Introduction

The incident of a printing press arriving by a boat at Madnabati, a settlement some thirty miles north of Maldah, on a day in September 1798 has often been recounted in books dealing with the history of print in Bengal.¹ Being brought over from Calcutta, the wooden press was a generous gift from George Udny – the owner of an indigo factory at Madnabati - to William Carey and his associates of the Baptist Missionary Society.² Entrusted with the duty of spreading the Gospel among heathens Carey had aimed to set up a printing press in the locality for the purpose of disseminating the word of God among the natives. Watching the missionaries’ enthusiasm as the strange machine sailed up the river, the native onlookers took it to be a sacred deity and christened it as ‘sahebder thakur’ or ‘the sahibs’ idol’. The incident as well as the local appellation is deeply emblematic of the enormous changes just beginning to unfurl over Bengal and India over the next century. They bring together the two major catalysts that had set in motion a series of radical transformations in the history of Bengal: one, the foreign agency represented by the ‘saheb’ and two, the ‘idol’ or the printing press. The story also provides an appropriate curtain-raiser to this thesis which engages with the birth and development of children’s
books in Bengal. For it was through the allied forces of the missionaries and the printing press that the seeds of a juvenile print culture were sown in Bengal. In January 1800, Carey removed the seat of the Mission to Serampore, a town sixteen miles north of Calcutta, where he along with Joshua Marshman and William Ward set up a printing office with the same printing press brought from Madnabati and types purchased from Calcutta. It was from this press, later named the Serampore Mission Press that the first Bengali children’s book was issued in 1801. *Shishuganer Pustak* [Children’s Book] – “a children’s book on Christianity”, in spite of being overtly proselytising in spirit, claims the honour of being the first printed book designed for juvenile readers in Bengal.

In many ways, the nineteenth century represents a time that saw the birth of modern Bengal. Through the course of these hundred years Bengal was the epicenter of the tectonic shifts taking place in the economic, political, cultural and social history of the Indian subcontinent. One of the first provinces to experience a ‘renaissance’ in the wake of a colonial modernity, it became – almost simultaneously - a stronghold of the British power in India as well as a nurturer of an incipient nationalism. Pushed into a momentum beyond control, heady with the exhilaration of a new life and yet registering an unease over
unprecedented changes and feeling the tensions of a growing empire, it was indeed the best and the worst of times for Bengal.

While the gamut of changes in the political, institutional and cultural spheres are well-documented in critical historiographies that have developed over the years, the parallel shifts in the private spheres have drawn academic attention much more recently. Of these again, the least importance has perhaps been given to study the changes affecting children and the ways in which these stimuli altered Bengali childhood. Along with the momentous reconstructions transforming the public world of schools and formal education, the child in nineteenth century Bengal was also a part of the subtler reformations happening within the private domains of the home, the family and the new ideologies of child-rearing.

Through the length of the Bengal renaissance – as the myriad revolutions are collectively termed – children passed from the older practices like 

\textit{hate khari} at the village \textit{pathshala} [indigenous school] with its oral lessons and writings on plantain or palm leaves to a completely different pedagogy of sequentially graded primers, readers and moralities in the form of printed textbooks. Again, starting from purely utilitarian books of instruction, by the turn of the century, books for children began to be attractively designed and advertised as desirable objects for their
young readers. Thus juvenile reading had developed not only as a means towards an education and an employment but also as a form of leisure and was matched by a vigorous book trade in the niche sector of children’s literature. As the century progressed through the diverse and complex manifestations of the Bengal renaissance, the duration of childhood itself was stretched and expanded to include the early and the late adolescent years. With the developments of a graded learning system and a competitive book market, childhood became further differentiated in various stages like infancy, early and middle childhood, adolescence and youth. As a result of these wide-ranging changes in both the public and the private spheres of life, Bengali childhood was metamorphosed during the nineteenth century. The versions of early nineteenth century Bengali childhood as found in the autobiography of Kartikeyachandra Ray or the biography of Ramtanu Lahiri are vastly different from the ones experienced and recorded by Punyalata Chakraborty or Nirad C Chaudhuri towards the beginning of the next century.5

