actuality the decision to commit sati propels her toward a repressive social ritual as her only choice, underlining her internalization of social codes that locate women's agency in their sacrifices. Ostry also notes that Alice's behavior in Wonderland mocks the lesson of the Victorian conduct book. Although she is ready with her conduct book lessons, she is frustrated at every point and forced to relinquish them, since her lessons do not seem to be applicable in the anarchic atmosphere of Wonderland. However, in her willingness to perform sati, Kankabati conducts herself according to the traditional patriarchal teachings of her time. In the realistic section, she does not act on her objections to her forced marriage, instead slipping into a coma. She prioritizes her father's advice over her mother's and cuts off the magical root that was attached to Khetu's hair protecting him from the female demon Nakeshwari Rakkhoshi (The Demon of the Divine Nose, by my translation). This action is what leads to Khetu's death, yet the realization of her mistake does not shake her blind loyalty to a patriarchal system. In the end, she only marries Khetu after her father and brother become reconciled to the idea.

In the dreamscape, every small degree of control she exerts over situations is with the aim of recovering her husband, and her treatment at the hands of the other characters betrays the constant slippage between her age, as a child, and her social position, as a married woman. The small degree of petulance or anger that she shows when dealing with Mister Gomiz, the scatterbrained frog gentleman, or Nakeshwari Rakkhoshi, as well as her initiative in undertaking the journey to the Moon to obtain the skin from the Moon's roots (mostly she is dependent on other people for help), are all in the service of her husband's soul. Indeed, her entire dream revolves around the mission of acquiring Khetu as her husband and, later, around the quest to save his life, which she ultimately fails to do. The adult guides whom Alice meets are unreliable, but Kankabati's adult guides, the Mosquito, the Frog, and Khorbur, are mostly reliable guides who try their best to help her (though not always successfully), further reducing Kankabati's motivation to find a solution to her problems by herself. She is consistently treated as a child and most of the characters refer to her as *balika* (a female child). When she is underwater, the fishes try to cajole her into becoming their Queen by giving her a boxful of "votes," a reference to the patriarchal understanding of women's suffrage, by reducing the votes to a box full of material objects and Kankabati to an ineffectual ruler. Later, when she is taken to the tailor for her queenly robes, she is treated with contempt both by the tailor and by her escort, the Crab. When she attempts to answer their questions about her species ("is she cottonwool, a piece of scrub or a pillow?"), she is scolded for her lack of comprehension. The Crab and the old Tailor repeatedly silence her by telling her, "You're a child. Why do you repeatedly interrupt our conversation? We are doing what's good for you, so be silent and watch us. Silence, you mustn't cry!" (Mukhopadhyay 47). Thus, she embodies the virtuous, obedient, beautiful, and talented daughter

and wife popular in contemporary literature and, despite the need for self-assertion, remains passive.

Despite the limited nature of Kankabati's agency, however, Mukhopadhyay does express an awareness of the necessity of social reforms, particularly ones that emancipated women. He criticizes child marriage and the sufferings of child widows through his depiction of Kankabati's sisters, who are both married to very old grooms for the sake of bride dowries, and are widowed in their childhood. Forced to return to their families and banished from the pleasures of a married life and motherhood, these young former child brides are consigned to a marginalized position in the household. They have to wear white, are allowed to eat only once a day, and are considered a burden on the male members of the family. This is a representative picture of the condition of widows in the late nineteenth century even after the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, which was proposed and pushed by Vidyasagar. By depicting the plight of the widows and satirizing Tanu Roy's religious beliefs, Mukhopadhyay puts forward a sharp critique. A conversation between Tanu Roy's wife and Khetu's mother also sheds light on his support of widow remarriage. Since Kankabati's other sisters were widowed, their mother promises to offer the Gods special votives if the law is passed. Khetu's mom responds, "Don't even bring those words to your mouth! What if the English decree that all widows have to marry? What will I do in my old age? I will have no option but to kill myself." "No, no sister. This law will only be for young widows who wish to remarry," says Tanu Roy's wife, a show of support for British social reform policies as well as the Moderate Nationalists' agenda (Mukhopadhyay 14–15).

Mukhopadhyay also uses the realistic section of the book to praise the social and educational policies instituted by the British in an extension of his support for social reforms. His characterization of Khetu, the male protagonist, evinces a blend of the old, the traditional, the

new, and the liberal, and it locates him in the “interface between homespun ideas, and strange ones appearing from the West” (Roy, “*Swadesh*”). Although Roy describes the prevalent perception of the colonial education as “the new western education system [that] only trained people to get jobs but appeared to lack that which helps create proper human beings,” Khetu does not display any of the faults evident in young men educated by Western principles (“*Swadesh*”). He is a loving son, supporting his mother and his foster family, as well as a brilliant student, liberated from the corruptions and superstitions of rural Bengal but adhering to the ideals of home and family. He is entirely committed to Kankabati despite her father’s efforts and is willing to take on the censures of social opprobrium to marry her. He is a teetotaler and a vegetarian and a *shubodh balok* (a good child).²⁵ Khetu is good not only because of his upbringing but also because of the education that was provided to him by his foster family, which is a liberal education along the lines of Western rationalism. That Mukhopadhyay’s support of the education system also extends to women’s literacy is evident in the fact that Kankabati herself is educated, reflecting contemporary trends in women’s schooling. The first school for women, Bethune School in Kolkata, was established in 1849, followed by Bethune College in 1870. This was a significant move, which is reflected in the novel in the actions of Khetu, who, having seen women getting educated in Kolkata, takes it upon himself to provide Kankabati with a modicum of education, starting with Vidyasagar’s *Barnaparichay*.²⁶ Yet this is in direct contrast to Tanu Ray’s motives for getting his daughter educated. Thus, while

²⁵ This term, popularized by Vidyasagar’s *Barnaparichay*, literally means “a good boy” and represents the obedient, virtuous young man as opposed to the recalcitrant, disobedient boy. This was a prevalent dichotomy in nineteenth-century Bengali children’s literature, according to Sibaji Bandyopadhyay.

²⁶ A reference to one of the earliest and most popular Bengali primers.

Mukhopadhyay reiterates the need for women's reforms, he still depicts a world where men grant and women receive, and where the British grant and the Indians receive.

Indeed, all the women in *Kankabati* are granted very little agency and there are no radical steps toward emancipation. Both Kankabati's mother and Khetu's mother are finally helpless to prevent Kankabati's forced marriage, and the role of the villain shifts in the dreamscape from Tanu Roy to Nakeshwari Rakkhoshi, the female demon who is ultimately denied the redemption of transformation that is granted to Tanu Roy. Once she wakes up from her dream, Kankabati reverts to the obedient, shy creature she had always been. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the moment of realism in which Alice wakes from her dream and returns to reality serves the purpose of evoking nostalgia but does not add to the main plot of the story. In *Kankabati*, however, a transformation occurs in the real world to which Kankabati returns. After her recovery from the twenty-two day feverish coma caused by the fear of her marriage, she awakes to find a miraculous transformation in the patriarchal attitudes of her elders. Her father has seen the error of his ways and is ready to allow her to marry Khetu. The zamindar apologizes for desiring to marry her and for maligning Khetu, and all the other conspirators either fall into troubled times or are jailed for their misdeeds. This comedic transformation is brought about not by Kankabati's active participation but by her very lack of agency, since it is the passivity embodied by her comatose state that rouses feelings of sympathy and remorse in all those involved. This cautious and ambivalent treatment of the figure of the girl child and of women reflects the colonial setting of late nineteenth-century Bengal, where women and girls had not yet acquired even the kind of power and agency displayed by Alice. The text reflects the attitudes of the Moderate Nationalists, who had not yet envisioned a state of complete emancipation for women.

2.1.3 The Story: Anticolonial Commentary in the Dreamscape

It is in the dreamscape that the book most explicitly reveals both its similarities to Carroll's Wonderland and its ambivalence toward a Moderate stance. It is also in the fantasy narrative that Mukhopadhyay reveals his critique of English colonial rule and its social influences. That the readers are not made aware of the transition to a dreamscape adds to the absurdity of the magical adventures that ensue. Despite his approval of social and educational reforms set in motion by the British, Mukhopadhyay uses the conventions of fantasy to critique the Moderate methods of arousing anticolonial, patriotic fervor, consisting mainly of the formation of committees, submitting petitions and appeals, and other measures that restricted the involvement of the masses. It is only after the Swadeshi movement (1905) and the arrival of Gandhi (1915) that the native population became involved in large numbers. Not surprisingly, the British response to Moderate demands was to insist that these demands of a small, elite section of the population were not representative of the bulk of native society. In the novel, Mukhopadhyay describes the situation with a humorous anecdote about a couple of supernatural characters who are basically a separated skull and skeleton. Enraged by the fact that the English-educated population were forgetting, or, rather, choosing not to believe in the existence of ghosts, these characters open a company called Skull, Skeleton, and Co. The choice of an English name for their company was a deliberate one since it would earn them credibility and increase the reputation of the company as well as people's faith in ghosts. The Skull justifiably complains that,

[e]ven when random Misters Mukhopadhyay, Bandyopadhyay or Chattopadhyay open a shoe, alcohol or pork store, and call it "Longman & Co.," people take them more seriously than a native shopkeeper. Then again, no one takes native scholars and pundits

seriously when they talk about religious scriptures, Shastras and Vedas, but when the foreign sahibs praise them, they become good. So, we've named our company Skull, Skeleton, and Co. (Mukhopadhyay 78)

But just like the Moderate Nationalists, their lofty intentions are belied by the inefficacy of their methods that consisted of giving speeches and printing books and newspapers. Although Khetu's faith in the Skull and Skeleton affirms their belief in the necessity of opening a company, the implication is that despite all these arrangements, people are going to take neither ghosts nor the people who employ such strategies very seriously, thus obliquely critiquing Moderate means of demanding political representation.

The episode of the Skull and Skeleton also pokes fun at the nineteenth-century Bengali "Babu" culture, an effect of colonial rule. The Babus were a class of individuals who had accepted the cultural superiority of the British, imitating their appearance and mannerisms and possessing the blind reverence toward the English language and culture that the Skull refers to. This was also the class that benefited most from British rule and was therefore opposed to ideas of political autonomy. The caricature of Babu culture is continued in Kankabati's encounter with the frog, Mister Gomiz, when she is trying to find someone who can help save Khetu's life, in a textual moment that amplifies the influence of Carroll-like nonsense that is evident in every illustration and every moment of the dreamscape. The political function of nonsense is explained by Supriya Goswami, who claims that colonial Bengali authors' appropriation and use of the nonsense form popularized by Lear and Carroll were subversive attempts to communicate with their young audience in the Swadeshi era, providing a context for Mukhopadhyay's earlier use of

Carrollian nonsense to express his views about colonial rule.²⁷ She further mentions Homi Bhabha's formulation of mimicry as "a seditious gesture of colonial resistance . . . the very act of appropriating the behavior and speech of the colonial masters causes a slippage or a gap as the process of replication is never complete or flawless, and this enables the colonized to subvert the master-discourse" (Goswami 5), and she goes on to describe Bengali children's literature of the early twentieth century as mimicking British literary traditions as a way of interrogating British rule (Goswami 6). For Goswami, mimicry's potential for subversion through imperfect replication renders literary nonsense similar to the strategies of the Swadeshi movement by inspiring the native population to fabricate a world that upended the one in which they lived. The literary nonsense and Swadeshi vision "generate[d] a calculatingly crafted and logical world, rather than one that had been randomly put together by its creator," allowing for dominant societal structures to be temporarily challenged and ruptured (Goswami 152). The episode with Mister Gomiz evinces a similar desire to imagine an alternative world overturning the one in which Kankabati lived. Mister Gomiz, the frog, is described by the narrator as a figure who evokes wonder in Kankabati when she encounters him. "The frog had a hat on its head, wore a coat and a pant. A frog in a Sahib's dress! He had become unrecognizable, except for his color, which was still that of a frog. No amount of soap could make him look like a Sahib. That and the fact that he had no shoes on" (Mukhopadhyay 86). When Kankabati speaks to him in Bengali, he retorts with gibberish that she takes to be English, and she pleads for him to answer her queries

²⁷ The Swadeshi movement was an economic strategy used during the Indian National Movement which involved boycotting British goods and using goods made by Indian industries. The Swadeshi movement started in 1905, after the Partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon, and ended in 1911, when the two parts of Bengal were joined together, and the capital of the British empire in India was shifted from India to Delhi.

in Bengali. In response, Mister Gomiz first checks his surroundings for the presence of others and then proceeds to scold Kankabati thoroughly in Bengali for almost exposing his native blood and for calling him a frog, all the while insisting that she call him a Sahib and address him as Mister Gomiz. By humorously denouncing the Frog and exposing the imperfection of his imitation (the lack of shoes, the color of the skin, the behavior, etc.), it is Mukhopadhyay who is undermining the master discourse. The Bengali Babu, Mister Gomiz, is a flawed replica of the British masters and is thus a symbol of mockery and subversion.

The most directly anticolonial statement that Mukhopadhyay makes, targeted directly toward the British, is through the figure of the Mosquito, with whom Kankabati and Mister Gomiz join forces to recover Khetu's soul. The blood-sucking Mosquito, with his desire to control the human population, is a clear parallel for the exploitative European colonialist, who, with his arbitrary and biased economic policies, wishes to drain the wealth from the colonies as well as steal the livelihoods of the people he is colonizing. In his speech to the other mosquitos in an impromptu and informal court scene (again, a nod to the infamous mock trial in *Alice in Wonderland*), the Mosquito, named Deergo Shundo, speaks of the increasing desire of Indians to travel across the *kalapani* as well as their tendency of regional migration.²⁸ He says that if Indians travel away from the jurisdiction of the mosquitos, it would lead to a lack of accountability through demographical statistics and disrupt the comfort the mosquitos experience while draining the blood of the Indians. According to him, Indians exist merely to serve the race of mosquitos and cannot be allowed out of their jurisdiction since traveling would enlighten the

²⁸ 3Translated literally, *kalapani* means black water, but it was also used to generally indicate parts of the world that could be accessed by crossing water, i.e., overseas. It was believed that traveling overseas would cause Indians to lose their caste.

Indians and knowledge would lead to empowerment. Once apprised of their oppressed conditions and of their heritage, Indian humans would no longer consent to remain as servants of the mosquitos. So, with the help of traditional legal methods and with the use of Sanskrit chants, the mosquitos pass a law forbidding Indians from moving out of their homes. Bound by their metaphorical and literal blindness, Indians are at the mercy of the mosquitos (Mukhopadhyay 99–100). This scene resonates with the anticolonial sentiments of the late nineteenth century, now voiced by the fantastic other. Deergho Shundo also empowers Khorbur, one of the characters who lives in his village and specializes in herbs, spells, and solutions, in his fight against his wife, because a happy Khorbur will yield sweeter blood for the mosquitos' nourishment. The success of Deergho Shundo's plan satisfied Khorbur, who agrees to help Kankabati, reminding his colonial readers of the occasional British strategy of pacifying Indians to ensure their cooperation.

Regardless of the explicit nature of this scene, the very fact that fantastic figures are being used to voice anticolonial sentiments points to a cautiousness that wisely acknowledges the censorship laws in late nineteenth-century Bengal. British surveillance was exercised on all printed materials to prevent the circulation of seditious and inflammatory materials. Bipan Chandra describes some of the hilarious ways in which the vernacular press of the late nineteenth century thwarted the British Raj's surveillance measures:

To arouse political consciousness, to inculcate nationalism, to expose colonial rule, to “preach disloyalty” was no easy task, for there had existed since 1870 Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code according to which “whoever attempts to excite feelings of disaffection to the Government established by law in British India” was to be punished

with transportation for life or for any term or with imprisonment up to three years.
(Chandra 104)

In tandem with some of the censorship legislation mentioned earlier, these measures reflect the desire of an increasingly authoritarian British government to curb freedom of speech in India. Mukhopadhyay's cautiousness in having the fantastic other voice anticolonial sentiments is a result of this censorship. This cautiousness was also reflected by the methods of the Moderate Nationalists, which are ironically the very methods Mukhopadhyay seems to simultaneously criticize and espouse, explaining his ambivalence toward colonial rule. Thus, the Mosquito, despite his opinions of natives, goes to great lengths to try and help Kankabati. Gautam Chando

Roy quotes from the article "Se Ek Upakatha" (1897), published in the children's journal *Sakha o Saathi*:

I have noticed that unlike Europeans, we Bengalis are never keen to save people in distress. They do their utmost to help a person threatened and are not daunted even if their own lives are at risk. Catching sight of someone in danger, the average Bengali will stand and stare, but a sahib will immediately proceed to save him, throwing off his hat and coat. He will not care if he has to jump into water or enter fire. (qtd. in Roy, "Swadesh")²⁹

More than indicating the helpfulness of Europeans, this quote points to the Bengali perception of European nature as resourceful and efficient, qualities that they probably found lacking in their own society, inundated as it was by gentle, effeminate, educated Bengali

²⁹ Originally published as "Se Ek Upakatha," *Sakha O Sathi*, vol. 4, 1897, p. 37.

bhadroloks (gentlemen).³⁰ This view of British character was an underlying reason for the Moderate Nationalists to delay absolute political autonomy and instead petition for better governance by the British Indian Government. This perception is borne out by the Mosquito, who helps Kankabati not for purely altruistic reasons but from an innate sense of his own resourcefulness and also from the desire to uphold his daughter Raktaboti's faith in her father, by helping her adopted friend, Kankabati. As a civil servant, Mukhopadhyay's tendency to acknowledge the positive repercussions of colonial rule is not entirely surprising. The most significant example of his allegiance to the Moderate ideals lies in the fact that Kankabati has to seek the help of Khorbur and the Frog (who are both representations of native stereotypes) as well as the Mosquito (the English colonial ruler) in order to save Khetu, implying that the conditions in India can only be improved by a collaborative effort between the English and the Indians, an ever-present goal of the Moderate Nationalists. Yet these ideologies of collaboration are not mentioned in the realistic framework of the novel and are merely implied and not uttered explicitly even in the dreamscape.

Although the novel does seem to portray a certain degree of ambivalence toward colonial rule, it is reflective of the sociopolitical atmosphere of the time, and Mukhopadhyay's nonsensical world is "a calculatingly crafted and logical world" reflecting the cautious nationalism and the sense of occupying a changing world that prevailed during the period (Goswami 152). Satadru Sen says of the Carrollian influence on Bengali children's literature: "These derivations were themselves dependent upon the ability of the Bengali child to make a leap of identity and become a brown Alice, displacing the bizarre on to unnamed alien locations.

³⁰ For more on the effeminate Bengali, refer to Mrinalini Sinha's *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late-Nineteenth Century*.

Yet the alien geographies are all suspiciously Bengali, and the pretense of displacement is never serious” (Sen “Juvenile Peripheries”) By placing the “suspiciously Bengali” dream narrative in an extended realistic framework using humor and satire, Mukhopadhyay ensures that his anticolonialist articulations are not taken seriously, even while taking advantage of the fantastic other-scape to express his ideological motivations.

As an adaptation of the Alice texts, *Kankabati* is an obvious product of the contact zone, and, in the moments when it exposes encounters between Western and Eastern ideals, it also shows evidence of transculturation.³¹ The portrayal of childhood is not confrontational but alternate to contemporary British conceptions of childhood, in its combination of imported as well as native ideals of childhood. The glaringly limited portrayal of Kankabati’s agency gives us a demonstration of some of the scripts of childhood that fed into the nationalist discourses in colonial Bengal. Goswami regards the mimicry of British literary traditions in Bengali children’s literature of the early twentieth century as an attempt to interrogate imperial rule (Goswami 6). However, *Kankabati*, though written against a background of nineteenth-century Moderate Nationalism and professing a cautious degree of subversive interrogation of British colonialism in India, is a rather measured imitation that is far from seeing children as resisters and does not grant much agency to either children or adults. Instead, it defines the expressive potential of

³¹ In the introduction to *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt defines the contact zone as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today. . . Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone. . . Ethnographers have used this term to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.” (4–6)

childhood as a symbiosis of stasis and motion rather than as a linear series of self-determining and triumphant actions.

2.2 *Khatanchir Khata*

Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), was a member of the illustrious Tagore family, and a nephew of the Nobel prize winning author, Rabindranath Tagore. He is best known for his accomplishments in the field of art, as the founder of the “Bengal School of Art” and as the creator of the “Indian School of Oriental Art” and thus, most of the scholarship about him have their origins in the field of art history.³² He is also remembered as a revered writer of popular children’s stories, like *Rajkahini (Tales of Kings)*, *Nalak* and *Khiner Putul (The Condensed Milk Doll)*, though his literary works have not received much attention from either Anglo-American or Indian literary or children’s literature scholars. In this chapter, I attempt to rectify this by examining *Khatanchir Khata (An Accountant’s Journal)* and its function within the tradition of children’s fantasy in colonial Bengal. I argue that Abanindranath uses this text to create a catalogue of native childhood experiences that performs the political function of acquainting children with the rich variety of swadeshi children’s culture.

That *Khatanchir Khata* (1921), an adaptation of Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* (1907), combines a multitude of generic and cultural traditions is not surprising, since this is a significant feature of Tagore’s artistic creations as well. Initially trained in European styles at the Calcutta

³² Sircar, Sanjay. “Shashthi’s Land: Folk Nursery Rhyme in Abanindranath Tagore’s *The Condensed Milk Doll*.” *Asian Folklore Studies* (57, 1): pg 25. 1998. Web.

School of Art, his art went on to establish what Sircar calls “a new and eclectic national vocabulary in painting,” combining European, Indian (Mughal, Rajput), and other Asian (Chinese and Japanese) elements in nuanced and complex combinations (Sircar). His literary oeuvre also includes *Buro Angla* which is a Bengali adaptation of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* by Selma Lagerlof. In his analysis of folk nursery rhymes in Tagore’s *Khurer Putul*, Sircar argues that “The technique could have been generated independently, but more likely Abanindranath’s source for it is a foreign one, well-established in Victorian English fantasy fiction, that he applied to native material and made his own. This is all the more likely given that such works as *Peter Pan* (1904) and *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (1907) are known directly to have inspired other works by him... Thus, most probably *Doll* derives the technique of using nursery rhymes from Carroll’s books. Abanindranath, however, does not follow Carroll slavishly” (Sircar). In addition to folk nursery rhymes and direct transcreations of sections of Barrie’s tale, *Khatanchir Khata* combines tales from the *Ramayana*, long descriptive evocations of rural and urban childhood experiences as well as imagery directly inspired by the lush pastoral fairy tales of Bengal, rendered in a tone oscillating between the social awareness of satire and the wonder of children’s fantasy.³³

The tale begins in the linear timeline of the Ray family, which is the outlining framework of the story. However, unlike *Kankabati*, the framework doesn’t serve the function of a realistic containing structure/skeleton/shell/scaffolding, but instead serves as a continuous thread allowing the reader to follow the somewhat tenuous storyline as it meanders amongst long descriptive passages eliding fantasy and reality, and different narrative modes (first and third

³³ The best way to describe transcreation would be as a portmanteau of translation and recreation. In this case, it refers to translation from one language to another, in a process which renders it suitable for its intended audience.

person). In other words, the linear framework of the narrative divides the story in time and space while simultaneously acting as a *sutradhar* (narrative thread holder). The opening chapter, titled “Anguti Panguti,” details the birth of Shona and her twin brothers, Anguti and Panguti, and their acquaintance with Putu in a digressive and meandering style. We are introduced to Khatanchi Moshai (Mr. Accountant) as he writes accounts of the *golabari* (farmhouse/shed/barn). We are informed that he keeps a strict account of all that goes on in the *golabari*, with salaries getting docked for any misdeameanours committed there, to the extent that his workers end up finding large chunks of their salaries missing at the end of the month. It's a beautiful spring day when his daughter, Shona is born and immediately starts crying as an omen of all that she is going to cost her father, including the costs of her upbringing, her wedding, her dowry and her subsequent trips to and from her in-laws place. We are also introduced to Shonaton, the old male servant who plays a short but significant role in the linear framework of the novel. Since he does a lot of the household shopping, he mainly to remind Khatanchi Moshai of dreaded and “useless” household expenses, as well as those incurred through fatherhood. He is also serves as the focal point of a tangential critique of child marriage, as the groom in an absurd episode of child’s play, but unlike Mukhopadhyay, Tagore seems to be more focused on creating a local and native imagination of childhood, rather than social reform, marking his preference for imagination over didacticism as a means of cultural decolonization. In any case, Shonaton functions to provoke Khatanchi Moshai’s calculating nature as, in a scene directly reminiscent of Mr. Darling’s calculations at the beginning of Peter and Wendy when the Darling children are born, he grumpily calculates how much his daughter would cost him and where he could cut and save in order to afford her, thinking

I could cut half a *seer* (measure of weight) from the wife's allotted share of milk and about eight ounces from the cream from my opium and the thick milk meant for my tea- that would be enough milk for three meals for my daughter every day. Also, if I substitute the two *koi* fish bought daily, with small fish for my wife and a big prawn for me, maybe I could use the oil for her hair – and have some money left over for a clay doll, red glass bangles and a pet bird. (Tagore 108).

Evidently, while the Darlings aspired to prosperity and were hard off in reality, the Khatanchi is prosperous as indicated by the mental catalogues of food and household costs he performs, and therefore, motivated not by concerns of household economy but by his miserly ways. The Nana substitute in this novel, a dog called Bohim, is made to perform not only the duties of the childrens' caretaker, but also those an all-purpose servant, similar to Shonaton. We are also told that his penny-pinching nature is the cause of his satisfaction when his twin sons, Anguti and Panguti are born two years later, as this would allow him to perform two sets of rituals in one go, throughout their lifetime. Yet, the reader cannot help but suspect that the source of his joy may lie elsewhere, since later, we're casually told that Anguti and Panguti go to school while his daughter, Shona, does not.

In any case, the reader is regaled with several descriptions of the Khatanchi's discomfiture at having to provide for the various religious rituals involved in bringing up three children, as well as the aforementioned incident of the mock marriage of Shonaton (in which Shonaton wants to have a real marriage to a 5-year-old girl, but the children want him to marry Bohim, the dog), obliquely critiquing costly religious rituals as well as referencing the imperative nature of gender reforms (the marriage to a child is framed within the absurd play of a mock marriage to an animal). Only after this are we

introduced to “Putu,” our Bengali Peter who never ages or grows in size. The children’s mother is the first to discover him lurking in the children’s minds. While Putu is never clearly visualized by Anguti and Panguti, Shona’s mind throws up a clear picture of him as a half child, half rooster.³⁴ Significantly, the description of the children’s mother rummaging through their minds throws up the most important thematic concern of the story, the book as metaphor for the play of imagination, and its centrality to the anti-colonial movement independence movement, when she finds the little mind books in which their memories and imaginative explorations are inscribed. She mentions him to the Khatanchi who dismisses her fear and implies that Bohim must be influencing their imaginations. Peter’s habit of strewing his belongings around is also seen in Putu, as Shona’s mother discovers *hijuli* (cashew) leaves (not found in their village) in the children’s room (not on the ground floor, like the Darling nursery). One afternoon, as she wakes up from a doze, she catches Putu in the children’s room, who “gnashed his teeth at her and made a small fist while preparing to escape through the window,” when he was attacked by Bohim (Tagore 126). Putu manages to escape but Bohim catches hold of Putu’s mind book (notebooks which encapsulate the minds of their child owners). Readers familiar with Peter and Wendy will recognize the sequence of events as almost a direct replica of those contained in Barrie’s opening chapters.

The first section of Putu’s book which contained biographical details about Putu’s life is missing, a damage inflicted by Bohim, or at Putu’s own hands. The narration in the opening chapter oscillates between third person and the narrator’s first-person perspective. However, as

³⁴ Which is also a playing on the term “maanush howa.” While in idiomatic parlance, it is taken to mean “becoming civilized” i.e. maturing or growing older and more socialize, its literal translation is “growing human,” referring to Putu’s fear of a literal return to a purely human society and thus, giving up his hybrid form and therefore, his ability to fly.

the book moves into the second chapter, the narration, while in first person, slips into Putu's perspective, as an appeal for trust as the readers are asked to willingly suspend their disbelief in an ancient and magical Kolkata. The reader is initially unaware of this change in perspective as the chapter takes the reader through a map of colonial Calcutta, juxtaposing fact and fantasy. The fantasy Calcutta, in which a land of forests, islands, lakes and gardens erupts in the city at night, is not accessible to everyone. This Bengal is not only located in the most teeming center of urbanity in colonial India, it is a place which combines reality and fiction, the urban, the rural and the pastoral, creatures like fairies and talking animals, as well as human children and adults. This is not an isolated Neverland, accessible only to lost children and fantasy creatures. This is a rather localized Neverland, hidden in the interstices of human life, coexisting with daily human life and interacting with it in unsuspected but necessary ways. Finally, Putu tells us that he is the only child to be able to access this hidden Calcutta because, alone of all children, he never wanted to grow and escaped as soon as he was able to sprout wings. He tells us the story of his arrival in Neverland, his initial sojourn on the island of the birds, his exploration of the land of fairies and the other parts of the magical Calcutta, and finally, of his hardship, homesickness and his desire to return to his mother. In the third chapter, after many adventures, Putu returns to his house and encounters his mother, sleeping in the nursery. He is torn between his love for his mother and his fear of growing older, bigger and more human. Eventually he decides to go back to magic Calcutta and return home later. But he gets absorbed in his play and forgets and by the time he returns, the window has been barred and his mother has had another baby. The chapter ends with Putu leaving, his tears for his mother indicating the social and political importance of motherhood in colonial Bengal.

The fourth chapter describes the Khatanchi and his wife leaving the children at home to go and attend a theatrical performance at their neighbor's. The Khatanchi expected his wife to stay at home and look after the children, but she sneaks out, leaving him to deal with the children. What follows is an almost exact rendition of the scene in chapter 2 when Mr. Darling tricks Nana into taking his medicine and then gets angry at her and locks her out. Being ostracized from the house, Bohim is unable to act when Putu appears and offers to take the children to the greenroom of the theatre, in order to give them a closer look at the local theatrical scene. Putu and Shona talk, like Peter and Wendy and then while they fly, Putu tells the children his life story. However, the thought of coming back home and finding their window barred scares Shona and her brothers so much, that they cannot sustain the happy thoughts required to fly and fall on to the earth beside the stage of their neighbor's theatrical performance. Their appearance is unnoticed and they consume some of the sweetmeats doing the rounds among the audience. This restores their happy thoughts and the chapter ends with them flying again. The fifth and the last chapter hurriedly wraps up their entire sojourn in magical Calcutta, which they enter and exit through the green room of Putu's theatre. The battle between Hook and Peter is re-enacted as a theatrical performance from the Ramayan, performed in Putu's own theatre. After this performance, the children are mysteriously transported home, and the children's mother return home from the performance to find the children crying and sleeping in their beds. They are excused from attending school and Putu watches them fall back asleep around their mother, before he returns to his land. The story ends abruptly with Shonaton returning from his village with a child bride and their world goes back to normal.

2.2.1 Imagination and Nationalism

Abanindranath Tagore used several descriptive passages in *Khatanchir Khata* to construct the imaginative world of native childhood which functions as an antidote to foreign learning in this novel. The first chapter throws up the image of the Khatanchi's wife rummaging through the minds of the children as they sleep. *Peter and Wendy* contains a comparable scene in which Mrs. Darling organizes the children's mental chest of drawers and which results in her discovery of references to Neverland and Peter. In both texts, this action serves as a secret didactic measure by which parents ensure that children retain subconscious memories of the good knowledge acquired during the day, by tucking their negative and naughty thoughts out of sight and airing out the virtuous ones. However, in Tagore's text, the description of this nighttime ritual is interspersed with local rhymes which are sung to children as they fall asleep. The universality of children being rocked to sleep with nursery rhymes is positioned simultaneously with the familiarity of rhymes such as "*Khukhu ghumalo para juralo*," (the neighborhood quietens down as the little girl sleeps) rendering this fantasy ritual of rummaging through children's minds more locatable and identifiable to native child readers. And then finally, readers are told about the hidden compartment which contains the children's mind books, a fictional textual representation of their imagination. Wrapped in a green cover, this book is delicious enough to be consumed as a sweetmeat by the children, thus symbolizing the tangibly material and aesthetic attractiveness of contemporary Bengali children's culture later described in great detail through the contents of the mind books. Thus, the books are kept in a secret compartment till the children are old enough to find and take charge of their own books (and there are some who never find their books). Since the contents of these books are intended to impart a sense of *swadesh* (own land), this indicates that the conscious inculcation of native

imagination is necessary to the process of envisioning a nation. Key to the patriotic tone in this description is the author's reminiscences of the discovery of his own mind book and the extensive catalogue of children's culture he frames in chronicling the contents of the mind books. The author made his acquaintance with his mind book when his mother saw him exploring his imagination through art, but relying on foreign newspapers and books for his inspiration. She seats him on her lap, indicating that the ideal age for beginning the processes of narrative indigenization should begin at a very early age, and goes through each page of his little book with him, rendering him amazed as to the unparalleled wealth, variety and color of the images to be found within. What follows is an extensive list of the subject matter of indigenous childhood culture, comprising a collage of fragmentary images of both rural and urban Bengal, underscoring the connection between creative output, imaginative play, textuality and nationalism.

