Chapter 3

The State of Children’s Literature

Here I take up the subject of ‘children’s literature’, its putative origin (or beginnings, to choose a more ‘secular’ word), its present status inside and outside the academia, and its ideological drive or valence with particular reference to ACK. We would trace the development of children’s literature – often used as an umbrella term to incorporate disparate material as well as a book-trade category – in post-independence India, and place ACK within that history. It is important to remember that ACK, being a comic book series, comes under the category of pulp or easy consumption items although there is a conscious effort to promote its educative role for young readers. Hence, it is as much likely to be treated as something other than children’s literature material. It can imply both less, and more, than what is communicated commonsensically by the term ‘children’s literature’. Less, when described as comics (as casual ‘fun’ reading) and more, when they are bought and read as accessible literature on Indian ‘tradition’. The responses of two major reader-consumer groups of ACK – a parent/guardian who is often an actual buyer/occasional reader and a child/intended reader – would usually vary between these two kinds. When read as comics, ACK has as much (arguably somewhat similar) use-value as toys, i.e. as something that a child will enjoy and will eventually grow out of. Or, it might fulfill a particular function, say that of a gift (birthday gift or prize for good conduct) or serve as casual reading material for an overnight journey. For now, we return to the topic we promised to begin with, namely, what we mean or understand by the nomenclature ‘children’s literature’.
As soon as we even try to start with a suitable definition of the genre, difficulties emerge. The first of these problems is indeed a cause of major concern – how fair is it to call a body, multifarious as it is, of literature meant to be read or consumed by children as ‘children’s literature’ that is almost invariably written or produced by adults? It is a paradox that has not ceased to baffle literary critics to this day as it leads to important concerns regarding narration or representation, its method(ology), and ultimately ideology. Also, such literature is often chosen by parents for their own children based on the formers’ own memory of having read that literature at a young age. All of these make the aptness of the term even more doubtful. And adults do read these books anyway, for ensuring that their kids are exposed to the right kind of stuff or simply as sheer diversion.

Should we then propose to start from an opposite direction? Should we consider the stuff written by children, often very formless, as something more significant than whimsical namby-pamby? We are then left with a body of writing that is not much to speak of in terms of volume, let alone that of literary merit – once again an adult criterion or prerogative. Also, this literature would have a highly unstable constituency in terms of readership. Who are likely to read and make some sense out of them? The young person’s peer group, his/her parents, guardians or schoolteachers, (academic) professionals and/or researcher-activists? The additional problem is that the documentation and archiving of this literature are next to non-existent. And even if we agree upon the constitution of this

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1 Examples of the last kind are often found in the form of organized contests on special days, such as 14th November in India, incidentally the birthday of the first Indian prime minister and beloved ‘chacha’ Jawaharlal Nehru (a figure discussed in more detail later in this chapter), or those organized by specific NGOs and corporate bodies or publishing houses such as CBT and NBT. Academic appraisals of literature composed or read by children are found in the pages of the socio-anthropological journals, such as *Childhood* (London and NY: Sage Publications), or more ‘literary’ journals, such as *Children’s Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
corpus, a wishful thinking or speculative project at best, its status as ‘literature’ is likely to be based on an unmanageably varied, personal and unpredictable set of criteria. But it is worth thinking about its ideological and (literary) theoretical implications – does it rest uncomfortably within the accepted practice or institution of literature because it would resist standardized, or perhaps any, canon-formation?

The riddle called ‘Children’s Literature’: adult-child binary

Leaving aside this speculative and somewhat radical proposition, let us return to a more workable scenario – what we mean or understand by the category called ‘children’s literature’ at present. Needless to say, like many other instances of quasi-universals, this rubric is constituted by contingent formations variable according to time and place, though we tend to ascribe some commonality to all young children. The possible explanations of the term, a cursory glance would reveal, are more than one. Is it a literature read and meant to be enjoyed by children and restricted to them only? Is it then, by implication, a sub-set of the representational and creative practice christened as literature with a capital ‘L’, therefore a specialized sector? Does the word ‘children’s’ carry a sense of what we mean by ‘childlike’ or ‘childish’? Is it simply a descriptive or a proprietary usage, perhaps also implying property as in a periodic table in textbooks of chemistry?²

² Some would prefer, and somewhat correctly since children usually play a very small part in determining the nature and content of this literature, to re-phrase the term as ‘literature for children’. We will see from the discussion to follow that this one, although relatively better from the angle of literary production, is not satisfactory from the point of view of (historical) practice. A good part of what we now accept as part of this body of literature were either not meant for children at all (Robinson Crusoe) or they form only one part of the ‘intended’ audience (Lewis Carroll).
Further questions follow. Assuming that this literature is primarily meant for children, are the principles of difference from adult literature regarding its conception, construction, and response structurally built in? There are arguments on both sides. Here is Peter Hunt, a long-time scholar on children’s literature, quoting C. S. Lewis, an expert on Medieval and Renaissance (European) literature and a writer of popular stories for children: “I am almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children’s story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children’s story” (italics mine) and further, “In much the same way, a book which is not worth reading at age 50 is not worth reading at age 10, either.”

Observe Lewis’ comment quoted in the same book earlier: “When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty, I read them openly. When I became a man, I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness…” These two quotations, especially with its references to age, might seem to make the same point at first but are leveled at (setting) two different, and related, parameters of reading. The first one is that of literary merit and/or enjoyment, the latter that of the passage or growth of the reader/reading subject. Are we also looking at a (micro-) narrative of identity per se in the latter case? If so, is the (un)learning that Lewis speaks of – an act of recovery or revisiting that one’s adult age makes possible – to be thought as a particular juncture in succeeding stages of a more or less continuous narrative? Students of literature are familiar with such schema in plotting the works of

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4 Ibid., 2. Compare this with St Paul’s words (I Corinthians, XIII, 11): “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things”. The echo, of course, might just have been incidental. However, Lewis’s own writings for children – the ‘Chronicles of Narnia’ series – are replete with Christian ideas.

5 This juncture unsettles the adult-child dichotomy and undermines the usual bias for the adult in society, even if momentarily and in an act of imagination or reflection. One can hardly overstate its importance as praxis.
particular poets. Examples that immediately come to mind are those of the artisan-poet-engraver William Blake or the nineteenth-century poet laureate Wordsworth, both frontrunners of the so-called Pelagian revival\(^6\) in the history of British literature. And both, to recount a critical commonplace sometimes offered in classrooms and enthusiastically reproduced in answer scripts of graduate students, seem to present a case for second or later innocence in adults following a quasi-Hegelian schema (innocence-experience-‘higher’ innocence). How do we describe this second and a more ‘mature innocence’, if such an oxymoron is allowed?