A print literature for children in Bengal dates back to the early nineteenth century when new-fangled ideas and novel methods under the British dominion were fast changing the nature and texture of the indigenous society. As one of the offshoots of British colonisation, this

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5 It should, however, be noted that this ‘modern’ juvenile book culture largely affected and radically redefined the concepts of childhood and pedagogy among the urban elite and middle-class society and did not have such a sweeping influence in the rural interiors.
literature very conveniently became a principal agent of the British imperial machinery and helped the colonisers to institute a socio-economic hegemony and to strengthen political control. But by the latter half of the nineteenth century, the niche print-genre, evolving through complex encounters of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ world orders, of popular culture and elitist reformations, of oral traditions and technologies of print, of indigenous practices and Western ideologies - had gathered a momentum and an agenda for generating children’s books beyond the curriculum.

The thesis traces the seeds of a reaction that became manifest towards the end of the century when the genre consistently began to articulate a desire to construct a *swadeshi* “terrain of childhood” and assesses what may be regarded as a reclaimed tradition as well as a subversive political genre.\(^6\) Focusing on the ‘leisure-time books’ for children that cropped up in Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in tacit opposition to the utilitarian text-book literature set up under a foreign rule, the study investigates the idea of a *swadesh* or a homeland in Bengali children’s literature. It studies the emerging concepts of a race and of a nation as embodied in the subterfuge of entertaining juvenile books in a colonial era.

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\(^6\) ‘Swadeshi’ in Bengali is the adjective derived from the noun ‘*swadesh*’ meaning a country of one’s own.
The dissertation views this flood of ‘homely books’ for children and the idea of ‘leisure reading’ that they unanimously promoted as a strategic departure from the public and formal reading areas (related to schools, education and examinations) that were wholly subsumed as part of a foreign government. These books, situated within the private and sovereign area of one’s home and inextricably linked with all homely traditions, essentially lay beyond the precincts of institutional control. The thesis regards this emerging area of leisure reading for children in colonial Bengal (1880-1920) as a consciously crafted space that was tactically used by a body of authors to free childhood from its colonial fetters. Using evidences from contemporary socio-political, personal and literary history it argues that in the ambience of a rising nationalism, what was ostensibly a *juvenile* and an *entertaining* genre constituted an *unthreatened* area and became an elastic medium for developing and disseminating notions of nationhood. In conclusion, the study also critiques the new social roles laid down for the readers who then came to be hailed as the nation’s ‘future citizens’.

Since the two major concerns of the thesis involve the idea of recreational books for children and articulations of nationhood in them, it is necessary at the outset to define and clarify the terms ‘children’ and ‘nationhood’ as the study uses them. As the very definition of childhood and the wider attitudes towards it are dynamic concepts in socio-cultural
history, the term ‘children’ becomes fluid and particularly elusive. In a very general sense it is used to club girls and boys of all ages from a stage of infancy till their initiation to adulthood. The latter again becomes an extremely variable factor, differing not only from one culture to another but also changing considerably within the same society with time. Through nineteenth century Bengal - the period that the dissertation engages with - the precepts of childhood were in constant flux as the older, traditional orders were giving way to vastly different systems and practices in a new colonial modernity. As the thesis is primarily concerned with print literatures for children, it limits its inclusion to a reading audience presumably from the age group of seven-eight years up to the ‘kishore’ or young-adult stage of thirteen-fourteen years. Such a stretch roughly covers the school-going period of the child who passed out of the English schooling system through the Matriculation Examination. While such a complete schooling and a subsequent passing into university level education was largely true for urban middle and upper-middleclass boys, the type and limits of formal education varied greatly with village residents and with girls. The latter were often schooled at the more traditional pathshala and left schooling once they had finished the elementary books and had acquired basic reading skills. Whether in school or not, the age group becomes important in context of the thesis in that it identifies and focuses on a
new, reading sector consisting of young boys and girls, who having learnt to read in the age of print, naturally looked for entertainment in reading.