The form of the list or catalogue is a significant one within the context of colonial methodology. The pressures of controlling an empire led to a preoccupation with "determining, controlling, codifying and representing" the culture of the colonial subject to the extent that processes of empire building took the form of "documentation, legitimation, classification and bounding" (Cohn 3). The controllers of the various administrative and cultural institutions were united under a widespread agreement that the society they were ruling could be known, represented and controlled adequately as a serial accumulation of facts. Cohn defines this as a "theatre of power managed by specialists who maintained the various forms of knowledge required" (Cohn 3). Thus, in the catalogued contents of the children's mind books in *Khatanchir Khata*, what we see is a collage of scenes and episodes, detailing children's imaginative play as enacting a behavioral script of the performance of native childhood, derived from a combination

of indigenous folk and fairy lore, nursery and playground rhymes, details of rural and urban domesticity. In Thomas Richards' *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*, the metaphor of performance metamorphoses into the concept of an imperial archive as the repository of colonial power. He describes the archive as "not a building, nor even a collection of texts, but the collectively imagined junction of all that was known or knowable, a fantastic representation of an epistemological master pattern, a virtual focal point for the heterogeneous local knowledge of metropolis and empire" providing an insight into Tagore's compilation of images as an alternative epistemological archive of subaltern childhood which also functions as an imaginative "focal point for the heterogeneous local" vision of patriotic knowledge (Richard 11). The description begins a portrait of a pastoral fantasy landscape, with language imitating *rupkathas* or the traditional fairy tale³⁵. The author's book contained images of the Land of the Orange Castle, where princesses played with cows and deer amidst the sound of the cowherd's flute (a reference to Vishnu's childhood as a cowherd in Vrindavan), and slept in dew laden meadows, with the moon hanging like a silver plate in the night sky with the cowherd watching over her. This is followed by the images of local boys playing amidst rural greenery, followed scenes of domesticity in the parents' home, then the trip to the in-laws' home and scenes of monsoon. He goes on to describe the notebooks of other little boys, filled with stories of voyages, of books and reading, of adventures in the countryside, playing football and marbles, flying kites and eating sweetmeats like *rosogolla* and *sandesh*. Little girls would see images of little kittens, picnics, cookouts in toy kitchens, of jewelry, clothes and playing dress up. These

³⁵ The language is very similar to Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar *Thakurmar Jhuli (Grandmother's Bag of Tales)*, a collection of local folk and fairy tales collected and published by him, often lauded as one of the most important fantasy texts in the post-Vidyasagar Swadeshi era.

scenes of rural domesticity would be interspersed with glimpses of urban modernity such as motor cars with drivers in them, electric lights, concerts of Hindustani music, the stethoscope in a doctor's hand. He concludes this list with an association between domesticity, reading and nationalism by stating that these imaginary texts, regardless of the gender of their owners, all contained images of their parents and their families, which never disappear or get erased, but sometimes, merely fade with time. The variety of indigenous children's culture is also materialized in the interspersing of the prose with nursery and folk tales recollected from oral culture. In a bid at a transcultural comparison, the author states that the map of the land of these books would be bigger than all of Europe, thus, inspiring in the young mind a picture of native childhood embedded within the Bengali landscape as having the landmass i.e. the potential of overcoming the cultural weight of European knowledge and education, and overturning Macaulay's notorious statement in the course of a single statement.

2.2.2 Nationalism and Textuality

While localized geographical spaces are crucial to Tagore's idea of native childhood, as manifest in the cartographic overlapping of Neverland and Kolkata to create magical Kolkata, the idea of textuality crucially frames the entire experience of the geography, firmly establishing the connection between children reading and a locally subaltern childhood. In fact, the concept of a magical Kolkata acts as a bridge between a visual representation of geography and the concept of native textual childhood as crucial to the futurity of India as an autonomous nation. According to Richards, "The ordering of the world and its knowledge into a unified field was located explicitly in the register of representation, where, most successfully of all, the archive often took the form of a utopian state" (Richards 11). The representational "utopian state" in Tagore's

novel, magical Kolkata, and its narrator and protagonist, Putu, firmly locate his archive of native childhood within images of texts, textuality and reading. Additionally, the novel itself rests on an interplay between real and imagined textuality, as the narrative moves between a real book i.e. the Katanchi Moshai's notebook, imaginary texts such as the children's mind books, and epic texts such as the Ramayana. These texts are alternatively feared in the case of the eponymous notebook, accumulated and earned in the case of the mind books, and read and performed in the case of the epics. Bolstered by images of children reading, this collection of texts cluster to create this archival text on native childhood. In other words, as Richards would say, the images of textuality serve as pretexts in the service of a text, in this case, a text of native childhood, a process which he terms as central to the creation of the "paper empire" that was the British colony in India.

In addition to serving as the narrative center, the realistic linear narrative establishes the slippage between real and imagined textuality that is at the heart of the novel's commentary on Bengali childhood. Khatanchi Moshai's account book, which exists only in the realistic realm, is the antithetical core of the archive of imaginative knowledge that Tagore upholds in this text. This resistance to contemporary systems of organized pedagogy is also represented by Putu's choices; while traveling through the Island of Fairies, he reveals that his fear and abhorrence of schools is one of the reasons why he leaves the world of humans and flies to magical Kolkata. Since the colonial education system was a British import, one can recognize a concern for a sovereign national identity in Tagore's stance on foreign, European learning. His descriptions of magical Kolkata might encompass a gentle mockery of Bengali culture but his opposition to the ignorance of Bengali folklore and culture is far more embedded, as evidenced by the placement of the mind books in fantastic chests of drawers located in the deep recesses of the subconscious.

The distance between the account books and the mind books, and all that they represent, might seem irreconcilable. However, the descriptions of magical Kolkata that are in the mind books reduce the distance between imagination and reality. As the control of the narrative slips between the narrator and Putu, the reader is asked to suspend their disbelief and is provided evidence of the existence of magical Kolkata, ensuring a readerly trust even before we encounter the space. The act of reading this section is an exercise in the play of imagination that Tagore espouses, since the readers are cajoled to believe in a space on the words of either a fantastical omniscient narrator or a half-human, half rooster character whose evidence seems more like rhetorical play than actual evidence. In a direct address to the reader the narrator/Putu asks, “You don’t believe me? You think I am making it up?...Okay, you can only see the blue sky, birds and clouds during the day, but if you look at the night sky, you will see all the stars blooming. If that is possible, why can’t the city transform into a garden at night?...If you could ever stay awake beyond 2 o’clock at night, then you would know the truth of my words...” (Tagore 128). Through the act of placing their faith in the source of the information, the readers extend their imagination to encompass both the temporal and spatial fabric of magical Kolkata.

This is followed by a description of magical Kolkata which combines the colonial set up of the city with the constant incursion of magic. It is in this description that he first gives us the name of the magical city, Haalishohor (Haali city). The Bengali word ‘haal’ has multiple meanings, one of them being ‘the present condition.’ Additionally, Haalishohor is also an older name for certain sections of Kolkata. Thus, Haalishohor is not just a geographical space, but also a temporal space, simultaneously occupying the present and the past, hidden during the day, revealed only at night. Putu’s book describes the place as being divided into two halves by a jorasanko (a double bridge, but this is also a play on the Tagore residence which was called

Jorasanko), one half of which belonged to the Raja (the king, or in this case, the ruler), the other half of which belonged to the Rays (a well-known Bengali surname). Through the two bridges, which formed the main artery of the city, one can enter the two halves of the city. In the King's half, one can find the King's Garden (Raja Bagan), and the Island of White Marble (Swetdeep) on Lake Red (Laldighi), where the wingless fairies lived. In the other half, one would encounter the Ray Garden (Raybagan), and the Island of Jambu (Jambudeep) in the middle of the Round Lake (Goldighi), which was the residence of the birds. Beside the Red Lake, one would find the King's Fort and his canon, while the Round Lake was accompanied by the Courtyard of the Babus with hookahs and other accoutrements. Thus, the contemporaneity of Haalishohor is also evident in the structure of the space, which mirrored the colonial division of Kolkata into a 'white town' where the British lived and a 'black town' occupied by Indians. Apart from the fact that this map of the city is only derived from Putu's mind book, the textuality of this fictional city is also represented in the description of the individual localities of the city, which consisted of facts about local places combined with humorous word play on the names of the places. Thus, Haatibagan (Elephant Gardens) contained elephants and BaghBazaar (Tiger Bazaar) sold tiger milk and tiger cubs, Potoldanga only contained potol (pointed gourd), Maniktala (Neighborhood of Gems) contained gold and trees bearing pearls and other precious gems, and Boubazaar (Wife Bazaar) and Mechobazaar (Fish Bazaar) were overrun with loud Bengali housewives shopping for fish. Since one can safely assume that colonial Kolkata did not contain trees bearing gems and tigers and elephants did not freely roam the streets, the fantastic textuality of the place is easily discernible. If Bengali children were to achieve a prosperous future through localized knowledge systems as well as an immersion in imaginative texts, this guided tour into a textual fantasy colonial space seemed to be an indicator of the most likely trajectory to that end.

As the narrative of the mind book move away from descriptive passages about to Putu's adventures, the narratorial control also slips from the third person omniscient narrator to Putu, who provides a first-person account of his arrival on the island and the sufferings he went through on his initial arrival in Haalishohor. Unlike in Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, readers are not spared the details of the Bengali Peter's homesickness and his difficulty in finding food or surviving in Nature. When Putu leaves his home, he is caught in the trees of the jungle and is thrown on to the Island of the Birds, in the "black town" portion of magical Kolkata. His transformation into a half human, half bird condition makes it difficult for him to survive either as a human or as a bird. Initially shunned by the birds, Putu's homesickness persists even when he is marginally accepted and he makes a constant effort to leave the island. He persuades the birds to help him build a boat and travels through Haalishohor and the Island where the fairies reside. He helps the fairies and they grant him two wishes. He uses the first wish to return to his mother, but upon his return, experiences his old fear of human adulthood. He returns to the fairies to collect on his second wish and spends time in magical Kolkata. By the time he remembers to return, the window is closed and he has been barred from his mother forever.

Tagore's insistence on the native knowledge systems is apparent even in the descriptions of Putu's adventures and in the images of textuality interspersed throughout magical Kolkata. Putu's survival and escape from the island depended on not only his acquisition of island lore, but also on his ability to remember rhymes and riddles he had learnt while in his nursery. He succeeded in befriending the birds and getting their help only because he acquired more birdlore than the residents of the island. On White Marble Island, the solution to the fairies' problems is contained in the nursery lore from his previous life. These knowledge systems are not merely oral but also alphabetical and textual. His ideal use of knowledge systems lies in the concept of

‘Nandanbagan Indrapuri’ which are twin, three storied houses located in a fountain contained in a little round garden built in the alphabet ‘R’ of the Peer Garden near the double bridges of Jorasanko.³⁶ Nandanbagan is another name for Eden, or the Garden of Paradise, while ‘Indrapuri’ is the palace of the God Indra, the king of the Gods in the Hindu pantheon. These houses, hidden like a pearl in an oyster, are full of boys residing in a state of constant creative play. Their specialty lies in their use of paper; unlike other boys who use paper to make kites or boats or merely hoard, the boys in these paradisial houses use the paper to write books or draw pictures. Thus, Haalishohor, or magical Kolkata is not just contained within a book and framed by its textual existence, but interspersed with images of the superiority of localized knowledge.

However, the biggest incursion of the textual in the fantastic realm is in the theatrical battle fought by Putu at the end of the novel. At this point of the story, the readers have been pulled out of Putu’s mind book and back in Shona’s house. Khatanchi Moshai and his wife attend a theatrical performance at a neighbor’s place and the children are left alone, accidentally, as it turns out. The text is positioned clearly in relation to *Peter and Wendy* in a scene where the Khatanchi tries to give Anguti Panguti their medicine. In an attempt to model obedience, he pretends to take his own medicine, but instead slips it to Bohim, who and angrily protests, and is removed from the house. This sequence of events is almost a verbatim replica of the scene between Mr. Darling and Nana which results in the Darling children being left alone in the nursery. Taking advantage of the children’s vulnerability, Putu slips into the room and persuades the children to fly to Haalishohor in another scene which evokes the Darling children’s escape from the nursery. Eventually, Shona and her brothers end up in the hijuli forest which is Putu’s home and his portable green room. Peter’s final battle with Hook is enacted in this Bengali

³⁶ In the text, the location is the dot of the Bengali alphabetic equivalent of R, which looks like ‘২’

Neverland in the form of a theatrical performance inspired by the Ramayana. The children finally return to their household when Shona mixes up her dialogues, betraying a lack of knowledge of the epics. Thus, Tagore simultaneously positions his text alongside a British text, as well as an Indian epic. This synthesis of epistemological system in the form of an adaptation is not only encouragement to know Indian national texts, but also an indication of the possibility of indigenization of foreign narratives.

2.2.3 Abanindranath Tagore and the Girl Child

Although the critique of the position of women in *Khatanchir Khata* is gentler than in *Kankabati*, and takes second stage to the focus on textuality and imagination in the service of the nation, Tagore does use his fantasy to draw attention to the treatment of women in the novel. Very early on, readers are made aware that Shona doesn't go to school while her younger brothers do. Additionally, the mind books of girls and boys vary distinctly in their contents depending on the gender of the child. While there are stories of fun and play everywhere, girls are shown to be mostly preoccupied with their appearance and with domesticity, rather than adventures and travel. The critique is also maintained through Shona's interstitial position as a girl and a woman, similar to *Kankabati's*. While she is still living at her father's place, she is constantly aware that she will have to leave her family and go to her in-laws. She clings on to the kitten which infiltrates their household, as a possible future companion in her marital journey. The story is also littered with folksongs about women getting married and leaving their household and neither Shona, nor her mom much agency within the household. But Tagore also uses the form of the absurd to mock child marriage, in the form of the play marriage between Shonaton and Bohim. As mentioned earlier, the unrest caused by the play compels Shonaton to

leave the village, but when he returns at the end of the novel, he is shown to have married a child bride from his own village. She encounters the Khatanchi and Bohim, is scared by their presence and hides in the house. She is thought to be dead and the Khatanchi is rather reluctant to invest money in finding her and the novel ends when she is found in her hiding place. While this doesn't offer any resolution, this incident draws attention to the prevalence of child marriages in Bengal. Since this novel was published before the passing of the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, the little girl's fear and bewilderment at finding herself in a strange place makes its political point by fictionally framing the need for such a law.

While these textual instances playfully refer to the inequality of gender roles, the final theatrical piece enacted by Putu and his companions goes one step further by portraying the lack of solidarity among women as one of the impediments to women's emancipation. The play takes place in a forest in the magical realm, which serves as Putu's portable domain, a site which can be moved between places at his will and which serves as the location for some of his adventures and his exaggerated theatrical explorations. Shona and her brothers find themselves in Putu's theatre when they fall asleep at the performance they had sneaked out to attend in their own reality. They are greeted with enthusiasm and are immediately made a part of Putu's improvised play. The play consists of three scenes which represent a loose combination of *Peter Pan* and the *Ramayana*. Putu's alternatively plays the role of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, two of the Hindu God Vishnu's most well-known manifestations, while Shona is automatically relegated to the role of Sita. In the first scene, Putu, as Ram, is attempting to revive an unconscious Sita, who has been struck down by a divine weapon unleashed by Ravana's eldest son, Indrajit.³⁷ The grief

³⁷ Ravana, the King of Lanka, had abducted Sita as revenge for his sister's humiliation at Rama and his brother, Lakshman's hands. In this story, Tagore refers to Indrajit's weapon as "mayabi rakkhoshi" which roughly translates

struck Rama is consoled by Hanuman and Vibhishan, his companions in the fight against Ravana, who offer to deploy all the famous weapons in their possession. In the end, they settle for building a palace around the prone Sita, providing her an abode appropriate to her rank as Rama's Queen, evoking the scene from Neverland when the Lost Boys build a cottage around the unconscious Wendy. The second scene evokes Ram as Krishna, Vishnu's other important manifestation and features his second wife, Satyabhama and her female companions. They plot to remove Krishna's first wife, Rukmini/Shona, from their husband's affections, by appealing to Shiva through ritualistic prayers. However, as they prepare, they hear Surpanakha, Ravana's sister, planning to kidnap Sita/Shona to avenge herself on Rama and Lakshman for cutting off her nose for trying to attract Rama, and feeding it to the crocodile. Since there is no mention of a crocodile in the Hindu epic, this can be seen as a blatant moment at narrative indigenization. Surpanakha hears the ticking crocodile approaching and flees.³⁸ This scene clearly outlines female rivalry, but also pokes gentle fun at the polygamous ways of men by situating Krishna's many marriages at the center of the conflict, and emphasizing a cyclical perpetuation of infidelity and gender strife. The third scene comprises the battle between Peter Pan and Hook, here played out through the battle between Putu and Surpanakha.³⁹ She is prevented from kidnapping Sita by Rama and Ravana and is ultimately eaten by the crocodile, while Satyabhama goes into decline

to "magical demoness." This could be a reference to the powerful weapons Indrajit was famed for possessing, or to his wife, Sulochana, the daughter of the King of Serpents, Shesh Naga, insinuating towards the lack of solidarity amongst women. Indrajit plays an important role in the battle between Rama and Ravana, racking up several successes before being beheaded by Lakshman.

³⁸ There is no mention of the crocodile ingesting a clock, so the ticking is inexplicable.

³⁹ Surpanakha's name translates to "hooked nose," rendering the allusion to a female Hook rather obvious.

at the failure of her plans. Sita/Shona, who has been playing at being unconscious for the entire play, is finally woken up by Putu/Rama, and immediately spouts the wrong dialogues before fainting again. The play ends on a note of confusion and Putu retires to his greenroom and Shona and her brothers wake up to find themselves in their bedroom.

Thus, the critique of gender inequality is masked by the perceived need for intertextual recognition and narrative indigenization. Tracing the importance of metaphors and images of childhood in the early days of American nationhood, Courtney Weikle-Mills establishes the political function of children's literature and images of children reading in inculcating the idea of citizenship within child subjects. "These texts," according to her, "present an opportunity to understand how their authors encouraged individuals to collectively imagine citizenship, tried to control how citizenship was imagined, explored the possibilities and limitations of imaginary citizenship as a viable form of political representation, and attempted to translate imaginary citizenship into reality" (Weikle-Mills 9). In prioritizing the encapsulation of childhood within images of textuality and intertextuality over the broader demands of social reform, Tagore firmly embeds indigenous culture and particularly native, imaginative childhood as important signifiers on the path to political autonomy, regardless of the actual political status of native child subjects.

3.0 Chapter Two: Moderate Ideology in Children's Periodicals

“Karon dhawn bawlo, aayu bawlo, onyomonoshko byaktir chaata bawlo, shongshaare joto kichu shawronsheel pawdartho aache bangla boi hochche shawkoler cheye shera (Be it wealth, be it lifespan, the umbrella of a careless person, the Bengali Book is the best of all memorable objects in this world).”

-“Poyla number” (“House Number One” 1920) Rabindranath Tagore
(my capitalization)

Though ironically positioned in this short story by Tagore, the notion that the “Bengali Book,” a synecdoche representing the wealth and wisdom of Bengali literature and culture, was an item of particular worth and significance, is one which increasingly pervaded nineteenth-century Bengal as the cultural effects of colonial rule came to be felt.⁴⁰ The humiliation of political subjugation and the oppressions of unjust economic laws had been obvious for decades, but in the decades following the establishment of the colonial education system, the educated intelligentsia and professionals keenly felt the connection between their ecopolitical system and their cultural status quo in relation to the British.⁴¹ It is no coincidence that this is the century

⁴⁰ The main character of this short story is so absorbed with his own intellect and vast knowledge derived from reading, that he fails to notice his wife's increasing unhappiness with him and the unrequited infatuation her neighbor had for her. While Tagore's reverence for the linguistic and literary prowess of Bengal is well-known, nonetheless, he takes time to depict the superfluity of intellect at the cost of exclusion of the external world, through this even more ridiculous, Causabon-like character.

⁴¹ This awareness was further inculcated by the Bengal Renaissance, “a period of social, cultural, psychological, and intellectual changes that were brought about in the Indian region of Bengal as a result of the contact between British

which saw the simultaneous rise of children's literature as a recognizable genre in Bengal, along with increasing nationalist sentiments. The late nineteenth century in Bengal was a time when concepts of childhood were dynamic, with writers and thinkers proclaiming it as both a Lockean blank slate to be filled with information and codes of behavior as future adults, as well as a time of innocence and wonder, to be nurtured with play and delight. This chapter examines how the political rhetoric of the Moderate period was circulated in a way that was accessible to children through the multi-genre form of the periodical. Since the Moderate period was a time of limited direct political engagement, children's periodicals became a site for reflecting indirect nuances of political understanding distilled into language and sentiments about how to be a model citizen of a progressive and prosperous nation.

As in the case of many other national literatures in colonized nations, the development of Bengali children's literature followed a combined trajectory of imitation, translation, adaptation (of both texts and genres) and original content.⁴² The import of children's books and ideas about childhood led to an increasing appreciation of the necessity of addressing children using modes and content specifically developed for them, as a way of combatting the deprecation of native culture. The political and cultural situation of being a colonial country probably also helped Indians realize the need for rousing cultural pride and patriotic sentiments as early as childhood

officials and missionaries on the one hand and the Hindu intelligentsia on the other," according to David Kopf (Kopf 1). The Bengal Renaissance was marked by "historical rediscovery, linguistic and literary modernization, and socio-religious reformation" (Kopf 3).

⁴² For more on this, refer to Rosemary Wighton's *Early Australian Children's Literature* and Webb, Jean. "Text, Culture and Postcolonial Children's Literature: A Comparative Perspective." In *Voices of the Other*, ed Roderick McGillis. Garland Publishing, 2008.

and during the formative years. By the time Tagore is voicing this sentiment in 1920, the symbolic Bengali Book and its importance for native children had been widely accepted, accompanied by the rise and proliferation of the children's literature publishing industry. While each genre of children's literature had its own functions within the cultural milieu (as I discuss in the rest of my dissertation), the children's periodical was the one with the largest and most geographically varying audience primed for the reception of scripts of childhood, a situation which the emerging literati of Bengal took advantage of. In *Notions of Nationhood in Bengal: Perspective on Samaj c. 1867-1905*, Swarupa Gupta writes that this Bengali literati was drawn together by a focus on dharma and cultural Aryanness, a term which had not yet acquired the rigid connotation of racial superiority that it came to represent later.⁴³ During the time period under discussion, cultural Aryanness was more of a sociological category characterized by a acceptance of the epics and puranas , connections with Sanskrit, belief in a supreme Godhead, and adherence to certain codes of conduct. The socio-cultural category did carry associations of Hindu Brahmanical caste system, but according to Gupta, "had an assimilative and accommodative nature, and amorphous and shifting boundaries" which could not be restricted to "Brahmanical norms and rituals" (Gupta 28). It was used by Bengalis to define a sense of self against both the British as well as regional others, people who were of the lower orders and non-Bengalis. However, the category of cultural Aryanness was an inclusive one, whereby others could be assimilated into Bengali Hindu society if they followed a code of conduct "consisting of approved forms of social behavior and cultivation and observation of indigenous customs" (Gupta 28) The elite Hindu intelligentsia propagated this codes of ethics and behavior in order to cohere Bengali society around an imagined community of local, region and nation, in which

⁴³ Especially during the Holocaust under the Nazi regime.

children played a crucial part as future citizenry. Children were instructed about behavioral scripts on how to inhabit childhood as well as future adulthood, and imbued with a sense of political commonality, adhering to the contemporary rise of cultural nationhood and combining society and culture with politics. Focusing on the periodical, this chapter examines these late nineteenth-century notions of childhood and their social and political importance during the Moderate period when awareness of nationhood was also nascent.⁴⁴

The periodical was one of the most popular genres of children's literature in late 19th century Bengal. Well established in England by mid nineteenth-century, periodicals were a popular site for entering the world of letters as well as a supplemental source of income for established writers. However, before 1824, there were only five periodicals for children in England, focused primarily on religious instruction.⁴⁵ In a testimony to the genre's rapidly rising popular, between 1866 to 1914, the numbers rose to 500. The cost-effective nature of the periodicals made them more popular as a source of fiction, in comparison to books and as the religious influence on periodical publication declined after 1850, these affordable and accessible sources of fiction increased rapidly. Though many of them folded due to the extremely competitive nature and the transience of the field, *The Boy's Own Paper* (1879-1967) and *The Girl's Own Paper* (1880-1956) ran well into the twentieth century, publishing around 150000 and 250000 copies per issue in the heydays of their popularity.⁴⁶ They were both weekly magazines, priced at a penny and were shipped globally, as we know from the dedication on their

⁴⁴ For more on the Moderate period, refer to Chapter 1.

⁴⁵ For more on children's periodicals, refer to Moruzi, Christine. "Children's Periodicals." In *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*

⁴⁶ Ibid

13th annual volume (1890-91) which is made out to “all kind friends around the world,” including to the colonies.⁴⁷ In India too, the periodicals followed a similar pattern for writers, but the very nature of the genre enabled it to take on a political function crucial in the years of the independence movement. Since periodicals are published more frequently and on a more continuous basis than novels, either weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, etc, it allowed for writers to bring up political discourse on a regular and more immediate basis. Although not as immediate as newspapers, periodicals allowed for a more balanced and deliberative rather than a reactive response. And since British periodicals had been circulating in India from the eighteenth-century, it was no surprise when the genre was “indigenized,” as described by Priya Joshi (Joshi xix).⁴⁸

We know, from Shibaji Bandopadhyay’s *The Gopal-Rakhal Dialectic* that the *Boys’ Own Paper*, which started publication in 1879, was also one of the popular children’s periodicals circulating in India. But the presence of other periodicals, children’s and adults, must have been felt earlier, since the first children’s periodical to be published in colonial Bengal was *Digdarshan* (1818). Edited by Jon Marshman and published by the Serampore Mission Press, the first printing press in India, this periodical ran for 3-4 years. It was meant for young children and was bought and sold by the Calcutta School Book Society, established for the purpose of

⁴⁷ Shibaji Bandopadhyay’s *Gopal-Rakhal Dwandoshomash-Upanibeshbad o Bangla Shishushahitya* attests to the periodical’s presence in India, at least.

⁴⁸ According to Priya Joshi, “By the time Indians started producing an English novel at the turn of the twentieth century, it was not Victorian fiction they carried with them so much as the practices of cultural translation and bricolage that they had developed from their consumption of this fiction, practices that I call “indigenization” and that remain evident in the divergent sources and multiple narrative idioms that continue to characterize the Indian novel in English.”

producing and distributing vernacular textbooks to schools in India as a way of making knowledge and information more accessible and combatting illiteracy.⁴⁹ It was in the format of an unillustrated informational periodical with articles on geography, botany, zoology, physical sciences, inventions and discoveries, with a substantial portion dedicated to the history of Bengal and India. The School Book Society brought out their own periodical in the form of an illustrated bestiary called *Pawshabali*, compiled by Padre Lawson and translated by W.H. Pears, from 1822. The periodical contained wood-cut illustrations of animals, followed by their description in English and then in Bengali. It must be noted that both of these publications were curated and edited by Englishmen, John Marshman and W.H. Pears, respectively. It wasn't until almost ten years later, in 1831, that *Gyanodoy* the first "Native Magazine" as it was termed by the School Book Society, was published. It was edited by Krishnodhon Mitra and contained histories of various countries like India, China, Greece. It was intended to be circulated among "good students," which is not surprising given its distribution by the School Book Society, which primarily published textbooks, readers, primers and prize books.

This was followed by a spate of periodicals, some short-lived, others surviving for a few years, mostly educational, informational and didactic publications. The reason why many early Bengali children's periodicals were interested in informing and educating was because of an increasing demand for Western education, which began even before Macaulay's famous minutes

⁴⁹ In the wake of changes to the colonial Indian education system, various societies were formed for the production and dissemination of books among native Indians, including the Calcutta School Book Society, the Vernacular Literature Society, Calcutta Tract Society and others. For more on the Calcutta School Book Society, look up Gupta, A. "The Calcutta School Book Society and the Production of Knowledge." *English Studies in Africa*, 57 (1), pp 55-65..

in 1935, as Abhijit Gupta notes. Most of the periodicals were authored and edited by the newly educated, Indian intelligentsia who were, especially in the early nineteenth century, very interested in engaging with modern disciplines which were emerging, and saw benefits of passing on that knowledge, in order to increase both employability and enlightenment. Additionally, these early periodicals were written in Sanskritized Bengali, making them harder to access for children, reducing their viability as objects of entertainment. Thus, many of the early periodicals were also intended to function as textbooks, and were intended to fill the void created by the lack of appropriate textbooks which taught the modern disciplines to the young. However, there were also periodicals which acknowledged the actual presence of children and aspects of childhood such as enjoyment and play such as *Bidyadarpan* (1853), which was run by two fifteen-year-olds called Priyomadhob Basu and Jogendranath Chattopadhyay and *Jyotirangan* (1863), a monthly meant for the instruction and entertainment of women and children, published by the Calcutta Tract Society.⁵⁰ One can see the early stirrings of the consciousness of childhood as a time of play, as well as, of the pleasurable functions of literature in their preface, “*Jyotirangan* is a monthly periodical meant for women and boys and girls...many people have tried to combine pleasure and instruction, but it has not been easy for everyone to be successful...we are publishing this periodical for the combined pleasure and instruction of women and boys and girls...the primary purpose of this is instruction through pleasure” (Mitra 17).

⁵⁰ The elision of the two categories of audiences points to the unstable and overlapping nature of age and gender categories in nineteenth-century Bengal, since young, married girls would have been considered both children and women.

Given this vacillation between providing instruction and pleasure, many of the periodicals met with dubious success on the entertainment front and ran for short periods of time. However, some of them did try to appeal more strongly to child audiences. According to Khagendranath Mitra, the earliest to do so was *Abodh-Bondhu*, published in 1866, edited first by Jogendranath Ghosh and then by the poet, Bihari Lal Chakraborty (who was a big influence on Rabindranath Tagore). The periodical was specifically meant for “children or women or people of lesser intellect,” as the preface to the first volume stated, modelled after English periodicals and ran for three years (Mitra 14). Not all the content was meant for children though, and there were very few illustrations. Another notable periodical was a fortnightly published by the Brahmo Samaj and edited by Keshab Chandra Sen, titled *BalakBondhu* (1875). Like many of the others, this periodical also purported to combine pleasure and information and along with some of the usual genres, published a news section. The editors tried to enhance its appeal by adding single colored, wood cut illustrations, letters and compositions by its child readers and most importantly, was one of the earliest to introduced serialized fiction for children. However, just like *Jyotirngon* often contained messages propagating Christianity and disparaging attitudes towards Bengalis and Indians, *BalakBondhu* contained writings steeped in Brahmo ideology and thus, neither have been considered as texts particularly suitable for children by recorders of Bengali literary history (Pal 14). The periodical ran on and off for a few years but was ultimately overtaken in popularity by titles such as *Sakha (Friend)*—the first one really suitable for children because of its aim of providing a friend or companion for children’s leisure and its focus on pleasure, according to Mitra—*Sakha o Saathi*, *Balak*, *Mukul*, with the form ultimately reaching the zenith of its popularity in Upendrakishore Ray Choudhury’s *Sandesh* (1913). This chapter will focus on *Sakha* and *Balak*, with references to other periodicals. The debates on suitability as

well as the vacillation between didacticism and pleasure indicate that definitions of childhood were in flux during this time. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the efforts to define, manage and order childhood would become more concerted, and popular genres like periodicals would play a large part in it by popularizing these discussions and concepts of childhood to its wide-reaching audience.

The nineteenth-century in Bengal saw a surge in nationalistic thinking along with attempts to delineate regional identities, especially in Bengal, amongst the higher caste Hindu intelligentsia. The second half of the century, especially, saw many changes for the Bengali population due to the rising literacy rate, the spread of print culture, the colonial education system, the interaction between western culture and indigenous traditions, as well as political changes in the relationship between the Indian population and the British in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857. In her book, Gupta claims that the discourse of nationhood in late nineteenth-century Bengal has to be considered within not only political moments, but also as originating in the cultural processes of regional identity formation around the concepts of samaj (society/community/social collectivity), jati (a collective self- a multifunctional term for several indices of identity) and rashtra (polity/national identity) in order to truly investigate “the ontology of being and becoming a nation” (Gupta 3).⁵¹ Indian culture in the nineteenth-century was rooted in pluralism and thus, an imagined nationhood would have to encompass some form of unity, order and harmony within society, which could transcend local and regional boundaries

⁵¹ She describes the idea of samaj as more than just a textual or spiritual notion, as an idea in everyday practice which prioritized cultural Aryan-ness and dharma in past and present contexts, which opened up a space where different temporal (history and present) and cultural (Western and indigenous) traditions could be fused together into an idea of nationhood.

to include the nation. Combined with the lack of an overt political integrality, the connection between the multiple regions and the nation needed a recognition of a connecting similarity, which according to Gupta, was envisioned as a samaj built around an understanding of the rules of dharma within the settings of cultural Aryanness, and an adherence to certain codes of conduct, as mentioned before. The foundations of an idea of nation as a cultural entity, fluid but with some commonalities, primarily originated from among the class of educated elites, who along with the westernized classes adept at the pragmatic of public life, helped create a literary public sphere which played a crucial part in propagating these ideas of nationhood, creating a connection between culture, society (samaj) and polity.