We do refer to old age as being a second childhood of sorts, however loosely\(^7\). There are crucial differences though, between the examples just cited and the problematic we set out to delineate, namely the mechanism, or operation, of the adult-child binary. The first line of caution here should be not to allow any uncritical extension of standardized humanist lit-crit analysis, a specific methodological tool, to the biographies of these poets, and finally a generalized schema of understanding\(^8\). That would be to deny the

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\(^6\) The term takes after Pelagius (c. 354 – 415/440), possibly the earliest spokesperson for children (so to speak, the immediate context or point was doctrinal) in the history of western civilization. There was a long and famous controversy between him and St. Augustine, the then Bishop of Hippo and famous theologian in which the former was indicted but not punished. This day very few of Pelagius’ documents survive, but he is generally accepted as one of the early ideologues of the Doctrine of Free Will, especially in relation to children as born outside the pale of Original Sin.

\(^7\) It is impossible not to maintain the difference within one’s life-span, although the creaturely and animal-like stages are sometimes apparently, and also experientially – in terms of sensory reaction – similar, hence the effective metaphor. The common grandeur of this cliché lies in its unfailing experiential factuality and as an idiomatic expression, in its formal economy as statement.

\(^8\) There is one more confusion or problematic, especially in case of Wordsworth since he insists on the autobiographical element in his poems, and occupies a distinctly different position from Blake in the matter of Christianity as personal/institutional faith. It is of crucial importance how the reader can accommodate the formal-representational element of persona in case of longue durée of Wordsworth that provide occasions for contemplation and results in a (imaginative-reflective) round-trip or completion, however provisional, of the circuit of personal (and poetic) growth – a theater of self as it were – and in movement. The child-figure in Blake would more readily approximate a Pelagian (radical, non- or anti-orthodox Christian) scheme.
specificity and autonomy (or ‘relative autonomy’) of a representational practice – the sphere and/or institution of literature. Secondly, the nature of this conciliation (between ‘adult’ and ‘childlike’/‘childish’ persona in an adult) is extremely subjective, tenuous and contingent, hence any universalization is ruled out. It is at best spoken of as joie de vivre and at worst a malady, but always as a trait – most persuasively and ‘scientifically’ expressed in the professional language of the (‘expert’) psychologist/psychoanalyst or in the fanciful language of the poet as we just saw.

Perhaps it is as rewarding to think of these two different modalities (adult-child) as existing simultaneously in one person and forming, or performing, an identity\textsuperscript{9}. This description has one advantage over the earlier stagist framework. It is more fluid and dynamic than any accretional model and also introduces a different temporality\textsuperscript{10}. In the stagist model, one’s identity, always in journey along a more or less straight (though not necessarily horizontal) line, is directed towards a closure, even a telos. It functions (or can function) according to, as well as within, the (predominantly European) narrative of developmental psychology (on a personal plane) and at times parallel to a history of civilization (on a grander scale, as in the Darwinian schema coupling ontogeny and phylogeny). This model, in contrast, cuts through this line\textsuperscript{11}, making the existence of

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\item 9 Especially after psychoanalytic (Freudian or post-Freudian) models of the development of human personality, that is, if we need to fall back upon an accepted ‘school’ of argument and a canon.
\item 10 It might work occasionally through the lens of memory, or a more direct persistence of the childlike mode whether willed or not, or both. Memory being the apprehension of something absent in present, childhood is the theme or object of memory par excellence.
\item 11 To make things easy, it could be thought of as a vertical depth. But that would be to deny its radical potentiality. The surface-depth model is limited and also problematic as it might also bring in an attendant imagination of ‘authentic’ self, which is precisely something this model does not permit. The space has to be thought of as spewing along every direction for which a given moment forms an epicenter. I take my cue from the description of the term ‘event’, pace Deleuze. For a very brief introduction, see Miriam Fraser’s entry of the same term in Theory, Culture and Society, 23.2-3 (2006).
\end{itemize}
adult and child-ish selves in an individual (who is past the eponymous mirror-phase) not only eminently possible, but a next-to-inescapable condition. The individual is always produced in, and through, a dialogue between the two. Thus the (apparently paradoxical) enunciation by Wordsworth, often quoted as a common maxim: ‘The child is the father of man’.

Just a small point before we move on. We have been taking our cue from a scholar and accomplished writer as to how the adult and child selves are accommodated and given due weight in articulating a balanced identity. Is it then a matter of individual merit and imagination and thus beyond the capability of the ordinary mass without a face? Does not ‘growth’ connote exchanging one’s younger identity for the adult one as a rule? My submission is that the answer, in keeping with a particular meaning of ‘exchange’, can at best be ambivalent. The process is always less conclusive than what it seems to an adult person, acculturated in the modes of society. Notwithstanding the usual social pressure to become a full-blown adult, commonly encountered in the deprecating use of words such as ‘infantile’, ‘puerile’ and the like, the child-in-the-adult is always waiting around the corner, and returns at odd and unexpected moments. One need not

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12 Needless to say, by no means this is the only determining factor. And it is important to remember that the whole situation is different for a very young child, a pre-mirror phase individual and a ‘minor’.

13 Not in the sense as commonly used in market economy although even that would not be totally inapplicable.

14 Incidentally, Adorno uses this adjective to describe mass culture in *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1991).

15 It is indeed pointless to give examples, since they are so common and idiosyncratic at the same time – therein lies its beauty. In literature, one could think of the famous madeleine episode in *Swann’s Way* or to take an example closer home, *Se* (That Person) by Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore’s experimental book that includes stories, poems, illustrations and nonsense compositions, was written during the last years of his life and is both autobiographical and discursive. It reminds us of autobiographical essays by Charles Lamb (say, ‘Dream Children’) of in terms of form and immediate (fictional) context (old man talking to his grandchildren) but introduces an interesting problematic of a non-communicating adult narrator persona. In this fantastic theater of thinly disguised autobiographical characters that
necessarily be deeply reflective in the manner of Wordsworth or charged with messianic Christian ideas like Blake. More than ‘poetry’ that involves formal metric composition of some length and merit\(^\text{16}\), it is better to think of these momentary occurrences of identity as ‘poiesis’ (from Greek ‘poiein’, to invent or generate) or an everyday poetics, along the lines of de Certeau’s deployment of the term *bricolage* or “poetic ways of ‘making do’”\(^\text{17}\) that he identifies as taking place in daily practices such as walking or cooking. Although the immediate occasion of de Certeau’s statement is different (he talks of the ‘productive’ consumer in the average individual), an alignment of these two positions is viable – if by default. The supposed lack of agency of the adult who carries a latent childhood (the misfit, childish adult) and the common, unwitting consumer (a ‘consumerist’ as an actor in capitalist economy) in a leftist-ideological critique make them cognate demographic categories, in need of education or some other disciplinary exercise.

