It has been noted that geographically, the long nineteenth century becomes an especially fruitful period to examine because of the compounded effects of “Cook’s voyages, the Napoleonic Wars, the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of the British Empire into India and Africa”. As the researcher points out, the long nineteenth century opened up new worlds and ‘other’ geographies for the Western nations, especially for Britain. With an institution of political power in these ‘new’ lands, for reasons related to governance and trade, it became essential for the newcomers to undertake the elaborate task of mapping of these ‘other’, unknown geographies. Thus, though the great era of maritime activities and navigational explorations and discoveries was past its prime, this new interest in the newer regions of the vast British Empire was manifest in a “growing concern with the exploration of the interiors of the continents.” For India, the nineteenth century was the time when its scientifically uncharted geographies – immense, varied and unknown, including the northern mountainous regions, the western desert-lands,
the densely forested eastern territories of Assam (and Burma) and the peninsular areas, would come under an organised cartographic scrutiny. It was in December 1799 – only a few days before the arrival of the momentous century in Indian history - that William Lambton sent his proposal of a “Mathematical and Geographical Survey” of the Indian territories to the colonial government. The plan entailed a precise and scientific mapping extending from the “Coromandel to the Malabar Coast . . . [and] facilitating a general survey of the Peninsular, and particularly [of] the territories conquered . . . during the late glorious campaigns”.³

David Arnold notes in his intriguing study concerning the traveling gaze and the imperial appropriation of India that “the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth century European ‘discovery’ of India advanced on many different fronts - through the investigation of Hinduism and the Oriental texts . . . or through the physical measuring and surveying of India”.⁴ The latter, “by 1857, had made possible the accurate mapping of virtually the whole of India from Kanyakumari in the south to the Himalaya in the north” (27). In a colonial context, such a sustained and organised cartographical project has historically been read as one enabling the transformation of the “seized space into legible, ordered, imperial territory”.⁵ Again, such a re-ordering of space through Cartesian coordinates, through physical inroads and empirical expeditions into the heart of the deep and wild interiors as well as through the Western gaze of the proliferating travel literatures, have been aligned, in the history of
colonial geography, with a pervasive masculinity. This masculinity becomes explicit in the imperial will to conquer and command the unknown and in its ability to establish authority through its powers and forms of knowledge.

These imperial and colonial geographies, along with the motivating masculine forces that discovered, explored, mapped and seized them, were ardently imbibed and disseminated by the numerous “healthy papers for manly boys” in the ‘home’ of the British Empire - in Victorian England. Such an interest in new-found geographies and an optimism of wielding a manly control over them became a well established tradition in the English juvenile periodicals, especially from the 1850s, when the religious climate of the English children’s magazines began changing into more secular and more thrilling volumes. Peter Hunt observes that the Children’s Friend, a juvenile magazine which had started in the wake of the Evangelical movement in 1824, with pious tales, prayers and Christian poems, was “influenced by the enormous expansion of missionary work overseas and by a growing interest in the British empire”. By 1849, the same magazine began to publish articles like “‘Anecdotes from Mrs. Ward’s Travels in Kaffirland’, ‘The Way they Boil their Kettle in Iceland’ and an account of a British regiment’s exploits in India”. In his excellent case study of the Boy’s Own Paper, Richard Noakes also identifies this fundamental change in the late-Victorian
juvenile periodicals, which happens in order to force a shift in the middle-class boys’ reading habits and to wean them away from the clutches of the swarming penny dreadfuls. Furthermore, during this time, the subject of imperialism, as reflected in the popular boys’ periodicals, became complexly and intimately associated with an image of Englishness that was invested with a fiery patriotism, a robust courage and a ‘manly’ spirit of adventure. Gillian Avery identifies the 1850s, the time of “the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny” as the decade when a “patriotic feeling surged into the boy’s book”. This cult of ‘masculinity’ that became popular in the British boys’ periodicals, has been extensively researched in a number of works like *Childhood’s Pattern, Propaganda and the Empire* and *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*. Broadly tracing a pattern in the late Victorian boys’ journals, MacKenzie observes:

These journals’ recipe, approved by parents and teachers alike, was to blend much of the violence, boisterousness and cruelty which had poured from the penny dreadfuls with the late nineteenth century world view . . . The world became a vast adventure playground in which Anglo-Saxon superiority could be repeatedly demonstrated vis-à-vis all other races, most of whom were depicted as treacherous and evil. (*Propaganda and Empire*, 204)
The violence and bloodshed involved in the process, MacKenzie explains, were made “acceptable because they could be depicted as necessary adjuncts to the spread of civilization, Christianity and Just Rule” (204). The very titles of these periodicals - *Boys of England, Rovers of the Sea, Sons of Britannia, Union Jack* and *Camps and Quarters* – to name a few, show the overt connection between the ideology of English manliness and imperial power [figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4]. They also demonstrate how dexterously these magazines, with their textual as well as visual contents, whetted the imperial appetite of the English boys. They indoctrinated them in the creed of an English or Christian manliness, which would, in future, enable them to participate in the most exciting and most expansive project of the greatest nation on earth. Tales of adventure in the fashion of Robinsonnades, treasure-hunting or executing a mission in the remote outposts of the Empire made a staple component of this masculine discourse. The boys’ periodicals serialised fiction by writers like Robert M. Ballantyne, W. H. G. Kingston, G.A. Henty, Thomas Hughes, Talbot Baines Reed, Ascott R. Hope and Jules Verne. Along with adventure fiction there were biographies, stories of conquests and colonial exploits of British patriots like Nelson, Clive and Desmond. These writings provided the Victorian middle-class boy-reader with that glorious model in which he would want to cast himself as a son of England:
Figure 3.1. Cover page, *Boys of England*, October 1882.

Figure 3.2. Cover page, *The Boy’s Realm*, January 1912.

Figure 3.3. Cover page, *Boys of our Empire*, November 22 1902.

Figure 3.4. Cover page, *The Union Jack: Tales for British Boys*, January 1 1880.
Those well-knit and vigorous forms that bear themselves with such pride, those clear faces, joyous mouths, the golden hair, the honest, kindly blue eyes that look at you so frankly, that aura of manliness and authority that rallies the sinking spirit of followers, strikes terror into the hearts of rogue and dastard, before whom the foreigner quails – that image, in fact, of the British boy so potent that an illustrator of the Bible even depicted Christ as one. (Avery, 164)

Closely paralleling the elements of territorial annexation, the display of masculine strength and energy, and the manoeuvering of power and control within the boys’ own spheres, was the intoxicating heroism of public-school sports. As the “world became a vast adventure playground for the Anglo-Saxons”, so did the English school playgrounds come to symbolise and replicate in miniature, the to-be-conquered unknown territories in distant corners of the Empire and a game played between two forms or two schools, verily become a mock drill of a strategic encounter against the enemy. Avery notes that “the obsession with sports creeps in [the school stories] somewhere in the early 1850s” and that while work becomes a matter of less importance, “the really serious matter is sport, the manly ideals are spirit de corps, truth-telling and standing by one’s fellows” (186). This heroism, extensively and gloriously displayed in magazines like the Boy’s Own Paper and its numerous followers through voluminous writings about middle class sports like cricket, rugby and hunting, was an active agent in developing
an imperial temperament and in training “a cult of super-boys and super-men” who would succeed “against overwhelming odds” (MacKenzie, 204). Through the thrilling accounts in travelogues, adventure fiction and football or rugby games, the young Britons were shown the blueprint of the expanding Empire and were taught the principles which would, in future, make them a part of that grand design. Whether real or fictional, historical or contemporaneous, earnest or playful, such territories of wild unknowns and Public school playgrounds, featured endlessly in the late-Victorian juvenile periodicals, can therefore be read as representations of ‘masculine’ geographies.

As a modern genre bred in a colonial culture, and as a distant descendant of the popular English children’s magazines, the Bengali juvenile periodicals were naturally infected with the warm enthusiasm of exploration and inquiry that was mapping and colouring the great Indian Empire. They abundantly reported the voyages and expeditions at home and abroad and wrote of new places and strange people far and near. Moving away from Macaulay’s pejorative “seas of treacle and seas of butter”, the periodicals ushered in a ‘new’ and ‘modern’ Geography through a varied genre of writings that included news articles, anecdotes, reports of expeditions to remote parts of the globe, descriptive travelogues and stories of adventure. As a literature intended for entertaining children, the magazines also reflected the increasing
popularity of the culture of colonial sport through numerous articles and commercials related to outdoor games and activities like cricket, football, hockey, badminton and cycling. Representing these various ‘manly territories’ through the writings on travel, adventure and sport, the Bengali juvenile periodicals rearticulated the colonial cult of manliness for their own (boy) readers. This chapter attempts to show that in the Bengali children’s magazines, in the domain of the colonial ‘Other’ (therefore inevitably being identified with the Non-English and the Non-masculine), these territorial geographies are simultaneously emulated as conformist pro-colonial gestures and appropriated to serve a nationalist agenda.