It is from amongst this class of educated elite intelligentsia that we got modern Bengali literature and what we, today, recognize as Bengali children's literature. Many of the most prominent and most popular Bengali children's periodicals were published by Brahmos. Promoda Charan Sen, a Brahmo teacher at the Rabibasariya Nitividyalya Sunday school in Calcutta was the publisher of *Sakha* (1883-1894). His teacher, Shibnath Shastri was the editor of *Mukul*, a popular and longest running children's periodical of the nineteenth-century, first published in 1895. After Sen's death at the age of 27, Shastri also took over the editorship of *Sakha* in 1887, followed by Annadacharan Sen in 1887 and Nobokrishna Bhattacharya in 1893-94. Ultimately, the periodical merged with Bhuban Mohan Ray's periodical *Sathi* (*Companion*), published from 1894, an illustrated monthly very similar to *Sakha* to which Ray was a contributor and whose original editor he was related to. The new periodical was called *Sakha o Saathi* (*Friend and Companion*) and it ran for about three years before it closed down due to financial difficulties. Though Shibnath Shastri spearheaded it, *Mukul* was a venture of the female teachers of another Brahmo Sunday school. *Balak* (1885), a Tagore family endeavor, was an

illustrated monthly edited by Gyanodanandini Devi, wife of Satyendranath Tagore. However, the actual operations and editing of the paper were done by the then 24 years old Rabindranath Tagore. Having his fingers in many pies, Tagore was also a notable contributor to many periodicals, for both children and adults. It ran for one year, after which it merged with the other Tagore family periodical, called *Bharati* and the joint title was called *Bharati and Balak*. Upendrakishore RayChaudhuri, a Brahmo writer, painter and printer, who was a frequent contributor to *Sakha*, *Balak* and *Mukul*. He is known for introducing modern blockmaking, half tone and color blockmaking to South Asia. He eventually, started his own periodical in 1913, called *Sandesh* (meaning news, but also is a type of popular sweetmeat in India). Apart from the editors of these periodicals who were all within a circle of acquaintances known for their literary and philosophical prowess, these periodicals had many other writers in common, such as the eminent scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose, Nobokrishna Bhattacharya, Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, the freedom fighter Bipin Chandra Pal, Jogindranath Basu, Jogindranath Sarkar and many others. In this chapter, I look at how these eminent writers and thinkers adapted a British children's genre and used it to make an intervention into colonial cultural politics during a time of nascent nationalism by an address to and a public conversation with children in the hopes of creating a sense of regional and national belonging. Using Bengali children's periodicals to move away from missionary teachings and the benign colonialism disseminated in British children's periodicals, the Bengali literati articulates a sense of nationhood even during the period of limited political action that was the Moderate period. The next section will take a look at how the *Boy's Own Paper* addressed children and spoke about international politics, as it is the one example we know these Bengali children's writers had in their midst.

3.1 'Othering' in The *Boys' Own Paper*

The *Boys' Own Paper* was a children's periodical published by the Religious Tract Society and ran from 1879-1967, a span that John Mackenzie notes was exactly coterminous with the 'new imperialism' of the late nineteenth century, which was characterized by an era of imperial consciousness in a period of relative peace on British soil. The British children's periodicals, along with other popular literature of this period, turned their focus from domestic matters, unlike the popular literature of the first half of the century, to wars, events, exploration, and trade involving Britain and taking place in an external elsewhere, becoming "exceptionally sensitive to developments in national concerns and contemporary events" (Mackenzie 19). Fostering middle-class and Christian values, these periodicals were considered higher and more approved forms of reading than the massively popular 'penny dreadfuls' which featured criminal heroism and Gothic horror. They featured stories in which British superiority could be demonstrated repeatedly across the playground of a global empire over other colonial powers like the French, German, Russian and the Dutch (especially in the stories featuring the Boer War). For example, W. H. G Kingston's "From Powder Monkey to Admiral or The Stirring Days of the British Navy," in serialized in *Boys' Own Paper* in 1879 depicted an England which "had at that time pretty nearly all the world in Arms against her" and English ships defeating both American and French ships almost at the very beginning, with English superiority being the starting point of the story (*Boys' Own Paper*, 1879, 17).

Apart from Kingston, *Boys' Own Paper* as well as other periodicals also featured serialized fiction by R. M. Ballantyne, R. L. Stevenson, G. A. Henty, Manville Fenn and other adventure authors whose works have since then been recognized as deeply

involved with Britain's imperial project.⁵² Along with charting imperial events in the colonies, these stories of adventure and fiction reflected British attitudes towards other races, usually a combination of racism and benign colonization. Warfare, brutality, military aggression, and genocide of the 'inferior' races were common in these narratives and as MacKenzie notes, "With races and nationalities that could not be expected to disappear...warfare's constructive end was in spreading 'civilization' and implanting through subordination and discipline faint traces of the character traits so admired in the dominant racial and class paradigm" (MacKenzie 207). Thus, the first volume of *The Boys' Own Paper* featured a story about 'An Afghan Robber' called Dilawar Khan whose exploits and bravery are described with great relish. We are told that while this kind of brigandry is not uncommon in some parts of Western Europe, it was still considered base. However, in Afghanistan, robbing was not considered dishonorable "any more than a Scottish chief thought it a crime to make a foray across the border to "lift" his peaceful neighbor's cattle" (*Boys' Own Paper*, 1879, 5). This story provides evidence of the difference in attitudes towards different races, and locates Dilawar Khan in a lifestyle which was brutal, but contained honor of the sort to be found amongst thieves. Many of his actions were also portrayed as the patriotic acts of a Muslim against the Sikh rulers of the area, but once the British conquer Peshawar, defeating the Sikhs, he is at once enamored of them. He sees the worth of the virtues the British both embody and espouse and join the British army, distinguishing himself against the Indians during the Mutiny. The British admired his manliness and his love for Christian values and after his inevitable conversion, he becomes 'the scourge to the Mohammedan priests,' because he knew

⁵² For more on this, See Chapter 4 which examines Bengali adventure fiction and involves a discussion of the genre as it developed in England.

their religion and their methods of argumentation. He remains loyal to the British through his whole life and finally dies in service to the British army (*Boys' Own Paper*, 1879, 6).

These stories of 'benign' colonization for the sake of spreading 'civilization' conveyed the righteousness of the imperial project without resorting to violence on the part of the colonial powers. Indeed, the narrative of 'civilization' was part of the basis behind the introduction of the colonial education system and formed an underlying rationale behind the debates on the most suitable curriculum for educating a British-Indian subject.⁵³ The images of India which abounded in the textbooks and periodicals of the era (varied forms of juvenile literature) were "both ethnocentric, enhancing the cultural superiority of Great Britain, and racist, assuming the critical differences between British and Indian to rest not only on environmental differences but on inherited biological factors" (Castle 25). By the time of the publication of the *Boys' Own Paper*, the British had regained the confidence which had been shaken by the Mutiny of 1857 and "turned the juvenile literary image of Indians into a loyal race, supplying great armies of domestic servants and splendidly attired regiments for the British military pantheon," while also including tales of sati and thuggee. In a nutshell, the overall image of Indians was that of an unenlightened, servile nation of backward peoples with a corrupt and inferior culture and incapable of governing themselves. These were the cultural dynamics of power which framed the rise of nationalism in India, and which the publishers of Bengali periodicals were trying to counter.

⁵³ For more on this, refer to Introduction, and chapters 1 and 3.

3.2 Sakha and Balak

The most popular children's periodicals were being published at the same time as the early stirrings of national consciousness were taking on more organized forms. The literati that Gupta describes were involved in many of these organizational endeavors as well as writing prolifically in periodicals, journals and newspapers talking of these efforts and propagating their ideas of regional and national politics, and cultural policies and reforms. While the children's periodicals had limited mention of the politics of the time (and political action was indeed very limited during these times of Moderate Nationalism), the cultural conversation that formed the basis of conversations about nationhood and sovereignty found their way into the children's periodicals as well. Using the layered accumulation of multiple genres, these periodicals provided a way to playfully introduce children to values of exemplary citizenship.

Before delving into the work of the periodicals themselves, it is important to note that most of these periodicals were addressed to boys, and mentions of girls and girlhood were restricted to their connections to boys and boyhood. One of the reasons for this could be the fact that while women's educational reforms had been taking place since mid-nineteenth century, the numbers were extremely low.⁵⁴ In fact, in 1946-47, just before independence, female

⁵⁴ The British Indian government first took responsibility for women's education in 1854 after Sir Charles Woods' dispatch to the then Governor-General of India, Lord Dalhousie, which among many other suggestions, recommended that the government should promote education for women. However, it took more than two decades for Calcutta University to admit their first females graduates in their degree programs, in 1878. And while the Native Female School, later called Bethune School after John Bethune, was established in 1849, Bethune college for women was only established in 1879

literacy rates were only 6% (Kamat). Under the circumstances, one can assume that most of the readers in the 1880s and 90s were boys and young men. While there may have been some female readers, girls who were educated before and sometimes after marriage, they would have been few in number and their education would have restricted to very basic literacy skills. The female teachers and writers who were involved with these periodicals were probably notable exceptions to the situation, and part of the literati circles. According to historian Gautam Chanda Roy, these children's periodicals also provided an emotional and intellectual shared space for boys and girls, which was unavailable since patriarchy and nationalism combined to portray and produce girls as the ideal wives and mothers of the nascent sovereign Indian nation (Roy "Science" 67). However, as he himself goes on to admit, this shared space was limited in the values they professed for the respective genders and "that the qualities of curiosity, intelligence and industry that they sought to impress upon readers, they liked to see not so much in girls as in boys" (Roy Science 68). That the editors were aware of the gendered readership of these periodicals is evident in their interactions with the readers. The lion's share of the readers' letters published in *Sakha*, *Sakha o Saathi* and *Mukul* were those by boys from the different provinces of Bengal. Whether this points to the actual readership of the periodicals or indicates an editorial preference is not entirely clear, but the fact remains that the contents of these periodicals were driven by the assumptions of a primarily male readership. That is one of the reasons why I have chosen the *Boy's Own Paper* for a comparison and have restricted myself to considerations of the male child in this chapter.

Bengali children's periodicals are an extremely understudied subject, even amongst the scarce academic studies that exist about Bengali children's literature. The usually find mentions in literary histories of Bengali literature or children's literature, in accounts of periodical

literature in Bengal, and in biographical accounts of the illustrious individuals involved with the periodical press in Bengal. However, extended studies of the form and function of Bengali children's periodicals is rare, with Roy being one of the notable exceptions. In his article, "Science for children in a Colonial Context," Roy examines the socio-political significance of science instructions for children in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century scientific periodicals. Examining articles on geography, flora and fauna, physics, chemistry, athletics and sports etc, Roy claims that, "Science instruction in Bengali juvenile magazines therefore affords clues to understanding a new idea of childhood, a new attitude towards children and a new adult-child relationship that was intended to be a basis of that society" (Roy Science 44). Scientific instruction was central to the Bengali literati's attempts to create a future citizenry composed of critical and liberal thinkers, rational beings who "who would uphold a society envisaged to be bereft of both colonial indignities and traditional injustices" (Roy Science 44). These new beings were to comprehend the benefits of scientific knowledge and invention for the West and glean knowledge which would allow them carve a path of progression for their own country. Thus, these articles were meant to create a sense of wonder at the physical while simultaneously encouraging a kind intimacy with the natural world, which was seen as a specifically non-Western trait (Roy Science 78). The language used in these articles was simple, lucid and included anecdotal narratives and conversational tones to render the information comprehensible for children while also using utilizing the effects of storytelling on the imagination as a pedagogical apparatus.⁵⁵ Since these articles were also designed to combine the best of Western

⁵⁵ For individual examples and more detailed explanations on how the various scientific genres worked together to implement a 'nationalistic' body of knowledge, refer to G. C. Roy's "Science for children in a colonial context:

disciplines with traditional Bengali knowledge, there were unmistakable elements of didacticism and attempts to inculcate a sense of discipline to accompany this new body of knowledge. However, these periodicals also made an attempt to include “a respectful attitude towards them as mortals with distinctive attributes, a Western Romantic notion that subsumed the traditional Indian attitude of adoration of infants,” thus, assuming a middle-ground between didacticism and delight (Roy Science 64). These ideas about Indian, specifically Bengali, culture and society run through the many genres and forms included in these periodicals and created an accumulative base of knowledge within a shared juvenile space. In this chapter, I will focus tracing this common core of ideas in works of fiction, biography, poetry, and the treatment of myth and history investigate the specific public messages about culture and the nation addressed to children.

There are commonalities between what Roy considers a ‘shared space’ and what Satadru Sen describes as “the juvenile periphery of colonial India,” namely that both of these terms signify an experimental, institutional and conceptual space of adult interactions with childhood, to reinstate and/or subvert the status quo of colonial Indian society, inhabited by proponents of both imperialist and nationalist ideologies (Sen). Describing this zone as “a shifting and productive zone at the edge of the modern — the colonial horizon of the metropolitan, the universal, the national, the middle class and the authoritative,” Sen substantiates his claim through an examination of colonial institutes in India, such as reformatories, juvenile prisons, and homes, where adult authority reigned supreme (Sen *Colonial Childhoods* 2). Roy locates his shared space in the public literary space of children’s literature and specifically, juvenile

Bengali juvenile magazines, 1883–1923” and ““Children's magazines in colonial Bengal, 1883–1923: an essay in social history.”

periodicals as an alternate site of “kinship, mutual admiration, respect, dependence and affinity” in the adult-child relationship, despite the hierarchical bonds which existed between the two (Roy Children’s Magazines 53-54). In a separate article, Sen extends the juvenile periphery to a more conceptual space by examining the geographies of literary childhood, a move similar to Roy’s. Ultimately, it is these spatial qualities of potential, subversion and collaboration which renders children’s literature and specifically juvenile periodicals inherent to the conversations about the nation as an imagined community. Using the imaginative, rather than informative, content of children’s periodicals such as fiction, poetry, myth and history to investigate the politics of cultural nationhood presented to children, I show how authors and editors include childhood within the new imagined community of emerging nationhood.

3.2.1 How to be a Model Citizen

The 1880s and 90s was the time during which the foundations of the more populous later protests against British colonial rule were laid. As the anticolonial movements increased in intensity and awareness, the Moderate Nationalists were eventually condemned for the limited nature of their national goals and political actions, by the more extreme, radical and militant nationalists. Yet, despite their limitations, the Moderates conducted valuable research into the nature of colonialism and the socio-economic problems of British rule, and founded the Indian National Congress (INC), resulting in increased awareness of the colonial situation among the Indian literati, elite and upper social echelons which gradually became wider and increasingly well-known. Dadabhai Naoroji, one of the founding members of the INC, and the first Asian to be a British Member of Parliament, spent decades in England fighting for Indian representation and petitioning for support and patronage of the “Indian” cause among the people there. He is

best known for his research on the economic conditions of India, and his theory on the “drain of wealth” in his book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1902). Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a liberal scholar and teacher, campaigner for education, also fought for political representation for Indians and was a renowned social reformer, playing a crucial role in bringing about key reforms such as the Morley-Minto reforms, in his capacity as a politician and statesman. There were many others who contributed to the national cause, and these steps taken by the early nationalists provided the bedrock of the Indian independence movement. The Moderates were the first to articulate the need for increased representation in the British Indian government and though they made very limited progress, the realization of this very confining and futile nature of this demand is what infused vigor and certainty into the later demands for complete political sovereignty.

Because the periodicals I look at are children’s periodicals, direct mention of nationalist politics is rare. Instead, utilizing a multiplicity of genres, the periodicals stressed on certain ideas and codes of behavior which formed a common ideological core of beliefs running through the writings of *Sakha* and *Balak*, which emphasized unity, virtuous future adulthood and a growing awareness of a nascent India as an imagined, emergent but increasingly more real community. The literati which Gupta speaks about also included some of the early politicians and nationalists, and despite awareness of their tender audience, it was inevitable that some mention of local and national politics would percolate in to the periodicals and in their address to children. A prominent example is an article title “Surendra Babu’s Karabaash” (Surendra Babu’s Imprisonment), detailing the beliefs and subsequent imprisonment of Surendranath Nath Banerjee, the first Indian to clear Indian Civil Services exam and the co-founder of the Indian National Association, in 1886, along with Anandamohan Bose (they merged with the INC after its formation). The article begins with the assumption that the readers of *Sakha* would already be

familiar with Banerjee, which indicates an authorial assumption that either the middle- and upper-class child audiences of the periodical kept abreast of the news, or that informing them of this assumption would encourage them to do so. In the early days of the independence movement, newspapers, pamphlets, periodicals formed a big part of the public literary sphere which was crucial to creating an imagined India and its community, this move indicates a desire to include children into public conversations about an emerging India.

The article also recounts, in detail, an interchange through a series of newspaper articles, which Banerjee had participated in, by publishing his remarks in *The Bengalee*, an English language paper he edited. He was imprisoned for publishing his sentiment and for contempt of court. This interchange was started by the *Brahmo Public Opinion* which published few articles against an English judge called Norris, on which castigated him for offending the religious beliefs of Hindus by bringing an idol to open court. When describing Judge Norris, the writer of the *Sakha* article claims that Norris was one of those Englishman who was good and kind when he first arrived in India, but eventually became contemptuous and oppressive towards Indians as time progressed, because “Sahibs can’t stay good for too long after they arrive in this country” (*Sakha*, Vol 1. 89). This reflected the contemporary strain of thought that it wasn’t the British character, but the nature of British rule in India which was the real problem, due to fact that the British Indian government didn’t actually practice the morals, values and virtues they preached at home. In response to the article in the other newspaper, Banerjee published an article in his newspaper, critiquing Norris’s character, comparing him to other cruel judges in the past, and declared him unfit to be a judge. In retaliation, *The Englishman*, an anti-Indian newspaper, published a letter imitating Banerjee’s article and claiming that his actions were in contempt of court. By summarizing this lengthy public editorial debate informing the child readers of this

reason behind Banerjee's court summons, the *Sakha* author not only brings children into the nationalist literary sphere, but also posits his opinion that it was appropriate and even almost imperative that children should be involved and informed of such public conversation, making a claim for the involvement of children in politics.

One of the most important moves the article makes is an outline it provides on Banerjee's ideas of colonialism in easy language to its audience. Banerjee is called a "god for Kolkata's youth" and is credited with inculcating a new found sense of national awareness in them.

Ten years ago, Bengali children didn't even know that they had a country of their own. They didn't understand the concept of a motherland very well. Surendra babu has extraordinary oratorical skills; and it is through this skill that he has inculcated a love for their own country and countrymen in the souls of the Bengali (*Sakha Vol 1*. 88).

The facts about colonialism enumerated in the article speaks about the complete British control over the country and its laws and the drain of wealth caused by the government collecting money from Indians, but misusing it and spending it for their own profit. The author claims this causes harm to the country since Indians never have money to spend for their own benefit while the laws are also not created keeping Indians in mind. This is because the English speak a different language, have a different culture and do not understand the needs of India and Indians. On top of that, all the high paying jobs which require intellectual labor are also occupied by Indians. The article doesn't deny the good that the British have done in India by bringing enlightenment to Indian civilization; however, the author is of the firm belief that Indians should gradually be allowed to be more involved in their own governance. Not exactly a plea for freedom, this opinion is in keeping with the Moderate habit of asking for representation instead of sovereignty. These ideas, which would have been unheard of a decade prior due to an absence

if interest in governance for lack of awareness of the possibility and need for self-rule, according to the author, have been generated and proliferated in people's minds through Surendranath Banerjee's untiring efforts using his words and actions. The article also offers him blessings for his being moved by his countrymen's sorrows and his efforts to ameliorate their situation as the country's foremost well-wisher. Helping one's countrymen is painted as God's work, establishing powerful and inspirational encouragement for anti-colonial political work amongst the child readers. The article ends on a similar note, considering Banerjee's imprisonment as good karma and exhorting children to learn to "shed tears for their motherland" (*Sakha Vol 1*. 90).

Not all the articles were so explicit about the condition of contemporary Indian nationalist politics; many of them used more indirect techniques to inculcate the idea of a unified nation in children's minds. In "A Song of Summons," Tagore attempts to interest his audience in the idea of a political or issue-based fight, by inviting Bengali children, like the rest of humankind, to respond to "the call of the horn that has rung out all over the world" (*Balak* 131). According to him, children, especially Bengali ones are entirely concerned with the "danger, grief, conflict and lamentation" that accompany the bonds of life and domesticity, which have to be discarded, along with the toys and trappings of materiality. Instead, children are invited to hear the joyful call of unified action running through the world. With this poem, he signifies a connection between childhood potential, unity and community-based action so crucial to Tagore's own nationalism.⁵⁶ He also advises them to "think about who they are" and remember their history, lineage and family pride and listen to the echo of the song of their ancestors" (*Balak* 131). The connection between personal identity and the history of a community of people

⁵⁶ More on this in Chapter 3

was of the utmost important to the literati, prioritized over secular markers like Sanskrit learning, English education, professional degrees, personal wealth and property, or their employment type in determining their social status. However, the true citizen of this emerging nation would not just be one already steeped in this elite cultural history, but one who would make a mark in the future historical continuum of their community, a task for which children were the obvious choice, embodying as they did, a futuristic potential. In stormy language evoking the motherland, Tagore thus exhorts children to be one with people and nature and the world, to break the old world and form the new. In his most political moment in the poem, he tells children to “wear new clothes, carry new strength and hold your heads high/Today you have received an invitation from the world/Throw off your old rags, they are the clothes of servitude” (*Balak* 131). Colonial servitude, in other words, can be discarded because if one is a true citizen of the new world, one can recognize and break the mental trappings of colonialism through embracing one’s own culture and land.

Focusing on the sorrows of multitudes is characteristic of Tagore’s writing from the 1880s and 1890s, when, as a landowner and zamindar, he came into contact with some of the most poverty-stricken people of the land. In “Birthday gift” he posits love and memory as the bulwark against the grief permeating society and the land, connecting the emotional condition with the political one. He expands the conceit of a birthday gift to encompass the condition of existence in this land he describes as “unbearable.” The speaker addresses a child on its birthday, apologizing for bringing them only “the gift of love,” rather than all the materials the speaker would rather shower on them. This, he says, is due to the fact all his money is in the bank, institutions which were mainly British or foreign owned, at that time. He also bemoans the fact that all the jewels he had planted in the ground had been looted by various jewelers and taken to

their own home, a clear metaphor for the drain of wealth which took place in India. “This world, city, my estates, are all being snatched at by ghostly hands,” and therefore, the only gift he could bring was that of affection and love (*Balak* 183). But, in this unbearable land, love is an invaluable gift, opening up for the child access to their memory, and tie them to their people and loved ones. Others in the country were trying to forget, so that they could leave this land behind, but the child would always grow up to remember.

The focus on emotions, memory and remembrance is a detour on the path to political knowledge, which was probably wise, given that imprisonment was a likely punishment for such seditious thoughts. The writers of the periodicals also conveyed their political opinions through stories of histories of wars and freedom movements from other countries and even from other regions and historical moments within India. These stories had the dual purpose of conveying disquisitions on the ethical and moral issues surrounding political power and freedom, as well as informing the readers about other parts of the country and the world, expanding their sense of a national community within a global one. For example, in “Island of Tahiti’s Parliament,” Srishchandra Majumdar starts by explaining the importance of unity when working for one’s country and also, the difficulty of bringing people together, claiming that, “It is easy to get five people together when it involves their personal gain, but when it involves the good of the country and its common people, gathering people is very hard” (*Balak* 376). The article describes the establishment of the Tahitian Parliament, but since there is no actual date mentioned, it is hard to tell whether Majumdar is referring to the formulation of the Tahitian Legislative Assembly in 1824, or of the French Protectorate in 1842 (the article mentions that this event took place “41 years ago,” which would place the event as the one happening in 1842). In either case, the article doesn’t mention that the former was under the supervision of the British government and

missionaries, while the latter was part of the gradual process by which Tahiti lost its sovereignty and became a French colony, which it remains to this day. The main body of the article describes a debate which took place on the first day of the Parliament, about whether exile or hanging would be the better punishment for manslaughter. The recounting of the opinions of various Tahitian leaders were presented as a “gift” to the children of Bengal. Without getting into the ethical and legal discussions about the debate, the one thing that is most noticeable is the constant comparison with British law, and the emphasis the Tahitians placed on establishing an autonomous law that was not just a blind imitation of an established nation, but their true desire to construct a legal structure uniquely suited to Tahiti. The ‘gift’ that the author wanted to provide was the exemplar of the codes of conduct and qualities required to be a people/community on the cusp of realizing their own political autonomy. Majumdar thus begins the article with a description of these qualities and providing counter examples of other failed political ventures. He compared it to the short-lived occupation of Sicily by the British during the Napoleonic Wars, and the attempts there to form a constitution and Parliament. He ascribes the short-lived nature of this attempt to the chaos and disorder within the Sicilian senate, the lack of wisdom or patience within the leadership and asks “how long could it go on like this?” In comparison, the Tahitian Parliament is praised for the orderly way in which their leaders and their monarchy surrendered their powers for the good of all, an implicit praise of a government that cares for the common good and is willing to share power and grant greater representation, which was one of the main goals of Moderate Nationalism.

Writing about Britain’s global colonial exploits had to be undertaken with caution as the author of “Brahmoraj Thibaw” probably, choosing to stay anonymous as he describes the third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885, which led to complete British control of the region (we know the

author was male because the word ‘Sri’ is mentioned where the name should be, indicating the male gender. The female address is Srimati). The article begins with the words “Burma is now under the feet of the British lion,” speaking of even how the territory which had been left independent through the successive wars had now been claimed by the British (*Balak* 419). King Thibaw had been exiled by the British government, who were now “free to keep him or kill him, as they wished. Or install a puppet-king through whom the resident would rule, or they could do away with even the pretense of autonomy and just bring the kingdom directly under British rule” (*Balak* 420) The article gives a detailed account of the main events of the third war down to minutes and hours, imbuing it with a sense of immediacy, which is heightened by the author’s description of the rest of the world as awaiting the details of British rule in Burma. The postscript at the end of the article informs readers of the decision to bring Burma under the direct rule of the crown, highlighting the capacity of the periodical to also act as a bearer of contemporary news. The selection of this topic, the sense that colonialism is a gradually encroaching evil, evokes a feeling that resistance is futile and British rule is almost unshakeable.

Yet, despite the despondence of such articles, the general tenor of the children’s periodicals encouraged discourse and deliberation on political autonomy and its prospects and potential in India. And because of the audience of these periodicals, such pieces inevitably associated children’s behavior and morals with progress within the country and connects them directly to the feasibility of sovereignty. In “My luck is bad,” two schoolboys have a conversation about their school work and what it takes to succeed in school, but the example provided is an example from the Scottish people’s history of independence. The author prefaces the story by expressing a preference for persistence over luck, and that forms the main topic of discussion amongst the boys, Sarada and Rashbehari. Rashbehari is of the opinion that their

classmate Gopal's success at winning school prizes comes from his good luck. Sarada corrects him by talking about Gopal's persistence and hard work, and how his family had built up generational wealth through these same traits. The ostensible moral of the story is that hard work builds wealth, while laziness brings about poverty. However, Sarada then proceeds to narrate a tale about a Scottish freedom fighter, who is inspired by watching an ant climbing up a wall with much difficulty, to not give up his fight against the English. The Chinese box-like narrative which leads up to this absolutely incidental addition the story ensures that the exemplar of resistance against the English is buried deep within the main story. The piece ends with a list of morals to follow in order to be persevering and prospering, which includes advice such as to not eat in excess, to quit idle talk and only speak of what is helpful, to not let sinful thoughts invade the mind, and to not waste time or money.

This emphasis on the relationship between children's behavior and morals and the conditions of society and nation is seen across periodicals through articles commenting on the minute details of children's lives, from diet, bathing, schooling, homework, religion and others, attempting to order children's daily routines. Most of these articles were not ostensibly political, implicitly performing a political function only when framed within the context of the periodicals and their aims. And then there were others which expressed their politics not in their content but within their framing. One such is a debate on exercise between Gyanadanandini Devi, the editor of *Balak*, and Rabindranath Tagore, who managed its contents. This debate was published in the form of a series of letters between the two and compared the physical prowess of British children versus Indian and Bengali children. While more details on this will be provided in chapter 4's discussion on physical culture in Bengal, these letters ultimately transform into a discussion of the causes of the lack of physical prowess amongst Bengali children, which is attributed to

poverty, lack of nutritious food, the harshness of the exam-based education system, and the paucity of employment which can enable the average Indian to rise out of perpetual servitude in the form of underpaying petty clerkhoods.

The article on Surendranath Banerjee also contains an interesting discussion about the extent of the information that should be provided to children, or in other words, on the type and suitability of reading materials for children. When Banerjee learns that the article published in *Brahmo Public Opinion* contained misinformation, he apologized to the court, but still posited the High Court's lack of authority to judge his case. Trained in the legal profession, Banerjee appealed for time to prepare his defense, but the court turned down his appeal and sentenced him to two months imprisonment without labour. The author of the article, ostensibly doesn't discuss the details of ethics of this judgement, whether Banerjee had actually committed a crime or elaborate on what his defense would have been, while deploying an ironic antiphrastic mode of defending this decision, very similar to Troilokyanath Mukhopadhyay in *Kankaboti* (1892).⁵⁷ He notes that "since *Sakha* is a children's periodical, I will not pass judgement on whether it was wrong that the crime for which the Englishman Taylor Saheb, or the editor of *The Englishman* got off scot free, should have led to two months imprisonment of Bengali Surendranath Banerjee," making his actual opinion rather clear, while escaping similar charges of contempt against court, an interesting use of the contemporary debate on suitability for children.

In general, the question for suitability loomed large over the children's periodicals, with many of the writings evidencing a societal concern with all aspects of childhood, from discussions on moral behavior addressed to child, to advice on child rearing, and outlining a

⁵⁷ Mukhopadhyay uses satire and fantasy to escape the wrath of both Indian society and the British Indian government, extending his critique to an analysis of the colonial situation overall.

child's ideal day. The range of the articles show an engagement with not just what children were reading and should read, but the entire structure and content of a child's mental makeup. This concern is evident in the article titled "Freedom," written by Sudhindranath Thakur, published in the first volume of *Balak*. Originally named "A child's composition," this article reads almost like a Moderate manifesto, but without the direct allusion to politics. The author begins by acknowledging that "there is a lot of talk about freedom nowadays," and goes on to state that freedom isn't worth having unless one knows how to regulate and control oneself (*Balak* 259). The argument is similar to the ones put forward by Moderate leaders when defending their decision to ask for increased political representation, rather than outright political sovereignty. However, the imagery used is of comparison with flora or fauna, a practice common in children's writings; control is the root which allows a plant to grow freely, it is what distinguishes humans from animals, with the implication that unless Indian society becomes more 'civilized,' it cannot progress freely. We are also told that to learn control of the sheer power that is freedom, we must submit to our elders while we are children. Extending the metaphor to politics, this statement indicates a desire for the continuity of British rule, till India becomes politically mature as a society. Thus, the body of the child and its youth stands in for India's supposed political immaturity, and concern for the moral welfare of children becomes concern for the welfare of the nation. In articles such as this, question of children's literature conflated with the issue of a child's being in this new and changing political climate, transforming even children's leisure reading and the employment of imagination and narration in the writings meant for them into sites for creating the ideal future citizenry.

Since the aim of these children's periodicals was also to invoke pride in Bengali and Indian culture, children were also encouraged to know their homeland, the history and

mythology carving out their nation as well as the physical land and its geographical features. A large portion of *Digdarshan* (1818), the first Bengali children's periodical, was devoted to enumerating the political and social history of the nation, creating a unified political entity in the minds of the readers. The periodicals of the late nineteenth century continued this trend and one could regularly find "illustrated features on such distant regions as Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Assam, and the Deccan, replete with accounts of language, dress, food, and customs of people inhabiting these places" (Roy Children's Magazines 19). Some of these accounts provided the background for original fiction, while others provided the basis for more informational articles on travel and geography, such as Satyendranath Tagore's articles on the history and culture of Bombay, and the comparative study of Bengali and Marathi music, published in *Balak*. There were also accounts of the poverty of people in the countryside and news articles on famines and droughts, designed to both rouse sympathy and provide a call to action. The comparisons between these places and Bengal, and the continuities between the self and various regional others provided a composite idea of samaj and jati, creating the idea of a whole made up of varying fragments. Historical accounts of 'patriotic' Indian groups like the Rajputs, Marathas, Sikhs and individuals within those communities, along with the exaltation of figures who helped bring India's glorious history to light, such as William Jones, played a dual function of emphasizing a past, as well as reflecting on the more modern context of the present. This opened up a space for "situating issues of unity within a longer historical tradition, fusing the past and the present in the imagining of nationhood," making the idea of a nation not just a spiritual or textual entity, but a matter of everyday reality, an idea-in-practice (Gupta 5).