If we accept that ‘adult’ and ‘child’ as metaphors for psychological states or sociological types that operate as binaries informing each other, then the description of children’s literature as being produced by adults and oriented towards children (as in the example of Tagore’s *Se*) makes some sense. Let us examine the strength of this statement against a historical survey. J. A. Cuddon, in his entry in a dictionary of literary terms, tells us that there was hardly any literature to speak of that was targeted at children in England before

\(^{16}\) I use ‘poetry’ as sometimes used in stereotypical parlance, as being representative of any imaginative expression or reflection of sustained length.

mid or late 18th century\(^\text{18}\), apart from didactic books, textbooks and books of etiquette or moral edification. Other sources included traditional stories such as fables and folktale
d and any adult literature (romance, travelogues, ballads, chapbooks and so on) that were thought suitable. Significant examples from this last category included Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (the book Rousseau recommends for ideal education of the young man in Emile and Marx examines critically for a completely different reason, as an early heroic portrayal of homo economicus), and Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels. Although the first of these is unlikely to be recommended now by many parents in a predominantly secular set-up, the last two retain their appeal to this day as fantasy or adventure stories\(^\text{19}\). Similarly, abridged and edited versions of many 19th century realist novels are regularly found in the racks of libraries or bookshops bearing the label of ‘children’s literature’ or ‘classics’ targeted at young readers. That brings us to our next point. If we are to think of at least two different ‘texts’ for each of these books, what bearing does it have on the issue of readership? Is the audience or the ‘interpretative

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\(^{19}\) Again, it is important to note that there has to be a secularization of sorts, or ‘abstraction’, for both these texts have a wealth of religious, more specifically Christian, and other symbols/mythologies to offer that are edited (out) in order to be appreciated by the uninitiated reader. The most well-known example in the case of fairy tales is the Grimms Brothers’ collection discussed, among others, by Jack Zipes. I am simply reiterating that textual editing is a socially normative act of formalization. As discussed in by Zipes, what we commonly refer to as ‘Victorian’ values become instrumental in determining or pre-scribing the literary form that we now identify as the ‘fairy tale’. We should note that this is roughly the same time (mid-19th century) when children’s literature becomes a niche category in publication records in Europe and such writings become a middle-class profession. Perrault’s tales, later known as ‘Tales of Mother Goose’ (sometimes credited to the son Pierre rather than his more famous father Charles) were part of the French tradition of fairy tales dating back to 1796/7.
community’, as Stanley Fish puts it\(^{20}\), vertically or hierarchically arranged in this case than as a horizontal expanse?

The extant publication records seem to suggest that the so-called ‘golden’ period of literature for children is the nineteenth century, a period also marked by rabid colonial expansion\(^{21}\). The expansion of the publication industry appears to be a major factor behind this boom. A significant development that takes place sometime in the latter half of the century and gathers strength to bring about a decisive change is related to this – the emergence of a literature for children emerges as a niche category. Presently it occupies a permanent place within the bourgeois chirographic culture industry\(^{22}\). If one thinks of the distance it has travelled since the days of traditional oral storytelling practices/performances in extended family or community situations, the change appears to be nothing short of a minor revolution.

One definite outcome of the arrival of print, at least for a good many years to come, is the setting up of a congealed category in publication records\(^{23}\). Tolkien’s comment (or


\(^{21}\) The same seems to hold true for colonial India as well as Africa, parts of Europe or America. But one definite handicap in making this claim is the lack of earlier archival records, at least in the case of India. See Darnton’s ‘Book Production in British India’, *Book History*, 2002 and Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, culture and the English novel in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

\(^{22}\) The stupendous popularity of Harry Potter books in recent times well illustrates the print-cultural phenomenon of publication categories/records, a saga conceived within (and after) capitalist relations of publication industry and subject to strict copyright laws.

\(^{23}\) We should be cautious here as to the scope of this comment. Folklorists often insist that a sharp break or dichotomy between oral and print culture is ill-suggested, that it is motivated by an ideologically driven inclination to find an uncorrupted past. See S. Blackburn, *Print, Folklore and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), ‘Introduction’. My comment pertains to how a popular comics brand can, and did, collect folklores from inside and outside India and present them in a particular visual-aided format. ACK folktales are actually less demanding on its readers than ACK biographies, and hence more enjoyable.
lament) about folktale’s ‘relegation to the nursery’ precisely draws our attention to this. Post-print, textuality becomes an important issue, and so does the claim of ‘authenticity’\textsuperscript{24}. The last bit is somewhat ironic as print often imposes a regulatory pattern, making itself both a condition and limitation of producing ‘literature’ – an identifiable body of works connoting a modicum of merit. With the development of printing mechanism, some other features of children’s books that we now accept as more or less universal – such as illustrations, color or size/shape – are decided. Comics, in particular, rely heavily upon these advancements\textsuperscript{25}.

‘The Storyteller’: Benjamin and after

ACK in the seventies, we have noted, addressed the nuclear, middle-class families of salaried professionals – then a historically recent formation in the cities and suburban townships. Purportedly, this new literature-commodity supplanted the intimate presence

\textsuperscript{24} The word ‘textuality’ is used here in a restricted sense, as to how printed volumes might be taken to represent in totality, even contain at times, the thoroughly flexible contexts of pre-print storytelling. ‘Authenticity’, as used here, does not convey any romantic notion of creative genius. It is more a matter of textual scholarship, of finding out or arriving at the first extant and ‘authentic’ document – the archivist’s dream. Tolkien’s own medieval saga, though, is understandable also from a somewhat different context – re-enacting the rich and complicated oral cultural (and mythical-religious) narration in a post-capital scenario. Rowling is an astounding example how print can actually be used profitably to recreate an elaborate ‘lost’ magic, though ostensibly more ‘secular’ in keeping an institutionalized ‘school’ set-up. The difference between Rowling and the likes of Tolkien and Lewis, subject to same or similar conditions of production, would depend, among other things, on the reader’s interpretation of the respective authors’ insistence on the individualist cult of the child-hero and how the (lost) magic-world is formally re-created within the ‘new’ relations of the narrative act in print.