Travels

“Bidesh Bhraman” [Travels Abroad] and “Desh Bhraman” [Touring the Country] – to use two indicative titles of travel serials appearing in Mukul - get an equal share of space and attention in the Bengali children’s magazines. The ‘abroad’ spreads from the far East to the West, including new-found lands and pioneering expeditions to the strange polar landscapes. On the other hand, articles, essays and letters reflecting on travels and explorations within the Indian Empire were also numerous. The latter writings express a deep interest in knowing the
diverse regions and races of the ‘nation’, in unraveling its history through accounts of visits to places of archeological antiquity and in discovering its multi-religious identity through descriptions of holy cities and sacred shrines. In his analysis of the various tensions implicit in the “literary geographies” in Bengali children’s magazines in the period between the Russo-Japanese War and the Second World War, Satadru Sen also notes that, “a staple feature of all the magazines is the exploration narrative: stories about travel to particular geographies.”13 It is in this “powerful set of geographies of childhood”, Sen argues, that the Indian elites could “locate not only the defeated present and the modern future, but also the pre-modern, pre-colonial past” (n.pag.). Widening the children’s geographical knowledge, these periodical writings were far removed from the dry, fact-filled geography text books that they read at school. Not only did the articles use an anecdotal style and approximate a story-telling form of narration but further, they were almost always accompanied by photographic or hand-sketched illustrations. The ‘sachitra bhraman kathas’ or illustrated travelogues enlivened their comprehensive factual overviews with interesting pictorial matter that visually documented topographies, people, traditions and cultures.

In keeping with their British counterparts, the thrill of the strange and the exotic and the enchantment of the far-off are persistently present in the printed world of the periodicals. While the Bibidhratha Sangraha
featured little-known places like New Zealand or the island of Kamchatka as part of its ‘geography’ section, accounts of the polar territories inhabited by the Eskimos and the sun-drenched landscapes of Congo were illustrated for the readers of *Sakha o Sathi, Mukul* and *Toshini* [figures 3.5, 3.6]. Maps and cartographical references – the iconography and jargon of a modern, scientific geography were often present along with the descriptive articles. An essay on the tribal people of Nagaland in *Sakha* began by pointing out the importance of geography as a field of study and emphasised the necessity of maps in a proper perusal of the discipline:

In your Geography class, you must have read some book like *Bhugolsutra* or *Bhugolbrittanta* and you might have wondered what good it would do you to learn the names of numerous countries, rivers, mountains and lakes. Memorising a list of names is not learning Geography nor can that be the object for studying it. An understanding of Geography is a pre-requisite for studying History, Archeology, Geology, Zoology, Botany and other such disciplines. In this case too, if you do not know the locations of Assam or Brahmaputra, you cannot form an idea about the position of Nagaland. Take a map in your hand and look towards the region of Assam -.”
Figure 3.5. “Eskuimo Jati”, Illustrated article, *Mukul*, June-July 1906.

Figure 3.6. “Eskuimo Jati”, Illustrated article, *Mukul*, June-July 1906.
Whiffs of the Western adventurous spirit, the challenge of mastering difficult seas and hostile terrains, of reaching remotest corners of the globe are frequently captured and romanticised in these juvenile periodicals. The article “Alexander Selkirk” in *Sakha* relates the miraculous survival of the real-life Robison Crusoe:

Many of our readers would have read or heard the story of Robinson Crusoe. It is, however, not wholly imaginary but based on a true incident. Indeed, in reality, a person had lived all alone in an uninhabited island for a very long time. . . . Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe* was framed out of this curious incident in the life of Alexander Selkirk.¹⁷

Though primarily an anecdote of adventure, the narrative strongly focuses on the grit and tenacity of Selkirk – qualities that had helped the marooned man survive in utterly hopeless circumstances. In the article, both of these are seen as characteristically English virtues. Selkirk, the author says, had been a living proof of the English adage “God helps those who help themselves” (129). In his history and analysis of the Crusoe story, Martin Green observes that “of all the stories of the British Empire, [it] was the most widely read . . . in the whole world” and sees it as being “profoundly imperialist both in Robinson’s relations to Friday, and in the stimulus it gave young Englishmen to go out and join in the adventure of the British Empire”.¹⁸ It is therefore, of no little importance that variations of the Crusoe myth were chosen to be serialised in the
most popular of the periodicals like *Sakha* and *Mukul*.^{19} The lengthy essays on the South and North Pole expeditions – “Meru Pradesh” [The Polar Region], “Dakshin Meru Abhimukhe” [Towards the South Pole], “Uttar Meru Abishkar” [Discovering the North Pole], “Dakshin Meru Abishkar” [South Pole Discovery], “Captain Scotter Merujatra” [Captain Scott’s Polar Expedition] by Hemchandra Sarkar in *Mukul*, similarly, not only tell of strange geographies but also spin a subtext that extol English courage and manliness.^{20} ‘Meru Abishkare Durghatana’ [A Mishap at the Polar Expedition] reports Captain Scott’s unfortunate death in the South Pole.^{19} Scott and his team had been part of an expedition funded by the Royal Geographic Society and had set sail on the *Discovery* in 1904 with a mission to reach the South Pole. The article, keen to provide its readers with an authentic, first-person account of the expedition and of the misfortune that befell the team, offers to quote verbatim from Captain Scott’s journal:

I will tell you an extraordinary tale. Such enormous courage, resilience and self-sacrifice, as shown by the hero, fill us with wonder. The last words in Scott’s journal, after which the journal must have slipped from his hands, were as follows –

“...The adversities that we have faced during the last month is beyond any hardship imagined or endured by Man... We have grown weak... it is a tremendous effort even to write. For my part, I declare that I have no regrets at all for choosing to
participate in this expedition. It proves that, like olden times, a son of England can still endure pain, help fellow countrymen in dire conditions and have the fortitude to meet death with infinite patience.”

In this reportage, as in the Selkirk article, the English expedition, the adventurer hero, the image of the English patriot and his qualities of extraordinary courage and endurance, become intricately and inseparably linked. The discourses thus get transformed into ‘true’ myths of colonial, masculine geographies.

Understandably, a substantial amount of interest and enthusiasm is reflected in the writings about England and about the modern, technological wonders of its capital city, both of which are repeatedly featured through travelogues and letters from abroad. “Londoner Galpa” [London Stories] by Abala Basu describes the Westminster Abbey, the Parliament and other places of importance, while “Bilater Galpa” [Stories on England] by Krishnabhabini Das – a series stretching over a period of one year – illustrates aspects of English school life and discusses the excellent moral and physical education provided for middle-class boys at Rugby. In the “London” episode of the travelogue, descriptions of the thronging crowds in the ‘city’ area, the narrow lanes and smoke-belching chimneys; images of afternoon amusements at Regent’s Park and of boys sliding over ice on the frozen lakes are put together to effectively
transport the Bengali child-reader to the capital of the great Empire. This “civilized abroad”, Satadru Sen observes, “is a deceptively inviting space” where the child can experience “orderliness and efficiency, airplanes and the Underground, boat races at Oxbridge and military exercises at Aldershot, inspiring teachers and polite policemen, and a king who is described as sharal: naturally innocent and apolitical like the imagined reader” (n.pag.). Indeed, many of these writings underscore the superiority of English life and culture, which are to be taken as examples and followed for general betterment at home. For instance, “Bilater Katha” [About Britain] states,

>M any of us [Bengalis] have started visiting places like Darjeeling, Nainital, Shimla, Waltair or Puri during the summer, puja or Christmas holidays for reasons of health - this is definitely a good sign, for such a change revives the body as well as the mind. It is a practice that we have mostly imbibed from the English.

Articles like “Baraf” [Snowfall] or “Prithibi ebong Tahar Adhibasi” [The World and its Inhabitants] are proof of the fact that the periodicals felt the need to familiarise their readers with a rapidly expanding world. The latter essay intends to acquaint the readers with countries all over the world and simulates an imaginary air-borne tour in which the readers are travelling with the author to different countries. The author
illustrates the distinctive characteristics of the places and relates factual information as they ‘arrive’ in different locations.