Social status remains one of the key conversations and Gupta notes that "This period witnessed the waning of caste as the sole marker of social status, and an individual could rise in

the social hierarchy by amassing wealth, acquiring education and taking up professions” (Gupta 53). Thus, many of the instructions in the writings included advice on “publicly morality” detailing how to be a virtuous member of society and acquire social mobility through education and good moral and ethical behavior (Roy “Children’s Magazines” 24). These new ways of acquiring higher social status would ensure a future society based on merit, worth, virtue and hard work. One way this moral education was included was again, through biographies and anecdotes about real people who had become prosperous battling the odds of a conflicted or oppressive society. These biographies of eminent individuals, both Indian and foreign and comprised of virtuous stories about their childhoods as well as their adult life. Determination, bravery and resourcefulness were described as values worth having that would help one move ahead in life and up the social ladder. A short story about Napoleon, “Nothing is ever Futile,” features a story about his devotion to a friend during his childhood. As Napoleon moves up in the military, his friend joins as a lowly soldier under him, once saving his life on the battlefield. At the end, this friend from his childhood is the only one at his bedside when Napoleon dies in exile. The focus is on friendship, loyalty, kindness and compassion learned in childhood, instead of on Napoleon’s military exploits. In “Gutikotok Golpo” (“A Few Stories”), Rabindranath Tagore writes three short biographical anecdotes about boys and men from different parts of the world and at different historical moments, portraying these traits as universally desired, the practice of which would allow one to move ahead in life. The first is a story about an English boy who found himself stranded on a beach in France during war with Napoleon. He longs for his family, his mother and his country and finding an abandoned barrel, he tries to create a raft to cross the English Channel, when he is apprehended by French soldiers. When Napoleon hears of his exploits, he is impressed by the boy’s patriotism, his bravery at willing to face the English

Channel on a mere raft and his love and loyalty towards his family and arranges a passage home, giving him a gold coin as reward. In a quick line at the end of the story, Tagore adds that the boy never spent the gold coin since it was a keepsake reminding him of the emperor's kindness. The second story, however, is about how the famous German sculptor, Johann Heinrich von Dannecker, went against parental authority to realize his dream of becoming an artist, by joining the military school established by the King where art was also taught. His father, a coachman and stable master, disowned him and threw him out of the house. Despite the poverty caused by these circumstances, Dannecker combines his rebellion against authority with a lot of hard work and goes on to become an internationally renowned sculptor, bringing pride and glory to his country, repaying the kindness of the Crown for giving him this opportunity. The third story is about the cleverness and bravery of a tiger fighter and the kindness of a king who returns a kingdom to his enemy when faced with the exemplar of the enemy's honor.

In each of these cases, resourcefulness, bravery and loyalty, towards the family and/or the nation is rewarded and kindness is received with gratitude, even if it does come from the enemy. In most cases, loyalty to the family, especially one's love for one's mother, is seen as a virtue and there are multiple stories about young boys' love and respect towards their family being an indicator of their patriotism towards their country. The biography of Sir William Jones was probably well known in India at the time, as the father of Indology and the founder of the Asiatic Society (178). The biography of him in *Balak*, written by Jyotirindranath Tagore, however, focused on his childhood and the careful pedagogical fostering he had received from his mother, which had nurtured in him strong cognitive faculties, laying the foundation for the scholar and thinker he was to become. The techniques used by his mother, which emphasized reading and memory skills, art and learning a second language, were imparted by methods described as

“unnoticeable and without much effort” (*Balak* 374). The same essay also mentions the mothers of Carlisle, Cuvier and Guizot are also mentioned, though the fact that not a single one of these women are named indicates the depiction of women in these periodicals as individuals whose social identity are validated by their relationship to men. The name of the article, “Mothers of Renowned Men,” serves to further inscribe this gender hierarchy. The biographies of great men provided a path to a better future, and hope of finding one’s passion and cause in life.

Not all the biographies were of famous personalities; the life of the ordinary man was also used to situate virtue and vice within the everyday. When it came to a conflict between family and personal morality, behavior which makes one a good and useful citizen is prioritized. For example, homilies against smoking and drinking like “Dhoompan” (“Smoking”) and “Radhalata’r Dukkher Golpo,” feature addicted parents. Child readers are warned, in no uncertain terms, to use their own judgement and not follow their elders when they see them commit wrongdoing or straying from the virtuous path. In “Ekti Ashar Kotha” (“A Word of Hope”), letters from boys who had quit smoking are praised, and the work of others in forming associations against smoking is mentioned. This extends to not just parents but also other authority figures. In an incomplete serialized fiction called “Pathshala,” (“School”) by Sreeshchandra Majumdar, published in *Balak*, the figure of the lazy schoolmaster is thoroughly lampooned. He operates through fear of his ever-ready cane, mainly uses the schoolboys to acquire his culinary needs from their homes, even instructing them to steal if their parents were not ready to be parted from their hard-earned goods. His eyes are bloodshot from marijuana abuse and he is content to sleep during class hours, letting the boys roam as they please, once he has gotten what he needs. Suffice to say, not an ounce of actual learning takes place in his classroom. Thus, wherever possible, the child readers of these periodicals are taught to emulate a

code of virtuous behavior, respecting elders but not blindly following them, using their own judgement to help them evolve in worthy, kind, compassionate, hard-working and dutiful citizens.

3.2.2 Fiction: *Bhimer Kopal (Bhim's Fate)*

In the earlier half of the nineteenth century, Indian children's literature contained very little fiction. Books were mainly informational, intended to inculcate children into the discourses of knowledge production that became popular as a result of the colonial education system. The fiction that was present, was either didactive, propagating certain scripts of behavior, or imitative, in the form of translations and adaptations of Euro-American stories and fairy tales. As discussed in chapter 1, the second half of the nineteenth century in Bengal witnessed the rising popularity of ideals of childhood framed by play, imagination and leisure, and along with them, genres of imaginative fiction such as fantasy and fairy tales. With the advent of children's periodicals created for the dual purpose of pleasure and instruction, a space was created for the publication of original fiction more suited for indigenous children than translations or adaptations of foreign stories. Many writers and thinkers of the public literati and elite intelligentsia mentioned by Gupta, like Upendrakishore Roy Choudhury, Rabindranath Tagore, Hemendra Kumar Ray, Pramada Charan Sen, Shibnath Shastri, Yogindranath Sarkar and others, published original fiction for children in the periodicals. Apart from fantasy, realism gained ground as a popular genre for addressing children because, as Roy notes, "‘realistic’ fiction in the children's magazines of the time – situations and characters that modern school-going boys could readily find credible and identify with – was the modern Bengali adults' preferred way of aiding them to cope with the pleasures and anxieties of growing-up years in a changed situation"

(Roy Children's Magazines). I will end this chapter by analyzing the first Bengali realistic novel/novella for children, serialized in *Sakha*, 1883 (never published as a stand-alone book, to my knowledge), and demonstrating how this story brings together the various ideological scripts surrounding 'others' in the cultural politics of Moderate nationalism, through an address to children.

In *Balak* (1885-86), Tagore published his famous short story, "Mukut" ("Crown") and the novella *Rajarshi* in serialized form. Both these stories are meditations on the dynamics of power, and are about royal strife, competitions for kingdoms, riches and authority. *Rajarshi*, in particular, is one of his earliest depictions of the king-turned-sage figure, a character that keeps showing up in later plays such as *Visarjan* (1890), *Raja* (1910) and *Arup Ratan* (1920). The figure of the king in *Rajarshi* becomes the site for his reflections on the ethics of authority and the various institutions that influence the lives of everyday subjects. Published two years before either of these stories, *Bhimer Kopal* is a novella written in an entirely different vein by author and editor Pramada Charan Sen, focusing mainly on the misadventures of a young boy, Bhimendra, who runs away from home. The novel begins with a description of two cousins, Bipin who is 17 and from erstwhile Bangladesh, and Bhimendra from Kolkata who is 15. We are told at the outset that stubborn, reckless and rude Bhim is the opposite of his calm and kind cousin, immediately setting up a city-countryside dichotomy. The author references the trend in Kolkata boys of denigrating their Bangal counterparts, but clarifies that even though Bipin is Bangal, the relationship between the two cousins is cordial and friendly. Here, Sen is referring to the historic cultural rivalry between Bangals, or people from East Bengal and Ghoti, the people

of West Bengal.⁵⁸ Later that evening, as Bhim is partaking of dinner at his uncle's place, he finds a hair beside his plate. Losing his temper at the sight, he abuses his uncle and aunt, and then all Bangals in general, before running out of the house in the pouring rain.

Through Bhim and his unfortunate adventures, readers are introduced to a whole range of characters found in the Bengali countryside, the 'others' of Kolkata residents, and come to know how little social status matters in comparison to character. The inclusion/exclusion of these 'others' was seen as crucial to the political order of the day for two, as Gupta points out, "First, they formed a contrasting image of the high-caste, professional, elite samaj of the literati, and helped define the latter through comparison. Second, they could not remain marginal to the discourse because the recreation of a jati through the conceptual tool of samaj implied conceptualisations of wider unities" (Gupta 173) Combatting the idea of the Moderate movement as socially rarefied was important because the accusation of elitism was one of the central justifications for British opposition to the idea of increased self-representation for Indians. Thus, while Sen doesn't have Bhim meet with any great tragedy, it is important that his bad luck is caused by his denigration of Bangals, and that he comes to regret his actions later almost as soon as he leaves his uncle's house, though a sense of shame doesn't allow him to return. He tries to make his way back to Kolkata, to his mother, but is prevented through one accident or another. The first occurs when he realizes that he doesn't have money to pay the boatman for his fare and is taken to the local zamindar's house. Though readers don't see the zamindar in the story, they are informed of his kindness to all his subjects regardless of social class, and of the prosperity of

⁵⁸ This is of course, in an undivided Bengal, when these rivalries had not reached the hostility prevalent around the time of the partition of India.

his rule, highlighting the necessity of benign authority figures as well as inclusive social policies in forming a regional/national unified identity. However, Bhim is not taken to the zamindar himself, but to his treasurer, a petty Muslim Nabab, who shows no compassion and puts him in jail. Gupta claims that “the literati’s discourse cannot be simplistically considered as a hegemonic and homogenised high-caste and high-Hindu metanarrative absorbing the particularisms of ‘lower orders’ through discourses of power,” yet in this instance, we can observe Sen replicating a hegemonic power dynamic in his depiction of Hindu-Muslim relations (Gupta 173).

After he is released, Bhim has to beg for sustenance as he makes his way to Kolkata, and malnutrition, combined with the harsh weathers of this outdoor life renders him severely ill. He is lying senseless on the road, calling for his cousin, when he is found by Deen Dayal Mitra, a homeopathy practitioner whose kindness is praised by the narrator in a direct address to the readers, “When you meet a stranger, does their pain evoke pity in you?” (*Sakha Vol.1* 21). This kindness is contrasted by Bhim’s ingratitude when, despite all the care of the Mitra family in nursing him back to health, he sneakily leaves the house in the middle of the night, without a word of thanks. Since the story represents a simple world where goodness is rewarded and vice is punished, Bhim ends up getting on the wrong boat and is dropped off in another unfamiliar village. Though he pays a cow cart driver to take him to Kolkata, he gets on the wrong cart when they stop to rest the cows and ends up separated from his belongings in the village of Rasulpur. It is here that Bhim comes into contact with the one of the poorest classes of people in India, farmers and peasant workers. The devaluation of class as a criterion for inclusion in mainstream society is most evident here as the narrator goes off on a tangent praising the ‘bhadrata’ or decency of these people of the lower classes, stating, “Why am I addressing these poor people

with respect? Because they are good...Readers, do not be ashamed if you have been borne into a lower caste, but be like the farmers of Rasulpur and I will call you proper. And if you have been born into a respectable household and have not inherited respected virtues, then who will call you anything but subordinate?" (*Sakha Vol.1* 82). In thus stating his opinions, Sen is also situating all his readers, regardless of class/caste into a larger continuity of respectable society, a consolidation of the masses of children in a unified appeal to public morality.

The farmers try to send him back to Kolkata, but as Bhim's serialized misfortune would have it, his party is captured by dacoits. In this last section of the story, tortured by the dacoits, we see Bhim's redemptive arc starting to form as he refuses to join their crew regardless of daily beatings. After a lot of suffering, he is finally found by his cousin Bipin, who had been looking for him, tracking him and narrowly missing him at several points of the story. They make plans for escape, but the dacoit leader, sensing his plans, moves him to a house in an unknown location. He manages to get a letter to Bipin describing the house who gets help and rescues Bhim. At the very end, the dacoit is also given a redemptive fate when he tells the judge of the real reasons why he became a dacoit (to revenge the oppressions of a zamindar whose subject he was), and is transported but kept alive. *Bhimer Kopal* (*Bhim's Fate*), published throughout *Sakha's* first year, is therefore representative of the priorities of the Bengali intelligentsia during the Moderate era. The story ends on a hopeful note for Bhim, who resolves to never forget the lessons of virtuous behavior and societal inclusion learnt from his misadventures, which formed the core of the principles of public morality circulated by Bengali children's periodicals in the late nineteenth-century, through its multi-genre form.

4.0 Chapter Three: Romanticism and the Colonial Child

Prothom manob Aadomer swargodyanti je amader ei baganer cheye beshi
shushojjito chilo amar eroop bishwash nohe...Baarir bhetorer bagan amar shei
shawrger bagan chilo (I do not believe that first man Adam's heavenly garden was
more beautiful than ours...The garden in our house was that heavenly garden for me).

-Rabindranath Tagore, *Jiban Smriti*, 1911

In a retrospective look at his childhood in his autobiography, *Jiban Smriti* (*My Reminiscences*), published in 1911, Rabindranath Tagore places his early childhood self within a romanticized existence bounded by the four fences of his house in Kolkata and absorbed primarily by the paradisaal glimpses of nature that he is allowed within those boundaries. In the preface to his memoir, Tagore tells us that the job of the person who records memories is to “paint pictures and not write history” (*Jiban Smriti* 1). He recounts his astonishment at encountering a gallery of pictures upon unlocking the door to his memory, a gallery which spoke not of a lived reality, but instead of his experience of it. The acknowledgement of a biased and fallacious memory allowed him to look at his own childhood through the lens of the perspectives and opinions of childhood he had accumulated throughout his already illustrious career, made even more so by being the first Asian to win a Nobel prize just two years afterwards.

In this memoir, Tagore writes of a childhood of strict restrictions enforced by the family's servants, a tedium of schooling and compulsory learning, broken only by the detailed enjoyment of the bits of nature visible through windows and balconies, the trees, with their changing colors and their mysterious nighttime rustlings, the skies, the birds, the little bathing

pond with its daily visitors, the stars and the moon. He also spends considerable amount of time recording his distaste for schooling and contemporary pedagogical methods and the travails of being forced to learn English, remarking on the happiness of baby birds who learn happier languages. In his opinion, English was not something that came naturally to the Bengali tongue, which “choked on the unfamiliar spellings and grammar” and he wept tears when feeding on the unsatisfying meal that is the English language. His love for learning, miraculously, survived these atrocities on his mind, though his fondest memories of knowledge acquisition were the ones that took place mostly within natural surroundings and in moments when the mind comprehended the natural rhythms of language. His memoir is also full of stories about the friends, family and quirky acquaintances who peopled his life. Though deploring the systems that kept young boys caged in school rooms, and prevented their play in natural surroundings, Tagore situates his younger self in a community full of learning, of artistic, creative and poetic endeavours and the humdrum attractions of domesticity. These selectively presented descriptions of a typical upper-class, Hindu, Bengali childhood and the contemporary education system represent the lifelong concerns he had about life and community in colonial Bengal and formed the crux of his visions of political sovereignty.

This chapter explores the political impact of the construct of the Romantic child as a bulwark against epistemic and physical violence in colonial India. I examine the writings of Tagore’s writings on childhood, in particular, the short stories from *Golpoguchcho* which feature children, and the poetry anthologies *Shishu* (*The Child*, 1902), its English translation *The Crescent Moon* (1913), and *Shishu Bholanath* (*The Child Bholanath*, 1922). I also consider Tagore’s beliefs about childhood, education and pedagogical practices, as expressed in his prose writings on nationalism and education, claiming that his vision of childhood is the site of

confluence of his educational philosophy and his imaginings of nascent Indian nationhood. I contend that through his focus on the Romantic child, and his actions towards formulating an indigenous pedagogical system based on Romantic ideals, Tagore provides the global south a path to decoloniality which both counteracts the violence of native militant nationalism and the “symbolic violence” exerted by colonial systems of education. Given the importance and relevance of his views to modern politics, I posit the crucial significance of Romantic childhood, a construct inherited from the British, to Indian politics of decolonization in the early twentieth-century, for its capacity to create an enlightened, rational and non-violent future citizenry. In doing so, I highlight the processes by which the ontology of youth and transnational literary practices of colonialism determine visions of sovereign nationhood in the Global South.

Given his fame as the ‘Bard of Bengal,’ details of Tagore’s life are available everywhere. In a very tiny nutshell, as a scion of the famous Tagore family, Tagore (1861-1941) was brought up in an atmosphere of imaginative creation and learning, with his elder brothers and cousins guiding his education and encouraging his love for the poetic and the dramatic forms. The Tagore family was famous for their patronage of art and education, their interest in social and religious reform and their contributions to political thought. Rabindranath Tagore himself was a prolific writer, a polymath who wrote poetry, plays, novels, short stories, dance-dramas and essays on both personal and political topics. He has contributed to Indian art and has an entire genre of music named after him, which generations of Bengali children, regardless of their musical inclinations, have been compelled to learn or, at the very least, know. He was one of the earliest experimenters in rural reconstruction, rooting his politics in what Uma Dasgupta terms “constructive swadeshi,” an action-oriented, grassroot level community focused form of anti-colonial enterprise (Dasgupta, “A Biography,” 16-24). His faith in the powers of imaginative

education led to the establishment of various schools during his lifetime, most famously in Shantiniketan, where he aimed at imparting an education reclaiming Bengali culture and in harmony with nature to children from the neighboring villages through the precolonial hermitage system, as a way of countering the violent ruptures in identity caused by the colonial education system introduced by the British Indian government. In the Introductory note to a contemporary biography of Tagore by B.K. Roy, Hamilton Mabie notes that “he is an important figure in the coming together of the East and the West,” a statement that is equally applicable to his literary works as well as his politics (Roy 16). It is this feature of his thinking that allowed him to see the usefulness in Western learning and infuse it in his philosophy of Indian pedagogy.

Tagore was not alone amongst his contemporaries to feel the need for addressing and educating children amidst surging calls for more Indian representation within the British government and later, for political sovereignty. Swarupa Gupta, in her book, speaks of an effort amongst the upper-class Bengali Hindu intelligentsia, in the wake of the rise in literacy and print literature in the nineteenth-century as results of the colonial education system, to define nationhood as community and society, a series of concentric circles, so to speak, encompassing the local, the regional, and the national, connecting society, culture and polity.⁵⁹ They comprised of mostly urban Bengali, high-caste, western-educated, professional upper and middle classes, though people from lower castes and classes and from rural Bengal could become part of this amorphous group through education, income, property and professional excellence.⁶⁰ While

⁵⁹ For more on Gupta, see Chapter 2

⁶⁰ She goes on to say, “Though the generic term ‘literati’ or more specifically, the *madhyabitta sreni* (middle class) has been used to denote the framers of the discourse, in reality they encompassed a multilayered social group. The *madhyabitta literati* included small landholders, teachers, native doctors, journalists and writers...the “*daridra*

Gupta speaks mostly about the conversations and addresses between adults, scholars such as Supriya Goswami, Gautam Chando Roy, Satadru Sen and others have also shown how the same period saw a rise in children's literature and children's literature publishing. It is from amongst this intelligentsia and literati that we see some of the earliest children's textbooks, primers, fiction, poetry and periodicals (which is something I address in another chapter). The primary concern of this group was establishing imagined communities à la Anderson at various levels of statehood, through education, especially, scientific, but also vernacular language education and history, and through codes of conduct which bound them together. Tagore was pretty much at the center of these conversations. He contributed to most of the contemporary children's periodicals and was the editor of *Balak* (Boy/Child, 1885-86) the children's periodical published by the Tagore family that I discussed in the previous chapter, which later merged with the periodical *Bharati*. His short stories such as *Kabuliwallah* (*The Man from Kabul*), *Atithi* (*The Guest*), *Post Master*, *Ichchapuron* (*Wish Fulfillment*), and *Ginni* (*Housewife*) all attest to the importance of

athacha bhadra lok" (poor but respectable folk). Though the term madhyabitta has been broadly equated with 'literati' in this study, it must be remembered that 'literati' intersected with categories such as 'elite' and 'bhadralok.' 'Elite' was a sub-group within 'bhadralok' and both these categories could be subsumed under the rubric of 'literati'. John Mc Guire has argued that the bhadralok comprised a respectable social group, mainly Hindu Bengali, embodying changing sets of social relationships. They included the rentier aristocracy or abhijat, and the madhyabitta... This multilayered group included the comprador-rajahs (men who had risen to riches through association with the English East India Company), aristocratic landlord families (abhijat), nouveaux riches landowners who were also editors of periodicals, professionals such as lawyers and college professors, and western-educated individuals connected in varying capacities with the colonial government." Despite occupying multiple layers and intersections of society, "certain common ideological factors and forces formed an analytic framework for explaining interconnections among the different sections of the literati."

childhood and children within his ideology and continue to be taught in schools even today. But it is in his poetry about childhood that one can really sense that, like his some of his English counterparts, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb and De Quincey, the locus of his Romantic ideology is childhood, underlying all his political and pedagogical views and his ideas of nationhood. *Shishu (The Child)* and *Shishu Bholanath (The Child Bholanath)* encapsulate his ideas of childhood in his favorite genre, revealing both the influence and the indigenization of British ideas of Romantic childhood.

4.1 The Global Spread of the Romantic Child

The construct of the Romantic child is well known among childhood scholars as a permeating omnipresence in children's literature scholarship, almost as "our foundational fiction, our originary myth" (Myers 45). However, there is less agreement about its definition, function and of the nature of its influence. The most common narrative is that the idea of childhood espoused by British Romantic writers and poets as a period of innocence, delight and wonder was unambiguously adopted by the writers of Victorian and Edwardian children's literature i.e. the Golden Age of children's Literature. Scholars such as Judith Plotz and Peter Coveney note that writers like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb and De Quincey made a vocation out of mapping, exploring and fetishizing childhood, to the extent that children were considered as a different race from adults (Plotz, "*Romanticism*" 2). During the Romantic period, children were considered primitive creatures, closer to Nature, divinity and innocent of the affectations and trappings of society, almost transcending diurnal realities. To preserve the continued existence of this pure, transcendental, asexual and happy child who comes "trailing clouds of glory" and

protect them from adulthood with its “shades of prisonhouse,” s/he had to be kept isolated from society and contemporary culture. Later, Victorian authors such as Dickens, Lewis Carroll, Barrie have been attributed with continuing what George Boas terms “the cult of the child,” a movement which was notorious for objectifying the child as a fixed symbol of innocence, detached from society and from adults.

There has, of course, been resistance to this narrative of transcendental childhood, with scholars like James Kincaid claiming that not all writers, even in the movement, entirely embraced the ideal of childhood purity and asexuality. Marah Gubar has suggested that while we cannot completely do away with the construct of the Romantic child in understanding nineteenth-century conceptions of childhood, there were authors, separate from this movement, who showed more skepticism towards this category of childhood and Romantic primitivism, instead regarding children as “collaborators” who were quite capable of subverting and deflecting adult expectations of them. This version of Romantic childhood has also met with resistance from Romantic feminist critics Mitzi Myers and Anne Mellor, who have located an alternative Romantic childhood in the writings of female authors which situates them in rationality, community and as developing or having the qualities of social human beings. Scholars have also noted that this figure of the transcendental child ensconced in wondrous play, imaginative education and leisure was an inherently elitist construct, available to the middle and upper classes, excluding children who did not fall into that category. Notable examples of this scholarship include Hugh Cunningham in his book *Children of the Poor*, and Judith Plotz who acknowledges the disparity between the sudden interest in sentimental childhood and the disregard for the real concerns of children, especially those of the poorer and working classes. However, it is the very exclusionary nature of this construct, along with its dominance in public

discourses about childhood, that led social reformists of the era to realize its radical potential, according to Alan Richardson. The need to democratize the transcendental, idealized child inspired educational reformers and anti-Child Labor activists, who used sentimental rhetoric surrounding this figure to further their causes. These critical conversations point to a lack of consensus on the definition; however, given its prevalence, entirely dispensing with the category would be detrimental to the discursive lens with which we examine nineteenth-century British and American childhood.

The protection of the Romantic child included careful monitoring of the child's educational and intellectual progress, since premature exposure to societal influences would mar the unspoiled innocence of the child. Taking a cue from Rousseau's *Emile*, excessive early education was considered anathemic to the Romantic child, as Plotz points out when she claims, "it is precisely the anti-educational strain, coexisting, as it does, with a ceaseless concern with development, that guarantees both the sincerity and value of Romantic educational thinking" (Plotz "The Perpetual Messiah 68) The Romantic vision of education as a pedagogical process guided by children's imaginative needs and imitating natural methods of learning, as Rousseau sets forth, disdained the mechanical nature of mere instruction.⁶¹ Plotz notes that, "To be truly

⁶¹ While Rousseau's claim of children being closer to Nature and therefore, in need of an education governed by natural principles may have influenced many Romantic and Victorian writers, in actuality, the debate was never about whether children need books, but about the contents of the books i.e. about the nature and methods of the education imparted to them, not about the need for education itself. While Rousseau may not have entirely believed in the practicability of what he preached, he encouraged aspiring for an education close to the one he describes in *Emile*. Taking up this maxim, Tagore too felt the need for an education system which took into account the needs of native Bengali children, and not the utilitarian rote and instructions of the colonial education system. For more on

childlike means to be imaginative” and that the “best education was one which carried childhood values to maturation” (Plotz “The Perpetual Messiah 87, 77). If the aim of education is to ensure a spontaneous continuity in human development from childhood and adulthood, to retain childhood in the mature psyche, as thinkers like Wordsworth, Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Herder believed, then child’s play and imagination transform from diversions to educational ideals. This led to what is known as ‘the movement from didacticism to delight’ in writings for children, fictional and educational. Fairy tales, folk tales, oriental tales, fantasy, legends, nursery rhymes gradually became staples in children’s fiction and images of the lively, imaginative child, the strange child and the eternal child came to dominate the images of childhood during the long nineteenth-century, highlighting the children’s connection to the spiritual through imagination (Kümmerling-Meibauer 189).

The movement towards imaginative fiction and education as a self-learning process guided by the natural human progression of physical, moral, mental and spiritual growth was not restricted to Britain. The transatlantic movement of Romantic childhood into America and its transnational growth across Europe has been well recorded by children’s literature scholars, with most scholars choosing to focus on British, American or Western-European notions of childhood. Emer O’Sullivan pays considerable attention to the preponderance of north-west European ideas of childhood, in particular, Romantic notions of childhood and the figure of the Romantic Child. Joining the ranks of other scholars like James and Prout and Zohar Shavit, she has claimed the need for a new paradigm of childhood, marking these older concepts and tenets of childhood as particularly Western ones, which have been elevated and projected at the level of

Rousseau and his effects on Romantic thinking, see Malley, Andrew. “The Eighteenth-Century Child.” *Representing Childhood*, http://www.representingchildhood.pitt.edu/eighteenthcent_child.htm

the universal and global. This eurocentrism points to a severe understudying of children's literature of the global south and brings to question the universality of quintessential childhood, and even the very definitions of the terms 'child,' 'childhood' and 'innocence.' Emanating from a tendency to exemplify modern western childhood, these apparently global ideals of childhood fail to account for both the history and the lived realities of non-Western childhoods, especially of marginalized populations.

This critique of the ethnocentric nature of the disciplines and discourses investigating global childhoods is now becoming increasingly common. Audra A. Diptee and David Trotman launch a similar critique in a special issue on "Childhood in the Global South" published by Atlantic Studies, pointing out that applying theoretical frameworks derived from the historiography and study of Western childhoods onto childhoods in the global south would be to perpetuate colonial structures of epistemology. Yet, children's literature in the global south has been influenced and shaped by forces of imperial history and we must acknowledge the travel of ideas of childhood and children's texts and distinguish between ideas that are local and those that have been imported and incorporated into the local in to arrive at culturally specific ideas of childhood. Given the elevations of north-west European tenets of childhood at universal, global levels, it is not surprising that these ideas were also prevalent in late nineteenth-century Bengal. In her dissertation, *Knowledge and Governance: Political Socialization of the Indian Child within Colonial Schooling and Nationalist Contestations in India, 1870-1925*, Sudipa Topdar attributes the sudden interest in children and childhood to the influence of Romanticism and the individualism associated with it, as well as the growing interest in patriotism and nationalism. She mentions the Tagore and the Roy Chowdhury families, Yogindranath Sarkar as authors who were interested in creating literature specifically for children. Rabindranath Tagore was

especially deeply roused by the message of freedom of personality, of man, of life, of “self-expression for all races and all countries,” that he saw in his readings of Romantic literature, as well as its radical potential for educational reform (Tagore, *Oxford*, 54). Steeped in European literature as well as vernacular and Sanskrit texts throughout his life, Tagore provides a good example for considering how the global south absorbed and indigenized European ideas of Romanticism through childhood and employed them as lenses through which to understand and participate in political and nation-building actions.

That Rabindranath Tagore was influenced by the European Romantic movement is almost a truism by now. His family’s love for English literature, for Shakespeare and Walter Scott, and the teachings from the Upanishads his father instilled in him were all strong inspirations for him. In his reminiscences he describes his childhood at the latter end of the nineteenth century as belonging to the “last vanishing twilight of the Romantic West” (Tagore, *Oxford*, 54). The lyrical literature of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, the fervor of the French revolution, with its ideals of freedom, its belief in the brotherhood of man, “in the human ideals that have permanent value, ultimate value in themselves,” moved and inspired him, heart and soul (Tagore, *Oxford*, 54). B.K. Roy, in his 1915 biography of Tagore, records his unhappiness with the contemporary school system, which led him to dropping out of institutionalized education. His love for nature, for life and his devotion to religious mysticism were both evident since his childhood as was his dislike of schooling. He attributes his own success to the fact that he “had the good fortune to escape the school training” which may have result in his literary output becoming merely imitative, based on an “artificial standard based upon the prescription of the schoolmaster” (Tagore, *Oxford*, 57). None of it is new information since his interest in education, his Romanticism and his unpopular political views, among other things, have been

well-documented by him, his biographers and through academic scholarship.⁶² However, though his writings and views on childhood are equally well-known, there has been surprisingly little scholarly attention devoted to it, with the exception of a chapter in *Rabindranath Tagore in the Twentieth-Century* titled “Remembering Robi” by Dr. Satadru Sen. There are anthologies and articles on individual writings for children, but the lens of childhood studies has just been overlooked in the case of this extremely famous children’s author. And yet, Tagore viewed childhood as a period during which the foundation of the individual, the nation and of mankind is laid, and thus, his vast repertoire of writings include works both on children, on childhood and for children, in a variety of forms such as poetry, short stories, essays and autobiographical accounts.