\textsuperscript{25} The precursors of comics, as usually maintained, are the religious emblem books of medieval Europe and the illuminated books of Blake. The length of cheap ACK books as (around) thirty pages is thus a deliberate and tested business proposition. One can think of the more or less uniform length of Tintin books as a case in comparison, although Hergé’s decision was in immediate response to the post-World War II economic distress – when color printing became an expensive business proposition. I have discussed some of the issues regarding printing technology and ‘book market’ in the first chapter.
of the grandparent-storyteller figure in a large family/community. In trying to understand what this curious cultural phenomenon entailed, we will look at the essay by Benjamin titled ‘The Storyteller’ – of particular importance to us as it addresses the subject of storytelling in the time of industrial capital. Here it might be tempting to draw an analogy between his notion of ‘aura’ and his description (or speculative recreation) of the storyteller in pre-modern culture that overlap with oral community situations as regards formation and circulation of knowledge and affect. One needs to be careful since Benjamin does not spell out these details clearly. And, as with his formulation of the ‘auratic’, a distinguished ontological status once embodied by the work of art that is accessed only in its loss, its fading away, so with the (oral) storyteller – speculatively constructed through Benjamin’s reading of the position that Leskov occupies in relation to that ur-figure. The proximity or similarity of the oral and ‘modern’ storyteller figures representing two different cultures is (over)determined by their irreducible difference – between a sense of immanent singularity, congealed in a mnemonic past and in itself accretional, inchoate and flexible, and a post-(print) capital,

26 We should note, in the same breath, that this elderly storyteller figure is as much a cultural invention as a possible historical reality. This cultural ‘type’ was not new either. Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar’s collections of Bengali folk/fairy tales were titled Thakurnamar Jhuli and Dadamoshayer Tholey (‘Grandma’s Sack’ and ‘Grandpa’s Bag’ [of stories] respectively) way back in the first decade of twentieth century.


28 As critics have observed time and again, this deep ambivalence towards modernity is symptomatic of Benjamin, most famously discernible in choosing/depicting Angelus Novus as the ‘angel of History’ as also in his writings on two emergent visual media of that time – photography and cinema. The crucial point, however, is that for Benjamin, the ‘aura’ can be ‘breathed’ or accessed experientially in reflection or re-created in artistic practice such as Dadaist/Surrealist photography. See his essay on photography in One-way Street and Other Writings (London: Verso, 1996), 240-257.
legally verifiable norm. Hence the risk of a theoretical overkill for anyone reading Benjamin’s essay today, of turning what is premised upon a play of (structural) difference into a positivist enterprise – assuming the ‘auratic’ as the originary point.

The crucial statement in the essay also appears to be a piece of literary judgment: “… Among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers.”

Let us try to understand the implications of this statement. First, that the best storytellers from modern, written culture and ‘many nameless storytellers’ from oral cultures (in the case of primary epics, textual scholars also speak of an ‘authorial consciousness’ made up of multiple individuals that is then represented by giving it a name) approximate each other. As we are looking at a seam between private and public spheres (the separation is less distinct in earlier societies) where this proximity is to be found, let us try to have a clearer idea of the differences involved in the act of narration in both cultures and more importantly, the changes that occur when stories travel from the earlier to the latter. It has significant bearings on the status of children as (implied and actual) audience.

The difference that sets apart these two cultures most clearly in terms of these narrative traditions comes from a generally accepted historical observation: storytelling in the earlier case is a public event with a mixed audience sharing common values whereas in the latter it is almost always a silent, personal practice – exemplified by the rise of novel. In other words, there are crucial differences as to the way the private-public negotiation is oriented. We turn to Benjamin again: “There is nothing that commends a story to

30 For example, Homer or, in a different sense, Vedavyas – literally someone who dissects/interprets the Vedas and puts them together again.
memory … than that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis. And the more natural the process by which the storyteller foregoes psychological shading … the more completely is it integrated into his (i.e. the reader’s/listener’s) own experience, the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday … This process of assimilation, which takes place in depth, requires a state of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer. … Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience31”. The paradox of modernity here shows itself in clear terms.

We briefly note some of the changes that the new chirographic culture brings with it. In place of ‘memory’ and shared horizon of values/beliefs, it offers private gratification. But at the same time, it dispenses with the discrete boundaries of older communities and the idea of collective is pried open to imagination via print, thus Benedict Anderson32. The new affective community, to whom (the stuff of) memory is articulated, recorded and made accessible in public, are the generation of readers to whom older ties of community are lost. They are themselves “uncounseled, and cannot counsel others”33. According to Benjamin, the secular force of History has gradually gained predominance over the pragmatic, ‘living’ ‘experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth’. For him, one of the pitfalls of the journey of modernity has been the displacement of ‘pre-analytic’

31 Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller’, 91. The last sentence particularly reminds one also of his essays on Baudelaire and Kafka.

32 One particular product of the print media that Anderson leaves out and becomes crucial for our purpose is the domain of popular visuals. Print reproductions of popular images in circulation, including chromolithographs and oleographs, is arguably at least as powerful as newspaper or novel in shaping the imaginary of the nation in simply being more accessible – they do not require formal literacy.

registers by the disciplinary exercises of a discourse and social science that records, always provides rationalist explanation behind events, builds its archive, and claims its authenticity on such bases. Written or archival ‘memory’, best exemplified by the discourse of History, can feed into the juridical foundation of a state, enabling it to arbitrate in matters of citizenship (membership and participation) and justice (‘distribution’ for ‘common good’, the proverbial social contract) and regulate its boundary as well – what the philosopher Paul Ricoeur has called the ‘obligated’, ‘ethico-political’ use of memory.

Folktales and mythology are two major ‘indigenous’ preserves that were reformulated, even re-imagined, with the coming of print in India during the nineteenth century. There is a considerable body of existing scholarly work that discusses how the (new) imaginary of ‘nation’ served as a pivot in the rapid and complex process of socio-cultural change in the Indian colony – print often provided the public space for articulating fierce, elaborate and passionate public debates on various issues. If we think of this ‘print public’ of the

An example of this is the so-called ‘etiological’ narratives, a distinct type of fairy/folk tales that often recount local rumors or legends. Or, they might present fantastic accounts or explanations of natural phenomena or distinguished habits and features in animals, taking us back to the ‘primal scene’.

P. Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 86-92. Ricoeur tells us that in contrast to personal recollection, this particular use of memory is not non-purposive – there is an ‘injunction to remember.’ “This injunction is meaningful only in relation to the difficulty experienced by national community or by the wounded parts of the body politic to remember these [historical] events calmly … It is at this point of friction that the duty of memory proves to be particularly equivocal”. Ibid., 86-87. One can think of the ongoing Ram Janambhoomi/Babari Musjid debate since the 1990s in this connection. It is more complex than Ricoeur’s description of the problem since the controversy puts the epistemological claims of history and communal memory at stake, not to speak of ideological maneuvers.

nineteenth century as a distinct incarnation or marker of the Indian middle-class (then a recent formation in all probability), ACK occupies a later stage in the same narrative – of re-inventing an ‘Indian-ness’ – to ‘recover’, edit, encapsulate and ‘preserve’ ‘Indian’ stories and characters in the domain of mass-produced ‘children’s literature’.

If ACK took upon itself the task of writing and re-presenting the past, it also ended up creating a ‘national memory’ – the title catalogue presents a host of names that direct us to that grand abstraction. This is how, over and above the ‘politics of interpretation/reading’, ACK becomes more directly political. The obvious problem of constructing an inaccurate (or selective) past aside, there is another, more knotty issue that concerns the representative authority of such acts/technology of writing. One could say, after Derrida, that writing has the ambivalent function of *pharmakon* to ‘memory’, simultaneously as aid and impediment. ACK, in representing or trying to record a ‘lost’ national past, also forecloses the possibility of that recovery. Because the ‘authenticity’ of a ‘living memory’ (that *was*) is not captured but always supplemented by writing.

**Child/reader: constituting a discursive category**

We return to our discussion of the topic that is both profound and ‘common’ – the status of child/childhood. But considering the vastness and complexity of the topic that is situated at the intersection of an astounding variety of knowledge practices (law, ‘natural’ and social sciences) and continues to produce volumes of commentary, it is better to start by stating the scope of our present discussion. I will address ‘the child’, somewhat abstracted and essentialized for purposes of discussion, less as a historical-anthropological ‘fact’ than as configuration – as both notionally given and discursively produced at every
point – proximate most (for present discussion) to the ‘implied’ young adult or adolescent reader. The particularities are conceded in favor of making certain general statements about a type of subject/subjectivities in context, travelling through a loaded ideological map – of ‘childhood’. I propose to relate this formation to a more specific historical scene of post-independence India, circa 1970, in order to speculatively reconstruct the predicament of the ACK reader/s. What I am proposing, in other words, is a prototype of an emergent middle-class individual citizen-subject in-the-making that need not exactly concur with ‘actual’ readers of this literature\textsuperscript{37}.

Any discussion of childhood and ‘real’ children (the social-historical child of anthropology/ethnography or, addressed in a different vein, of psychoanalysis/psychiatry) exists at the nodal point of a web of social, historical, institutional or legal practices, each of them having discursive value according to their merit and influence at any given point in place and time. The locus of childhood, so to speak, is a differential space that is (over)determined by each at the point where they intersect, not to speak of the additional problem of a ‘third world’ country like India, an erstwhile colony recently experiencing an image makeover on world politico-economic plane. On the whole, the readership of ACK (intended or implied reader\textsuperscript{38}, not statistical average though these two are materially connected) serves as an index or prototype of young citizen-subject living in India in the latter half of the twentieth century. I intend to study this literary-sociological

\textsuperscript{37} Calculations of probability show us that in rolling a dice, there can be six possible and equally unpredictable results for each throw, but what is loosely called the ‘expectation value’ – the figure from which each outcome will vary the least, an unreal but mathematically constant value – is 3.5. Let us say, in a manner of speaking, that this fictional-speculative figure of the child corresponds to the expectation ‘value’ of the model citizen-child which is a measure of the existing historical multitude. The former is constructed presently for purposes of discussion but the latter is no less discursively produced for that.

\textsuperscript{38} I borrow the idea from the reader-response critical school represented by the likes of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss.
denomination as being linked, historically, to an earlier moment in the early-mid nineteenth century India when ‘children’s literature’ starts its journey and emerges as an autonomous category around 1880s in all probability. It has flourished as a trade category since. Such an enquiry is cognate, one could claim, with the Gramscian project of analyzing ‘common sense’ of the masses – as uncritical self-awareness connected to a ‘philosophy’.

‘Child’ in official documents

Keeping this intellectual temper in mind, let us look at some recent legal-constitutional documents of the Government of India that are expressions of public sentiment, but nonetheless juridically enforcible and having finality in matters of dispute. ‘The National Policy and Charter for Children’ (2001) starts with a literary-religious metaphor of ‘enshrining’ ‘the cause and the best interest’ of children, and goes on:

“The State can make special provisions for children (Art 15 (3))

No child below the age of 14 years shall be employed to work in a factory, mine or any other hazardous employment (Art. 24)

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39 I have depended mostly on the history of Bengali children’s literature to arrive at such dates. Literature in other languages, such as Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu, Malayalam, Assamese etc., seem to confirm that pattern, as also the history of English-language children’s literature in India. The first published work in the last category seems to be Old Deccan Days; or Hindoo Fairy Legends (1868) by Mary Frere, daughter of the then Governor of Bombay. But we are in dire need of a comprehensive historical account – the commonly available ones are rather disorganized and dilatory.

40 Gramsci means philosophy as a systematically organized ‘conception of the world’ whereas philosophical activity is both individual interpretation (putting into practice) and a contested act of various cultures/values acting on one another. He also mentions ‘religion’ as being akin to common sense, though he is probably thinking of religiosity rather than specific institutional religion and it is, as we will see towards the end of this chapter, instructive in our case. This ‘spiritual’ mode is connected with his ethical-political (he mentions ‘morality’, explained as ‘higher’ morality or ‘morality tout court’, deriving from a Socratic idea, having its basis in wisdom and constant, critical re-examination) model of an ‘organic intellectual’ and ‘philosophy of praxis’.
The tender age of children is not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength (Art. 39 e), and that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment (Art. 39 f),

**Whereas** through the National Policy for Children, 1974, we are committed to provide for adequate services to children, both before and after birth and throughout the period of growth, to ensure their full physical, mental and social development,

**Whereas** we affirm that children’s rights - economic, social, cultural and civil, are fundamental, human rights and must be protected through combined action of the State, civil society, communities and families in their obligations in fulfilling children’s rights.