The term ‘nationhood’ in the thesis signifies a sense of an inherited identity that underlies the foundations of an imagined, kindred community united under a ‘mother’ nation. Translated as ‘deshbodh’ in Bengali, it is a feeling that connects the self to a larger family on the commonality of a geo-political space and as a people with a shared past, present and future. The affiliated terms like ‘nationalist’ and ‘nationalism’ are used in similar senses and do not necessarily imply aggressive militancy. Since its germination in the 1860s (with the organisation of the annual Hindu Mela) for the larger part of the late nineteenth century, it was not articulated as a fully political movement but was an expression of a people trying to assert their own personality. According to one of the greatest men of those times, this nascent nationalism “was not a reactionary movement but a revolutionary one”.

While the thesis centrally investigates the emergence of entertaining books for children in colonial Bengal and the representations of nationhood in them, in the course of its analysis it also addresses areas like impact of print, book history, education, social reformations and history of childhood through the period concerned.
Methodology, Sources and Literature Review

The largest and the primary source of my investigation had been the extant books and journals published for and read by children during the nineteenth and in the early decades of the twentieth century. Factual data has been sourced from supplementary sources like nineteenth century bibliographies and catalogues as well as book advertisements and reviews published in contemporary newspapers and magazines. The thesis uses nineteenth century autobiographies, recollections and memoirs as a major repository of evidences of reading during childhood either at school or at home and also to acquire a larger picture of the changing patterns of childhood through the period in focus. Pictorial illustrations, which not only reinforced the verbal contents in children’s books but also had a high degree of appeal for juvenile audiences, were being increasingly used to make the publications more attractive for children in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Some illustrations from contemporary children’s books and periodicals have also been used as supporting documents in this dissertation. The thesis draws on secondary literature across a range of disciplines like the history of print and education in Bengal, the history of Bengal renaissance, the emergence of nationalism and popular cultural traditions in contemporary Bengali society. Because of its colonial
context and as a cross-cultural study, it also refers to critical studies on the history of childhood and children’s literature in the West.

Since my thesis concerns a colonial time and deals with a genre initiated under colonial influence, the study is broadly informed by the ideas of power and domination as expounded in the classic colonial and post-colonial criticisms of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Fanon’s theory of launching a ‘cultural resistance’ through a reclamation of the colonised peoples’ own past, Said’s critique of Eurocentric universalism and Ngugi’s defense of traditional oral literature as the indigenous voice of a colonised culture have been particularly helpful in establishing the premises of the thesis. More closely aligned to my main argument is the concept of nationhood as formulated by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. In a more local context, the study draws on the colonial-national tensions as discussed in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* and *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* by Partha Chatterjee and *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* by Ashis Nandy. *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* by Bernard Cohn, *Masks of Conquest* by Gauri Viswanathan and Henry Schwarz’s article “Aesthetic Imperialism: Literature and the Conquest of India” have been important in foregrounding the imperialist agenda in education under British rule.
For studying the advent and impact of print and print-related technologies, my main references had been *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* by Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *A History of Reading in the West* by Cavallo and Chartier and *The English Common Reader* by Richard D. Altick. Works such as Mufakhkhar Hussain Khan’s *The Bengali Book, Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal* edited by Partha Chatterjee, *Dui Shataker Bangla Mudran o Prakashan* edited by Chittaranjan Bandyopadhyay, *Print Areas* edited by Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty and *Nyara Bat-talay Jay K’bar* by Gautam Bhadra have provided vital information in the areas of print and book history in Bengal.

In tracing the movement from a mimic genre initiated within a colonial infrastructure and heavily influenced by trends in Western counterparts, to a full fledged indigenous genre articulating a national consciousness, a major part of the research becomes a cross-cultural study. Indeed, in matters of printing as well as illustrations, the western influence continued well into early twentieth century period. For briefly outlining the connections between Bengali children’s periodicals and books and their English predecessors, the study considers the history and development of British children’s literature from late eighteenth to the nineteenth century with a special focus on imperialist ideas. For this, I have drawn necessary data from the well-known histories of the genre.