4.2 Tagore and Politics

In order to examine the significance of Romantic childhood in Tagore’s nationalist visions, it is necessary to understand the cultural and political milieu in which Tagore formulated his beliefs and ideologies. In 1885, the formation of the Indian National Congress inaugurated a new era of anti-colonial resistance. At the beginning, the demands of the nationalists were moderate, limited to asking for more representation in the government, through peaceful methods such as letters, petitions, meetings and discussions. With the partition of Bengal into explicitly Hindu and Muslim provinces in 1905, and the relocation of the capital from Calcutta, which had become a hotbed of anti-imperial politics, to Delhi in 1912 to actively discourage political action,

⁶² Insert names of books. BK Roy, Tagore and European Romanticism, Triveni article, Shahane article

anti-colonialists and nationalists noted the reluctance of the British-Indian government to grant their requests for greater representation, let alone self-governance. Thus, the 1900s and 1910s saw a gradual shift towards increasing use of violence in the nationalists' resistance. Subsequently, with the return of Gandhi in 1915, the anti-colonial resistance took on a mass scale following the popularity of his methods of *satyagraha*, i.e. non-violent, civil resistance. At the forefront of various social and political movements, the Tagore family experienced and were contributors to the various waves and phases of the nationalist movement. In *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*, Ashish Nandy describes Rabindranath's trajectory as "an intellectual and emotional journey from the Hindu nationalism of his youth and the Brahmanic-liberal humanism of his adulthood to the more radical, anti-statist, almost Gandhian social criticism of his last years" (Nandy, 3-4). Living out this "intellectual and emotional journey" led to many detractors, resulting in a lifelong ambivalent and often contentious relationship with mainstream Indian politics. Commenting on his simultaneous critique of British imperialism and the swadeshi extremism of the nationalists, and his tendency to prioritize resistance to Indian conservatism and the negative socio-cultural effects of colonialism over direct political action against British rule, Satadru Sen terms Tagore's reputation as that of a "peculiarly vexing rebel" (Sen 114). The importance of his Romantic philosophy of childhood has to be situated in the location of his political action within cultural and social reform through education. For him, the path to freedom from foreign rule lay in strengthening and reforming Indian society through rural reconstruction and education, in what Uma Dasgupta terms as "constructive swadeshi,"— a form of patriotic political action rooted in the constructive forces which can lead to social progress in a new nation (Dasgupta 2004). And children and their education formed the crux of his constructive swadeshi.

The key feature of Tagore's politics seems to be a vacillation between conservatism and progressivism. Talking about the multifaceted nature of cultural politics in the second half of the nineteenth century, Gupta points out that, "Just as there were several social/familial/caste/class (in the sense of rank) layers among the literati, there were also differences in regard to respective adherence to various ideological and intellectual currents" (Gupta 60). Based on individual differences of family background, social standing, upbringing and regional/sub-regional influences, ideologies varied between Hindu revivalism and liberal progressivism, with the literati torn between their allegiance to the British and rethinking their identity and their conceptions of both western and Indian society. Thus, Tagore's vacillation was part of the ideological wavering of the time, with individuals and groups professing certain ideologies changing, moving away and sometimes even returning to their original beliefs and traditions, depending on their circumstances. For instance, while Tagore did dabble with Hindu nationalism in his youth, as Nandy points out, as secretary of the Brahmo Samaj, appointed in 1884, he earned the ire of the conservatives for introducing non-Brahmins as ministers. He came to strongly oppose Hindu revivalism and gained widespread unpopularity by entering into a respectful but public literary debate over it with Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, a nineteenth-century literary stalwart, a key figure of the Bengal Renaissance and a supporter of Hindu nationalism. This oscillation points to an ideology-in-development, and also helps explain some of the differences between his idealized child and his treatment of children in real life, which, like his ideas, wavered between conservative and progressive. He was a critic of child marriage and the joint family and his relationship with the orthodoxy remained bitterly antagonistic for the rest of his lifetime.

Ironically, Tagore's rejection of the orthodoxy did not lead to the approbation that might be expected from the other, more liberal, groups of Bengali society. Tagore's ideology, radical for his time, alienated even those who might have supported some of his more progressive and philanthropic ideas. The situation was not helped by his changing opinions and he was critiqued for marrying off his daughters at a young age, despite his opposition to child marriage. Indeed, his treatment of the girl child in his writings as bound by domesticity often belies the supposed empowerment granted to his older female characters. As Dutta and Andrew's mentioned in their biography of Tagore, by the last two decades of his life, he had become:

a peculiarly isolated celebrity. To the average British official, especially the police and the intelligence department, he was virtually a non-cooperator; to the average Indian official he did not 'play the game' of Anglo-Indian back scratching; to the average Indian nationalist he was unpatriotic for not supporting Gandhi's movement; to the average Bengali writer he was a natural object of envy; and to the average Bengali in general he was an aloof, unconventional, critical presence, however much honor he might have brought upon Bengal abroad and in the rest of India. Rabindranath knew it all so well. (Dutta and Robinson 285)

While managing his father's estates at Shelidah, Tagore had encountered the evils of both India's caste structure as well as Hindu-Muslim disunity. His voice joined Gandhi's in advocating against untouchability, and both as an intellectual and as a landowner, his support of Hindu-Muslim unity was undeniable. He gathered many admirers for his writing and didn't shy away from writing about the marginalized and oppressed. The years he spent at his estates in Shelidah impressed upon him the plight of India's rural population and his writings were filled with characters and scenes from villages. As much as he could, he attempted to protect his

tenants from the corruptions of India's legal and penal system. Despite all this, his educational institution at Shantiniketan continued to maintain certain caste rules and still remains, according to some "a bastion of cultural orthodoxy" (Sen 114). His detractors and younger writers often criticized him for his tendency to focus on the beautiful and the joyous, at the expense of the social and political evils permeating colonial Bengal. At the end of the day, his upbringing, education and temperament were aristocratic, and he was never allowed to forget that, by his detractors, and his own conflicted self.

Well-travelled and well educated, Tagore's criticism of Western imperialism was mainly directed against the widespread sufferings caused and perpetuated by British rule in India, rather than towards a direct critique of British culture itself, as preached by the Hindu orthodoxy. In his lecture in Japan in 1916, he states, "I must not hesitate to acknowledge where Europe is great, for great she is without doubt... In the heart of Europe runs the purest stream of human love, of love of justice, of spirit of self-sacrifice for higher ideals" (Tagore, *Nationalism*, 19). His experience with the British character, both through his travels and his reading of English and Western literature, left him unable to reconcile the differences between the values they professed at home and those they practiced in the colonies "defying her deeper nature and mocking it" (Tagore, *Nationalism*, 21). Yet, this belief in the goodness of mankind, whether at home or abroad, and his willingness to incorporate the best of all cultures is what led him to combine European Romanticism with his vision of an idealized childhood as the foundation for a future sovereign citizen.

Tagore's ideas of globality also left him equivocal about English as a medium of education. Because of all that English education symbolized in colonial India, he considered it unnecessary to a true education and therefore, wrote and taught in Bengali (the language of

instruction in Shantiniketan, where his school and subsequently university was located).⁶³ At the same time, “he saw English literature as a highly desirable conveyor of excitement and agitation, not only in a culture that was overly inert and given to restraint, but also in the nature of the child that stood to remain restrained and underdeveloped. English stirs things up in sluggish pools, he wrote, and this is good even if it stirs up the mud of the bottom and produces rebellion and disobedience (JS 100–4)” (Sen 125). This indecision towards English literature and culture was fodder for both the orthodoxy and the nationalists, especially because he was simultaneously excoriating in his critique of Bengali society. As might be surmised, this endeared him to neither Bengali politicians, the “liberal” population who still believed in the superiority of British culture and English language, nor the progressive nationalists who saw the need for social reform, but resented the open criticism as being unpatriotic at a moment when nationalist feelings were on the rise.⁶⁴ His critique of Bengali and Indian society was central to his imaginings of an ideal

⁶³ As explained in the next section

⁶⁴ In 1891, in an essay on Pandit Vidyasagar after his death, Tagore’s veneration for him was mixed with scathing utterances for his fellow Bengalis:

“It is hard to see how such an outstanding example of manliness [Vidyasagar] came to be born in this degraded land of ours...He was an exile in his own homeland, for there was none to share his ideals and work. In the men around him there was not even a trace of his own authentic humanity, and so he was far from happy. He did good to others and received ingratitude and lack of cooperation in return. He saw day after day that we begin but never finish; we make a show but do nothing concrete; we do not believe what set out to do; what we believe we do not carry out; we can spin out words without end, but cannot make the smallest sacrifice; we feel pleased with ourselves by exhibiting our pride, but never think it necessary to be worthy; we depend on others for everything and yet rend the skies finding fault with them. We take pride in imitating others, we feel honored to receive their favour, yet we try to throw dust in their eyes and call it politics; and the main object of our lives is to make clever speeches that fill us

Indian childhood and his visions of a pedagogical practice that would encourage their growth and potential.

Apart from his aristocratic nature and ties with the British, he was also unpopular with the nationalists for his ideological opposition to Indian mainstream politics and the concept of nationalism. While his patriotism should never be doubted (his rejection of his knighthood by the British government after the Jalianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 was only a symbolic example of his love for India; he made his anti-imperial stance clear in many ways), Tagore was nevertheless alarmed by the self-perpetuating nature of the state as an institution, regarding it as an inevitable site of oppressive power dynamics and violence, and retreated into his writing after the Partition of Bengal to continue to practice more constructive methods of protest through rural reconstruction and education. In his 1917 essay, “Nationalism,” Tagore addresses his Indian and non-Indian audience alike stating that “Not merely the subject races, but you who live under the delusion that you are free, are every day sacrificing your freedom and humanity to this fetish of nationalism...the weakening of humanity from which the present age is suffering is not limited to the subject races, and that its ravages are even more radical because its insidious and voluntary in people in peoples who are hypnotized into believing that they are free” (Tagore, *Nationalism*, 79-81). Years ago, in a letter to Jagadananda Roy, he had described nationalism as a “bhougolik opodebota,” a geographical or territorial demon (qtd in Dutta 415). Claiming that the ideals of

with intense self-admiration. Vidyasagar had infinite contempt for this weak, mean, heartless, lazy, arrogant, argumentative race of me. He himself was apart from them in every way...He gave cool shade to the weary and fruits to the hungry, but he held himself aloof from the chattering, the endless speechifying, of the numerous mushroom societies and assemblies of the time” (Tagore, R. “Vidyasagarcharit”, *Rabindra Rachanaboli Vol. 11*, pg. 348).

the earlier INC, as well as the extremist nationalist were based on western history and conferred not autonomy, but power, he espoused a vision of nationhood rooted in the real traditions of India, which is to attempt to achieve “an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them and yet seek some basis of unity” (Tagore, *Nationalism*, 107). He believed that India had never developed a real sense of nationalism and that it would do “India no good to compete with western civilization in its own field” (Tagore, *Nationalism*, 117). Violent nationalism and imperialism were two sides of the same coin, which could only be combatted by the politics of a multi-ethnic society and his vision of combining the global with the local to transcend artificial boundaries instituted by political greed, describes Dipannita Dutta. In a climate of extreme patriotic fervor, especially after the return of Gandhi, Tagore’s constructive swadeshi was either vilified or largely ignored.

This emphasis on constructive actions as a political site also led Tagore to certain disagreements with Gandhi and his methods. While Gandhi’s adoption of rural reconstruction and non-violent methods of political action did meet with Tagore’s approval, he accused him of manipulating the masses with the use of symbols, like the spinning wheel (charka), instead of providing substance and positive action. He was also of the opinion that following it symbolically, as the masses did, would inevitably spill over into violence, both physical and epistemic; he was especially alarmed by the increasing communal violence among Hindus and Muslims. Thus, Romantic education, with its basis in the natural processes of mental and moral growth, and by extension, Romantic childhood, becomes the crux of his ideology of anti-violent nationalism and his crucial political action in defense of it. In publicly endorsing his policies, Tagore did not endear himself to anti-colonial resistors who believed in a mono-cultural, universally homogenized nation-state with its record of violence. Tagore’s vision of India was

not a boundary less state, but one which is cosmopolitan to enough the discard artificially and imperially imposed boundaries while respecting differences. And the key to achieving this lay in schooling and imaginative education, because, as Plotz describes of Romantic imagination, it was “a psychological process by which we unify our experience, an agent for assimilation of the otherness of the world unto ourselves. Imagination is the faculty that uses images to body forth totalities, visions of organic wholes. It is the great factor of unification of multiplicity under a leading idea or emotion” (Plotz, “Perpetual Messiah, 87). It is the prioritizing of a national vision of ‘unification of multiplicity’ which led Tagore to his belief in the education and pedagogy as the most crucial site for non-violent, constructive political action rather than symbolically motivated mass movements, with the romanticized child at the center of this vision. Despite his wavering opinions on the social reform and political progress, Tagore’s faith in an idealized childhood which combined learning with play and imaginative pleasure as the best possible form of decolonization never changed.

4.3 Colonial Education in India

The role of the colonial education system in perpetuating colonial rule has been well-documented by postcolonial scholars. Apart from creating divisive policies which led colonized populations into a race for limited resources, the epistemic violence caused by colonial education policies has resulted in collective trauma which haunts and slows down the process of decolonization in former colonies even today. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, N’Gugi talks about the process of African decolonization and claims that the biggest form of oppression created by imperialistic systems was that of the “cultural bomb,” the effects of which he says “is to

annihilate people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately, in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own..." (Thiong'o 3). His own experience of colonial education disrupted the harmony he had with his culture, by rupturing his connection to the language of his culture, leading to a spiritual subjugation forcing him to see the world through the lens of another's language and culture. He describes this subjugation as a condition experienced by the African peoples and as a problem of African decolonization.

N' Gugi's linguistic argument about the symbolic and epistemic is further expanded by Pierre Bourdieu in his enumeration of the symbolic violence caused by pedagogic systems, in general. The term "symbolic violence" was defined by Pierre Bourdieu in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* as the "power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 4). Later, in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* he goes on to describe the way in which "the dominant groups endeavour to impose their own life-style" as a way of establishing their habitus, "the system of dispositions characteristic of the different classes and class fractions," as the primary one (Bourdieu, 526, 6). Though, both these influential works were based on French society and culture, scholars such as Julian Go have argued that his early work in French Algeria and colonialism contained the nascent expression of his later ideas, including habitus (Go, 2013). Whether or not Bourdieu's views on colonialism influenced the development of the theory of symbolic violence and habitus, it is easy to see how such a concept may be applicable to the colonial situation. Symbolic violence was required to create a habitus in

India which would be more amenable to both British tastes and economic interests. The colonial educators and missionaries may have had philanthropic and religious motivations, but ultimately, it was this realization by the British Indian government that finally shaped the form and content of the colonial Indian education system.

India was one of the earliest sites of British experimentation in colonial education. In her overview of colonial education and the birth of English literary studies in India, Gauri Vishwanathan writes “Although commerce was the means by which England expanded internationally into distant outposts, education was effectively the site on which its reach was consolidated. Since the imperatives of assimilating colonial subjects to a mission of management were better served by cooperation rather than conflict, education gained an exalted position in the hierarchy of interests claiming British administrators’ attention” (Vishwanathan, xvii). As J.A. Mangan points out in the Introduction to *The Imperial Curriculum*, the school curriculum was an integral part of the process of control by stereotyping, since colonial school books tended to perpetuate carefully crafted images of the colonized as weak, barbaric, chaotic and primitive in order to rationalize the colonizer’s continued presence and assuage any sense of guilt they might have felt, a pedagogic action necessary for maintaining imperial habitus. Thus, education became one of most powerful methods by which to move young native subjects from their own symbolic universes to that of the rulers because it intervened “in the process of transferring legitimacy of ideological perspective from one generation to the next” (Mangan, 20). Assimilation was just one of the goals of colonial education; British reasoning behind creating educational institutions was simultaneously altruistic and paternal, with far-reaching consequences. Pedagogical apparatus was also an important aspect of the civilizing mission professed by missionaries, since enlightenment of the natives was an important part of the

process of assimilation without increased military conflict. Since perpetuation of the dominant social formation requires the establishment of a habitus that is “durable, transposable and exhaustive,” the most effective way of accomplishing it by methods which didn’t involve physical oppression on the part of the British was by exercising symbolic violence through pedagogic action, since it concealed, at least initially, the power relations in play (Bourdieu, 33-34).

Even so, the content and medium of this education remained a matter for debates which continued over the first half of the nineteenth-century, with legislators unable to decide between a vernacular, traditionalist system of education, or a western, liberal one. Gradually, with the Charter Act of 1813, Mills Dispatch of 1817, The Education Act passed in 1835, and the Wood’s dispatch of 1854, a decision was made in favour of a Western, liberal, rationalist mode of education, to be imparted in English. Macaulay’s 1835 “Minutes on Indian Education” proclaiming the indisputable worth of a single shelf of European literature over all of India and Arabia’s native literature gives us some insight into the rationale behind the eventual selection of English literary and humanistic studies as the primary vehicle of colonial education. However, beyond the racial hierarchization lay the fact that in order for native Indians to assimilate into the habitus established the British, it was necessary to raise them “to the intellectual level of their Western counterparts,” by creating a subjectivity congruent with European ideals which would thus, be more conducive to colonial rule (Vishwanathan, 6). Attempts to do so through missionary efforts drew the ire of the religious Indians and eventually, English literary studies became the suitable means of establishing the dominant colonial habitus.

Additionally, colonial education and the English language were also seen as avenues towards material advancement, and therefore, were recognizable as legitimate, or in Bordieusian

terms, as having more symbolic force. Similar to, but earlier than the African continent, India experienced the gradual rise of English as the main indicator of a formal education system and the path to a “colonial elitedom” (Thiong’o, 11-12). Suresh Chandra Ghosh notes, “While enlightened Indians like Raja Ram Mohun Roy saw in the introduction of English education an opportunity to deliver his countrymen from obscurantism and barbarous superstitions, the majority of young Indians saw in it an opportunity to gain employment in various British establishments, official as well as non-official” (Ghosh, 186). The British succeeded in their goals; the introduction of colonial education did create a class of Indians who benefited from English education and the jobs created by the administrative apparatus, and were therefore, content to be loyal to the British Indian government. As time went on, however, it also led to two unanticipated outcomes. Firstly, as the numbers of educated Indians gradually increased, they found themselves without adequate employment. English education had rendered them disinclined to traditional, agricultural occupations and since the upper echelons of the administrative jobs were reserved for the British, educated Indians found themselves without any means of gainful employment. The resulting discontent became an important site around which the demand of increased political autonomy hinged; the Indian National Congress, from its earliest days, considered employment as one of their main agendas. Secondly, the paucity of employment caused groups of Indians to turn to professions which would not be entirely dependent on the goodwill of the government. Teaching, law, journalism and medicines increasingly became popular career options, and it is this group of people who ultimately came to form the bulk of the Congress.

Confronted by these unforeseen complications, in the 1870s, the government passed a resolution to withdraw financial support for English education on the grounds that the system

had become self-sustaining, unlike vernacular education. Though they had to withdraw this resolution due to widespread protests, in 1882, after the Hunter's commission reports, the government started investing less in higher education and encouraged private investment. Most educated Indians believed that it was the Raj's gradual realization "that the decision to promote English education since the days of Macaulay was 'a story of grave political miscalculation' containing a lesson that has its significance for other nations which have undertaken a similar enterprise'" which led to them refraining from further activities in the field of higher education (Ghosh, 193). In other words, they realized that colonial education had led to the creation of a habitus which they were no longer willing to support for fear of fomenting political dissent. Tagore recognized these ruptures when he claimed that, "The history behind the snowball fight between Charlie and Katie might be intriguing to an English child. But when our boys read these in a foreign language, not having the memories, they cannot form a picture in their imagination, and have to proceed blindly" (Tagore, 1892). Having been educated in English as well as vernacular tongue, Bengali, he is aware that English language education within the contemporary colonial system merely served utilitarian market purposes, encouraging the colonial subject to be imitative, servile, uncritical and imaginative (Tagore, 1892). As his biographers Dutta and Andrew put it, "In tandem with his patriotism grew the deepest of all his social convictions: that faulty education was the cause of most of India's ills. He hated the system's monotony, of course, its alienation from life and nature, its utilitarianism, its emphasis on English virtually excluding the mother tongue and, most of all, its joylessness" (Dutta and Andrew, 123). In his own institution in Shantiniketan, he established Bengali as the medium of instruction. In setting up his own pedagogic agency and pedagogic authority, Tagore was aware that "all pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary

power” (Bordieu and Passeron, 5). But he had also come to the conclusion that the only sustainable way of countering the symbolic violence of colonial education would be the establishment of a new habitus, to reduce the oppression of the arbitrary, through a method of subaltern vernacular education based on the principles of pleasure in learning, critical thinking and independence of thought, all of which he found sorely lacking in the education system. It is in conceiving this site of political action, and in his attempts at reviving joy in native education, that he found Romantic childhood and Romantic education to be instrumental. Using a pedagogy in his institution which mimics the natural and intuitive processes of learning, translating ideas of Romantic childhood for a native audience through his writings, and adapting them to reflect native realities was therefore key to his endeavors of a new habitus.

4.4 Colonial Bengali Children’s Literature: Tagore’s Vision of Childhood

The young boy Bawlai, in the eponymous short story by Tagore, is seen as a being almost completely of Nature. A quiet child, his very body seems to resonate with the reverberations of Nature; he feels the rain with his body, the pain of every torn flower and blade of grass, and the colors of the natural world in his very soul. His preferred way of occupying his time would be in the mountainside, or in the garden, playing amongst trees, staring at them with wondrous eyes, gardening. His soul is described as ancient, existing in tandem with the very life force of Earth and traveling with it from rocky lands to an existence full of greenery. The story itself is rather short, covering, other than his relationship with Nature, his relationship with his adult caretakers i.e. his avuncular relatives. The plotline consists of his efforts to grow a sapling he finds in the middle of the garden path and save it from orderly instincts of his uncle, who desires to uproot it.

As Bawlai grows, so does the tree and eventually, by the time his father sends him to boarding school, the tree is fully mature. At the end of the story, on the verge of leaving for England, Bawlai asks his uncle for a picture of his old friend, the tree. But alas! The tree, like his childhood, is no longer part of the household, or the narrative and has been cut down. The story ends with his aunt's mourning words, "That plant was his reflection, his soul's twin" (Tagore, "Bawlai," 224).

That the tree doesn't survive Bawlai's step into adulthood is a pointed use of the Romantic trope of the virtuous child who cannot survive in a harsh world without losing their innocent singularity and is therefore, better off dead. By transplanting his childhood from Bawlai to his beloved tree and depicting its death at the hands of societal processes (the aesthetics of garden landscaping), Tagore reiterates the Wordsworthian notion of adulthood as a period of absolute separation from the experiences of childhood. It is also significant that it is his aunt and not his uncle who recognizes the tree as a soulmate. These two telling factors encapsulates Tagore's ideology of childhood and child-rearing: based on his readings of British Romantic literature under the tutelage of his family, his idea of childhood gravitates towards a Romantic ideology of transcendental childhood, but unlike the child in British Romanticism, Tagore's children are not isolated objects of a masculinist, discourse, nor are they representative of only the upper and middle classes. Following paths similar to Romantic female writers, he places the child in a domestic, community setting, with female figures, both child and adult, playing an important part in the upbringing of the child. However, like most of his late-nineteenth century colonial counterparts, his thoughts are mostly occupied by the male child, with a few notable appearances of female children which this chapter will examine. Scholars of Bengali female childhood like Jasodhara Bagchi, Shibaji Bandopadhyay and Bharati Ray claim that "Children's literature, in trying to

reproduce the innocence of childhood, endlessly repeated the socially accepted gender stereotypes” (Bagchi, 1993). Yet, at a time where female childhood was seen as a time of training to be a good wife and mother, and child wives were not seen as children by either Indian traditionalists, the British government, or even their own family, I contend that Tagore’s view of girls as children, even in a limited capacity, resisted both colonial indigenous patriarchal codes and imperialist patriarchy. His imaginings of native childhood as a time for imaginative education, play and wonder for both genders while being rooted in domesticity and society, therefore, forms the crux of his anticolonial views.

The focus on imagination, like his British counterparts, forms a crucial part of both his vision of transcendental Romantic childhood as well as his pedagogic aspirations, since imagination, enabling visions of a new world, paves the way to a new habitus. In the short story “Oshombhob Kotha” or “Impossible Tale,” written in June, 1893, Tagore gives us a layered description of the process, product and motivation of storytelling, an act of imagination. The story begins with the narrator-storyteller’s grievances against people’s reluctance to willingly suspend their disbelief. After the timeless “once upon a time, there was a king,” readers are told of their modern counterparts who, upon hearing this very first line, immediately jump in with questions about the king’s name, the historical, geographical and temporal details of his existence (Tagore, “Awshombhob,” 270). The contemporary writers’ exhaustion with such an unimaginative audience has also made them shrewder, and when asked, they respond with lies that are couched in terms of historical unverifiability. Their listeners are informed that there were three kings named Ajatshatru, one of whom died too young to be historically recorded, the other on whose details of existence ten biographers are in conflicted on, so on and so forth. The storytellers’ audiences eat up these lies as proof of the erudition of the storyteller. This period of early nationalism (1880s and 90s) saw the construction

of 'India' as an imagined national community, and the involvement of various literary genres, fictional and factual, in the process. At a time when the spirit of cultural nationalism found its expression in the resurgence of research into India's 'glorious' past and in the revival of history writing, historical fiction, myths and legends, this disbelief in stories and storytelling and the resultant lies signal not just a lack of imaginative engagement, but also a disavowal of patriotic trends.

The narrator-storyteller goes on to contrast this disturbing tendency with children's ability and willingness to engage in acts of imaginative learning and entertainment using an anecdote from his own childhood. Children's lack of skepticism allows them to enjoy fairy tales, a genre he characterizes as "naked as a babe, as simple as truth, and as clear as an effervescent fountain" (Tagore, "Awshombhob," 271). The willingness to believe is not to be confused with children's propensity for being taken in by lies; it is framed entirely as a response to an act of storytelling signaled by the words "once upon a time, there was a king" (Tagore, "Awshombhob," 271). More so, their willing suspension of disbelief is what protects them from the lies authors and storytellers have to tell when answering questions of credibility from adult skeptics. The whole short story is structured as a Chinese box, with the narrator's complaints framing his childhood reminiscence which frames the actual fairy tale at the heart of the story. The anecdote from his childhood describes a young boy desperately avoiding his tutor for the pleasures of a storytelling session by his grandmother on a lazy, rainy evening, interspersed with the fairy tale itself. Written in a chatty, digressive tone, the tale is a retrospective look at the primacy of imaginative composition in children's education. By fleeing from his tutor, the child expresses a preference for the lessons learnt through imaginative fiction rather than the austere pedagogy. The fairy tale at the heart of the story is mostly a pretty piece of fiction that matters not so much for its

content, but for its ability to draw out a willing suspension of disbelief in the child (its value is more for the child listener within the short story than for its readers). As the grandmother ends the fairy tale on the death of the male protagonist, the child is compelled by his natural curiosity to ask, “after that?” (Tagore, “Awshombhob,” 277). As the grandmother responds by stating that what follows is more impossible, the narrator-storyteller abandons all attempts to follow the story and instead recounts the boy’s reaction to having his heart shattered by the end of the tale, forcing the grandmother to resuscitate the hero and the story to bring this candlelit evening of truancy to a joyful and satisfactory end.

The child’s utter absorption in the “impossible” aftermath of the tale and his willingness to not just listen to, but feel and believe in the values of a fictional world sets him apart from the skeptics who would never be able to follow the path “after that.” As mentioned before, Tagore’s abhorrence of the colonial schooling system as was well known and he believed that “children have their subconscious mind more active than their conscious intelligence” (Tagore, “Oxford,” 102). Thus, by setting up a child character who learns better through playful imparting of values and knowledge, he establishes children and their imagination as central to the processes of nation-building through education. In doing so, he is joining many eminent Bengali late nineteenth-century writers and thinkers who urged the inclusion of delight in children’s literary experiences, moving away from the prevalent trend of purely didactic and informational books, similar to their English contemporaries. As the need for texts specifically targeting a child arose in the process and aftermath of the establishment of an education system imparting European forms of knowledge, various groups emerged in the nineteenth-century to meet this demand. Indian children in colonial Bengal not only had access to British authored, Romantic and Victorian literature, as evidenced by contemporary local library catalogues, but also to vernacular children’s

texts produced for them by Indian authors. The publication of *Digdarshan or Viewing the Horizon*, the first vernacular children's periodical, edited by John Clark Marshman, in 1818, by the Serampore Mission Press, was followed by many initial decades of "useful" and edificatory literature for children. Both periodicals and textbooks for children contained information on history, etiquette, the natural and physical sciences, language, grammar and composition rules and other subjects designed to create knowledgeable model colonized citizens. Post the Mutiny of 1857, however, the proliferation of children's literature was followed by the gradual inclusion of themes such as nation, nationalism and patriotism, as well as an increasing interest in fiction, folklore, fairy stories and fantasy. Imagination and playfulness became key criteria for denoting literature suitable for children, developing simultaneously with a consciousness of the disadvantages of British rule.

Writing in this milieu, childhood became the lens with which Tagore assimilates his views of education and nationhood. His distaste for the colonial education system is well-known, especially from the descriptions of his personal experiences in his autobiography, "My Boyhood Days." Like his cousins, Rabindranath expressed a desire to attend school. However, by the time he was 13 or 14, he was set against formal schooling. "School grabbed the best part of the day," he describes, "and only fragments of time in the morning and evening slipped through its clutching fingers. As soon as I entered the class-room, the benches and tables forced themselves rudely on my attention, elbowing and jostling their way into my mind. ...There is a kind of grasshopper which takes the color of the withered leaves among which it lurks unobserved. In like manner my spirit also shrank and faded among those faded, drab colored days" (Tagore, *Boyhood*, 53) While he believed in absorbing some aspects of Western liberal and rational education, he was convinced that the colonial system of education was restrictive and meant to serve an ulterior imperial purpose. And he wasn't wrong given that the

history of educational legislation was eventually directed towards serving Macaulay's aims of forming "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1835). Thus, in his 1892 essay, "The Discrepancies of Education," he claimed that the learning and mastery of the English language took up much of the children's time and energy and this was a kind of rote activity in which the mind and mental faculties were not overly engaged. This was a common Romantic critique of bookish learning, now directed against English language learning in India, since, according to Tagore, the discrepancy in medium and thought enfeebled the intellectual capacities.

Tagore also believed that India had never had a real sense of nationalism. "Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than the reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity," therefore situating his fight for political autonomy squarely within the sphere of education and community reconstruction (Tagore, qtd in Dasgupta, *Biography*, viii). Dasgupta, contextualizing 'constructive swadeshi', says "Rabindranath and his family contributed substantially to that (cultural) leadership by making culture the basis of their service to humanity outside the political movement. They did this by articulating and nurturing the creation of a new Indian personality capable of appreciating the many currents of the Indian cultural tradition along with the liberal values of the West" (Dasgupta, *A Biography*, 6). It is in service of the creation of this new Indian personality that Tagore deployed his ideas of the Romantic childhood and Romantic pedagogy. Educated, well-read and having spent considerable time

traveling across Europe, Asia, South America and America, Tagore was well aware of the Romantic philosophy of childhood and that “educational and developmental idioms are a crucial part of the Romantic idiom, since humanity had come to be defined as the capacity for intellectual, moral and imaginative growth,” as Judith Plotz tells us (Plotz, “Perpetual Messiah,” 64). Thus, *The Impossible Tale* begins with the timeless phrase, “Once upon a time, there was a king” and goes on to describe the need for a malleable imagination in the contemporary situation. The alternation between the frame story of a young Rabindranath trying his best to avoid his tutor and the fairy tale told by his grandmother highlights the capacity of originality and imagination to bequeath true education as opposed to pedagogical rote.

Wordsworth, often regarded as “the principle explorer” of childhood, was undoubtedly a powerful influence on Tagore’s thinking about childhood, as is evident from “Bawlai” and many other short stories, as well as his poetry for and about children (Plotz, *Romanticism*, 1). The opening poem of *Crescent Moon*, titled “The Home” describes Tagore, like Wordsworth, walking through the fields during sunset when he hears the solitary voice of an unseen boy singing. The boy’s voice leaves “the track of his song across the evening,” a reverberation reminiscent to that of Wordsworth’s profound vale profound overflowing with the sound of the Reaper’s voice (Tagore, *Crescent Moon*). Both these children are utterly absorbed in their outdoor activities and their respective songs, unaware of their listener. However, unlike the Reaper’s song, the boy’s song is knowable, speaking of his village home “at the end of the waste land, beyond the sugar-cane field, hidden among the shadows of the banana and the slender areca palm, the cocoa-nut and the dark green jack-fruit trees,” in a landscape that is unmistakably Bengali (Tagore, *Crescent Moon*). He walks away as Wordsworth’s poet-speaker does, bearing

with him the music “long after it was heard no more,” in the images awakened in his heart, of happy childhoods spent in the arms of mother and Mother Nature (Wordsworth 656). The knowability of the song reveals one of Tagore’s major differences with British Romantic discourse, which attributes to the child the mental qualities of “befitting a solitary creative genius who in isolation from human society is able to form unitary visions of a world instinct with meaning” (Plotz, *Romanticism*, 13). Tagore’s children are not permanently solitary or alienated from society. Instead, while society and adulthood have the capacity to damage the childlike aspect of the mature mind, a natural and imaginative education has the capacity to carry “childhood values to maturation” (Plotz “Perpetual Messiah” 77). And this education is not acquired by seclusion but a combination of natural education and a harmonious socialization process, as we see strongly demonstrated in his short stories, particularly, “Atithi” (The Guest). Through these stories, Tagore portrays an affective dysfunctionality cause by lack of assimilation of idealized and domesticized childhoods in children, a trope in his stories. Time and again, this separation of idealized and domestic childhood harms both children and their families. While Tagore does see as culture and Nature as two separated realms, he suggests that it is the cooperation between the two in individual children which makes for the most mature and evolved adults, who can not only grow up to prosper, but also occupy the position of being a useful and therefore the most desirable kinds of citizen of a politically autonomous nation.