**Whereas** we also affirm that children’s rights must be exercised in the context of intrinsic and attendant duties directed towards preserving and strengthening the family, society and the Nation, and by inculcating a sense of values directed towards the same end.

**Whereas** India has acceeded to the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child in 1992, wherein it has committed itself to realise the best interests of the child through the maximum extent of its available resources,

**And whereas** we believe that by respecting the child, society is respecting itself,
Now, therefore, in accordance with our pledge in the National Agenda of Governance, the following National Policy and Charter for Children, 2001 is announced.

Underlying this Policy and Charter is our intent to remove the structural causes related to all issues affecting children’s rights in the wider societal context and to awaken the conscience of the community to protect children from violation of their rights, while strengthening the family, society and the Nation.”

In a promissory language that we could dub as literary legalese, one observes the fate of the child, the intended addressee, having the function of an empty signifier – the proverbial blank slate of John Locke – even as his/her identity is congealed around foundational social imaginaries. Any intellectual obscurity in phrases such as ‘discursive production’ is matched, or perhaps bettered, by the apparent simplicity and finality with which it speaks to us. After such totalizing representational claims, how does one, let alone the child him/herself, talk of, or indeed mobilize, children’s ‘rights’?

The role of rights activists becomes crucial in this context as they have the mobilizing power and representational ‘agency’ to negotiate with the state. But occasional misuse

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41 Found at whoindia.org/en/Section2/Section228_521.html. Emphasis original. The rest of the document discusses specific rights after this.

42 One can think of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak’s ‘rhetorical’ (representational-grammatological) question: ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ in this connection. Perhaps more than the issue of a ‘woman’s voice’ (certainly a perennial concern in the western academia since Virginia Woolf or Beauvoir, among others) to which the latter part of Spivak’s article is devoted, the possibility of recovering an ‘authentic child’s voice’ is a representational problem that can never be comprehensively answered. Scholars such as Jacqueline Rose (The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction, London: Macmillan, 1984) and Perry Nodelman (The Hidden Adult: Defining Children’s Literature, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) have drawn our attention to the issue.

43 For a discussion of specific cases where the matter is decided between the activists or representatives of donor agencies and the state in typical third-world situations or by the way of provisions in state-aided family planning programs, see S. White, ‘Children’s Rights and the imagination of community in
or excesses of power of mobilization (operating as structural condition rather than exception) notwithstanding, it is not difficult to see how the document quoted above illustrate, or even reify, childhood as a site of social and moral investment and overall rearing of a child as part of body politic – what David Archard calls the ‘caretaking thesis’⁴⁴. The three institutions of family, society and nation/state appear, connected in the same signifying chain as it were, to have complete authority to decide the child’s gradual and ‘natural’ development. Whether we think of this ‘socius’ as a series of gradually expanding concentric circles with the child at its centre, or as an axis of one’s growth, does not matter much in terms of setting a prescription for biological development. The Piagetian schema, taking the Darwinian model in its stride⁴⁵, has found a new destination – the configuration capitalized (and perhaps personified?) as Nation.

The same document quoted above, marginally altered, re-appears in 2003 as the National Charter of Children published by the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development (again, the coupling is normatively gendered), and is approved by the Government of India in the following year. Both re-affirm the supreme arbiting authority of the Indian state to cope with possible ‘dangers’ to children, even arising within family situations – such as the right to take legal action

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⁴⁴ D. Archard, *Children: Rights and Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1993). One can also think of the Foucauldian idea of the state as pastor in this connection.

against guardians – involved in ‘violation’ against children\textsuperscript{46}. For the offence is cardinal on a scale of (im)morality and criminality, not only against a specific child but the moral fulcrum of the state/community where, to return to the documents once more, ‘conscience’ is a measure of ‘health’ or ‘well-being’\textsuperscript{47}.

The document, quite clearly prepared along the lines of United Nations’ Convention of the Rights of the Child, follows a ‘western’ tradition of thinking about the child as the property of state and the subject of education. We can go back in history to look briefly at this ‘tradition’. The idea behind state (\textit{polis}) having duties and responsibilities towards children as future citizens was present in ancient Greece. Plato’s \textit{Republic} Bk. II-III, \textit{Meno}, \textit{Protagoras}, and \textit{Laws}, Bk. II and VII are oft-cited examples. Platonic dialogues provide a model of wholesome education for \textit{all} citizens with the exception of slaves\textsuperscript{48}. They chart out in detail the ethical potential and applicability of different disciplines of ‘liberal’ education (learning ‘letters’, wrestling, music, craftsmanship and so on), and prescribe corresponding time-periods for each. Storytelling as an activity in Plato is not

\textsuperscript{46} It can, and does, lead to embarrassing situations for parents, community (sometimes appearing in these documents in the guise of ‘civil society’) and the state. For a specific example, see P. Mankekar, ‘To Whom Does Ameena Belong?’ etc., in \textit{The Feminist Review}, 56 (Summer 1997), 26-60.

\textsuperscript{47} Child abuse is taken to be the crudest form of such violations, but it is not without any intellectual-ideological history either. For a brief but succinct discussion, see C. Jenks, ‘Child Abuse in the postmodern context: the issue of social identity’, in \textit{Childhood}, 2 (1994), 111-121.

\textsuperscript{48} Women in ancient India did not usually have access to the sacred texts, as a rule. Plato, in \textit{Laws}, prescribes similar course of education (both physical and otherwise) for men and women in the early part of their life. However, it would be simplistic to call Greece of Plato’s time as being ‘democratic’ in the present sense although it had an active public sphere. The population of Greek \textit{poleis} was divided between native, land-owning citizens and slaves – pedagogues were employed by noble houses often as private ‘slaves’. Gendered division of labor is found in Platonic dialogues too, as in \textit{Meno} when Socrates says (put in the form of a rhetorical question) that the virtue of a man lies in ordering the state and that of woman in ordering the house. On the other hand, the ancient Indian society was hierarchically organized and miscegenation, though not infrequent, was a taboo. Another justification of caste-system was a social division of labor.
unwelcome as such, but holds its place according to their edifying ‘value’\textsuperscript{49}. More importantly, the primary sensations of pleasure and pain evoked by stories in a child are to be reined in vigilantly. Fables likely to produce shame or fear in the impressionable audience are seen as inimical to the ordering of daily life expected of a citizen and therefore unjust, so is any other activity that indulges a child’s whims. Every action a citizen performs and individual lives are gathered around the imperative to build a subjecthood\textsuperscript{50}. There is a disciplining impulse at work in ACK as well, but a containing one – it supplants epistemology with information, skepticism with moral certitudes, and ‘self’ (understood as a primarily inward-driven paradigm of consciousness born out of an ethical management of life) with a coda of behavior\textsuperscript{51}.