However, the ‘inviting abroad’ is not only limited to articles about England or Europe. Significantly, there appears a substantial volume of literature depicting Eastern countries and oriental geographies. Names like China, Japan, Tibet and Burma are frequently listed in the ‘abroad’ sections of the periodicals, indicating a growing interest in the countries outside Europe and especially in those of the ‘far-East’. “Barma Jatrir Patra” [Letters from a Traveller in Burma] narrates the journey from Calcutta to Burma via Chittagong and Akyab to Rangoon and finally to Mandalay, the city of Thebaw, the erstwhile King of Burma. Numerous other descriptive travelogues like “Chin Desh” [China], “Tibbat” [Tibet] and “Japaner Path-e” [To Japan] or “Brahmadesh Bhraman” [A Tour of Burma] indicate a growing fascination with eastern cultures.26

An article describing Japan’s fiery volcanoes and devastating earthquakes, though mainly concerned with its topographic distinctions, digresses to include a significant comment in conclusion. Japan, the author notes, though an ancient civilization, has been able to reform and revitalise itself as a powerful and modern nation.27 Satadru Sen infers that through the varied representations of Japan in juvenile periodicals in between 1904 and 1939, in the Bengali child’s imagination, Japan
emerges as “an icon of Asian modernity”, and becomes “a modern, technologically and militarily accomplished Asian nation” (n.pag.).

Writing about his initiations into nationalism, Radhakamal Mukherjee recalls the moral inspiration that the youth in Bengal had drawn from the victory of Japan over Russia:

The Russo-Japanese war ended in the same year [1905] with the signal victory of Japan over a mighty European power. The entire continent of Asia became ablaze with new hopes and aspirations. For the first time the victory of an Asian people gave flesh and blood to nationalist aspirations. India, China, Persia and Turkey, in particular, showed a tremendous upheaval. The movement of de-colonization mingled with a cultural resistance.28

A similar rebirth of a powerful nation in the East is celebrated by a number of essays that discuss the contemporary social reformations happening in China. Underlying such ‘revitalised’, Asian geographies was the message of an imminent revolution at home. The following excerpt from an article on the revival of China under Sun Yat-sen, displays such a hope:

We are now witnessing a beginning of a great revival of all the ancient races of the world. People who had wielded great power once and had later fallen into decadence, have in recent times been stirred by a renaissance. In the last few years Japan has emerged as one of the most powerful nations. In recent times, such a revival
seems to be taking place in Turkey. Persia is showing signs of a new birth as well. But among all, it is the contemporary history of China that is most intriguing and enlightening.²⁹

Writings like “Chine Nabajagaran o Sun Yat-sen”[China’s Revival and Sun Yat-sen], “Chiner Katha” [About China], “Chin Jahajer Jatri” [To China in a Ship], “Chin o Anyanya Desher Chhelera” [The Youth of China and Other Countries] tried to put forward the reformation in China as a case in point.³⁰ For its successful revival of ancient glory from a more recent state of degeneration, China was repeatedly projected as a model for the Bengali youths, on whom rested the responsibility of bringing about a similar rejuvenation of their people.

Parallel to these varied, enchanting and inspiring foreign geographies, the periodicals also manifest a keen interest in exploring the variegated territories within the subcontinent and an eagerness to understand their diverse cultural histories. The wide stretch of the Indian peninsula with its as-yet disparate, far-flung provinces, come together under the collective identity of a desh [nation] in the pages of magazines like Sakha, Balak, Mukul, Sathi, Sakha o Sathi, Prakriti, Toshini and Sandesh. Places within and near to Bengal like Barishal, Darjeeling, Puri or Assam as well as remoter ones such as Bombay, Karachi or Kashmir are featured as part of the ‘desh bhraman’ series of the periodicals. Bibidhartha was the first periodical to bring to the family
circle, through illustrated articles like “Sikh Itihas” [Sikh History] and “Rajputra Itihas” [Rajput History] a knowledge of the diverse races of India, enlightening the readers on their origins, traditions, regions, customs and racial characteristics.\(^{31}\) The writings, especially the necessity felt by the author to supplement the articles with visual images, clearly indicate that the contemporary common reader in Bengal (especially in the rural areas) at that time would have had little or no idea regarding the Rajputs or the Sikhs. This, according to the author, is because, “travels within the different regions of Hindostan had not been so prevalent earlier and therefore the people have hardly taken any interest in the inhabitants of other territories” (10).

The extensive travelogues in Balak urge the readers to explore and to know intimately their native land. These writings, imbued with a deep love of the land, read as veritable lessons in swadeshi nationalism. Often inculcating a ‘back to roots’ patriotism, they aspire to instill a sense of belonging in the young minds and to make them aware of an identity in a larger context. “Nadiya Bhraman” [Nadiya Tour] by Srish Chandra Majumdar is a beautifully lucid travelogue in which the author recounts his thoughts and impressions as he journeys deep into the heart of rural Bengal.\(^{32}\) The first place of the author’s visit is the village of Palashy. This was where, in 1757, the forces of the East India Company under Clive had the historic victory against Bengal’s last independent Nawab, Siraj-
ud-daulah.’ Being the first decisive British occupation in Indian territory, the victory was significant in signaling the onset of the long British rule in the country. However, though generally paraded as an instance of English pride and glory, Clive’s bribing of an army chief named Mir Jafar, and persuading him to betray the Nawab in the battlefield, is common knowledge. Mir Jafar, along with some other chieftains, thus purposefully abstained from joining forces with Siraj-ud-daulah at the last moment. As a result, the Nawab’s army was outnumbered and defeated by Clive and his soldiers. While describing Palashy as a silent witness of that lost battle and the devastating betrayal, the author’s soul is overwhelmed by patriotic passion: “the English heart, ever proud of his race, brims with triumphant pride at the site of the great battle, [but] why are not we affected in the least bit?” (513). The travelogue goes on to articulate a very different, alternative folk history that has been sustained by the local oral culture. Visiting the little village nearby, the author finds memories of that distant defeat carried on in scraps of rhymes and songs:

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* Known in its anglicised version, as ‘the battle of Plassey’, the town of “Plassey”, as well as the site of the battle on the bank of the river Bhagirathi, was located in the district of “Nuddea” in the map of colonial Bengal. See, Walter Hamilton, A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindostan and the Adjacent Countries Vol I (London: John Murray, 1820), 146-47.
Ki holo re jan
[O dear life!]
Palashir maidane nabab haralo poran
[The Nawab is dead in Palashi’s strife]
Chhoto chhoto telengaguli lal kurtigaye
[The little foreign men in red coats dressed]
Hatu gere marte teer Mir Madaner gaye
[Kneeling, shot arrows at Mir Madan’s chest]
    Ki holo re jan
    [O dear life!]
Palashir maidane nabab haralo poran
[The Nawab is dead in Palashi’s strife.]

Teer pore jhanke jhanke guli pore roye
[Arrows fly in clusters, strewn canon balls]
Akla Mir Madan sahib koto nebe soye
[How much can Mir Madan bear till he falls]
    Ki holo re jan
    [O dear life!]
Hastisale hasti kande ghoray na khay pani
[The elephants in tears the horses won’t drink]
    Ki holo re jan
    [O dear life!] (515)

The folklore, as also its crooners, the rustic folk of the village, still relive
the painful memories of the treachery as they lament the heroic deaths of
Mir Madan and Mohanlal, the two faithful generals of the Nawab who fell
defending Bengal against Clive’s red-coat forces. As part of the same
travelogue, the author celebrates not a place, but a person of singular
importance – the famous and feared ‘Bishu dakait’ of Bengal. Bishwanath Sardar, a native of Nadiya, though a bandit and an outlaw, was in every sense a Bengali Robin Hood. He was known to have looted the treasuries of the rich landlords in order to help the poor. That he had popular support is indicated by the fact that he could evade the law for a long time. Though hanged by the British government “fifty years back”, the author states that Biswanath Sardar continues to be loved and revered by the poor village people (517). Both the histories - of the battle and of the robber - related by the author as part of his travelogue, are essentially introspective and subversive histories. Not only do they contradict the established colonial histories built around that proud territory of British victory, but uphold alternative, locally popular histories as well.