Written in 1895, before either of his famous anthologies of poetry about childhood and in the early days of his experimentation with the genre of short stories, “Atithi” is a complex story about the affective dysfunctionality cause by lack of assimilation of idealized and domesticized childhoods in children. The story centers around two child-protagonists, Tarapada, a Brahmin boy of 15-16, and Charushashi, a 9 years old girl. Tarapada is described at

the very outset as fair, beautiful, with simplicity etched on his face, and is someone “who works completely according to his own wishes, but does it so easily that there is no evidence of stubbornness. One finds no trace of shame in his behavior” (Tagore, “Atithi,” 244). The trajectory of the story mainly follows Tarapada as he moves around on his adventures. Though extremely beloved by his family and village, including the teacher, there is something in Tarapada, “something entirely new” which resists the bonds of affection, and we are informed that his first attempts at running away from home occurred at the age of eight (Tagore, “Atithi,” 245). Despite being brought back, his repeated attempts at escape frustrates his family and village and they finally let him leave on his adventures. He is fond of music and acquiring new crafts and skills and always remains independent of the bonds of love and domesticity. He joins a traveling theatre troupe, a music group and then a gymnastics group, always leaving just as the people in the group come to adore him and attempt to convert his stay into something more permanent. After the gymnastics group, on his way to a fair in a distant village he meets Motilal, the zamindar of Kathaliyar. Tarapada asks him for a lift to the fair and Motilal Babu takes one look at this beautiful boy and immediately feels affection for him. The rest of the story details Tarapada’s stay on the boat, and subsequently, at the zamindar’s house. He is immediately proficient at cooking and other household skills, and when Motilal Babu appoints an English teacher for him, he proves equally apt at picking up the language. He stays at Motilal Babu’s place for two years, charming the villagers and the zamindar household. In the end, while Motilal plans his marriage to his daughter, Charushashi, Tarapada gets another wind of his wanderlust and disappears, as is his nature.

Another important component of the story is Charushashi, who is entirely viewed through the lens of her relationship to Tarapada. Charushashi is the zamindar’s daughter, well-beloved,

but entirely whimsical, stubborn, possessive and quick to anger. She is depicted as alternately being jealous of her parents, for claiming Tarapada's attentions, and of Tarapada, for the affection shown him by her parents. Her mind, an impenetrable fortress, quickly devices ways to upset the whole household and frustrate Tarapada's efforts at befriending her. Charu, like T. Mukhopadhyay's Kankabati, is depicted as part-adult and part-child, a prevailing trend in literature especially those about female children, acknowledging the existence and evils of child marriage. We see this particularly in Tagore's writing, given his controversial attitude to child-marriage and Charu is no different from the rest of his female characters.⁶⁵ Thus, we are informed that the only time Charu secretly pays attention to Tarapada while on the boat-trip is when he is bathing. In Kathaliya, back home, Charu disrupts Tarapada's studies and spills ink on his books, but prevents her friend, Shonamoni, from becoming friends with him on the pretext of his studies being harmed. She also competes with him, joining him during lessons and childishly demanding to keep up with every bit of progress he makes, showing admiration through competitive imitation. As she becomes of marriageable age, 11, she begins to resist her parents search for a husband, till Tarapada is presented as a prospective groom. Both children change as the marriage draws nearer, Tarapada, beginning to feel the bonds of the household he had settled in and Charu, feeling in turn, joy, anger, love and apathy. We are never told how she feels when he disappears.

In these two children, idealized and domesticized childhood are kept apart. On one hand, with his poise, ability to talk to people, and his precocity at learning a variety of crafts and skills, Tarapada might seem like a boy entirely encapsulated by society. However, throughout the story

⁶⁵ Talk about his writings on child marriage and his marrying off his daughters at a young age.

we are reminded of his affinity with Nature, situating him within the site of Romantic childhood. As “afraid of ties as a fawn,” while traveling in the boat, he preferred sitting outside look at the grassy meadows, dark green forests, little village paths and fields burgeoning with harvest; “this huge, immutable, unending, mute world seemed to be this young boy’s close relative, yet not even for a moment did he try to bind this restless person in the bonds of affection (Tagore, “Atithi,” 248). Even his extreme need for independence seems to reflect the vastness and omnipresence of the natural world. He saw patterns of music in the sound of the rain and thunder, in the cries of animals carried out of the forest by the wind. In the end, his wanderlust returns with the monsoon rains, and we are given a given a description of the joy of the overflowing river and the life that revolved around it in tandem with his changing feelings towards Charu. And the fact of the advent of a town fair at the time when Tarapada disappears recollects his original plans of visiting a fair, rendering his two years in Kathaliya to a transitory tangent in his otherwise continuum of wandering. Not for a moment was he hindered by feelings of gratitude towards the zamindar, who had fed, clothed and educated him for two years; it is as if such human emotions didn’t enter his consciousness or unconsciousness. Thus, while Tarapada is a bird who can settle in any nest, his innate self is only at peace when he is one with the vastness of life and Nature.

Charu, on the other hand, is seemingly headless and whimsical, as chaotic and uncontrollable as the winds and utterly opaque and unknowable, as Romantic transcendental children tend to be. However, she is treated as an immature woman, rather than a child, the biggest evidence of which is her relationship with Tarapada. Her jealousies are seen as complex, hovering between anger and competitiveness at his academic prowess and a clamoring for his attention. She is jealous of Shonamoni, another girl in his life and wants him entirely for herself. And unlike romanticized children, Charu's feelings for Tarapada have a hint

of the sexual in them, as evidenced by her secretly watching him bathe and refusing all other suitors than him. Even on the boat, Charu spends her time indoors and her life seems bound by the house and domesticity, to the extent that in the end, when she becomes a marriageable child, she is entirely confined to her house, steeped in the vagaries of community. There is no description of Charu that doesn't involve her feelings, all of which revolve around her home, family and Tarapada. This separation of idealized and domesticity childhood eventually harms both children and their families and more importantly, disrupts the social fabric that Tagore sees as crucial for a functioning and progressive society. Tarapada, educated and brilliant, is unable to take his place in society as a useful citizen, something Tagore sees as necessary for all boys, as evidenced not only by the preponderance of the boy child in his writings for children, but also through the foundation of his school.⁶⁶ Charu's path to maturity is also halted by the lack of actualization of her feelings for Tarapada.

In his treatment of Charushashi as a bride-to-be, wrapped up in domesticity, Tagore is staying close to contemporary depictions of girl children. However, in closely recording Charu's transition from childhood to womanhood, Tagore focuses on an aspect of female childhood that is largely ignored by his contemporaries: that of the bride-to-be as a child, trying to establish her personhood and her identity, albeit through rebellion, disobedience, competition, and jealousies. While authors such as Yogindranath Sarkar, also wrote for and about female children during the latter half of the 1890s, Tagore's nuanced treatment of the girl child was early for his time. In the

⁶⁶ Apart from the specific female child characters I discuss, my readings of Tagore's ideas of childhood are based upon the male child, simply because most of his short stories and poems about childhood are based on boyhood.

early-twentieth century, as the spirit of nationalism and independence became mainstream, one can see the increased involvement of women in politics, education, and in the public sphere, in general, which is also reflected in children's books and periodicals of the time. Tagore has been lauded for his understanding of female characters and what it meant to inhabit the world as a woman in a man's world and this understanding extends to the depiction of his female children as well.⁶⁷ Even before "Atithi," we see it in his depiction of Mini in his 1892 short story, "Kabuliwallah" (The Man from Kabul). The word describes traveling merchants and traders from Afghanistan and surrounding areas who would annually travel to India, staying for a few months and peddling their wares before going back to their homeland. The story itself describes the friendship between a kabuliwallah called Rehmat and his friendship with a young Bengali girl called Mini. Over the years, on his travels in India, Rehmat cultivates a friendship with Mini by listening to her stories and giving her gifts of pistachios, cashews and raisins. One year, while collecting his dues, Rehmat get involved in a fight and stabs a man, for which he is arrested and sentenced to jail for eight years. After his release, he comes to see Mini before going back to Afghanistan and give her the usual gifts of nuts and raisins (for which he doesn't take any money). Though her father is loth to arrange this meeting, since it is Mini's wedding day, Rehmat's reasons ultimately sway him from his original decision. The kabuliwallah shows Mini's father a handprint of his own girl child, and the evidence of paternal affection in his fellow human, moves him to empathy and thus summon Mini to the public living room. On meeting Mini, Rehmat realizes that she is no longer the little girl who was his friend and sadly leaves for his journey to his own daughter, who he realizes, will also have grown up.

⁶⁷ The limited nature of Tagore's progressive views has received a lot of critique, during his lifetime and after, as mentioned before, the depth of his understanding and sympathy for his female characters is undeniable.

Upon first glance, Mini might seem to be an object of male fascination and affection, both to her father and to the kabuliwallah. She is extremely talkative and curious, imaginative, and with an incessant desire for stories, and is beloved by both adult men for these very qualities. Unlike other girls, Mini's parents are self-proclaimed liberals, and she is initially brought up without any knowledge of the inevitability of her marital path. When Rehmat asks her, jokingly, if she is going to her in-laws' house, Mini's enchanting ignorance makes both men smile, and she is given to believe that 'shoshurbari' is a type of monster Rehmat is going to vanquish. So, when she sees him led away in ropes after he is arrested, Mini asks if he is going to 'shoshurbari,' and he affirms it and tells her he would beat up the monster, if his hands weren't tied. Mini's act of viewing the arrest and her confusion over the term 'shoshurbari' emphasizes her innocence while simultaneously foreshadowing the inevitability of the day when she will no longer be confused about the word, but part of the adult world of marital knowledge. Tagore's depiction of her growth and transition to womanhood, therefore, strips away any illusions of a childhood dictated by these qualities being an eternal one, as seen in British Romantic depictions of childhoods frozen in time and of premature deaths of beloved children. Mini will grow older, and change will be wrought.

As Mini loses her kabuliwallah friend, her father realizes that her curiosity and open-hearted nature renders her quite improper within society and that this situation will have to change. As she gets older, we are told that her number of male friends slowly decreases in favor of female ones and that "these days she doesn't even visit her father in his writing room," a previous habit of hers which indicates Mini's realization of her own impropriety and her attempts to rectify it as she slips into bride-to-be mode (Tagore "Kabuliwallah.225). But perhaps the most telling moment of the realization of the transient nature of childhood comes

at the end of the story when Rehmat meets Mini. The narrator, Mini's father writes that "perhaps Rehmat still believed that Mini would be exactly the same and would come running out to greet him crying 'kabuliwallah o kabuliwallah,'" and they would start their conversations where they had left off" (Tagore "Kabuliwallah" 226) Earlier, when her father had tried to pay him for the gift of nuts and raisins, Rehmat tells him that he too has a daughter, and it is in her memory that he came with the gifts for Mini, and not for trade. The exclusion of his relationship with Mini from the financial transactions responsible for his very presence in India places her more firmly on the pedestal of childhood, persuading her father to call for her. As Mini comes out, she no longer recognizes Rehmat and is shy in front of a strange man, a heartbreaking moment for both men as they both receive the final confirmation of the transition that has taken place. Rehmat leaves with the sad knowledge that he would have to repeat the whole process with his own daughter.

In "Kabuliwallah", Tagore depicts the inevitable end of childhood for the girl child while reinforcing the need for giving her the childhood all children inevitably deserve, one of stories, imagination and the freedom to play. As with Tarapada and Charushashi, this childhood cannot take place by either isolating children or completely domesticating them. The adult Mini is a "proper" woman because of the freedoms she had as a child, as well as the state of happy domesticity she lived in. She may not be the same Mini, but she has grown to occupy a functioning place in society, however limited it might be for women in the 1890s. Without this assimilation, society would not be able to progress towards enlightenment or sovereignty. In an earlier story called "The Postmaster," (1891), Ratan, the little servant girl, becomes a mere site of relief for the young postmaster's feelings of homesickness and remains a figure on the fringes of society. Never inquiring about Ratan's desires, he educates her and expects her to take care of him when he falls sick. His conversations

with her are always conducted with half an eye to his own situation at being stranded in a remote countryside post-office, and his questions about her late family is small talk, rather than an actual desire to know her. Ultimately, their conversations veer towards his family and his life in Kolkata, rendering her a mute receptacle of his thoughts. This story takes place during the monsoon and Ratan's presence in the postmaster's life becomes associated with the boredom of being stuck indoors, and her temporary education stops as soon as he is able to establish a connection with the world outside the village. When the post-master informs her of his decision to depart, Ratan is rendered mute. Like the natural beauties of the area, which had no effect on the postmaster, Ratan's one effort to articulate her wish to accompany him to his family in the city at the end of the story is overlooked and ultimately, she is utterly silent except for her tears and her pleas for him to not worry about her. She can express nothing of who she is and ultimately remains an extension of the overwhelming natural world of the village, opaque, silent and merely a vessel for those around her. She has no caretakers and has to fend for herself, neither living the life of a child, nor that of a bride-to-be. Her lack of any real connection to either the village community or the social world introduced by the postmaster becomes a site of suffering and at the end of the story, remains entirely unassimilated into society.

This importance of balancing domesticized and idealized childhood seeps into his writings, no matter which aspect of childhood he addresses, aligning himself unconsciously with the values of Romantic feminists like Anna Barbauld and Maria Edgeworth. In "Ginni" (The Housemistress), Ashu is a retiring young boy who prefers playing with his sister and her dolls over socializing with other boys his age. His school master, a cruel, sadistic disciplinarian finds out about this and following his propensity to punish his students by cruelly naming them, proceeds to call Ashu a housemistress/housewife. The story critiques the mistreatment of those

who do not follow normative masculinity and showcases how the failure to be properly socialized into boy culture creates a humiliating situation for Ashu. In “Aapod (Problem),” the young boy Neelkanto suffers because he not successful in assimilating into either the natural or the domestic world. Even stories which are not directly about childhood feature children in various degrees of assimilation. In “Didi” (Sister), Shashikala’s young brother remains an empty vessel-like repository for her feelings. In “Shubhodrishti (Auspicious look),” the young girl of unparalleled beauty is utterly unmarriageable, because she is both dumb and mute and seems to utterly live in the natural world with her animal friends.⁶⁸ The young girl in “Malyodaan” who is described not as a woman, but as a deer in a jungle born to humans, simple, inarticulate and innocent, when confronted with adult emotions such as love and rejection, does not survive; her imperfect understanding of societal conventions ultimately leads to her death. The suffering is not just restricted to children who veer towards the extremities of either the natural or societal order and fail to assimilate; even the adults who attempt to fix their idealization in time also suffer from grave consequences. In “Mastermawshai (The Teacher),” the child Benugopal is a beautiful, innocent, if willful, child who is spoilt by his parents. He is idealized by his teacher and as long as he remains under his master’s tutelage, the idealization seems to be bearing fruit. His parents notice him growing isolated from everyone else except the teacher, since a Romantic childhood requires self-absorption and solitude, and he is eventually forced to leave after being insulted by his employers for his attempts at prolonging Benugopal’s idealized childhood. Years later, when he meets Benugopal again, he cannot look past that young, romanticized boy to see the debauched adult the boy has become. As a result, he does not anticipate the boy’s betrayal and theft, and consequently, loses his professional reputation and his life. In *Artful Dodgers*,

⁶⁸ Shubhodrishti is a rite during a Hindu wedding ceremony in which the bride and the groom look upon each other.

Gubar claims that Victorian and Edwardian authors did not merely see children as romanticized beings, but as savvy, acculturated collaborators within the culture they inhabited. Even his poetry, which feature the transcendental child of Nature and divinity to a much greater extent, has the same claim running through it. Thus, children meet and play “on the seashore of endless worlds,” with sand houses, leafy boats and empty boats, while still being ensconced in the world of nurseries and mothers (Tagore, *Shishu*, 4). Not a race apart, these children get dirty and cry when scolded and have conversations with their siblings, and dream of being princes. Unlike Madhu the boatman whose boat “is moored at the wharf of Rajgunj,” and who takes his boats to markets, they will take theirs across “the seven seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland” (Tagore, *Shishu*, 42). But, at the end of the day, they come back home to tell their mothers all that they have seen, safely ensconced in the arms of domesticity.

The quintessential transcendental Romantic child, Plotz claims, “is principally produced by two initiatives: the identification of childhood with Nature—both as Law and as the green world—and the attribution to children of an autonomous, unitary consciousness” (Plotz, *Romanticism*, 5). This unification and harmony, with nature, and within mankind was one of the aims of Tagore’s schools and the source of his belief in an aesthetic education, the ideal repository for which was the imaginative childhood full of curiosity, play and world. As beings of Nature, children are filled with the vitality, beauty, primitivism and proximity to divinity that Nature is imbued with. And as autonomous beings with unitary vision, the child’s mind is represented as a repository of farsightedness and prophetic qualities which include idealism, holism, vision, animism, faith, and isolated self-sufficiency. In Tagore’s children, we see many of these qualities. When the child in “Jonmokotha,” titled “The Beginning” in *Crescent Moon*, asks his mother about his origins, her response “You were hidden in my heart as its desire, my darling. You were in the dolls of

my childhood's games; and when with clay I made the image of my god every morning, I made and unmade you then. You were enshrined with our household deity, in his worship I worshipped you," describes the child as a divine creation made from the very soil of the land, a creature to be simultaneously worshipped, but also convenient in its 'clayful' plasticity, made and unmade in the eye of the adult's desire, like its British Romantic counterpart (Tagore, *Crescent Moon*). The elision between the child and the divine is clearly visible in the poem "Shishur Jibon (A child's life)" in *Shishu Bholanath*, where the poet's address to the child slips almost imperceptibly into a conversation with God, and his comparison of his dreary, material, adult life with the child's turns into a request to God to return him to childhood so that he could play God in solitude, and understand the world as simply as when seen through God's eyes. Yet, Tagore's poetic children, in contrast to the self-sufficiency described by Plotz, are creatures embedded in social context. They envy merchants, hawkers, sailors and gardeners for their freedom in choosing their own vocations, run away from the authority of institutionalized education, are misunderstood and chastised by society, compare themselves to the adults in their lives and aspire to be like them. They are babies, imagining, dreaming, sleeping in their mothers' arms, yet, are fascinated by the mysteries of adulthood, when learning will no longer be an oppression and clarity will reign. In "Choto Boro," titled "The Little Big Man" in *Crescent Moon*, the child dreams about growing up, and not kowtowing to various forms of authority (teacher, father, elder brother). He is willing to take adult responsibilities, if it is accompanied by adult freedoms. The immersion in imaginative play does not extract him from his position in society or exempt him from maturation and growth. These are no fixed, eternal, timeless children but children who display the potential for carrying their

childhood values into adulthood. And to do so, education becomes a necessity, especially in a colony whose visions of nationhood are only as steadfast as the potential of its youth.

If Tagore's reversion of the solitary self-sufficiency of the essential child reflects the Indian values of domesticity, then his discarding of Rousseau's anti-intellectual, anti-educational stance of Romantic childhood squarely positions children's education as the crux of India's nascent nationhood. Discarding may be too harsh a word; Tagore had always propagated for an imaginative education which allowed children the freedom to combine learning with pleasure. He spent the last 40 years of his life as an educator and in his own pedagogical practices, he set up pioneering techniques, such as learning through crafts (which Gandhi adopted later), holding classes outdoors and educating all the senses through the performing arts. He chose Shantiniketan as the site of his educational experiments because of its rural remoteness and distance from city life. He describes this school as owing its existence, not to "any new theory of education, but the memory of my school-days" (Tagore, *Oxford*, 88). In his lecture on "Nationalism in India," he declared "political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free... Those of us in India who have come under the delusion that mere political freedom will make us free have accepted their lessons from the West as the gospel truth and lost their faith in humanity" (Tagore, *Nationalism*, 132-134). He realized that in order to break the gospel of the West and shake his countrymen out of their complacency into forming a new habitus which would free the mind, a new system of pedagogic action was severely needed.

In order to do so, apart from his pioneering methods, he also insisted on education in the vernacular, to encourage love for Indian language and literature, and thereby, Indian culture (though other international languages were also actively pursued; he saw Vishwa-Bharati as an international seat of collaborative learning). Furthermore, incorporating the vernacular with

the international, using Romantic pedagogy, had the added advantage of broadening the cultural horizons of conservative and culturally insulated Indians; thereby facilitating the new Indian personality he believed was necessary for the progress of an autonomous culture. He had always maintained that, "Our real problem in India is not political. It is social...from the earliest beginnings of history India has had her own problem constantly before her--it is the race problem. Each nation must be conscious of its mission, and we in India must realize that we cut a poor figure when we try to be political, simply because we have not yet finally been able to accomplish what was set before us by our providence" (Tagore, *Nationalism*, 104-105) This work could only be accomplished in a site where learning flourished, where all were accepted, regardless of religion, race or culture, which is what he wanted his university to accomplish. As Dasgupta notes, "The creation of an integrated Indian personality, free from the conflict of communities, was a quest for self-respect in response to the humiliation of colonial rule and the weakness of a divided people. The quest was also to find a basis of unity with the world" (Dasgupta, 6). He was of the opinion that "The minds of children today are almost deliberately made incapable of understanding other people with different languages and customs. The result is that, later, they hurt one another out of ignorance and suffer from the worst form of the blindness of the age" (Tagore, *Oxford*, 83). Cultivating this personality lay at the core of his political action through education, not just because it signified resilience, but because it would be a force for national unity, the lack of which he saw as one of the main deterrents to India's emancipation.

Though his own countrymen took no notice of his pioneering work, in a letter to Gandhi, he described his work in Shantiniketan as "the cargo of my life's best treasure" (Dutta and Andrews, 323). His primary complaint was against the pedagogical practices followed in

colonial Bengal, a reflection of the education system he felt was restrictive and meant to serve an ulterior imperial purpose. Thus, all the complaints by children in *Shishu* and *Shishu Bholanath* are against tedious methods of pedagogy and the unsympathetic, pedantic authority of the schoolmasters, not against the acquisition of knowledge. He believed that “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence” and in poems like “Nirlipto” (Unconcerned) and “Khoka’r Rajyo” (The Boy’s World), “Bhitore and Bahire” (Inside and Outside) we find child figures who, unruffled by the vagaries of adult life around them, learn about the world through their communion with the soil, the wind, the trees, the stars and Nature itself, since they are “dwellers of the inner chambers of the world mother’s house” (Tagore, *Oxford*, 90; Tagore, *Shishu*, 22). Even when they are not ensconced in the lap of Nature, they fret against the daily regulations of the school day and want to pretend it’s evening, so that they can play (“Proshno” (Question)), and re-enact their teacher’s admonishments on their pet kittens (“Masterbabu”). They make paper boats out of their fathers’ notebooks, prefer to stay ignorant and long for the arrival of Sunday, under the oppression of a system which shut down questions and created adults who blindly followed the violent and communal ideologies they were fed, both by the government and the militant nationalists. Even in “The Housemistress,” Ashu’s problem is with his cruel teacher and not the actual work itself; we are informed that he was quite a diligent student. In advocating for Romantic methods of education, Tagore places the Romantic child, with its potential for an open mind and expanded consciousness, at the forefront of his politics. Though he stayed away from active politics, Viewing Tagore’s immense contributions to ‘the modern consciousness in India’ through the lens of childhood studies, thus, demonstrates the political function of the Romantic construct of childhood and its crucial role in establishing India’s constitutional stance of ‘unity in diversity.’

5.0 Chapter Four: Boyhood, Imagined Geographies and National Identity in Bengali

Adventure Fiction for Boys

The genre of boy's adventure fiction has, of course, notoriously been implicated in the cultivation and practice of imperialism from the earliest moments of its production and consumption and has been recognized as such by scholars of the subject. In *Empire Boys*, Joseph Bristow places the genre among other forms of popular literature that arose due to a chain of factors which included anxieties about the expansion of literacy, the dichotomy between working class and highbrow culture, and India's assimilation under the British crown after the Revolt of 1857. To combat the corruption of working-class children, British school and adventure narratives from the 1870s onwards celebrated patriotic nationalism, empire and adventurous militarism, connecting the two in a celebration of masculinist virtues, an uncomplicated masculinity Martin Green describes as 'aristomilitary' (quoted in Nelson 118). Sikata Banerjee and Shubho Basu use the term 'Anglo-American hegemonic masculinity' to describe the masculinist culture celebrated in British boys' adventure fiction, which influenced public discourses of masculinity in India and comprised of qualities such as "rationality, martial prowess, muscular strength, competition, individualism, male camaraderie" (Basu and Banerjee 173).

In *Propaganda and Empire*, John Mackenzie situates adventure fiction as one of the means by which propaganda about empire could be circulated amongst the population at home in England. Fiction such as Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* and Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* popularized a culture of manliness in public schools, nourished through robust sporting cultures and a strict honor code, and 'Robinsonades' such as those of Captain Marryat, R.M. Ballantyne

and Robert Louis Stevenson geographically expanded the reach of this masculinist culture in the imagination of their readers. The location of adventure fiction is divided between home and away, and the away spaces are selected to allow boy heroes to “act as natural masters of these controllable environment...without revealing any lack of manful maturity” (Bristow 94). Islands across the Americas, East and West Indies and entire continents like the ‘dark’ Africa and Asia, featured heavily in the novels of Henry Rider Haggard, George Alfred Henty, Joseph Conrad, and W.H.G Kingston, which were produced by and productive of the doctrine of imperialism (Bristow 129). They became ‘otherscapes’ comprising of unknown flora, fauna, and inferior races of foreign people who had different languages, customs and skin color, against whom British masculine character and British domestic culture could be tested and found triumphant. Thus, the exotic abroad functioned not just by propagating an imperialist and masculinist ethos but also played a cartographical role in explaining to British children their place in the global political structure.

Mrinalini Sinha, in her book *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly’ Englishman and ‘Effeminate’ Bengali in the Late Nineteenth-century*, writes about the stereotype of the effeminate Bengali which came to dominate public discourse about Bengali males. Adventure fiction was a very suitable genre for both exploring and envisioning a Bengali colonial masculinity which could oppose the allegation of effeminacy and therefore be a more integral part of nation-building process and nascent imaginaries of political sovereignty. It also allowed authors to go beyond the resistive mode of direct hegemonic opposition and envision a masculinist nationalist self-image which was “neither ‘revivalist’ nor ‘reawakened’ but a redefined modern Indian” (Chowdhury 4). In this chapter, I examine the adventure fiction of Bengali authors Hemendra Kumar Roy (1888-1963) and Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (1894-1950) to

demonstrate how the genre both opposed prevalent stereotypes about Bengali masculinity and sets up a modern identity through the self-fashioning of two figures: that of the ‘manly’ Bengali boy in Roy’s stories and its softer, non-hegemonic alternative in Bandopadhyay’s.

While children did have adventures in other genres (such as the fantasy books that began the dissertation), they ultimately succumbed to the pressures of middle-class Bengali life, as Nivedita Sen notes, and returned to a life of servile stability under the socio-economic conditions created by the colonial condition. In contrast, adventure fiction, with its real and imagined geographies and the absence of authority figures, afforded ample potential for depicting Bengali boyhoods with more freedom and agency than they had in reality. The genre and its function, when appropriated and adapted by the colonies for the colonies, might seem to be merely derivative, as acknowledged by Satadru Sen, in its regurgitation of tropes like exotic locales, unfamiliar flora and fauna, mythical monsters and dangerous cannibals. Banerjee and Basu, referring to the African setting of *Mountain of the Moon* say, “After all, Bengali readers were familiar with H. Rider Haggard’s Allan Quatermain – the protagonist of *King Solomon’s Mines* – and Edgar Rice Burroughs’s Tarzan and recognised this playground of imperial masculine adventure” (Banerjee and Basu 178). However, the function of a collective national Self when pitted against the foreign Other takes on an added significance in these colonial Indian renditions. And even within the derivative environment, the cartographic function of the genre when transported to the colonies played a large part in introducing young Bengali readers to unknown parts of their own country, and the globe, enabling them to develop a sense of nationhood, and claim a position in global movement and politics in subversive resistance to what they had been taught. These novels, published in Calcutta during the heyday of the Indian Independence Movement, were part of a nascent tradition of boys’ adventure fiction set in

foreign lands meant to represent an exotic, but character building otherscape, what Sen calls “the exotic abroad within the juvenile periphery” in Bengal (Sen “Juvenile Periphery”). This was at a time when the Indian independence movement was moving into its most vigorous phase, the Gandhian era with its mass movements, which spread anti-colonial sentiments among previously uninvolved sections of the population, and finally proved to the British Government the unfeasibility of holding on to India in the long run. The nationalist ethos manifested in Roy’s *Jokkher Dhon* or *The Yaksha’s Treasure* (1930) and *Abar Jokkher Dhon* or *The Yaksha’s Treasure Again* (1933), merged with the nascent nationalism in colonial India to take on a directly anti-colonial function. And, as I demonstrate in the case of Bandopadhyay’s *Sundorbhone Saat Botsor* or *Seven years in the Sunderbans*, and *Chander Pahar*, or *Mountain of the Moon*, this nationalist ethos is not established by mere replication or opposition to hegemonic norms, but an appropriation and alteration which emphasizes a unique Indian identity, albeit one formed in full consciousness of not one but two foreign cultures.

5.1 Indian Politics and Children’s Literature in the Early Twentieth Century

Till the 1910s, the Indian Nationalist movement, led by the Indian National Congress, mostly used Moderate methods of petitions or Extremist methods of passive resistance such as agitations, strikes and boycotts (popular during the Swadeshi movement in Bengal) to make their demands known and progress their agendas. The initial split between the Moderates and the Extremists was resolved by the 1916 meeting of the Congress, yet friction about directions and methods continued to be part of the political discourse. In the second half of the 1910s, the Congress also recognized a need to evaluate the elite and isolating nature of their politics and

involve the masses in their movement. After Gandhi's return from South Africa to India in 1915 and his involvement in nationalist politics (in what is also known as the Gandhian era), the movement also become more widespread during the 1920s and 30s and expanded its social base.⁶⁹

As the nationalists became more inclusive, the articulated concerns of local, regional, class, caste or religion-based groups often represented differences within the movement, with Provincial Congress Associations sometimes departing from Congress's national agendas. These differing elements characterizing the various aspects of the anti-colonial movements also represented different nascent visions of national and local identity, split along ideological, regional, caste/class and religious lines, which are reflected in the literature of the time. In "The Bengali Novel," Supriya Chaudhuri traces the form in Bengal and the ways in which it reflected shifting indigenous concerns over the decades, as a complicated product of the colonial literary trade. Social realism, historical novels like those of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, reformist novels on various social issues, including women's reforms and domesticity, political novels such as Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* and *Gora*, sentiment, and satire were all part of Bengal literary modernity. In the 1920s, the Bengali novel came to focus on the Bengal countryside with its beauty and poverty, the rural urban divide, the anxieties of the urban middle class, with psychological realism and aesthetic modernism becoming prominent topics during the 1940s.

⁶⁹ Srilata Chatterjee states that In Bengal, due to the variety of political sites regulated by the Indian Association and the Bengal Congress branch, "the politics of nationalism never lost touch with the hinterland," either in its early days, when the movement was mostly restricted to educated elites, or in later periods when more of the populace was involved.

The Bengali children's literature of the period reflected similar concerns and ideologies, made palatable to children through address, tone and the inclusion of entertainment. In earlier chapters, we have looked at how children's literature grew in tandem with the rise in national consciousness, the growing popularity of genres such as fairy tales, fantasy, nonsense, genres such as poetry, short stories, novels and periodicals, the inclusion of play and entertainment in children's texts, and the political importance of Romantic childhood. Nivedita Sen locates a trend of child-rebellion in the Bengali literature for and about children in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. She traces this rebellion through depictions of children at home and in school but claims that these rebellious children get reintegrated into the contemporary middle-class ethos because of the "frustration and futility of a life without education and good breeding," with the texts ultimately reinforcing the oppressions of these two authoritative institutions in children's lives and a compromise with the same systems against which they protested (Sen xvii). The ever-present repression in the lives of the child protagonists Sen writes about also lead to an attraction towards the "outside" and the "other." This can often take the form of interaction with characters who are often outside the boundaries of these institutions, fantasizing about leaving home or school, or actually leaving temporarily, of gaining power over the adults who control their circumstances. It is in the context of this attraction that she places the genres of children's detective stories and boys adventure fiction. Although she considers Hemendra Kumar Roy's stories as detective or mystery stories, I would argue that they can also be classified as adventure fiction since the 'whodunnit' element is not really the strongest part of the stories. In fact, his novels *Jokkher Dhon* and *Abar Jokkher Dhon* more closely resembles the genre of adventure fiction like *Chander Pahar (Mountain of the Moon)*, than the stories of popular detective fiction writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Edgar Allen Poe, or G.W.M. Reynolds.