School texts and didactic moralities were the very first books to be printed for children in colonial Bengal and these laid the foundations for a children’s print culture in the vernacular medium. Therefore, though the central focus of this study lies outside the boundaries of text-books and institutional curriculum, a survey of these texts, along with the pedagogical intentions and educational policies that shaped and defined
them, form the historical context of the thesis proper. The areas of colonial education, vernacular text books and indigenous modes of education prevalent earlier have been extensively researched by scholars, especially in vernacular criticism. Apart from primary evidences sourced from old and rare texts accessed from libraries, the background information in Chapter I is supplemented by data and critical analysis from existing critical works like *Bangla Deshaja Shikshadhara* by Poromesh Acharya, *Bangla Primer Sangraha* and *Bangla Gadye Nitishiksha* by Ashis Khastagir and *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* by Sanjay Seth.

Apart from classic historical works like Sumit Sarkar’s *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, a number of books in the area of cultural studies – for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe*, Ashis Nandy’s *Alternative Sciences*, Mrinalini Sinha’s *Colonial Masculinity*, Sumathi Ramaswamy’s *The Goddess and the Nation*, Sumanta Banerjee’s *The Parlour and the Streets* and J.A. Magan and Boria Majumdar’s *Sport in South Asian Society* – have been invaluable in framing the perspective of my thesis. Studies like Meredith Borthwick’s *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*, Malavika Karlekar’s *Voices from Within*, Tanika Sarkar’s *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* and Sibaji Bandyopadhyay’s *Bangla Shishu Sahityer Chhoto Meyera* have helped in
identifying the ideologies set up for girl readers and in highlighting the
gender roles that were propagated through children’s books.

Children’s books – as researchers and critics have observed - are
almost always regarded as frivolous and ephemeral. In Bengal too, where
children’s literature has a rich two-hundred-year-old print history and
has been a staple part of a popular culture and a thriving publishing
industry in the vernacular area, the genre has attracted little critical
attention and has remained largely neglected in historiography and
research. Nevertheless, as a field gaining in popularity in a changing
climate of colonial influence and nationalist enterprises, as a discipline
involving parents and their wards, teachers and students, schools and
homes and public and private spheres, the genre did involve and reflect
the politics of power and control as also the counter tendencies of unrest
and opposition. The few histories of Bengali children’s literature or
bibliographies of Bengali children’s books that have been written include
_Satabdir Shishu-sahitya_ by Khagendranath Mitra, _Bangla Shishu Sahitya
Granthapanji_ by Bani Basu, _Shishu Sahitya: Nana Prasanga_ by Atwar
Rahman and _Children’s Literature of Bengal_ by Pravash Ranjan Dey.
Debiprasad Bandyopadhyay’s introduction to the more recently
published anthology of Bengali children’s literature _Shishu Kishore
Sahitya Sangraha_ sketches a brief but insightful history of the genre. The
chapters devoted to the genre in _Dui Shatakaer Bangla Mudran o_
Prakashan provide important facts regarding the print history of children’s books. Contemporary bibliographical records like James Long’s *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Works* (1855), *Returns Relating to Publications in the Bengali Language* (1857), the yearly Bengal Library Catalogues and more general lists of publications like Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan’s *The Bengali Book* and Asoknath Mukhopadhyay’s *Early Bengali Serials, 1818-1950* have also been useful for sourcing publishing data. The anthology of old Bengali primers edited by Ashis Khastagir, Amal Pal’s chronological compilation of the content-pages of five Bengali children’s periodicals from the nineteenth century and the reprint of *Sandesh* (Vols 1& 2) published by Parul Prakashani have been very helpful for reproducing authentic data in cases where original texts could not be located.12