As part of his travels in the district of Nadiya, Majumdar writes about his experience of the poush-parban, the annual harvesting festival of the Bengalis. In a small village surrounded by autumnal fields, the ritual harvesting celebrations make the author deeply nostalgic, kindling past memories of his childhood days. Such landscapes, located in the very heart of a virgin, rural Bengal (unlike the towns and cities, these were felt to be uncontaminated by the visible forms of colonisation and the moderniations that followed in its wake) become a ‘pure’ and ‘pristine’ retreat, where the author can regress into the childhood of his
past, into an unalloyed innocence of nature. The nineteenth century saw a steady exodus from the village to the developing cities and towns, as the latter rapidly became the nodal centers of economic power under changing systems of a colonial seat. Under the circumstances, it was usual and indeed almost inevitable, for the middle class Bengali to have his parental home in his native village, commonly referred to as ‘desh’ and another place of residence, often rented, in the city of his employment. In the Bengali psyche, therefore the rural-urban divide becomes impregnated with a host of other binaries symbolic of the past and the present, of childhood and adulthood, and of the private and the public. At the opposite extreme of the ‘colonised’ city, the rural landscape stands for warm and unselfish familial affections and the loving comfort associated with one’s home. While describing the household celebrations of *poush-parban*, the author’s metaphors are replete with resonances of a fertile femininity as he strives to represent the ‘true’ Bengal for his urban readers:

What more can our verdant Bengal want? We are the children of this lush and green land, why then instead of happy songs should we be voicing sorrowful tunes day in and day out? . . . Those fields are storehouses of eternal wealth, the sugarcane and date trees shower you with honey; with her blue sky and green meadows, and her vines ever-laden with fruits and flowers Bengal’s nature is always ready to embrace you! (519)
In an extended analogy, the nourishing, this life-fostering image of Mother Bengal becomes embodied in the archetypal village housewife, who is variously denoted as the *kulalakshmi* or the *grihalakshmi*. Synonymous with a self-effacing motherhood, both Mother Bengal and the rural Bengali housewife are endowed with nurturing and replenishing virtues. Satadru Sen observes that “The landscapes of the past were typically constructed as the innermost refuge of the colonized child: a space charged with escapism, innocence, femininity and other 'mindsets' that might be experienced as nostalgia” (n.pag.). Other examples of such nostalgic, feminine geographies of a motherland – which contrasted starkly with their imperial, masculine counterparts - include the many haunting portraits of idyllic Bengal like “Chandrapurer Haat” [The Village-Market at Chandrapur] and “Bana-pranta” [By the Woods]. Written by Balendranath Tagore, the discourses of these travel narratives exploit the powers of sentimental romanticism and are touched with a strong nostalgic current.

The less explored, wild topographies are not neglected altogether. Kartikchandra Dasgupta’s “Himalay-e Akdin” [A Day in the Himalayas] recapitulates a journey by railway through the Himalayan foothills from Coochbehar to Jayanti for a visit to the fort at Buxa. Like “Nadiya Bhraman”, this piece of travel writing, though abounding in nature

† Bengali prototypes of the ‘angel in the house’, these words are strongly connotative of the traditional discourse associated with the wife in a Bengali household.
descriptions, is interspersed with local, anecdotal histories. Alipurduar, the travelogue reveals, derived its name from the brave Colonel Hedayat Ali, who had rendered commendable service to British Government during Bhutan War. Previously known as Damanpur, it had previously been occupied by Bhutan and was won over by Hedayat Ali and his forces and annexed to the British Empire. In this context, the author digresses for a while to relate an “exemplary and admirable” incident. As the story goes, when Hedayat Ali had visited his senior British officer—after the conquest, far from congratulating the victorious Colonel, the Briton had refused even to offer him a seat. Hedayat had retaliated to this humiliation with a resounding blow of his “masculine hands” on the British officer’s face, as he cried out fiercely protesting against his senior’s unfairness and injustice. The anecdote, couched in such a high-flowing rhetoric of a patently masculine discourse, concludes with the British officer acquiescing to treat the brave Indian with civility and due respect.

Fairly common among travel writings are narratives of visits to places of antiquarian, historical or religious interests. Treatises on historic cities like Chitor, Lucknow, Delhi, Agra or Fatehpur or accounts of peregrinations to Puri, Gaya, Baidyanath or Prayag recreate the glorious civilizations from past history and tell of great emperors, spiritual leaders and profound philosophies. Such writings relate to a
special kind of ‘sacred’ or ‘holy’ territory that is indigenous and unique and attempt to inculcate an awareness of the ancient martial and spiritual glories that lie embedded in the nation’s history. An essay on Gaya in Balak uses the diverse discourses of religion, philosophy and history to urge the readers to visit the sacred place: “Readers! If you are eager to see the land where Buddha lived, the abode of peace and the magnificent ruins of ancient Aryan splendour, come to Gaya once” (524). Combining the elements of natality, race, martial brilliance and spiritual wealth, the pilgrimage implicitly becomes not only a journey to be undertaken for a religious cause but also for a national one. “Chitor-darshan” [Visiting Chitor] by Abala Basu, describes the historic fortress-town of Chitor in Rajputana. The visitor’s account celebrates the history of its bold Kings - who had “even shaken the mighty emperors of Delhi” (7). Rambling among the desolate palaces of the fort which now stands bereft of its brave people and warrior heroes, the author wishes for a magical re-awakening of its past heroism. This invocation, that reiterates as a lament and as a dream through out the narrative is braced with a wonderfully potent metaphor:

Alas! Is this the glorious Chitor? It feels like a land of sleep – as if its hills, houses, people, animals and entire vegetation have fallen into a deep stupor . . . Entering the citadel I saw a splendid palace, its gardens filled with fruits and flowers. A temple stands opposite the palace - with intricately engraved walls and an idol of Mahadev
within. Nearby, densely foliaged mango trees surround a crystal lake – but everything here seems to be dead. The palace, the temple and the mango gardens are all empty. The pathways and residences in the town are all in order but the spark of life is gone – it seems as if someone has put the place to sleep with a touch of the wand-of-death.† (7-8)

Chitor feels like “a sleeping city” in a fairy tale – rendered impotent and inert by some curse. Implicitly, it seems to await that touch of a magic-wand which would at once bring the lost life back to the deserted fortress-town. The fabulous magic latent in the tradition of folk-lore and the fairy-tale discourse from which the metaphor is drawn, enables the possibility of the impossible in bridging the states of ‘past glory’ and ‘present decline’ of Chitor and of the nation.36

The numerous travel literatures in Bengali children’s magazines thus reproduced and represented diverse geographies for their readers. Including territories both foreign and indigenous, in a colonial period, these travelogues drew on a range of discourses to create new geographies that were variously desired, lost, nostalgic, native and sacred. One of the most perceptible effects of these varied writings, manifest in the juvenile periodicals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, is a changing idea of swadesh. Even as the maps of an emerging nation and iconographic images of a motherland were

† The author’s words are “jano ke marankati chhoyaiya shohortike maria rakhiachhe".
getting popular, these periodicals were reiterating a concern to forge a unified, territorial identity out of immense regional, popular and cultural diversities. The point is well established through the following extracts from two travelogues published in Balak and Mukul in 1885 and 1906 respectively.37 “Prabashir Chithi” [Letter from a Person Away from Home] by Nagendranath Gupta, written while the author was staying in Sindh, was published as part of a series of epistolary travelogues. His letter refers to the germination of a new idea among the contemporary populace:

Nowadays everyone is speaking of a ‘United India’. The care-worn and ghostly-ashen image of Bharatmata has gone and in its place a new, powerful and unified idol is being erected. All the brotherhood is joining in unison. A cry in the Himalayas is echoed in the far Kanyakumarika, any turmoil in Calcutta gets carried to Sindh through waves of newspapers and speeches. The entire land of Bharatbarsha is inhabited by one race. (497)

“Dakshinatya” [Deccan] published in Mukul in 1906 also takes note of this important change that has been developing over the past few decades:

Our Bharabarsha is an extensive land; it has such great variety among its people, religions, races and communities. Generally we hardly have any knowledge about these diversities. Now a new feeling for swadesh is arising among us, we are learning to love
our homeland. We need to know what constitutes our *swadesh* and what is its nature? Ideally, everyone should tour the nation once. Today we propose to tell you something about the Deccan region. It is usual for us to visit places in northern Bharatbarsha when we venture to travel. Our acquaintance with the [southern] Deccan region has indeed been very little. (9)

Both the extracts, in varying degrees, point to a changing significance of the term ‘*desh*’ and underline the recent and developing interest in ‘*swadesh*’ or a ‘land of our own’ which “we are learning to love” and which clearly encloses a territory greater than Bengal. Around the same time a travel series with the title “Swadesh-e” [In my Homeland] included articles on places in the east, south and west of the subcontinent like “Bhubaneshwar o Khandagiri”, ‘Trichinopalli” and “Bombai”. For the readers, these regions therefore were parts of one nation.38

**Adventure and Sport**

Martin Green’s opening lines in *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* splendidly sum up the ‘Crusoe effect’ in the English culture:

[T]he adventure tales that formed the light reading matter for Englishmen for two hundred years and more after *Robinson*
Crusoe, were, in fact, the energizing myth of English imperialism. They were, collectively, the story England told itself, as it went to sleep at night, and in the form of its dreams, they charged England’s will with the energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer and rule”.