There were crucial non-literary factors contributing to the popularity of boys' adventure fiction in Bengal as well, which involved public discourses about a hierarchized colonial masculinity. Mrinalini Sinha argues that the perceived dichotomy between British and Bengali masculinity, embodying manliness and effeminacy respectively, played a major role in discourses of colonial masculinity, which in turn, represented the underlying logic underneath most of the nationalist and colonial discourses during the 1880s and 1890s. The British were associated with administrative and military control, occupying positions at the top of the colonial order and having power and control. The Bengali who occupied roles lower down the pecking order were seen as "unnatural" and "perverted" versions of British masculinity and associated with the stereotype of the "effeminate babu." She contends that these binaries of colonial masculinity, "in the context of imperial social formation in the late nineteenth-century, produced and exploited such categories" for eco-political and administrative purposes (Sinha 2). The association of effeminacy with babus (i.e. the Western educated Indian elite) was a product of the second half of the century, when there was a shift from the early Anglicist policies of administration to a more indigenous tradition-oriented viewpoint in response to the problem of accommodating the educated indigenous elite in the colonial administration which favored the British. The rise of a professional middle-class in Bengal and their relegation to petty clerical jobs also led to a self-perception of effeminacy amongst the Bengalis themselves. The British understanding of Indian masculinity as hierarchized between martial and non-martial Indian castes and groups served to emphasize the stereotype as well.⁷⁰ While "the degeneration of the

⁷⁰ Though, as Sinha points out, certain groups of Bengalis such as the laboring classes and the peasants, lower castes such as Gops and Gwalas, and Bengali Muslims were exempt from the accusations of effeminacy, which was restricted to the middle-classes of bhadroloks and babus. The stereotype would also sometimes be used to indicate

body of the elite Hindu male became the symbol of the negative impact of colonial rule on indigenous society as a whole,” as Sumit Sarkar points out, this emasculation and ‘demilitarization’ of the elite Hindu male also became the basis of resistance against certain colonial policies and colonial rule, in general, indicating a simultaneous acceptance and resistance of the “effeminate babu” stereotype (Sinha 7). It is within this ordering of colonial power, along with the involvement of wider swaths of the population in anti-colonial resistance that was the hallmark of the Gandhian era, that one can locate the popularity of the genre of boys’ adventure narratives like those of Roy and Bandopadhyay.

5.2 Physical Culture in Bengali Children’s Literature

The hegemonic structure of colonial masculinity, the self-perception of effeminacy and the idea of racial degeneration were matters of concern and anxiety among Bengali intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who made many efforts to combat it through opening gyms, emphasizing a physical culture of sports and exercise (Sinha 21). Sudipa Topdar also examines this physical culture as being an integral part of early twentieth-century nationalist discourse, incorporated through school curriculums which guided physical juvenile bodies into proper social conduct, as well as the reintroduction of indigenous sports like wrestling, sword and dagger fighting, and lathi playing (fighting with sticks) to reclaim a lost pre-colonial Bengali

all Western educated middle classes nationally, depending on discursive convenience. The idea of Bengali middle-class effeminacy and its associations with inefficacy circulates in the national consciousness about Bengal even today.

martial culture (Topdar “Corporeal Empire” 177). The Bengali male child’s body thus became a zone for political contestations schools, in particular, acting as fraught sites of “the colonial project of corporeal reconstruction and the depoliticisation of ‘seditious’ Indian students’ bodies, coercing them away from political activism” (Topdar “Corporeal Empire” 176-177). The incorporation of physical education in the school curriculum, therefore, was not only meant to enervate the bodies by adding movement, but also discipline them, address public health concerns by sanitizing with instructions on hygiene and orderliness, and later, when the Swadeshi movement saw unprecedented numbers of student involvement, to discourage them from political activity. On the other hand, Indian nationalists persuaded boys to not only participate in passive resistive practices like picketing, and boycotting foreign goods and culture, but also encouraged them to strengthen their minds and bodies through physical exercise, military drills and marches, and mock battles combatting the British policy of indigenous demilitarization. Young boys also became involved in “revolutionary semi-militaristic actions involving manufacturing bombs, political dacoity and assassinations of British colonial officials,” revealing the flipside of a masculinist nationalist ethos (Topdar “Corporeal Empire” 181).

The emphasis on physical culture found its way into Bengali children’s literature and periodicals. In her article, Topdar focuses primarily on early twentieth-century periodicals such as *Mouchak* and *Amar Desh*, both of which she characterizes as highly nationalistic. However, the necessity of physical culture in childhood had been a topic in Bengali children’s periodicals since at least 1885, when there was a public debate on it between Rabindranath Tagore and Gyanadanandini Devi, the editor and publisher of *Balak*, in the pages of the periodical. The first article ‘Byayam’ (Exercise) was written by Gyanadanandini Debi in which she bemoaned

parents' lack of attention to the physical education of their, especially in comparison to their emphasis on other aspects of schooling, supporting the need to do so by making a connection between physical health and cognitive abilities. She blames physical weakness for the reason Bengali children couldn't achieve much in comparison to their English counterparts who were brought up in a childhood culture of exercise and play which inculcates a lifelong inclination for activity and sports. She attributes the Bengalis' physical weakness to laziness of the race and their apathy towards caring for the body, as well as a rice-based diet, and the air and water of Kolkata. She requests all children and their parents to make exercise a habit during childhood, and ends by providing instructions and illustrations of exercises male children could practice.

Responding to this article, Tagore wrote 'Lathir upor lathi' (Sticks on sticks) in which he attributes the Euro-American habits of exercise to the purity of their air, as well as their meat-based diets which give them the energy required for activity. He goes on to blame poverty for both the dietary restrictions the Indians face, as well as the excessive emphasis on studying and passing exams, since that is the only way of escaping abject poverty and meeting the cost of living, for most Indians. Amidst a struggle to survive, apathy for a physical culture is natural. Interestingly, he compares the condition of Bengali children to the British girls who worked as seamstresses in shops and scholarship students, making the point that poverty everywhere is a deterrent to a childhood of physical self-care and play, even in the colonizers' world. Even acquiring education is harder for Indian children because they have to do so in a foreign language, which takes time to learn. Since both men and women were taking examinations, he asks, "will the Bengali race now pass from this world due to the excessive taking of examinations?" highlighting one of his main problems with the colonial education system, rote learning for the sake of exams. Thus, he associates the education system with mental and

physical stunting, which is probably why he included exercise and outdoor classes when he applied his Romantic pedagogy at Shantiniketan, as we have seen in Chapter 3. Tagore was supported in his claims by Kedarnath Bandopadhyay in another article called “Lathalathi” (Stick Play) which details how, even if children have the desire for exercise, they’re forced into adult responsibilities at an early age by the need to get a job and support their families. Daily survival becomes so difficult, Bandopadhyay claims, that there is neither time nor energy to continue these childhood practices, resulting in disease and illness later in life. In addition, he makes an argument for vocational and professional education so that Bengalis could escape from their life of petty clerkhood, making a connection between the colonial educational and economic systems, and the lack of physical culture.⁷¹

Apart from encouraging sports and exercise, children’s periodicals from the 1880s onwards like *Balak*, *Sakha*, *Sakha o Sathi*, and *Mukul*, also contained non-fictional articles on real-life adventurers and explorers which spoke glowingly of the love for adventure, courage, bravery, curiosity and physical strength. Given the mostly indirect nature of political engagement in the Moderate era (as discussed in chapters 1 and 2), these articles functioned not just as information about the world, but also provided a reformatory thrust to the development of citizenship goals by providing character-building ideals. These stories increased in popularity in the early decades of the twentieth-century as the Swadeshi movement left its after effects. G.C. Roy notes about Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury’s *Sandesh* that, “There were regular tributes to such exemplary contemporary characters as Colonel Suresh Biswas who served creditably in the

⁷¹ Tagore was aware of the need for vocational and professional training. His efforts at rural reconstruction including the founding of Sriniketan, near Shantiniketan, where the local rural populations were trained in traditional handicrafts, as a path to build alternate forms of livelihood and revitalize small-scale cottage industry.

Brazilian war of independence, Shyamakanta Bandopadhyay who tamed tigers and held weights on his chest, Ramchandra Chattopadhyay the first Bengali to go up in sky in a balloon, and the clerk Nafarchandra Kundu who gave up his life in trying to save some Muslim coolies trapped in a storm drain” (Roy “Contested Sites” 19-20). In addition to these feats of bravery, there was also the recurring idea of the necessity of a physical culture in order to strengthen anti-colonial resistance, which would lead to the alleviation of the same socio-economic conditions that were preventing this culture from developing. By the 1920s, as Topdar notes, “most children’s magazines published a series of articles emphasizing the benefits of physical culture, maintaining good health and featured sports including boxing, cricket and football” and body-building (Topdar 186). These articles express regret for the lack of brave, Bengali men and disappearance Bengali traditions of physical culture. An article in Mouchak claimed that the Bengali avoidance of exercise as rowdy resulted in the British considering them as ‘subhuman,’ and that the internalization and lack of resistance these narratives deepened the humiliation and insult, making a direction connection between “effeminacy” and the colonial condition. These are the social, political and literary discourses that came together to contribute to the popularity of the genre of boys’ adventure fiction in Bengal.

5.3 Bengali Adventure Fiction: Hemendra Kumar Roy and the Manly Bengali Boy

Hemendra Kumar Roy (1888-1963), the pen name of Prasad Roy, is generally considered to be the father of Bengali adventure and detective fiction, but he also wrote historical fiction, science fiction and horror. He started his career writing for adults but soon moved to writing for children, reigning over the genre for the next four decades. He was a regular contributor to

children's periodicals like *Sandesh* and *Mouchak* and even took on the editorship of the children's periodical *Rangmashal*. Recalling those times, Khagendra Mitra, in his preface to Volume 1 of Roy's collected works states that "if a famous children's periodical or annual didn't contain one of his stories, it was considered uninteresting to its child readers" (Mitra, Preface 5, *Rachanabali Vol 1*) Roy was a prolific writer, novelist, poet, artist, art critic, composer and playwright and wrote over 80 children's books during the course of his life, many of which were first serialized in periodicals before being published in novel form. In this section, I examine two of his most famous stories *Jokkher Dhon* (1930) and *Abar Jokkher Dhon* (1934), to demonstrate how the genre of adventure fiction in Bengal responded to the discourse on colonial masculinity by creating a manly Bengali boyhood that resisted the stereotype of effeminacy.

Both of these stories were initially serialized in the children's periodical *Mouchak*, *Jokkher Dhon* in 1923 and *Abar Jokkher Dhon* in, before being published in novel form in the 1930s. Khagendra Mitra and Dhirendralal Dhar, in their respective prefaces to volumes one and two of Roy's collected works, praise the lack of political entanglement in his works, with Mitra stating "Socialist, fascist, reformist or any other type of political, social, economic ideology that touched his mind went unexpressed in his writings" (Mitra, Preface 8, *Rachanabali Vol 1*). However, Dhar also recalls a meeting with Roy in which Roy advised him to base his own adventure stories in India, in response to Dhar's first novel being set in Africa. Roy stated that places abroad were for sahebs (white Europeans) who had traveled all over the world. Basing Dhar's novels in India would enable his readers to learn more about their own country, the entirety of it, along with inculcating patriotism and love for their nation and inspiring them to be proud citizens of their own country. Perhaps that is why Roy set his first adventure novel, *Jokkher Dhon*--which set off a wave of almost instantaneous popularity for the writer as well as

the genre--in the Khasi hills of Assam, encouraging his readers to explore parts of India which are traveled less frequently and learn about the natural beauty of the rest of the country. He would set his adventures abroad as well, and *Abar Jokkher Dhan* is set in Uganda, providing a comparative view of the landscape. Despite the difference, both stories are structurally similar. They are about the adventures of the duo Bimal, an intrepid specimen of Bengali masculinity, and Kumar, his friend and side-kick. Both open with the story of a long-lost ancient treasure, on the trail of which they're set off with the discovery of a relic related to the treasure, a skull and a map respectively, and a slight element of mystery and the supernatural. The journeys to the treasure locations are described in great detail, as are the dangers they face along the way. They reach their destinations in a crescendo of increasing danger and manage to either learn more about or recover some of the treasure. The main questions of the story being resolved, they go back to Calcutta, where they are based. In both stories, a regional as well as national masculine identity is created through the boys' interactions with both the landscapes and the characters they meet, who range from villainous and cowardly to brave and quirky. By creating central protagonists with a love for conquering the dangerous, the unreachable and the unconquerable, Roy's depiction of Bengali masculinity resists contemporary discourse, and thus, both political and ideological, despite the opinions of his preface writers.

In *Jokkher Dhan*, we are first introduced to Kumar following his grandfather's death, when he discovers a skull etched with numbers and a notebook in his grandfather's locked trunk. On his mother's request, he discards the skull on a garbage heap. The next day, he is visited by a neighbor, Karali, who tries to suppress it, but instead displays an intense interest in the skull. That night, Kumar's house is broken into and it is only after this that he decides to investigate the notebook and discovers the history of the skull and the treasure it leads to. Karali is set up as the

villain of the story when he learns that Karali had tried to steal both skull and notebook multiple times from his grandfather. This belated curiosity is characteristic of Kumar in this novel and he is mostly portrayed as a foil and canvas for Bimal. Kumar recovers the skull and goes to Bimal, his best friend and neighbor who he describes as the cleverest person he knows, well-traveled, “having the strength of a demon,” since he wrestled and exercised every day (Roy, *Rachanabali Vol 1*, 18). Thus, Bimal is the author’s vision of an ideal Bengali boy personified. Bimal is the one who decodes the etchings to find the exact location of the treasure, as well as the one who takes the initiative to steal it back from Karali’s house when he manages to finally steal it. Bimal is the one who takes the decision to go after the treasure and the one who creates a fake skull which is what Karali steals on his third attempt at stealing it. He makes all the arrangements for travel and owns guns which he carries on the journey. In short, he is the one with all the solutions and all the initiative.

Bimal is Roy’s mouthpiece and expresses his disdain for Kumar’s caution which he equates with cowardice. When Kumar objects to stealing the skull back from Karali on the grounds of not creating a scandal in the neighborhood, Bimal tells him, “If you want to be a man, be daring” (Roy, *Rachanabali Vol 1*, 30). He goes on to say that he couldn’t stand those society considered as “bhalo chhele,” or good boys stating “They are ones whose spleens are burst by foreigners’ shoes, they are the ones who die in danger, and even that death is a coward’s death. They are a Bengali’s shame” (Roy, *Rachanabali Vol 1*, 30) He connects bravery to civilizational progress and claims to love danger. Bimal’s contempt for “good boys” is not really against virtuousness, but against the stereotype of the good boy depicted in Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar’s 1885 Bengali primer, *Barnaparichay*. In *The Gopal-Rakhal Dialectic*, Shibaji Bandopadhyay writes about how the good boy Gopal from Vidyasagar’s primer came to represent in society the

kind of boy who accepts middle-class Bengali aspirations of stability and is always obedient, punctual, disciplined and orderly to the point of being servile. In contrast, Rakhal, the wild, indisciplined, inattentive, careless boy who meets with a bad end in Vidyasagar's text came to epitomize rebellion, courage and initiative. Tagore also comments on this dichotomy, but instead of supporting Gopal, he eulogizes the Rakhal stereotype as the one India (and Bengal) needed for racial and national progress on the path to political sovereignty. He doesn't see them as mutually exclusive archetypes; his idea of the ideal Bengali boy was a combination of the two.⁷² But in this novel, Roy clearly sets up Kumar and Bimal as Gopal-Rakhal stereotypes with Bimal schooling Kumar into transforming into Rakhal, who he, like Tagore, considers the more useful one for the nation.

Apart from portraying the ideal Bengali boy through the contrast between Bimal and Kumar's characters, he also establishes his nationalist agenda through their thoughts about and interactions with the landscape and the people they meet. While Kumar is not at all enthused about the danger they have to face, he is quite enthusiastic about the travel aspect of their adventure. He says,

I have always had a desire to see new places. Seeing pictures from various countries in books and reading about made my mind soar with the wish to travel to these places. Sometimes I would want to be Robinson Crusoe and go to an island where I would build my own hut and happily spend my days, at other times I would want to fly in the skies with roc birds like Sinbad the sailor, cook on a whale's back, and defeat the old

⁷² A trend he demonstrates in his philosophy, in general. Tagore tended to favor more nuanced perspectives. In chapter 3, I demonstrate how he rejects other binaries such as that between the child in nature and the child acculturated into society, showing the need for both in a balanced and functional childhood

residents of an islands. I would want to under the sea and loot the treasures from an underwater kingdom. I had so many desires, if I start recounting them all, you all will laugh at me. (Roy, *Jokkher Dhon* 25)

That Kumar, the sheltered Calcutta boy, is the one to express these thoughts renders them aspirational, since Kumar goes through a transformation in this novel, becoming more daring and adventurous at the end of it. Thoughts about Robinson Crusoe and Sinbad speak of the influence of adventure stories for various cultural traditions. As we have discussed, travel and mobility are intrinsic aspects of adventuring and the adventure genre, from which Roy is drawing inspiration, have always featured travel to places both at home and away, and have relied on these spaces to establish the individual and national identities of the adventuring protagonist by comparison. In including the element of travel in his novels, Roy is reverting to this tradition in order to demonstrate that his Bengali boys are on par with boys from countries where traveling was more accessible and expected, establishing, as Rajashree Majumdar puts it, “the colonial people’s appropriate, if yet-unclaimed, place within the world” (Majumdar 255). Thus, while the history of migration for labour does inform the imaginaries of authors setting their stories in the exotic abroad, especially in providing direct cartographic knowledge, Roy is depicting travel purely for adventure and leisure, setting his protagonists on a more equal plane with British boy heroes.

Roy and other adventure fiction writers were also drawing on the interest in traveling and the globe that had become an indelible part of Indian consciousness as a result of the colonial encounter. By the time Roy is writing, the motivation for travel was no longer restricted to trade, work, or religious pilgrimages; as Kumar’s aspirations clearly point out, there was a desire to travel to know, to see, to experience, and to conquer new lands. This shift in motivation had come about due to several factors, as Majumdar points out, including the introduction of

geography as a subject in schools in the nineteenth-century, the development of cheap steam transportation and railways, the increase in overseas travel for trade, work and pilgrimages, and the development of cheap print which led to a surge in publications of travel accounts, both at home and overseas (children's periodicals in Bengal had include such accounts from its early days).⁷³ Sen divides Bengali children's literature of the early twentieth century into four literary geographies, "the civilized abroad, the exotic abroad, the dysfunctional/comic/real home, and the nostalgic/fantastic/lost home" (Sen "Juvenile Periphery"). These geographies together make up the literary in a larger juvenile periphery Sen considers as essential to the imaginings of political sovereignty in colonial India. In *Jokkher Dhon*, the fantastic/nostalgic/lost home is the setting of the actual adventure as Bimal and Kumar race to find the treasure in the Khasi hills near Shillong before Karali. Roy draws upon the possibilities of adventures at home to indicate the broader advantages of knowing their own land and country. Even through the dangers, through the eyes of the first-time traveler Kumar, the beauty of the Indian countryside unfolds in front the reader. As they cross the Padma River, now a part of Bangladesh, Kumar is dazzled by its beauty and the gorgeousness lush greenery of the Bengali landscape, both of which were integral to contemporary patriotic writings about Bengal. After yet another attack by Karali's men in the boys' hotel room to acquire the notebook which contained the coded directions to the treasure, Bimal opens the window to reassure Kumar. The reassurance comes in the form of a view of the hillside at night under the moonlight, a scene which Kumar describes as a dream, stating, "Whether or not we find the Jok's treasure, I just want to go there once," indicating that it isn't

⁷³ For more on this, see Majumdar, Rajashree. "In Search of Mammon's Treasure Trove: Hemendra Kumar Roy's Use of Travel in Children's Adventure Literature." *Studies in History*, Vol. 35 No. 2, 2019, 250–279.

even enough to travel for adventure, but one must want to travel for the sheer desire to know and experience one's country in all its glory (Roy, *Jokkher Dhon* 61). A few days later, as they travel across the hills, Kumar looks at the variety of flora in the hills, he thinks to himself,

Such a variety of flowers is present everywhere in our country, but we don't bother to know about the beautiful flowers we have. We sit on our hands like fools and this treasure of flowers is looted by the foreign sahebs with two good hands. They sell them in bazaars in big cities and other sahebs buy them. From this we can realize that we not only do we not have business sense, but what is more shameful, we haven't learnt to appreciate our own country. (Roy, *Jokkher Dhon* 77)

In this moment, Roy is making the connection between colonialism and the economics of capitalism, and attributing Indian failure to reach a position of equality to the lack of love for and interest in the motherland. Since the fantastic home is also the lost and nostalgic home, it is evident that travel and mobility becomes a way of knowing and thereby supporting the nation, a site for nationalism embodied in the path through the Indian landscape. To that end, he also describes the specialties of the areas they pass through, be it their cuisine, or the things they produce, agricultural or industrial.

Bengali adventure fiction also shapes a Bengali masculine identity by pitting the masculine self against racial others, as Majumdar points out and while that is more clearly visible in stories set in the "exotic abroad" of Sen's four geographies, it is also evident in the descriptions of other people they meet traveling at "home," within the country. The idea of regional and national others had always been a problem in conceptualizing India as one unity, as mentioned earlier. Apart from the growing divide between the Hindus and Muslims, local and regional interests permeated Provincial Congress Associations and led to multiple notions of

nationhood circulating in the Indian imaginary. In Bengal, as Swarupa Gupta has pointed out, the literati whose writings dominate public discourses of nationalism was a Hindu or Brahmo, upper-caste elites whose ideas of nation included ideas of cultural Aryanness. However, in order to enfold conceptions of the regional into a unified national imaginary, it was necessary to find a way to incorporate ‘others’ into this Aryan/Hindu dominated samaj. These others included people of lower classes and lower castes, ‘adivasis’ who were aboriginal or tribal people, and untouchables. The process of their incorporation was not a simple one of Brahminical appropriation but involved “finer and nuanced contexts of multiple layers of inclusion, co-opting and situational exclusion of specific groups and categories” with strategies changing based on who is being incorporated in order to make the social consolidation a seamless one (Gupta 173).

In *Jokkher Dhon*, we see this primarily in the text’s stance towards Karali and his henchmen and the description of the Khasi Hills. Though they do travel through other parts of India, because of the necessity of secrecy, we do not see them interacting with the people of the area, probably the indigenous tribes who peopled the hills, except for describing their physical features. Continuously dogged by Karali, they avoid cities and other highly populated residential areas where they could be identified and so we don’t see them interacting with the locals either. The only ‘other’ they interact with is Ramhari, Bimal’s manservant who travels with them and is described as old, but really strong, who doesn’t seem to have any other goal except to serve Bimal and keep him safe. He only expresses grief if anything happens to Bimal, does everything he is asked, including the cooking, and is basically used as a convenient plot device who slows them down when he has a fever, which allows Roy to dwell on the dangers of the forest, and pen an encounter with a tiger. Their main interactions are with Karali and his henchmen who have “ugly, pitch-black faces” and exist in the story to follow instructions and then get killed by

Karali in the end (Roy, *Jokkher Dhon* 37). Roy's perspective on these men who were probably of lower caste and/or class is evident with their association with darkness and their tendency towards brute violence. Not only are their bodies black, but they also mostly move in the darkness of the night in residential areas like Calcutta or Bimal's room, or under cover of thick forests.

Similarly, the landscape gets more densely forested, the terrain steeper, the obstacles harder, and the nights darker as they progress through the landscape. But the most telling feature of this 'otherscape' is its association with the supernatural, indicating not only its otherness in comparison to the rational, logical ideal Bengali self, but also a generic similarity to British adventure fiction with its associations of freedom and individuality developed in hierarchic comparison to similar landscapes. The treasure is located underneath a Buddhist monastery (another non-Hindu cultural monument placed conveniently in far-off lands, but within 'home') and is guarded by a 'jokh.' The term 'jokkher dhon' is an idiomatic phrase denoting a Mammon's treasure, or riches belonging to a miserly person. However, the term 'jok' also refers to a mythical class of gods/ghosts appointed to guard treasures and this aspect of the treasure is never far from Kumar's mind. The jokh in question can be deactivated by the skull, but that is stolen by Karali's men sometime after they leave Kolkata, which activates intense fear in Kumar's mind. Though Bimal doesn't believe in the supernatural, Kumar refers to it at every unusual sound they hear, or whenever they're in the darkness. He dreams about it, and in his dreams the mountains amidst which the Buddhist monastery is situated are described as "shadows of demons" (Roy, *Jokkher Dhon* 47). They also trade ghost stories about a 'pisach,' a ghoul or some other kind of undead creature and then later, Karali's laughter is described as 'poisachik,' the adjective form of the word, making a tripartite connection between the

landscape, the supernatural and evil men. This triad is ultimately 'conquered' by our Bengali adventures when they enter the underground tunnel which leads to the treasure. They hear creepy, unearthly laughter, but that laughter is revealed to belong to a flesh-eating lunatic who had made the tunnel his home. The lunatic is killed by their faithful dog, Bagha (bagh means tiger), who is an Indian street dog with extreme strength. Karali recovers the treasure but as they chase him through dark caves and forests, he loses his footing and falls into an underground river with the treasure. His men are all killed by him in his greed. Thus, the denouement ends with the vanquishing of the supernatural as untrue, the forests becoming familiar, and the evil men dying, while Bimal and Kumar returns to their 'swadesh,' Bengal, treasureless, yet happy and triumphant.

The plot ends on a triumphant note for Bengali masculine identity, and though this novel is a very good example of Roy's muscular nationalism, it also reveals its negative side. As evident from the prefaces to his collective works, instilling a sense of patriotic nationalism amongst boys was a priority for Roy, and his texts clearly express that. His need to redeem Bengali masculinity was a response to more than a century's denigration of the character of the Bengali people and their association with non-physical pursuits. Sinha notes that throughout the nineteenth-century, Bengalis had been "regarded as 'the greatest cowards in India' and that the 'term Bengali [was] used to express anything which was roguish and cowardly'" (Sinha 15). In fact, in his Essay on Clive, Lord Macaulay says about them, "There never perhaps existed a people so thoroughly fitted by habit for a foreign yoke," the reasons being their sedentary habits and pursuits, their languid and feeble bodies, and their aversion to bodily exertion (quoted in Sinha 15). Thus, imbuing Bimal with extreme strength, cunning, courage, independence and

combining it with his love for his land and his country is a straightforward resistance of such stereotypes which were circulating in colonial discourses.

However, Bimal seems to lack any understanding or sympathy for human frailties or fears. His attitude towards Kumar, while mentoring, is also extremely disdainful. After the first sound of theft, when he is trying to convince Kumar to steal the skull back from Karali's house he calls him cowardly and asks, "This is the courage with which you are going to go to Rupnath Cave and retrieve the Jokh's treasure? It is better that you stay at home in your mother's lap like a pampered child" (Roy *Jokkher Dhon* 29). He is dismissive, instead of reassuring, of Kumar's fear of causing a scandal in the neighborhood should they be caught. In fact, throughout the novel, he treats Kumar's fears with contempt and harsh mockery, and doesn't display any sympathy towards him, or the henchman who get hurt or killed under Karali's employment, at any point of the novel. The fact that it is only by dismissing Kumar's caution and his wishes that the plot can keep moving makes them all the more inconvenient, or even redundant. Towards the end, while they're chasing Karali and the treasure chest through forests and caves, they discover that he has stabbed the last henchman who was helping him and left the man to die on the cliffside. They give the dying man water, as he requests, but also keep asking him for information till his dying breath. Kumar is somber at the thought of the many injuries and deaths caused by Karali, but Bimal expresses no regret. Bimal's muscular nationalism also has its effects on Kumar, and by the end of the novel, he has become as comfortable as Bimal (though neither of them ever shoots to kill). In the middle of the novel, when he thinks Karali's and his men have killed Bimal, his first impulse is to kill them. There are no thoughts about less violent forms of justice and he doesn't even take the time to mourn, telling Ramhari, "There is no time for tears. Revenge first!" (Roy *Jokkher Dhon* 82). Kumar doesn't have any awareness of the fact

that Kumar's desire to loot the treasure of underwater kingdoms, or in this case, an ancient king's treasure, is similar to the Sahebs looting the flowers i.e. resources of their colonies for their profit. Kumar's turn to violence and his lack of awareness of his own desires and behavior as replicating the colonial process highlights the more extreme elements and toxic potential of the kind of muscular nationalism Roy is espousing. As Sen points out, "It is also the self-loathing of the archetypal colonized nationalist: Ray hates in Bengalis precisely what he has been told to hate by Kipling and other delineators of mimicry. He feels enclosed and limited by colonialism, but he wants to own the walls and control the windows, rather than imagine a geography where the child constantly outgrows its boundaries" (Sen "Juvenile Periphery"). In other words, by mimicking hegemonic masculinity as constructed by colonial discourses, Roy is perpetuating the toxic elements of these very same discourses, in a manner that is counter-productive to anti-colonial imaginings of the national self.

Sen acknowledges Roy's muscular nationalism even in his editorial work, calling *Rangmashal* "aggressively nationalist" and less cosmopolitan than *Sandesh* and *Mouchak*.⁷⁴ His editorial for the first issue of *Rangmashal* was "a nearly explicit critique of colonialism as a kind of children's prison" (Sen "Juvenile Periphery"). According to Sen, in Bengali adventure fiction, "the colony reclaimed the genre for its own purposes, but the problem of slippage for the colonized-as-colonizer remained persistent" (Sen "Juvenile Periphery"). These slippages are definitely evident in *Jokker Dhon* in the way Bimal and Kumar are positioned against each other, the other characters and the landscape, and it becomes even more pronounced in *Abar Jokkher Dhon*, in which they rush off after yet another ancient king's treasure, this time located in the

⁷⁴ Both periodicals to which Roy contributed but were edited by others.

mountains of Uganda and guarded by a whole underground city of jokhs. Kumar has definitely evolved from his first appearance (this is the second Bimal-Kumar novel), and his position as the timid Bengali has been taken by Maniklal Basu, the inheritor of the treasure map who reluctantly accompanies them to Uganda. Manikbabu approaches Bimal and Kumar because he is convinced that his house is haunted. Upon investigation, this haunting turns out to be the work of men hired by his youngest uncle, Makhan Babu, to retrieve the treasure map that his uncle has left him. Fear and a love of food and comfort seem to be the only things we learn about him throughout the novel. When they leave the western shores of India, Manik babu expresses to Kumar that he is scared because he doesn't know if he will return to the country "with his head on his shoulders" (Roy *Abar Jokkher Dhon* 36). Even though this is a legitimate fear in his eyes, given that they would be on another continent, traveling through forests with wild animals, filled with people who he characterizes as savage Africans, Bimal and Kumar do not acknowledge it. His deviations from their standards of bravery are treated as the main comic relief of the text. When they are confronted by danger, either from Makhan Babu's men, the local tribes or wild animals, Manik Babu's first impulse is to flee, faint or climb up a tree.

There was no limit to Manik Babu's anxieties. In his opinion, every bush here hid the gathering of some wild animal, every tree hosted a meeting of ghosts. As soon as evening fell, he would start chanting the name of Ram, and the fear of catching the eye of a bad-tempered animal kept him in his tent all night. (Roy, *Abar Jokkher Dhon* 58)

Even though he is the inheritor of the treasure, he still resents Bimal for dragging him all the way here to Africa. The only redeeming aspect of the trip for him is Ramhari's cooking (the manservant had also accompanied them to Uganda, as well as the dog, Bagha), and the boys regularly make fun of his growing paunch, teasing him about being the perfect prey for lions, and

about not being able to keep up with them. He is not allowed the transformation Kumar is afforded in the first novel, and at the end, even though they did not manage to acquire all of the treasure, he is determined never to return to Africa again. Kumar, on the other hand, becomes an example of the improvement that Bengal boys have the potential for, if only they are mentored and exposed to hardiness at the right moment. He is more participatory, observational, voluble and takes part in strategic planning, though the main brilliance is still all Bimal's. Kumar even manages to save Bimal just as he is about to be hanged by Makhan Babu and the Africans he had hired. His contrast with Manik Babu indicates that though young boys still have a chance at becoming ideal national subjects, adults have neither the desire nor the opportunity to do so, preferring to live a life of comfort and complacency, bound by petty colonial servitude.

Bravery, physical and moral courage are the main determinants of character in Roy's world. Thus, Bimal and Kumar are superior to both Makhan Babu and the other Africans in character. However, after reaching Lake Tanganika, they meet an Arab called Gatula, to whom they had been directed by the letter written by Maniklal Basu's uncle, Suren Babu, who had sent him the treasure map. He is another representative of heroic, uber masculinity in the novel, and his presence evokes a civilizational camaraderie, a unity among different races and nations based on courage, morality and righteousness, not surprising given that Indians had better relationships with the Arabs due to centuries of trade than the other races of Africa. Gatula knew Suren Babu in his last days, since he had accompanied him on their unsuccessful trip to recover the treasure, and admired him for his intrepid nature. Gatula and Bimal connect instantly with a similar unity of purpose. When Gatula is describing the dangers yet to come, Manik Babu is ready to give up and return to India. However, Bimal states, "The dangers that you are describing, do not deter me at all because I am a Bengali boy," to which Gatula responds, "A man's word!" (Roy, *Abar*

Jokkher Dhon, 97). He is dismayed to learn that Manik Babu is Suren Babu's nephew, but in a moment of racial solidarity, Bimal explains to him that Manik Babu is not scared, merely missing his homeland. It is Gatula's strategy and his that helps them avoid the hordes of African tribesmen who lived in the mountains and protected the treasure cave. However, he is still superior to Gatula, since he is determined to avoid manslaughter unless absolutely necessary, unlike the Arab.