Aspects of Bengali children’s books and children’s reading patterns are subjects that have only occasionally surfaced as subordinate references in books dealing with other print genres. *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal, The Bengali Book, Art and Nationalism in Colonial Bengal, Bangla Gadye Nitishiksha, Print Areas* and *Nyara Bat-talay Jay K’bar* provide brief glimpses of this unexplored field while discussing other areas of print in nineteenth century Bengal. Besides such passing references, full length critical studies on Bengali children’s books have been very few. Again, of the critical works that
focus on the juvenile print genre, most have been devoted to studies of
textbooks and school curriculum like those by Poromesh Acharya, Ashis
Khaustagir, Gauri Viswanathan and Sanjay Seth. Only a handful of
scholarly studies foray into the area of what can be called ‘children’s
storybooks’. Among these, Sibaji Bandyopadhyay’s pioneering work
*Gopal-Rakhal Dvandvasamas: Upanibeshbad o Bangla Shishusahitya* is
the most acclaimed. A recognized expert in the field, through the course
of this massive study Bandyopadhyay delves out hegemonic
manifestations of race, culture, class and gender in Bengali children’s
books while unraveling the mechanics of the ‘good boy’ and ‘bad boy’
stereotypes in a colonial context. One of his following publications in the
area *Bangla Shishu Sahityer Chhoto Meyera* engages with gender issues
in popular children’s books. Some books, focused on individual authors
of Bengali children’s literature offer a survey and critical account of their
works for instance Hemantakumar Adhya’s biographical volume on
Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri, Manabendra Bandyopadhyay’s analysis
of Rabindranath Tagore’s writings for children and Krishnarup
Chakraborty’s book on Sukumar Ray. 13 Besides these, the existing
scholarly materials in the area are limited to articles and paper-length
studies. Each of the papers generally concentrates on a single text or a
literary type like nursery rhymes or science fiction. They include among
others, “A Juvenile Periphery: The Geographies of Literary Childhood in
Colonial Bengal” by Satadru Sen, “An Annotated Chhara-Punthi: Nursery

Inseparable from any history of children’s books is the history of childhood in the corresponding society and culture. Unlike the groundbreaking works like Philippe Aries’ *Centuries of Childhood*, Lloyd deMause’s *The History of Childhood* and Linda A. Pollock’s *Forgotten Children* that discuss and debate the histories of childhood in Western societies, the vast area of pre-colonial Bengali childhood yet remains to be critically examined. The traditional concepts of childhood as represented in medieval and early modern Bengali texts are yet to be researched to produce a substantial body of study that would collectively outline and define the principles and paradigms of indigenous Bengali childhood. In my research the most fertile sources for studying the experiences of childhood in nineteenth century Bengal have been the autobiographies and memoirs of various men and women who had recorded their childhood days either for publication or simply as stray recollections in personal journals. *Colonial Childhoods: The Juvenile Periphery of India 1850-1945* by Satadru Sen, “Reconstructing Childhood” in *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias* by Ashis Nandy and Judith E. Walsh’s critical observations in *Growing Up in British India*
have also been helpful in framing critical ideas about indigenous childhood in absence of any substantial scholarship in the area.

The major focus of this thesis is to study the emergence of a leisure-reading culture for children in Bengal and to examine the nationalist discourses generated through it. It shows how this ‘new’ print area was used in a colonial society, to preach ideas of nationhood to the children of an enslaved ‘mother-nation’. While certain sections of Sibaji Bandyopadhyay’s *Gopal-Rakhal Dvandvasamas* and Satadru Sen’s “A Juvenile Periphery” deal with colonial-national contestations that are similar to the agenda of my study, the development of reading as a constructive pastime and the idea of entertaining and homely books as a manoeuvred space in a colonial ambience are subjects that have remained unexplored in any earlier work in the genre. This study considers the genre of recreational books for children as part of the numerous techno-cultural developments happening in nineteenth century Bengal and as a phenomenon that in turn transformed the idea of Bengali childhood and reconstructed Bengali social history.

As the study attempts to identify the sources of Western pedagogies and ideologies that worked their ways into Bengali children’s books from their overseas predecessors, it has a sustained cross-cultural dimension. This becomes relevant and essential not only as the study
involves an area moulded under colonial impact but also as one that became a contested terrain between Western modernity and indigenous traditions. Apart from the central critical question involving ideas of nationhood in recreational literature for children, the thesis also engages with areas like print history (of children’s books) and history of childhood in Bengal.