\textsuperscript{49} The word ‘value’ is used here in a sense not wholly understandable from within the Platonic conception of what is ‘virtuous’, ‘truthful’ or ‘real’. I hardly need to point out that his frame of reference is different from that of modern, secularist usage of the word – in fact they are opposite.

\textsuperscript{50} For Socrates, there is no other way a person can achieve his/her goal but by fulfilling and actively endorsing legal recommendations because laws are not only good for all but in keeping with ‘true’ arrangement of things.

\textsuperscript{51} The American philosopher Daniel Dennett describes ‘self’ as a “narrative center of gravity” in as much as the center of gravity is a ‘theorist’s fiction’ – a central but abstract foundation of Newtonian physics. See Dennett, ‘The Self as a Center of narrative Gravity’ in F. Kessel et al, eds. \textit{Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives} (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), accessed via the web at www.cogprints.org. Foucault’s discussion of self as forming the epicenter of one of the four types of interconnected ‘technologies’ (the other three being production, sign systems and power) is consistent with Dennett’s scientistic approach. Within essentialist-religious world views, as in a number of Occidental philosophical traditions, self-knowledge leading to the dissolution of the ego is the goal of life sought through trials and renunciation.
The Enlightenment idea of ‘education’: The ‘social’ as discursive formation and the paradox of ‘growth’

In his foreword to Jacques Donzelot’s seminal work *The Policing of Families* that traces the mechanisms of governance through the ideologies of medical and ‘social’ care, Deleuze observes that “the rise of the social and the crisis of the family are the twofold effect of these same elementary causes.” The ‘causes’ can also be described as new sets or systems of *affiliation*. According to Donzelot, the modern, ‘empathic’ child-rearing practices (at least with specific reference to France) are augured by the impulse or a principle, around the mid-eighteenth century, described as the ‘preservation of children’. But this principle was not simple or unwitting in its emphasis or concern with children/childhood defined in terms of ‘lack’ vis-à-vis the normative adult; and would not lead to the logic of welfare state without a wink. ‘Preservation’ was fed in directly by Enlightenment theories of education, and here is Locke: “[the current and innate notion that advocates] ‘Parents preserve your children,’ is [so] far from an innate truth, that it is no truth at all: it being a command, and not a proposition, and so not capable of truth or

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52 G. Deleuze, ‘The Rise of the Social’, in Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), xi. What Deleuze draws attention to, presumably in the context of ‘modern’ France or Europe, are a set of ‘new’ relationships (the pronoun ‘these’ in quotation refers to this) that blur the divisions between the discourses and institutions of private and public spheres (arising in a crescendo of sorts to the emergence of professional expertise of psychiatry that does away with any such division) to bring about the emergence of a ‘hybrid sector’ that he calls ‘the social’. Such grand histories of *mentalité* are, however, not to everyone’s taste, and have been criticized for relative disregard for hard empirical evidence. The now-classic study by Philippe’ Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (New York: Vintage, 1962, original Fr. publication 1960) belongs to the same line, and has been criticized on similar grounds (i.e. lack of data as evidence) in Lloyd deMause ed., *The History of Childhood* (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974). The historian Lawrence Stone, in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (abridged edition, London: Pelican Books, 1979) uses the term ‘affective individualism’ to explain an array of historical events similar to those in Donzelot.

53 The oft-maintained historical break of the French Revolution remains the critical juncture for him to draw a difference between public and familial power under two epochs.
falsehood. To make it capable of being attested to as true, it must be reduced to some such proposition as this: ‘It is the duty of parents to preserve their children.’ But what duty is, cannot be understood without a law, nor a law be known or supposed without a lawmaker, or without reward and punishment, so that it is impossible that this, or any other, practical principle should be innate, i.e. be imprinted on the mind as a duty, without supposing the ideas of God, of law, of obligation, of punishment, of a life after this, innate: for that punishment lies not in this life the breach of this rule, and consequently it has not the force of a law in countries where the generally allowed practice runs counter to it, is in itself evident.”

If one finds a way through the long sentences where rhetorical turns match the complexity of the networked situation described, this is where the civic-secular protocols of the proverbial ‘social contract’ lies.

Another Enlightenment text relevant to our purpose, needless to say, is Rousseau’s *Emile*, one that offers a rigorous model or ideal of ‘total’ education. What we might remind ourselves, though, is that the author himself ran away from Geneva while being an apprentice to an engraver at the age of fifteen. Rousseau starts with an unabashed, if still instructive, declaration: “We know nothing of childhood; and with our mistaken notions the further we advance, the further we go astray.” To guard against such miscalculations, it seems, this generic mélange of fiction and tract traces the fictional male protagonist (and later his female counterpart) from early childhood through

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55 Apprenticeship is, or used to be, a major marker of childhood or ‘immaturity of youth’, as professional status often preceded over biological age in matters of social acceptance as an (independent or ‘established’) adult. Servants or male attendants were referred to in similar terms used to address a minor, even when they were well past youth.

successive stages till he is ready to enter the mature world of adults, fully equipped in every aspect. Rousseau’s goal is to bring forth the ideal citizen and a perfect member of society – the all-round ‘development’ of an infant (literally, someone unable to speak) that is to be harnessed in the service of a strong nation-state. At a time when decadent aristocracy and dwindling popularity of institutional religion did much to corrode the general faith in old ideals, he takes his task very seriously indeed. The ‘classical’ metaphors of gardening, pruning, cultivation and fruition abound, and the Enlightenment ideal of education shores up the course of ‘natural’ development to match biological growth at every step\textsuperscript{57}. Rousseau also maintains, in clear terms, that the principal source of charm in the phenomenon (‘beholding the beauties’) of childhood is imagination rather than “perfection of manhood”, just as imagination “adds to the sight of spring the image of the seasons that are yet to come”\textsuperscript{58}. Another significant move in Rousseau’s book is the implied (ideological) alignment of the author-educator and the parent\textsuperscript{59}. With Enlightenment, we shift already from an earlier (Socratic) modality of learning as praxis to education as program. Evidently, the imagination of child as subject (and future

\textsuperscript{57} Rousseau’s ‘method of nature’ is very detailed. He differentiates between stages – infancy, puberty, adolescence, youth etc. – and insists that each has a “ripeness of its own” (ibid., 122).