Tales of adventure and derring-do, as briefly noted earlier, was one of the most popular and dominant features of the late-Victorian English juvenile periodicals and perhaps supplied their young readers with the most sensational and thrilling images of British imperialism, masculinity and power. Transported overseas, in a genre of the colonised ‘Other’, the models of the adventure story and that of its manly English protagonist were imitated, appropriated and subverted to reconstruct the image of the virile Bengali, to engender the idea of a national heroism and thereby to overturn the very symbols of English colonial power. The Bengalis were often seen by the English to be a weak and effeminate race beside the other Indian races like the warrior Rajputs or the militant Sikhs.40

Using the same tropes borrowed from the English adventure tales, the magazines project the image of the undaunted and courageous Bengali, who braves expeditions into the heart of the unknown. Big game hunting and dangerous encounters with fierce wild beasts were two common adventure tropes to be appropriated by the Bengali elite to recover and to re-establish their masculinity. MacKenzie observes:
Trapping and hunting lay at the heart of the nineteenth-century image of exploration, pioneering, and adventure. They put a premium on environmental knowledge and an understanding of natural signs, on a heroic encounter with often adverse elements, on physical fitness and cool courage in the face of highly dangerous animals. The hunter’s grappling with the wild not only called for endurance and stamina, but also for qualities of character admired by the Victorians - stoicism, application, command of self and followers, and the capacity to encounter high risk and triumph.41

Nearer home, hunting was very much a part of imperial recreation enjoyed by white men of high status and power. A hair-raising account of a white-man’s encounter with a tiger is related in the adventure tale “Ashcharjya Paritran” [A Miraculous Escape].42 The illustration accompanying the tale is very similar to that particular brand of wild and thrilling visuals in the English boy’s periodicals, showing encounters with beasts that were “highly dangerous and often extraordinarily large” – in dense tropical forests and exotic jungles (“Hunting and Natural World”, 147) [figure 3.7]. “Sunderbaner Janoar” [The Beasts of Sundarban] describes a similar hunting excursion in the tiger-infested riverine forests of Sundarban. In this particular safari, however, the
Figure 3.7. Illustration of adventure tale “Ashcharjya Paritran”, *Sathi*, February-March 1894.
English sahibs with their entire physical and technical prowess do not fare very well. With their vessel anchored on the Raimangal, the hunting group enters the thick forests of Sundarban along the little deltaic rivulets in a small steamboat. Their first adventure, which involves a spectacle of a gruesome fight between a tiger and a huge wild boar, is soon followed by a more perilous one when the sahibs’ boat is attacked by fierce crocodiles:

The sahibs in turn started shooting the crocodiles. But even that did not thwart the beasts . . . Indeed, one of them pounced and snapped off a man’s rifle, very nearly killing him . . . truly, that day the sahibs, frightened and shaken, were utterly helpless . . . When nothing else could stop the crocodiles, they scattered some kerosene oil on the water around the boat . . . [the crocodiles] had never tasted this anodyne and had never come across anything close to its startling sting . . . For that day, the sahibs were only too happy to give up their plan of feasting on pork meat. They fled from the place as fast as possible. (227)

Survey of the extensive wildernesses and densely forested areas of India – a practice earnestly undertaken by the British government through extensive explorations, maps and measurements – often provides the context of the Bengali babu’s adventure. Often these are written in first-person narrative modes and recount the dangerous adventures experienced by Bengali boys or men in the wild. Pramadaranjan Ray, the author of “Boner Khabor” [Jungle Notes] – an
adventure journal serialised in *Sandesh* - was employed as an officer in the surveying department and often had to undertake long and hazardous expeditions into wild, unknown and untrodden territories. In these thrilling accounts he has left a fascinating record of his adventurous experiences. As he states in the beginning of the serial, these often involved close encounters with wild beasts:

Men involved in surveying often have to travel across areas that are highly dangerous. These are regular haunts of elephants, buffalos, tigers, bears and rhinoceroses, and where such beasts are absent, there are humans who are much more frightening. Through the fourteen years that I have spent in those regions, I have had plenty of scary and exciting adventures. Today, I will tell you a few of those.

In these trips one has to live in tent . . . [and] mostly it happens so that there are no human beings in a radius of twenty to twenty five miles. The forests are so dark and dense that trees have to be felled and a way cleared before we can advance. If an animal-trodden path is found it is thought to be a great convenience. Such are those places. In my early days I got easily scared. I remember how terrified I was one night when a tiger was breathing quite audibly near my tent. But later, much more dangerous situations could not perturb me. (125-26)

He narrates his experience of a few such wild encounters that are thrilling, petrifying and at times humorous, in the subsequent episodes.
of the serial. That the writer, a Bengali gentleman, got adept and expert in tackling dangerous situations becomes evident in the course of the serial. As is clear in the following account of a nocturnal adventure in a jungle camp:

Suddenly I felt as if something was watching us from behind a big tree couched in darkness. A couple of times I had stopped in the middle of a conversation and looked that way. The last time I stared long enough to spot two objects gleaming in the darkness. Clearly, they were a pair of eyes – belonging to a tiger. I was up in a trice ordering for my gun to be brought and the tiger, understanding it was no use hiding anymore, jumped down near my feet (at a distance of only 6/7 feet) . . . Terrified, my khalasis § had taken refuge in nearby tents and were too scared to come out and fetch my gun. Quickly, I went inside myself and got the revolver but on my return, the tiger had disappeared from sight. (260) [italics added]

Writings of this genre evidently endow the Bengali with the masculine abilities of a successful hunter, which as identified by MacKenzie, are “physical fitness and cool courage in the face of highly dangerous animals” as well as “stoicism, application, command of self, and the capacity to encounter high risk and triumph”.

§ A manual worker or porter.
“Sundarban Jatra” [Trip to the Sundarbans] by Yogindranath Sarkar – an adventure story in a comical strain - articulates the anxiety between the ‘childish’ fears of the boy narrator and his cherished desire to grow into a bold tiger-hunting ‘man’. The boy, eager for a hunting experience accompanies his father to his cutchery in the Sundarbans. His expectations are rewarded on the very first night when a tiger comes within a few yards of the cutchery house but the thrill is short-lived: “When the tiger, loitering just a few yards away, had escaped to safety – I was quite crestfallen”(100). Later however while trailing a swine on a real hunting expedition out in the forests, he admits, “The tiger had come from the side of the stream. I did not quite feel like going in that direction after the swine . . . and decided to return to the cutchery” (101). The manly Bengali that he cannot yet become is symbolised by his father who retains his cool when the tiger stalks around the house and mildly admonishes his son for being a coward, “Why didn’t you join them [the hunting party]? Such a weakling! How can you ever hope to be a hunter?” Through such fictions of adventure and real-life anecdotes, the Bengali bhadralok†† instead of being cast in his stereotypical role of a meek office-clerk, becomes a zealous hunter, an intrepid adventurer who ‘dares’ to cross the kalapani or becomes a hero outwitting a band of notorious thugs.†† Besides providing the young readers with the thrill

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†† A term designating the upper-class, educated Bengali who is usually known to be easy-going and elitist.

** A court of law.
and sensationalism of adventure such stories also salvage the masculinity of the ‘effeminate’ Bengalis.

This image of the virile Bengali is epitomised in the illustrated serial “Bangalir Biratwa” [Bengali Heroism] by Bipinchandra Pal published in *Mukul* in 1899 [figure 3.8]. The article begins by challenging the ‘English’ notion that “the Bengalis are thought of as a weak and cowardly people”. It reports an interview with the famous tiger-wrestler Shyamakanta Bandyopadhyay of Dhaka who became well-known for his unarmed tackling of caged tigers and cheetahs. At first, the writer is mildly surprised to find him to be a person of ordinary height and stature. “Far from appearing extraordinary in any way, he looked the typical ‘dhuti-chadar’ clad genteel Bengali”. It is interesting to take a special note of the following description in which the performer recounts of one of his amazing feats with the big cats:

The tiger’s temperament is hardly consistent - it can suddenly turn angry or fierce. You are most certainly in grave danger if you panic . . . Once, a tiger was very nearly swallowing my head. Using both my hands to force apart his jaws, I drew my head out. There had

‡‡ Unstitched clothing traditionally worn by Bengalis.
Figure 3.8. “Bagher Sahit Mallajuddha” [Wrestling with a Tiger], Illustration for “Biratwe Bangali”, Mukul, April-May 1898.
been a few scratches but no great harm done . . . On one occasion in Hoogli at the end of a show, the tiger suddenly pounced on me and landed on my chest. Many sahibs had come to watch the sport that day, most of them fled from the place out of fright, some English ladies fainted, my team was also very alarmed. They brought a gun in order to shoot the tiger but I forbade them. (7)

The unassuming plain-ness of the man and his mundane Bengali appearance and clothes that belie his extraordinary physical prowess, recovers the tarnished image of the *chhaposhal* [ordinary, petty, insignificant] Bengali and at the same time cleverly undermines and invalidates the ‘manly’ image of the brawny English sahibs.