Thus, while the Bengali boy is superior, he is matched in his prowess by the Arabs of the region. On their arrival on the African mainland, as he narrates the history of Mombasa, even while extolling the cosmopolitan history of the place (noting the evident signs of Chinese, Egyptian and Persian civilizations in the area), Roy chooses to focus on the Arab history with the Portuguese. The Portuguese dominated the area from 1505 to 1729, but he only goes into the details of the Arab siege of the Fort Jesus against the Portuguese in 1696. He notes the success of the siege, and notes that even though the area came back under the control of the Portuguese, this moment significantly reduced the influence of the Portuguese in that area. His choice to selectively focus on the history of the area highlights his respect of another martial race of people and signifies a collective unity in anti-colonial struggles. This respect is not afforded to the black Africans, who are mostly represented as large, collective bodies with no specific individual standing out, with the exception of an unnamed villainous 'Kafree.' Dhruba Gupta notes similar racial hierarchies in Indian perceptions about Africa where Arabs were co-traders in the slave trade and shared mutual respect, also in part due to the influence of Muslim rulers in pre-British times. Indians freely participated in the slave trade and black Africans were mainly considered objects of servitude and pleasure. In fact, there have even been movements by Indians to have

East Africa considered an Indian colony, since Indians had historically contributed to their development (Gupta 162).

This sense of racial superiority towards black Africans is very evident in *Abar Jokkher Dhon*. The black Africans, the Zulu, Kikuyu and other East African tribes as represented in unindividualized hordes, either as servants in Bimal-Kumar's party, as Makhan Babu's hired henchmen and goons, or as the tribes-people who came to attack them, bringing with them the sounds of war drums, loud noises and naked, riotous bodies, who were unintelligent enough to be directed away from their party through Gatula's ploy of separating their party. The only individual black African who is mentioned is the man known merely as 'Kafree,' a term which became popular in Bengal in the late-nineteenth century, meaning either infidel (inherited from the Arab traditions) or Black Africans (Gupta 166). The 'Kafree' in Makhan Babu's party is first spotted on the ship to Mombasa, when he is describes as tall, outlandish and terrifying looking, with a creepy, macabre laughter, "dark as ebony wood with glowing, fierce eyes, like an animal. His nose is as flat as a monkey's," and he is lipless, causing his teeth to protrude like a skull (Roy, *Abar Jokkher Dhon*, 38-39). Thus, the one African who is elevated to the level of individual interest is described in primitive, animalistic terms. This is further emphasized by the 'Kafree' turning out to be Ghatotkoch in disguise, the apparently supernatural creature who Makhan Babu's party kept locked in a trunk, and who had been the actual perpetrator of most of the crimes, from the theft of the map, to more heinous acts of violence. Ghatotkach is a figure from the Mahabharat who is the son of Bhima and a demoness, another intertextual reference to non-humanity. In the novel, the 'Kafree' disguises as the being they call Ghatotkach, wearing a body costume and a mask of a large, terrifying simian creature, firmly establishing the connection between large, African, black male bodies and animalistic bestiality. Thus, even as

Roy instills his readers with a sense of patriotic Bengali superiority, the superior masculinity he describes as ideal is more than tinged with the idea of conquering and colonizing.

Like his descriptions of the people, Roy's attitude towards the landscape also veers between moments of civilizational solidarity and a colonizing impulse. No doubt is left about the superiority of the Indian motherland. As they leave the shores of India, in a rare moment of commiseration with Manik Babu's homesickness Bimal says, "I despise those who do not feel sad while leaving their country...Our motherland is greater than our human mothers!... Bharatbarsha! The birthplace of Bhim and Arjun! The country of the Aryan race!" (Roy, *Abar Jokkher Dhon*, 37). This moment of solidarity raises India to a pinnacle of civilizational glory which is also specifically Hindu in its reference to the Mahabharat and to India's ancient Hindu history, extending the idea of otherness not just to non-Hindus and lower castes and classes at home, but also to the 'exotic abroad.' The history of Mombasa is accompanied by a description of the city, "From looking at Mombasa, one would never be able to tell that there lay deep jungles, steep hills and lonely deserts in the vast heart of Africa. This city had all the signs of modern civilization" Roy, *Abar Jokkher Dhon*, 53). This is in stark contrast with Suren Babu's description who had called it a "land of uncivilized" people in his letter Roy, *Abar Jokkher Dhon*, 29). Acknowledging these signs of civilization undercuts the stereotype of Africa as primitive and places the country on a footing of colonial solidarity. As they set off further west across forests, mountains, rivers and meadows into heart of the country, Roy comments, "Sometimes we would see a dirty village, its huts as rickety as they were broken, its people similarly poor and ugly...This place looks like India in many places," acknowledging the similarity in the financial plights of both these great and historical civilizations Roy, *Abar Jokkher Dhon*, 57). The natural beauty of the country is also praised, especially around Lake

Tanganyika; however just as in *Jokkher Dhon*, the elements of wildness and primitivity increase, as does the presence of the supernatural. Near the treasure caves, the forests are haunted with loud inhuman sounds and macabre laughter following them as they try to make their way quickly. And unlike the first novel, the supernatural element in the caves is never explained away; in the caves in Assam, the lunatic residing in them is the source of the killings and the laughter, but in these caves, there are thousands of mummified statues and never know what happens to cause the roaring sounds, ringing bells, and noises of presences. Unlike the first novel, Bimal-Kumar's team do not dare to venture too deep inside and eventually only get the single chest of treasure that Makhan Babu's men acquire, losing their entire party of hundreds of men to the creatures in the caves. The novel ends with the death of all the villains at the hands of Ghatotkach, his own death at the hands of a gorilla, and his eventual unmasking. Thus, while the supernatural outside the caves is explained, the one inside the cave is left ambiguous, leaving us with a vision of the African landscape that is irrational, terrible and unreal, ensconced in the same otherness as non-Bengali parts of home.

5.4 Bengali Adventure Fiction: Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay and the Modern Bengali

Boy

Bengali writer and novelist Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (1894-1950), is best known for his book *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Road*) and its sequel *Aparajito* (*Unvanquished*), which were immortalized by the director Satyajit Ray (grandson of Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury) in his famous trilogy of movies named after the main character, Apu. In *'Time Out' in the land of Apu: Bildungsmoratorium and the Urban Middle Classes of West Bengal*, Hia Sen regards the character of Apu as epitomizing the same

romantic innocence surrounding the child that we saw in Tagore's writings in Chapter 3. She goes on to say, "The twelve year old boy Apu, short for Apurba in the novel *Pather Panchali*, (English translation: Song of the Road) has an allegorical status, emphasizing not just the ideals of innocence and an untainted childhood in the countryside,' the figure also draws attention to the predicaments of the educated, rural, upper caste Bengalis in the early twentieth century," connecting the figure of Apu to the upper-caste, Hindu *bhadrolok* culture which dominated much of the public discourses about both nationalism and childhood in India, the same culture that Swarupa Gupta writes about (Sen 21). Bandopadhyay characterizes Apu as a dreamy, wide-eyed, intelligent young son of a Hindu priest, upper-caste but nevertheless living a life of poverty, whose childhood is mostly spent in the rural Bengali countryside, playing indigenous games within the lap of Nature, along with his sister Durga. Even after they leave the village at the end of the novel, Apu's life is spent on acquiring education and working to support his family, unlike Bimal and Kumar who not only encounter different adventures, but have the financial security to indulge in them. Thus, the character of Apu, even as a child, stands in stark contrast to the 'manly' Bengali boyhood Roy envisions and espouses and represents a softer masculinity which is neither the effeminacy of babu culture or the more hegemonic masculinity represented by British colonial or even the more 'martial' Indian races, a self-fashioning of Bengali males through an alternate, not oppositional, vision that could represent a Bengali and thereby, an Indian modernity.

This softer masculinity is very much in evidence in Bandopadhyay's adventure fiction, both in *Chander Pahar* (*Mountain of the Moon*) and *Sunderbane Sat Botsor* (*Seven years in the Sunderbans*). He worked in various professions that took him all over Bengal and most of his writings are set in rural Bengal, *Chander Pahar* being a notable exception. *Sunderbane Sat*

Botsor is no different, and is set in the Sunderban delta region of Bengal, located right before the Ganges meets the Bay of Bengal. The novel has a very interesting publishing history and was first published 1952, by Sudhindranath Sarkar, two years after Bandopadhyay's death. This edition featured a handwritten note by Bandopadhyay which led readers to believe that the novel was not entirely his. The preface to a 1973 edition of the book by Bandopadhyay's son, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay alluded to the fact that this story was first started by writer Bhubanmohan Roy in 1895, serialized in the short-lived children's periodical *Sakha o Sathi*, but was left incomplete by the author and later, completed by Bandopadhyay. However, the editors of the current edition make it clear that they have found no evidence of the publication in the periodical. The novel is undivided into chapters and ends in a hurry, and even if there are two authors writing it across half a century, there is no way of demarcating individual authorship within the novel. What is interesting, however, is the consistency with which the novel espouses throughout a vision of a Bengali boyhood which is much gentler than the hegemonic masculinity that Roy portrays, even temporally, if the rumors about multiple authors are taken to be true.

Sundorbon e Sat Botsor tells a story of a teenager, Neelmani Roy or Neelu, who goes to the Ganga bathing fair at Sagar Island, and is kidnapped during the three days of the fair by Burmese/Arakanese dacoits who live in the Sunderbans and make a living through human trafficking. Because the head dacoits' son takes a liking to him, he is not sold but instead kept as a companion. Neelu lives in the Sunderbans for seven years, first with the dacoits, then with other fishermen, and towards the end, with an old man who lived on a deserted island, before returning home to his family. In the Preface to the 1952 edition of the book, Rajsekhar Basu posits adventure fiction as more useful than fantasy or fairy tales since it serves the dual purpose of providing information as well as inspiration for bravery. He goes on to say, "I don't see the

need to go to Africa or Mars for a courageous expedition or dangerous events, describing what is near home is much more realistic and natural” (Bandopadhyay Preface 257). The book almost reads like a catalogue of the local flora, fauna and environment, detailed through the individual adventures, and functions to acquaint the readers of the area in an attempt to create an adventurous setting in “the nostalgic/fantastic/lost home” (Sen “Juvenile Periphery”) In a reclamation of this geography, the readers are provided with detailed and informative descriptions of the adventures Neelu, Manu (the dacoit leaders’ son), and Nibaran (the son of one of the boatmen) have with multiple tigers, various snakes, different kinds of fishes including sharks, and of course the dangers of rivers, storms and the open seas.

The novel also makes space for discussions on Bengali respectability and masculinity by pitting it both against the landscape and the ‘others’ Neelu meets who provide an outsider’s gaze on Bengali identity from an insider’s perspective. Thus, this novel represents an attempt at self-fashioning an identity in full consciousness of the public discourses of frailty and effeminacy that circulated about Bengalis. We are told at the very outset by the narrator, Neelu himself, that he belonged to a well-off, upper caste family, and was incredibly spoilt as a result. He blames himself for his own misfortunes because of his stubborn insistence on going to the fair with his grandfather. While at the fair, the son of the dacoits befriends him because of the rumours of his grandfather’s wealth and finds out the location of his family’s ship. At night, when his grandfather is offshore and busy with meditations, the whole ship is stolen while Neelu is sleeping. The crew and his guards are killed by the dacoit’s gang and the ship is looted and sunk. Realizing his utter helplessness and humiliated by it, Neelu tries to make the best out of the events which befall him throughout the novel. And in doing so, he learns lessons not just about the landscape and the people, but also by comparison with them, about his Bengali identity and

the rules and principles it confers on him. Along with his adventures then, the novel also traces his evolution to an ideal Bengali boy as a result of being forced away from the city into the alien nature of an unknown part of home, the Sunderbans.

When Neelu is kidnapped, he tells the dacoits that he would rather die than live amongst them, but he soon realizes he is at the combined mercy of the dacoits and the dangerous environment, and falls silent (Bandopadhyay *Sunderban* 263). Once he reaches their island, he makes Manu's acquaintance and quickly becomes friends with him. He tells Manu the stories he had read from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which motivates Manu to want to learn how to read. But when he mentions that to his dacoit father he says, "It seems the Bengali boy has turned you into a Bengali! What kind of a dacoity will you do with your education? Once you become educated, you will become cowardly like Bengalis. The pen is the weapon of Bengalis, swords, arrows and guns. You can neither hunt, nor loot with pens. Only learn what you need to, no need to learn extra things" (Bandopadhyay *Sunderban* 264). Manu responds by saying that he will read of tales of bravery and fight wars with kings for their kingdoms, but his father is unconvinced. The question of schooling and bookish education and Bengali proficiency in them comes up often in the novel and the dacoits' initial criticism of it gradually transforms into a realization of the necessity of education for social mobility. When Manu refuses to criticize his father for what he sees as his own future profession, Neelu tells him that because he loves him like a brother, he wants to lead him away from dacoity. Manu is reluctant but does admit that there is an increasing fear of the police, even though he has no other means of earning his living. Neelus advises him to enroll in a school and get an education to ensure a profession.

Though the subject is dropped then, Neelu continues to educate Manu, teach him Bengali and help him read the few books the dacoit leader deigns to bring them. Matters come to a head

when Neelu is seventeen, and he and Manu are taken to an initiation ceremony for inducting them into the profession of dacoity. While Neelu has seen the gradual transformation wrought in Manu due to the effects of education, he despairs of escaping this terrible fate. When Manu's father arrives, Neelu tells him, "I am a boy from a respectable family. This is not my profession. I cannot kill or loot others" (Bandopadhyay *Sunderban* 292). Thus, apart from holding up education as a means of social mobility, Neelu also associates it with his status of respectability in society, setting him apart from the children of others who remain outside of it. Manu has changed enough by now to not want to become a dacoit, but his father threatens to sell Neelu to the Chinese. Manu's father is enraged at his transformation into a weak Bengali boy but both boys are adamant and tell him to have faith in God, and recognize that the times are changing. Through this incident, Bandopadhyay reiterates the upper-class/caste Hindu ideology of faith in religion and education as ways of assimilating into a progressive and respectable mainstream society. This may not have been enough to convince his father if not for the fact they suddenly encountered officers from the state forestry department. They recognize Neelu's presence as an anomaly amongst the Burmese and begin questioning him. However, he protects Manu and his father by not revealing his status as their prisoner, because his Bengali sense of honor could see the good in Manu and wouldn't allow him to betray them. This impresses all the dacoits and they are convinced by Neelu's education and respectability. Manu's father releases him but requests him to stay on and arrange for Manu's education and his entry into respectable society. He decides to return to Burma, and start a logging business for his son, inviting Neelu to join them. This transformation that Neelu is able to bring about in the dacoits not only sets them on the so-called right path, but also returns them to their proper place i.e. Burma, while ensuring a brighter

future for Manu. Through the neatness and convenience of this arrangement, we can clearly see Bandopadhyay's espousal of Bengali upper-caste notions of assimilation and respectability.

The landscape of the Sunderbans also plays a part in enabling Neelu's transformation. Satadru Sen notes that in this geography of the juvenile periphery, stories set in the Sunderbans mainly functioned to enable the Bengali child turning "big-game hunter and intrepid scientist" (Sen "Juvenile Periphery"). Certainly, the series of adventures Neelu, Manu and Nibaran have, have the effect of strengthening Neelu's courage. While he defers to the Burmese boys' knowledge of the area, he is forced to join them out of an ethical sense of participation, appealing to his honor, which wouldn't allow him to abandon his companions to face dangers without him. This emotion is something Neelu gradually develops and its increase is traced across the various adventures involving animals and the environment. At times, he is even happy at being kidnapped, feeling the joy and the freedom of being close to Nature, thinking to himself, "Would I have experienced this joy if I had not come with my grandfather to the Sunderbans? I was a thirteen years old boy leading a trapped life in a small house. I was completely unaware of the joys of this vast world, of its unrestricted glories" (Bandopadhyay *Sunderban* 269). The fantastic adventurous home is also the lost and nostalgic home, and we see evidence of that as well in the various ancient temples and ruins the boys find, making Neelu aware of a rupture not just between the city and Sunderbans, but also with his ancient past. He wonders, "Who will take me by the hand and lead me to ancient Bengal? No one," acknowledging that their ancestors would not be able to recognize them and vice-versa (Bandopadhyay *Sunderban* 284). Thus, the rural countryside also becomes the site for nostalgia for a pre-colonial past. After he is saved from snake bite by Manu and an exorcist, he realizes that "God dwells in all human beings," recognizing the equal rights of all 'others' (Bandopadhyay *Sunderban* 287)

The Sunderbans enables Neelu to become braver, more connected with his history and heritage, as well as extend his sympathies to others he meets. He doesn't miss civilizational comforts and his love and brotherhood for Manu would have had him wanting to stay with them forever, if not for his mother. Like Roy's Kumar, Neelu's main tie to home and the only female presence in his life seems to be the mother figure, which is why when he meets an indigenous woman who is sympathetic to him and wants to see him return home rather than being sold, he begins to refer to her as mother. Rather than looking down upon her for the circumstances of her birth, he respects her and expresses his affection for whenever she brings him food or comes to see him when she is injured. Neelu's instincts, even when guided by his own interests, is still tempered by a sense of society which allows him to look beyond caste and see the qualities for which they can be assimilated into mainstream society. We see that in the case of Manu, as well as his indigenous mother and even though Neelu has to leave his companions by accident, getting swept out into the sea on a solo boating trip, his affection and concern for them never leave him. After he is saved by Muslim fishermen, he visits the island of an old man who everyone considers a lunatic. In this last section of the novel, he finds out that this old man had forsaken the very society Neelu is from and lived on the island subsisting on turtle meat and oysters and other odds and ends which he managed to trade for the turtle shells he acquired. Even though the old man has accumulated vast amounts of wealth in the form of raw pearls he had collected from the oysters, he doesn't trade with them or use it to acquire societal wealth and prestige because he despises human greed and wishes to live a simple life, principles which attract Neelu into staying with him for a while. This old man, then, is the imparter of the last lessons he requires before heading back into society, those of simplicity, charity and serving others. The novel ends with him leaving the old man and finally going back to his family, of

whom only his grandfather is alive, and setting up a business with the one pearl gifted to him by the old man. The old man's last words to him, to "be a good human" represents the culmination of the ethos the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia upheld as ideal and that Neelu learns through his encounters with various groups of others and the landscape (Bandopadhyay *Sunderban* 314).

In Neelu, we see an idealized version of Bengali masculinity which does not replicate the hegemonic masculinity admired by the British in the other martial races of the nation. His courage increases with his adventures, but he never loses his admiration for the liberal values of goodness, simplicity and the care of others within society. Unlike Bimal and Kumar, he makes no attempt to conquer or colonize these wilder elements of home, instead appreciating them for their biodiversity and the people they harboured. He also respects the resources of home and makes no attempt to plunder them, leaving all the pearls behind except for the one gifted to him, even though he had permission to take as many as he wanted. Thus, whether it is while living with the dacoits, the Muslim fisherman or the old man, Neelu only accepts from them and his environment as much as he needs and nothing more. This non-colonizing, non-aggressive masculinity also characterizes Shankar, a young Bengali boy who goes to Africa for a job and ends up having the adventure of a lifetime in his search for hidden treasure, in Bandopadhyay's iconic adventure story, *Chander Pahar* or *Mountain of the Moon*.

Bandopadhyay, writing *Chander Pahar* from the not unique position of never having been to Africa, was heavily dependent on British travel literature and fiction about Africa. In his preface to the novel, he says, "Chander Pahar is neither a translation of any English novel, nor has it been written under the influence of foreign story of that class...However in order to properly describe the geographical location and natural landscape of the various regions of Africa, I have taken the help of travel books by Sir H.H. Johnston, Rosita Forbes and other

famous travelers” (Bandopadhyay Preface 5). Thus, it is not unusual that he, and Roy for that matter, would have replicated some of the imperialist, masculinist stereotypes about Africa that circulated in the Indian imaginary, though these British texts. Bannerjee and Basu acknowledge that in their essay, as does Dhruba Gupta in “Indian Perceptions of Africa” when he says,

The image-making of Africa in India, and more specifically in Bengal, since the middle of the nineteenth century has been almost completely guided by the accounts of the ‘dark continent’ provided by Europe, where the models were Livingstone’s journals, Rider Haggard’s novels and, in the twentieth century, the Tarzan films. As the colonial educational system offered no access to even early official anthropologists, or to travel literature of a superior kind, Rider Haggard was the main window onto Africa. Even a great novelist like Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay took him as his model when writing a delightful book for children entitled *Chander Pahaar* (‘Mountain of the Moon’) (Gupta).

In this section, I focus on the constructions of masculine identity in the novel which, I argue, in its simultaneous identification and distinction from what Basu and Banerjee call an “Anglo-American hegemonic masculinity” attempts to contribute to the rising confidence of a nascent nationalist ethos (Basu and Banerjee 173). The quest for masculinity in India has its roots in the cultural processes instituted by imperialism with the colonizers defining their own masculinity against a feminine, subjugated other. This situation was even worse in case of Bengalis who came up unfavourably in comparison to other non-Bengali races such as the Marathis, Punjabis, Sikhs and the Rajputs. The effeminate stereotype of the Bengali babu, an elitist Indian imitator of English cultural values, was widespread in contemporary literary and popular culture, and has received a considerable degree of literary or scholarly space since then. In colonial Bengal, boys’ adventure stories with their imperialist and masculinist function,

became a space for anti-colonial resistance to a feminizing imperialist discourse. In *Chander Pahar*, the articulation of an Indian masculine identity happens in two ways: a) by virtue of the protagonist, Shankar's relationship to the other people he encounters, and b) through his encounter with the unfamiliar, primitive, dark landscape of Africa. Thus, it is an identity which formed in full consciousness of the foreign Other.

In his adventures in Africa (an attestation to the image of the continent as colonized, but other), Shankar, traveling from India, first takes up a job with the Uganda railway near Mombasa, then at an isolated railway station near Kisumu in the Veldts and then finally, goes on a quest to find the fabled diamond mines in the Richtersveldt Mountains. We are told, at the very outset, that Shankar, unlike ordinary Bengali boys, is athletic and adventurous and is languishing at the prospect of fulfilling a middle-class Bengali destiny of becoming a clerk at a factory office. When he gets a chance to escape this destiny by unexpectedly acquiring a job in Africa, this muscular side of his masculinity is highlighted by being pitted against the harsh natural landscape of Africa. As mentioned earlier, Dhruba Gupta has noted the historically appropriative, imperialist and exploitative attitude Indians have nurtured towards the African continent and its inhabitants and Shankar's attitude to the landscape is no different. Even though he does not replicate British stereotypes in his behavior towards the African people, his attitude towards the landscape is entirely appropriative. He is equally enamored of the beauty of Africa and aware of its dangers. When his fellow coolie, Tirumal Appa, dies at the hands of a lion, Shankar calls Africa "strangely beautiful, but also terrifying! Even if it looks like a Bengali field of babla forests, Africa is an unfamiliar death trap! There are cruel death traps laid out anywhere and everywhere—no one can predict in a moment, what's going to happen in the next instant. Africa has claimed its first sacrifice, the tender youth Tirumal. And It wants more sacrifices"

(Bandopadhyay *Chander Pahar* 26). He imaginatively invests African landscape with agency, and thinks of it, in turns, as unconquerable, unknowable, narcissistic, mysterious, primitive, provoked and provocative, unreal and ancient. It is in his interactions with Nature that he inadvertently reveals his only moment of racism, designed to provoke a favorable image of Bengal by comparison, “The Richtersveldt mountains are not like the divine, kingly Himalaya of India—like this country’s Masai, Zulu, Matabele and other ancient tribes, it’s soul is cruel, savage and cannibalistic. It is not going to exempt anyone” (Bandopadhyay *Chander Pahar* 98). His perspective of the African landscape is constantly peppered with comparisons to the Bengali landscape, both to its advantage and detriment. Unlike Bengal, Africa allows him to gratify the adventure in his blood, to triumph over lions and snakes and mythical monsters like the Bunyip and to have brushes with heroic forms of death. But also, unlike the lush pastoral beauty of Bengal, Africa and its people and landscapes are fearsome, and the novel describes in great detail his fear, hopelessness, ignorance, and lack of experience even going as far as depicting him regretting his adventures, unlike Bimal and Kumar who rush headfirst into danger. When he is confronted by the lion at the construction site, he is too scared to note whether the bullet he fires actually find its mark. In the jungle with his mentor, Diego Alvarez, exhausted and resentful at the idea of taking a single step more, Shankar thinks, “Where am I going? What is Alvarez’s relationship to me? Why would I even attempt this, at his advice? I have no need of diamond mines” (Bandopadhyay *Chander Pahar* 115) He is unable to read the maps after Alvarez dies, since he never bothered to learn and was just content to be an apprentice. He is almost driven mad with fear, when he is lost in the cave, as well as in the Kalahari desert when he is surrounded by coyotes and wolves. He is devastated when Alvarez dies and can’t function for two whole days, undecided on what to do and where to go. But, in the end, even though he is

shown enjoying the comforts of civilization, his masculinity is ultimately redeemed by his eventual survival. And his Bengali masculinity is established and shored up by this constant comparison, as well as the fact of his eventual survival against all odds. Even while the text provides scripts of masculinity to young boys, it also subverts the Anglo-American concept of hegemonic masculinity that the colonies witnessed by its detailed descriptions of Shankar's fear, anguish and his consciousness of his terror and ineptitude.

The nuanced nature of an Indian/Bengali masculinity is even more pronounced in his encounters with other people. The association between masculinity and civilization is established in his encounter with the native Africans. Shankar has always been aware that Bengali boys are mostly destined to be clerks, schoolmasters and doctors, that what is possible for boys elsewhere is not possible for the emasculated colonized race of Bengali men. However, against the native Africans, Shankar's colonized civility becomes advantageous for his survival. It is notable that Bandopadhyay doesn't have Shankar mouth any of the racial stereotypes about Africans. So, Indian masculine identity, enlightened and compassionate, is portrayed as different from African masculine identity, but is not as denigrative. Thus, even though he doesn't express much concern for his fellow Masai workers, when they get carried away by man-eating lions, for instance, Shankar respects them for their stoicism and ability to survive in the African landscape. Yet, his instant attraction to white, European, muscular masculinity is instantaneous. The Europeans he meets on separate occasions, even apart from Alvarez, are treated with admiration, even though one of them, Albuquerque attempted to rob him of his money, providing evidence of the flaws in European character.

When he meets Diego Alvarez, Shankar is immediately attracted to his bravery "his smile made Shankar think he was not an ordinary man" (Bandopadhyay, *Chander Pahar* 53) and even

though, at times, Diego treats him quite patronizingly, his admiration for Alvarez never wavers. Even before setting out on their adventure, Shankar's attachment to him is quite evident "Shankar looked at the prone Diego Alvarez's worn out closed eyes and the criss-crossing of veins on his arms, his radiant, steely, blue eyes hooded by his mature eyebrows and his heart overflowed with love. What a man he was indeed!" (Bandopadhyay, *Chander Pahar* 65). Alvarez orders him around, laughs at his ignorance, and treats him like a white European would treat a native affectionately. He is devastated when Alvarez dies, and not just because he is stranded in the Richtersveldt, but because "in these few months, he had truly loved Alvarez. His fearlessness, his decisiveness, his capacity for hard work and his bravery had captured Shankar's admiration. He had loved Alvarez like his own father. Alvarez had also regarded him with similar feelings of affection" (Bandopadhyay *Chander Pahar* 142). However, his admiration of Alvarez's intelligent, scientific, educated, rational and martial European masculinity aside, Shankar's own masculinity never imitates that of his companion's. He is depicted in a nurturing role, from the very beginning, and as someone who has to be saved on various occasions. It is through Alvarez that Shankar picks up stereotypes about African natives, who portrays them as unscientific, chaotic, superstitious and simple minded Kafirs, indicating that it is not in the nature of the Bengali boy to denigrate people, but that it is a response learned from colonial hierarchies. When the Matabeles approach Alvarez and Shankar, in the Richtersveldt, it is Alvarez who calls them anti-colonial, lawless, and fearless of even the Devil. It's Alvarez who describes an encounter with a tribe near Orange River in which he saves a young, black, naked tribal girl with European medicine. He describes the tribal clan as superstitious, thinking that the girl had been possessed by demons, as ineffective, in tears and chaotic, wanting to kill the girl, and finally, grateful for his white man's medicine (homeopathy!).

Yet, Shankar never tries to be exactly like Alvarez and is not unaware of this difference between them and in a moment of supreme contemplation, the narrator says, “The beauty loving, thoughtful person within Shankar was caught in admiration and wonder in the midst of this colorful afternoon. After all, he is a son of Bengali soil, and not just a hard soul, constantly seeking prospector” (Bandopadhyay *Chander Pahar* 84) And Shankar is very aware that he is a son of Bengali soil and not a hard headed prospector like Alvarez. Thus, Shankar’s masculinity is a much softer version of the harsh European counterpart and that is an admirable and desirable condition. Shankar, India’s sole representative in the jungles of Africa, is no gun-toting heroic, rebellious Bengali boy, but has a nurturing, grateful, obedient, thoughtful and even intellectual side. Thus, by presenting this nuanced view of Bengali masculinity, Bandopadhyay’s positions Indian national identity as one not merely attempting to replicate yet another hegemonic imperial form, but to expand the very concept of masculinity, or probably boyhood, in Shankar’s case, in an attempt to create an identity which truly emanates from the peripheries of the empire and belongs to the colonial subaltern. And to do so, he portrays the gradual construction of Shankar’s identity as one formed in the double consciousness of not one, but two sets of foreign Others, in the shadow of two alternative epistemological systems whose awareness he cannot avoid.

6.0 Conclusion

This dissertation demonstrates the importance and function of children's literary texts in processes of decolonization in the Global South through the example of the development of Bengali children's literature in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. I examine the reception of different genres of children's literature and ideas of childhood which are legacies of British imperial history, such as adaptations of British Golden Age fantasy and adventure fiction, periodicals and the construct of the Romantic child. These inherited genres and constructs went through a process of indigenization and became politically significant at different phases of the Indian independence movement based on the affordances of their generic conventions. The adaptations of British fantasy enabled Bengali children's authors to mount critiques of both the colonial rule and the nationalist movement, and the world building facilitated by fantasy helped generate an archive of Bengali childhood. The multi-genre form of Bengali children's periodicals allowed the Bengali literati to propagate ideas of cultural nationhood crucial to the early i.e. Moderate phase of the nationalist movement, while the construct of Romantic childhood allowed literary stalwart Rabindranath Tagore to envision a non-violent decolonial process after the disillusionment of the Swadeshi movement and the Extremist era. And finally, the genre of boy's adventure fiction advocated for initiative and action be redefining Bengali boyhood and masculine identity in the post-Gandhian era, when the anticolonial movement became more vigorous and widespread.

This is by no means an exhaustive list from the rich and vast repertoire of Bengali children's literature and future iterations of the project could make room for children's textbooks, readers and primers, domestic novels, school stories and many others. Yet the

implications of this project remain wide-reaching, identifying alternative epistemologies of childhood and the need for their inclusion within global histories of childhood which are still dominated by Euro-American frameworks of analysis. Though this project does not yet include a study of the literature addressing girl children in colonial India, their liminal positioning as girl children and child brides indicate the necessity of revising the definitions of childhood prevalent in current discourses as a figure kept separate from conjugal domesticity.

These multiple colonial histories have lingering effects on the lives of children in postcolonies beyond the moment of independence, with colonial policies influencing post-independent legislations that order and manage the lives of children. For example, the rise of theories of Aryan racial superiority and not only led to the tragic horrors of the Holocaust but continue to play a crucial role in present-day Indian politics. Hindu nationalism emerged during the Indian independence movement, despite the inclusive measures that Swarupa Gupta outlines, and the ideology and vision of a Hindu Rashtra has been transmitted across generations to result in a political space where secularism is viewed as antithetical to nationalism. Investigating this transmission necessitates tracing this history back to the early stirrings of nationalism in the late-nineteenth century, and considering the circulation of Hindu nationalist ideology in and through Indian children's literature and media situates us to better understand the nation-building processes in India today, since these texts form the ideological basis for creating future citizenry. Thus, this dissertation is also a call to increase scholarship on postcolonial children's literature in order to understand the national trajectories of former colonies.

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