Plan of the Thesis

The thesis has a simple structure. Following the introduction, Chapter I offers a brief survey of the various missionary agencies and the British educational policies in India – under the combined impact of which the systems of education in Bengal were transformed by the middle of the nineteenth century. It shows how with the development of vernacular printing facilities and with a growing preference for English education among natives, the earlier pathshala–curriculum was dismantled and a new graded-system of text-books was fitted out for schools through numerous primers, readers, moralities and books of science. These books – which were the first to be printed for children in Bengal – embodied either evangelical or rationalist principles. The new education asserted an unquestioned superiority of the West over the
traditional indigenous pedagogies and literatures which were invariably seen as irrational and obsolete. Such texts thus dissociated the young readers from their traditional past and engendered in their minds a love and admiration for everything Western. However these were not the only books available to literate children who often surreptitiously turned to the cheap and entertaining volumes of the miscellaneous Battala literature – a thriving printing trade that catered to the popular, pre-print tastes of the masses. The drudgery of dry books of learning, the development of a new reading sector and a reformed attitude towards children that considered the Battala culture to be damaging for the young minds, all contributed to create a rising demand for a recreational literature appropriate for children. This chapter provides the context and background information for the study and takes account of the divergent reading areas cropping up in nineteenth century Bengal. It underlines the acute social necessity felt around the middle of the century, for a ‘proper’ literature that would amuse juvenile readers and keep them away from ‘bad’ books and harmful reading.

The first form of publication to cater to the demands of this new and growing reading market had been a group of children’s periodicals that arrived in close succession and competed with each other in the second half of the nineteenth century. These juvenile magazines played an important interim role in linking the dry lesson books and the full-
fledged entertaining books that began appearing by the turn of the century. Through periodicals like *Sakha*, *Balak*, *Sathi*, *Sakha o Sathi* and *Mukul*, Bengali children were sanctioned a wider reading culture that could virtually include any subject. In a wider context of a brewing nationalism, this area of juvenile print, by the virtue of its miscellaneous and flexible nature, came to be used as an informal space where nationalist ideas could be voiced and communicated to the young.

Chapters II and III study the late nineteenth and early twentieth century juvenile magazines as an emerging area of leisurely reading for children. Aiming to merge education with entertainment, these periodicals published interesting articles on science and scientific inventions, reports of famous expeditions and geographical discoveries, travelogues, adventure stories, fictional narratives as well as writings about various constructive pastimes including outdoor games and sports. The broad patterns of these periodicals were borrowed from the English children’s magazines and their miscellaneous contents often reinforced the imperialist binaries vis-à-vis the coloniser-colonised cultures (rational-irrational, civilised-uncivilised, manly-effeminate and so on). However it was through the writings of these periodicals that these hegemonies also came to be challenged, countered and subverted. As the new knowledge was inducted into the mettle and temper of the society, the foreign disciplines of “The New Sciences” and “Masculine
Geographies” were Indianised. The two chapters study how the fields of ‘science, technology and industry’ and those of ‘travel, adventure and sport’ – the very areas of imperial authority and colonial domination, gradually came to be animated with an indigenous fervour and collectively expressed a new spirit – that of a racial and a national pride.

The discipline of history, like others in the curriculum, came to be radically redefined around the axes of rationality and reality. Macaulay’s infamous Minute had asserted that Indian history was “abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long”. Following the colonial impact on education, the history text books for school children not only included a history of the Western world but also sifted the mythical from the real and constructed a Western historiography of Indian past. In this context, Chapter IV is devoted to the analysis of alternative histories that resolved this schism in the entertaining children’s books. Concentrating on the numerous mythological narratives and folklore that filled the children’s periodicals and appeared as entertaining story books for children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century period, this chapter shows how traditional histories – once discarded as absurd and superstitious in a foreign curriculum - were reclaimed and retold in print for children. An important and unique distinction of these indigenous histories published for children, lay in their use of original and imaginative
illustrations. The shifts from a borrowed technology and a revamped, colonial art form to an area of native expertise and indigenous portraiture were most emphatically and exuberantly manifested through the marvellous pictures that appeared in the books of epics, mythologies and folktales for children. As part of the chapter devoted to the alternative, indigenous histories in Bengali children’s literature, the thesis studies these changing trends in the field of art and examines the various aspects of the new, swadeshi cult of book illustration.