In an imperial context, intimately related to the themes of travel, exploration and adventure are physical abilities like agility and strength. Indeed the entire masculinity of the genre derives from these underlying abilities without which, it was thought, the English could not have been proved the most superior race on the earth. Such physical abilities enabled the English hero to bear out all odds in the dense tropical jungles or in the icy Polar regions and in these, therefore he is suitably trained at home right from his boyhood. Inculcating this physical toughness hand-in-hand with alertness of mind and quickness of reflex through athletics and out-door games, the Public School system of England had become synonymous with
the archetypal English boy, tiresome, reckless, and danger-loving, but redeemed by his devotion to games, where he ‘unwittingly acquires a grounding of those qualities so dear to men of his nation – Fortitude and Endurance, and as the Autumn afternoon closes in, and we stand and watch him pulling his tired self together in a hard fight to save his goal, we see in those grey eyes the first kindling of that light which will some day be burning brightly in them as he stands face to face with danger and perhaps with death.\textsuperscript{48}

Critics like Avery, Bratton, MacKenzie and Richards have studied the intricate ways in which the school stories, published by the dozens in the popular English juvenile periodicals, disseminated imperial aspirations and inculcated imperial mentalities.\textsuperscript{49} The school stories especially those involving a match or a competition, invoked and closely approximated situations where British men tackled the enemy and triumphed against all odds in a hostile terrain in a foreign land (because of the same abilities that are required to win the game). “My First Football Match” recounted by ‘An Old Boy’ and appearing on the cover of the first issue of the \textit{BOP} (18\textsuperscript{th} January 1879) with a half-page illustration, is one of the famous and often-cited examples of the cult [figure 3.9].\textsuperscript{50} Written by Talbot Baines Reed, who was known for his boisterous public school
Figure 3.9. Cover page illustrating a rugby match, 1st issue, *The Boy’s Own Periodical*, January 1879.
tales, the story is a heady mix of boyish excitement, thrill of a match, and the glory of ‘fighting’ for the honour of the school. Full of dizzy emotions of the young boy who has the unexpected honour of playing for his school, the story digresses into an aside at the point when the teams, just about to enter the field, are warming up and eyeing each other from a distance:

An officer in the Crimean War once described his sensation in some of the battles there as precisely similar to those he had experienced when a boy on the football field at Rugby. I can appreciate the comparison, for one. Certainly never a soldier went into action with a more solemn do or die feeling than that with which I took my place on the field that afternoon. (n.pag.)

Passages like this, in such “pure ballads of boyhood”, of innocent school matches and boyish emotions, establish the unmistakable imperial angle in these tales of public school sports and competitions. “The Parkhurst Boat-race”, “Parkhurst vs Westfield” and “The Willoughby Captains” are a few examples from a profusion of ‘plucky’ sport stories that crowded the pages of the popular juvenile periodicals in England and spurred imperial dreams in their young readers’ hearts. While many late-Victorian children’s magazines had a substantial amount of literature on sport and athletics and advertised the fact on their cover pages, there were also several periodicals that were solely devoted to the subject or alternatively, published special sport issues, like *British Boy in Sport,*
This model of “youth, masculinity and fitness” propagated through rough adventure and vigorous, outdoor sports was readily inducted into the Bengali juvenile periodical. Besides games, the practice of physical exercise as way to enhance one’s strength and stamina was also stressed upon. An early example is provided by the article “Byam” [Physical Training] by Gnanadanandini Devi which illustrates, with the aid of sketches and diagrams, a sequence of drills for improving the fitness and strength of the young readers of Balak [figure 3.10]. They are advised to devote some hours daily to outdoor exercises in order to better their health and strengthen their bodies. Comparing the relatively feeble and lethargic Bengali boys with the active, outgoing and ‘manly’ English youth to the obvious advantage of the latter, the article reflects and seems to be inspired by the athletic, good-at-sports, masculine image of patriotic English boys paraded in the Boy’s Own brand of English juvenile periodicals:

In a test of knowledge, the Bengali school boys or those aspiring for the Civil Service examinations are at par with their English competitors but later in life, how great a difference exists between
Figure 3.10. Illustration for “Byam”, Balak, May-June 1885.
the Bengali and the English! After the imaginations and dreams of boyhood, when their aspirations and knowledge mature and they enter the sphere of work, what great goal can the English not achieve? If something immovable bars his way, he removes it with fiery enthusiasm and a resolute mind and marches forward (the mountain-tunnels at Barghat and Talghat testify to that), if a turbulent river checks his speed he digs a tunnel in its bed and makes his way (the Thames tunnel is proof of this), wielding a power greater than that of Raban§§, he has chained the forces of fire, wind, water and lightening and tamed them into permanent slaves and makes them do a thousand jobs for him (the evidences you can see all around you) . . . The fiery spirit in a Bengali’s life, burning brightly in his schooldays, vanishes as soon as his youth draws to a close . . . At par with the English at one stage [the youth], why, later on [in the middle and old ages] should there be such a stark difference in the natures of the two races? (237-38)

The answer, the author observes, lies in the English habit of undertaking taking strenuous physical exercises through various forms of recreations and games.

In England, various measures are taken so that their boys can develop their physical and mental strengths to the fullest. Their games – whether indoors or outdoors are designed to work their bodies and all their schools have gymnasiums. Not only British boys but their young and old men too regularly engage themselves in activities like riding, walking, badminton, cricket, polo and so on as a way of keeping themselves fit. (239)

§§ The ten-headed King of Lanka in Ramayan, the adversary of Ram.
A rejoinder to this advice, “Lathir upar Lathi” [Stick for a Stick], which appeared in the next issue of the periodical, was written in the assumed persona of an average reader of *Balak*. Authored by none other than Rabindranath Tagore it draws attention to the underlying tensions that rupture this foreign model of manliness for the colonised native boy. Pointing out the wide differences in the climactic and the socio-economic conditions of the two countries and races compared, he reminds the author of the Bengali youth’s constant struggle to prove himself in examinations and degrees in a foreign system. In the glare of his poverty and other familial responsibilities, he can hardly afford such extra-curricular luxuries. “Bent under the burden of poverty, we are forever racing against the insurmountable barriers of a foreign language. In actuality, we do not have the least time for flexing our muscles” (246). Here, Tagore is underlining the fundamental cleavage present in the very condition of colonial childhood. It is defined by the unbridgeable division between the ruler and the subject, between aspiration and achievement. Therefore it invariably generates tensions, anxieties and frustrations in colonised children who are given a model they cannot realise.

Nevertheless, that this emphasis on an earnest pursuit of physical fitness and outdoor sport became a popular trend in the following two decades is apparent from a number of manifestations in the juvenile periodicals as well as in a wider socio-cultural context. On a more
general plane a growing importance on physical strength-building and ‘masculinity’ was felt in the combined influences of the annual Hindu Fair or the National Mela that along with indigenous arts and craft, exhibited native talents in indigenous sport like wrestling and gymnastics. The necessity of physical prowess was also heightened in the development of various ‘secret societies’ which aimed to train young men in martial skills. Rabindranath Tagore, who had taken wrestling lessons as a young boy, reminisces about a lack of sporting culture in those days,

Games were few and of very ordinary kinds. We had marbles, and what is called ‘bat-ball’ - a very poor distant relation of cricket, and there were also top-spinning and kite-flying. All the games of the city children were of this same lazy kind. Football, with all its running and jumping about on a big field, was still in its overseas home. (My Life, 25)

In her memoir, Prasannamayee Devi also writes about a similar recreational culture and mentions indigenous games like “ha-du-du, chor-chor, dandaguli” and swimming and kite-flying as the usual outdoor pursuits enjoyed by village children during the 1860s. Not long after, beginning with the 1880s, numerous articles in Bengali children’s monthlies set out to teach their readers the basics of English sports like tennis, hockey, football, cricket and badminton. These tutorials illustrated (often with the help of diagrams and sketches), the rules, field
positions and structures of the various sports learnt from the English. “Khela” [Sport], “Cricket”, “Badminton Khela” [Playing Badinton], “Football Khela” [Playing Football], “Cricket Khela” [Playing Cricket], “Khela” [Games] are a few examples of such sporting lessons in juvenile periodicals. The writings further encouraged the boys to form groups and clubs among themselves and to arrange matches, tournaments and competitions of such sports in their localities. Around the same time youth icons like Swami Vivekananda and Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, while voicing their dreams of a future nation, spoke of the necessity of developing a physical and a sporting culture for young boys and men. Vivekananda had famously urged “Be strong, my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of Gita . . . . You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles a little stronger”. According to P.C. Ray guardians “who forced their children to extra tutorials after school hours” were nothing less than “murderers of boys”. He strongly advised that boys must play daily for at least two hours after school. “That is the time when you [school boy] will run in the open fields, jump, row boats in the rivers – and only then will you have a healthy body and a joyful mind.”

The growing popularity of foreign sports is reflected in the commercials appearing repeatedly in the pages of Sakha, Sathi and Mukul during these years. Put in by the various manufacturers and
sellers of sport ware like “S. Ray & Co at 62, Bowbazar Street, Calcutta”, “Kar & Mahalanabish at 1&2, Chowringhee, Calcutta” or “The Athletic Store: Manufacturer and Importer of sporting goods at 70, College Street, Calcutta”, the advertisements displayed a host of sporting goods and equipments. The young cricketer could choose from various sorts of cricket bats with cane, leather or rubber handles or ‘white bats’ without cane grips, practice and match balls having varying number of stitches, stumps and other cricketing gear like gloves, gauntlets and leg guards. The aspiring footballer had an option of Hercules, Samson or Armicop balls having ‘good quality bladders’ along with inflators. Besides cricket and football, the commercials advertised badminton and tennis rackets, shuttle corks, nets, hockey sticks and cycles. Such promotions, frequently seen on the inside front or inside back cover of the periodicals are definitively indicate a ready and growing market of sports wares among the readers.

“Bilate Bharatiya Cricket Dal” [The Indian Cricket Team Abroad] laments, in context of the defeat of the Indian team in fifteen matches out of twenty-three during their England tour, the fact that our people had never taken sport seriously. The article admits that playing, for Bengalis, had always meant something inconsequential and childish “but now surely, things are changing fast”: 
As in England, sport is now being regarded as a way of improving our race, though at the moment we are far from being at par with England. In England’s national history, side by side with political struggle and social reforms, sport has always been a matter of prime importance. Their schools, colleges and universities consider sport as a serious business. It will indeed be no exaggeration to say that their emphasis on games is greater than on studies. A student showing skills in sport does his college or university more proud than one securing good marks at an examination.

(92--94)

Contemplating possible reasons for the Indian team’s defeat, the author says, “the members of our team did not play from their hearts. Personal differences amongst them could have been a cause of their defeat. The Indian team constituted of players from different communities . . . There is a rumour that the Parsi players had misbehaved with the Hindus”. His observation is that the players for India were not united – as a team in a cricket match should be and as the English teams most definitely were. Acknowledging that something is lacking, the emphasis is on rectifying the problem. The idea of a national unity, of playing as one race and one team, is therefore put forward as a necessity in order to win.

An article in *Sandesh* speaks about a set of ‘manly’ and ‘patriotic’ ideals that can be imbibed through a practice of English sports like football and cricket. Beginning with the universality of ball games in all cultures (the author draws a reference from an episode in the Indian epic
Mahabharat where the young princes play with an iron ball) the author states, “Nowadays the games you play are all foreign in origin. Sixty years back no one here had known such games. They used to play dandaguli [a stick and ball game] . . . and had a lot of fun out of it.” But according to the author such and other indigenous sports are mere child’s play compared to formally structured and rule-bound games like cricket and football. There is understandably much fun to be derived out of running and jumping in the field, he says, but besides that, cricket and football can give one rewards of a higher order:

It is just not enough to play, you have to play well. You have to play for your team and save its honour. Foolish, cowardly, lazy or selfish people do not stand a chance to be good at such games . . . playing as a team, having a sense of self-control, forgetting your own gains and trying hard for your nation’s glory . . . these are some of the values you master through these sports . . . Cricket and football are very dear to the English. It is therefore common to find these qualities among them. They say that the nature of a grown-up person is often foreshadowed in the playground. (59)

Clearly, the very same associations – that had been cast in an inspiring and patriotic model in the popular English juvenile periodicals – an accretion of a cluster of assets and ethics with certain outdoor, team games, are here being put together for the Bengali boys.62
Gradually, some articles in sport sections in the juvenile domain start to register signs of change from a desire to emulate and imbibe the ideologies of their rulers’ sport to an acquisition and mastery of the same. Beating the English at their own games, as it were, the indigenisation of the foreign sport along with an assimilation of its metaphors of moral order, political power and cultural control begin to be implicit in the sport writings of the juvenile periodicals.63 “Cricket Khela” in Mukul reporting Ranjitsinhji’s visit to Calcutta can be seen to mark the very cusp of this transition. The article, written by Saradaranjan Ray – the ‘father of Bengali cricket’ - acquires a deeper significance because of its author. Not only was Saradaranjan a good cricketer himself, he earnestly advocated outdoor sports for a sound health and contributed enormously towards creating a popularity for cricket in Bengal. Following Ranjitsinhji’s marvellous feats in the cricketing field in 1896, the article is a tribute to the ace cricketer.64 Unlike in the previous years, the author reports, the hero who drew an unprecedented crowd of more than 20,000 to the grounds was a new player in the Maharaja of Patiala’s team:

This player is Kumar Ranjitsinhji . . . As a boy he had his first training in cricket at the Rajkumar College at Kanthiawar. In 1892, aged twenty, he went to England. England is the birth-place of cricket, you can not imagine how greatly they love the game there.
Dr. Grace is England’s best cricketer. There has never been a player like him in the past and will probably never ever be in future. In 1871 he scored a century ten times. From the dawn of cricket till 1895 there had been no parallel to this record. In 1896 Kumar Ranjitsinh made ten centuries . . . With 2780 runs to his credit in 1896, he surpassed Dr. Grace’s 1895 record of 2746 runs. Beating Dr. Grace by 34 runs, Ranjitsinhji became the best player of the year across the world. (145)

The report warmly describes the popular enthusiasm surrounding the ceremonious reception of the celebrated player on his arrival at the Howrah Station and later at the Town Hall: “The reception incurred a huge expenditure of 3000 rupees. But let that be, it is satisfying to know that Bengalis can honour their fellow countrymen” (146). The narrative exudes a sense of pride in the outstanding performance of this sportsman who is a “swadeshiya”*. Creating a sense of euphoria in such a rare achievement of an Indian player, the author invokes the feelings of a patriotic solidarity: “Should we not be proud that a fellow Indian is being crowned with such rare distinctions?” Given the odd native-colonial crossover position of Ranjitsinhji as an Indian prince and an English cricketer, in an ambience that combined the paradoxes of the national and the imperial, the article succumbs to the temptation of representing him as a national hero rather than as a colonial athlete.65

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* A native of one’s own country.
Encouraging Bengali boys to learn the game, the author promises his young readers a cricket lesson in the forthcoming issue.

A total appropriation and complete subversion of the games ethic of the English with its connotations of justness, fair play, team spirit, solidarity, physical strength and masculinity, is displayed magnificently in “Football-e Banglair Jay” [Bengal's Victory in Football] in *Mukul* (July-August 1911) [figure 3.11]. The article, published soon after the Indian Football Association’s annual tournament of 1911, effusively celebrates the historic victory of Mohan Bagan - a Calcutta based Bengali football club - against the East Yorkshire Regiments at what has since gone down in Indian sporting history as the famous “1911 Shield”. It begins with the statement of the fact that though such English sports like cricket and football has only recently been introduced to “us”, “the outstanding proficiency of our men at these games is truly remarkable”:

Some say that the Indians are only good at studying books, but none of them -especially the Bengalis - can excel in tests of physical strength, hard work and endurance. That this is not true is being proved by fresh instances every day. Just the other day, the Mohan Bagan players at Calcutta have given us yet another great testimonial of the fact.
Figure 3.11. “Mohun Bagan Football Daler Egaro Jan” [The Eleven Players of the Mohan Bagan Football Team], Photographic illustration for “Football-e Banglaire Jay” Mukul, July-August 1911.
In this issue, we are printing a photograph of all those players [who had played and won the match]. You will see that apparently, they do not seem to possess any extraordinary physical prowess but they had defeated many English soldier teams. (63-64)

The author describes with elation how the East Yorkshires – a team that had defeated the fabulous Royal Scotts by two goals – were no match for Mohan Bagan’s skill and game strategies. The article ends with a note of jubilation and a fervent swadeshi spirit as the author passionately describes that proud moment in Bengali racial history when Mohan Bagan was awarded the silver shield and “thousands of Bengalis applauded in unison”.