The first section of Chapter V “‘Amar Desh’: Home, Homeland and Homely Books for Children”, explores the image of a motherland that repeatedly surfaced verbally and visually in the various genres of Bengali juvenile literature. This image, the chapter argues, not only defined the geo-political identity of the nation for the readers but also made them conscious of their natural kinship with the mother-figure. Being hailed as sons and daughters of the same mother(land), they were necessarily knit into a familial relationship and were made, by the inevitability of their births, a part of a larger, national community. This section also discusses the nationalist roles that were set up for the children of the nation, reminding them of their moral responsibility and familial duty by which they were bound to ‘free’ their captive ‘mother’. Distinctly demarcated by gender and bringing in a conservative twist to the question of indigenous identity, such roles were copiously displayed in
the various recreational literatures for children and provided the models in which these literatures wanted to recast their boy and girl readers. Building on the nationalist metaphors embodied by the kindred relations of the mother and the family, the second part of Chapter V reviews the familial space of the ‘home’. In the context of a struggle for power and control in a colonial era, especially in the arena of Bengali children’s literature, this space, the thesis argues, came to symbolise the extreme opposite of the institutional domain of the ‘school’. Thus where the school, being an integral part of the colonial apparatus, stood for the public sphere of formal education and foreign discipline, the ‘home’ represented a private space, imbued with kindred affections and associated with a sense of freedom (from textbooks and punishments) and leisure. As the thesis sees it, the home as a sovereign territory becomes an important space in harbouring and a significant factor in defining an indigenous, recreational literature for colonial children.

The conclusion engages with the politics of homely books for children. It shows how the concept of home as a private and sovereign space and the idea of voluntary and pleasurable reading were fused together in shaping a ‘free’ space for children through homely books. Filled with indigenous tales and touched with familiar voices of loving grandparents and nurses, reminiscent of comforting bedtimes and kindred affections, these children’s books were grounded in the
securities of the child’s home and family. Unlike the earlier school
textbooks, these were free of the fearful associations of punishments and
examinations and were ‘story books’ to be read for pleasure. Clearly set
beyond the boundaries of institutional education, these books, by their
very intimate associations with the homely sphere and with the practice
of reading by choice and reading as leisure, could ideologically
circumvent colonial domination and establish an indigenous literary
space for children in Bengal.
Notes to Introduction


2. Carey had been one of the earliest missionaries to be appointed in India under the Baptist Missionary Society and was a founder of the Baptist Mission at Serampore. At the time of the incident Carey had a job as a Superintendent at Udny's indigo factory. In some books the name appears as George Woodney, as in Sisir Kumar Das, Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College of Fort William (Delhi: Orion Publications, 1978).

3. This shift was due to the political asylum that the missionaries got from the Danish Governor of Serampore. At the time the East India Company was cautious about allowing missionary activities in their territories – they feared that religious interference might cause adverse or even rebellious responses among the natives.

4. Khan, The Bengali Book, 204. Khan's evidence for this book, which is not mentioned in any other historiography either of printing in Bengal or of Bengali children’s books, is conclusive as he provides not only the location where a copy of this 1801 publication is preserved but also a photographic reproduction of its title page.


7. In actuality, the age of taking the Matriculation or the Entrance Examination seem to have varied anywhere between fourteen and seventeen during the nineteenth century. With the Wood’s Dispatch in 1854 the privately run primary, middle and secondary English-language institutions became the main feeder-schools to the university system. In the year 1857 Satyendranath Tagore, aged fifteen, had appeared for the first Entrance Examination conducted by the Calcutta University. Bipin Pal writes about sitting for his school leaving examination when he was around fourteen years old. Sarala Devi, born in 1872, mentions getting admitted to Bethune School when seven and a half years old and passing out of Bethune College with a B.A. degree at the age of seventeen. A fifteen-year-old Subhas Chandra Bose ranked second in the entire University in the Matriculation Examination of 1913.


11. With the exception of Debiprasad Bandyopadhyay’s introduction these works mainly offer chronological surveys and are not critical histories of a literary genre. At least two more accounts of Bengali children’s literature had been authored - one by Asha Gangopadhyay and another by Nabendu Sen – but both are currently out of print and no existing copies of their works could be located.