A football or cricket match between an English club (often called a ‘gora’ or ‘white’ team) and a native team, with the sanctioned combat between contesting teams in a game, evidently became politicised with colonial antagonisms. Such a match between the coloniser and the colonised could be seen as a “psychological head-on collision with the colonial masters, a masculine confrontation on the cultural battlefield of the maidan”. With the idea of a ‘battle’ built into the very structure of such sport, the playground of such a match provided an ‘official’ and public space for a test of strength between the coloniser and the colonised. The arena as well as the game represents a territory and a space in which one’s superiority over the other is decisively established.
and officially accepted, albeit temporarily. Under a growing awareness of colonial oppression and a rising sense of nationalism, the spectacle of a Bengali team ‘playing’ in unison to ‘vanquish’ the foreign players undoubtedly instilled a sense of burning patriotism among the players and the audience as they teamed up in opposition against the *gora* sahibs.68

The much talked about triumph of the Bengalis at the 1911 Shield, naturally endowed with all sorts of anti-imperialist symbolisms, became a landmark in the indigenous history in more ways than one. As a manifestation of native superiority on the sporting turf, it was long remembered and sung about with explicit nationalist rhetoric. The following article published in 1920 in *Mouchak*, revives the memories of the same victory – emphasizing, at the same time, the adversities that the native team faced.69 “The English football teams have professional players while the Bengali clubs have to do with amateurs. The Bengalis play barefoot whereas English wear boots that have spikes that prevent them from slipping” (161). More importantly, it marks the beginning of an indigenous tradition of Bengali football as an aftermath.

Many years back when a Bengali club had won the Trades Cup for the first time there was a great uproar. Even then no one ever thought that one day the Bengalis’ would win the Shield . . . Mohan Bagan had won the Trades Cup thrice in the past. When
Mohan Bagan defeated several English clubs of repute to win the Shield, that victory generated a lot of enthusiasm. Bengali football clubs mushroomed everywhere and multiplied by the dozen everyday. Now we have so many football clubs that you can hardly keep a count. (161)

Writings as these must have made a significant impression on the young readers. They showed that the British who were generally held to be “always victorious” were no longer absolutely invincible and made them believe in the strength of their own people, especially as a unified race. As articulated in the last lines of the article, the “moral impact of the victory” had dramatically altered the social status of the sport and that of the players almost overnight (Bandyopadhyay, 38). Boria Majumdar argues, in his paper concerning a larger sporting culture, that a triumph against the foreign power in the sporting field could very well have signaled hope for similar feats in other areas of state and politics. From the early sport-related articles like Gnanadanandini Devi’s “Byam” (Balak, 1885), admiring the English prowess in sport, work and life and desiring the same for Bengali boys, to the steady confidence and jubilant overtones of “Football” (Mouchak, 1920), the Bengali juvenile periodicals document a transformation of the colonised sporting fields to those most visibly asserting an indigenous authority and articulating a passionate nationalism.
Notes to Chapter III


3. Quoted in *Account of the Operations of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India* Vol 12 (Dehra Doon: Survey of India, Trigonometrical Branch, 1890), 3. Lambton’s plans, proposed in 1799, were passed in 1800. In colonial map-making Lambton was preceded by James Renell – the surveyor-general of Bengal.


10. Gillian Avery, *Childhood’s Pattern: A Study of the Heroes and Heroines of Children’s Fiction, 1770-1950* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), 169. She illustrates her point by from Hain Friswell’s *Out and About* where the boy hero Flook says, “I mean to be an engineer and go among Indians and beat them and blow them up... I would fight for my country like – like a Briton.”


15. In the second issue, the editor of *Bibidhratha* mentions that some readers have requested the magazine to publish maps along with the articles of geographic interest. These, the readers feel, “will greatly benefit their understanding and knowledge”. Incidentally, the *Bibidhartha* office did prepare a map of the country with its important cities, roads, rivers, mountains and other places of importance.
costing a rupee and four annas. See, Editor, “Pathak Mahashaydigake Nibedan”, *Bibidhratha Sangraha*, November-December, 1851, 32.


19. Adityakumar Chattopadhyay, “Alexander Selkirk”, *Sakha*, August 1888 to October 1888; Amritalal Gupta, “Robinson Paribar”, *Mukul*, November-December 1902 and serially from June-July 1903 to March-April 1905. The story of Robinson Crusoe was already popular from an earlier phase in the history of vernacular publishing. It had been cheaply available in adapted and translated versions. The one published by the Vernacular Literature Society, in particular, had seen a rapid sale. Rabindranath Tagore recalls his wish to be a Cruose in *My Boyhood Days*: “It [an old palanquin which lay out of use] was to me an island in midst of the ocean, and I on my holidays became Robinson Crusoe.” Quoted in *My Life in My Words* ed. Uma Das Gupta (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2006), 17.


36. Many of these travelogues in the children’s magazines had been written by women like Nalinibala Basu, Abala Basu, Krishnabhobini Das, Surama Ray, Subarnaprabha Basu, Labanyaprabha Sarkar, Kumudini Mitra and Leela Pal. In a colonial cross-cultural context, it is relevant to note Norcia’s study of the marginal geographies produced by English women for children. She draws attention to the fact that “because their voices were not welcome in scientific or academic circles, in courts of law or shipping yards or in the policy-making sessions of civil servants stationed in the empire, these women chose to write for child audiences . . . these texts presented women authors with a socially acceptable outlet for intellectual activity and a means of participating in the scientific and imperial discourses of their day, carefully couched as service to young people, an endeavor already long established as an appropriate calling for women, who filled roles as governesses, teachers, mothers, and nurses.” (3).

The social restrictions limiting the peripheries of Bengali women in the late nineteenth century were far more confining than those faced by their Western counterparts. Therefore these travelogues by Bengali women in children’s journals, at a time when women were beginning to assign their names to published works, could be rewarding areas of research in terms of negotiating social roles and defining new spaces.


42. Editor, “Ashcharjya Paritran”, *Sathi*, February-March 1894, 216-21. There are some tales, like “Cheeta Dwara Shikar” [Hunting by a Cheetah] in *Sakha* that are set in African forests and describe exotic adventures abroad.


44. [Pramadaranjan Ray], “Boner Khabor”, *Sandesh*, serialised intermittently from July-August 1913 to September-October 1914, reprinted in *Sandesh* eds. Rajshekhar Saha.
   A civil engineer form B.E. college, Shibpur, Pramadaranjan, the youngest brother of Upendrakishore Ray, had joined the office of the “Surveyor General of India” and had undertaken extensive travel in wild and difficult terrains. These writings on his experiences in Indian wilderness predate those of Jim Corbett. See, Hemantakumar Adhya, *Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri*, Bharat Sahityakar Pustakmala (Kolkata: Sahitya Academy, 1997), 6-7.


54. Rabindranath Tagore, “Lathir upar Lathi”, *Balak*, May-June 1885, 60-63; reprinted in *Balak* eds. Parthajit Gangopadhyay, 244-47.

56. Prasannamayee Devi, “Purba Katha” in *Phire Dekha* Vol1 (Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 2010), 28. Parts of “Purba Katha”, especially the sections concerning the author’s childhood, had also been serialised in *Mukul*.


61. [Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri], “Khela”, *Sandesh*, May-June 1913, 58-60.

62. It is relevant, in this context, to note Tony Mason’s remark that “team games in particular those which were thought valuable for teaching conformity and solidarity and football, cricket, hockey and rugby were rapidly being established as central parts of the curriculum in schools all over the Empire from the 1880s”. See. Tony Mason, “Football on the *Maidan*: Cultural Imperialism in Calcutta”, *The Cultural Bond: Sport, Empire, Society* ed. J.A. Mangan (London: Frank Cass &Co. Ltd., 1992), 142.

63. Boria Majumdar’s article “The Vernacular in Sport History” establishes a strong argument against the earlier histories of sporting journalism in Bengal - like those of Mason - on their sole reliance of English press reports. Majumdar shifts focus and breaks new ground, to consider the reports of the same matches in the vernacular presses. Majumdar states, “while English journals and newspapers explain the spread of British sports in terms of an imperial agenda vernacular literature argues to the contrary”. However he takes only slight notice of the volume of sport journalism in children’s periodicals, and refers in passing, only to two
articles from *Sakha* and *Mukul*. Boria Majumdar, “The Vernacular in Sport History”, *EPW* XXXVII 29 (20th July 2002), 3069-75.


67. Kaushik Bandyopadhyay, “1911 A Retrospective” in *Sport in South Asian Society* ed. Boria Majumdar and J.A. Mangan (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 29. In his retrospective analysis of the 1911 victory, Bandyopadhyay quotes Paul Dimeo: “1911 victory was a moment of nationalist resistance when the ideological underpinnings of colonialism, the beliefs in innate British superiority and Indian physical fraility were dramatically and publicly undone”.