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 122. The crucial addition is the ‘common sense’ that “has its seat in the brain”, and “results from the well-regulated use of other five, and teaches the \textit{nature of things} by the sum-total of their external aspects”. Ibid, italics added. The point is to lead the child from the region of ‘sensation’ to his ‘reasoning’. “Thus what I call the reasoning of the senses, or the reasoning of the child, consists in the formation of simple ideas through the associated experience of several sensations; what I call the reasoning of the intellect, consists in the formation of complex ideas through the association of several simple ideas”. Ibid. However, Rousseau’s text was written partially in response to other theories of education prevalent at that time and successfully emphasized the issue of children’s education as a central concern of public debate.

\textsuperscript{59} Note the strong proprietary tone, followed by a totalizing claim, in ibid., p. 369: “…My business, mine I repeat, not his father’s; for when entrusted his son to my care, he gave up his place to me. He gave me his rights; it is I who am really Emile’s father; it is I who have made a man of him. I would have refused to educate him if I were not free to marry him according to \textit{his own choice, which is mine}” (italics added). Rousseau’s author-persona continues taking responsibility beyond a stage that, as he points out, Locke leaves out to the order of family life – by preparing Sophie in perfecting her ‘feminine’ virtues as the able wife/companion.
citizen) has also changed in terms of agency. S/he had a broad guideline earlier, but now cannot but be harnessed to a mould already set by the guardian/educator/parent\footnote{In *Meno*, Socrates says that virtue is neither natural nor acquired but an instinct given to the virtuous by the God; nor is this instinct supported by reason, and hence cannot be taught. *That* is the crucial difference from a representative Enlightenment position, say that of Locke’s, who would argue against innatism and insist on right education and closely-guarded upbringing.}

It is perhaps not too unwarranted to say that ACK adapts itself easily to the last impulse, and has been doing so since its inception. These comic books often implore parents in express terms\footnote{As in captions like “Give your child a gift he’ll treasure forever”, “Acquaint your children with their cultural heritage”, and the like. And a slogan like ‘the route to your roots’ can be addressed to anybody, but is likely to be more appreciated by a person who has reached his/her youth.}. The adult readership of this literature assumes significance in that context and returns us directly to points raised earlier – about ‘implied’ or ‘intended’ reader and the adult-child binary. To these, we could add another, related point – the figure of the reader as subject. The philosopher Jacques Ranciere, in an essay on what constitutes the nature of the politics as a form of action, points out that the ordinary individual ‘part-takes’ in the act (or ‘fact’) of ruling and being ruled\footnote{Quoting Aristotle, Book III of *Politics*, in J. Ranciere, ‘Ten Theses on Politics’, *Theory and Event*, 5.3 (2001).}. He calls it a *supplementary* part, a part which does not rightfully belong to him/her and hence a paradoxical form of action. In that definitively transgressive performance (described also as a ‘rupture’), the citizen-subject is born.

It is especially instructive in our case where the reader/child participates in narratives that are supposed to make an adult out of him/her – the ‘paradox’ is translated in the language of ‘growth’. What s/he actually wrenches out by exploring new and different forms of action is looked upon as part of prescribed and universalized norm. ‘Subjectivation’ is not understood as rupture here but an advancement on a more or less predestined path and/or
a cyclic repetition\textsuperscript{63}. The double bind of reading – play/enjoyment and its supposed ‘utility’ which could otherwise be a cross-over and leap of experience – thus becomes a single movement\textsuperscript{64}. However, in case of ACK, the heroic figure (with whom the reader, as commonly maintained, would or could identify\textsuperscript{65}) can serve as ideal (idealist, idealized) or archetypal figurations that might run counter to the protocols of daily life. This can happen when the reader typically chooses, say, to focus on heroic ‘action’ over exemplary lessons in living\textsuperscript{66}, and follow or imitate them at his/her own peril and others’ embarrassment.

‘Children’ in ACK: A few examples

We will now look at examples of ‘reading’ in some ACK issues. In other words, we imagine for ourselves the situations (and implications) where actual readers would be looking at ACK characters engaged in reading. In \textit{Rani of Jhansi}, little girl Manu (aka Manikarnika, Lakshmibai’s pet name, the most accessible form of address for an intended child-reader) is shown attending a school, in a classroom full of boys, while elderly women look on and muse over the possible utility\textsuperscript{67}. After three pages, she is shown

\textsuperscript{63} That is, the same cycle as his/her predecessors. The Wordsworthian maxim lends itself to this understanding as well and as easily, connoting an unbroken chain of humanity, and humanist assertion of life-on-earth.

\textsuperscript{64} Particular transgressive uses will always be there, such as reading comics in classrooms or as a pleasurable alternative to textbooks.

\textsuperscript{65} Although the degree or kind cannot be ascertained at all, this factor has to be recognized as a matter of building a model of response. But here reading-as-performance will be dialectically linked with this cognitive-psychological observation. See Bruno Bettelheim, \textit{The Uses of Enchantment} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) where he situates the latter within the Freudian schema, but chooses to ignore the former. I discuss it later in more detail.

\textsuperscript{66} Which are, as even young readers might perceive, of ‘another’ time – the absolute space/temporality of \textit{mythos}.

\textsuperscript{67} No. 51, priced at Rs. 3, with script by Mala Singh and illustrations by Hema Joshi. The order in which the balloons would follow (appearing in a single panel, it might be a little confusing at first, as the 2\textsuperscript{nd}
arbitrating the charge of usurpation (of landed property) in the royal court, lowering tax on food crop, and writing a petition letter to a governor-general. The virtue of women’s education could not have shown to be clearer terms, nor a representation more limiting – insisting on the good ‘results’ of formal education.

But not all students follow a similar course before they have become ‘adults’. The young Rash Behari Bose protests when the class teacher recounts the ‘story’ of Bengal’s conquest by Baktiar Khilji and his seventeen cavalrymen. The teacher retorts: “Are you trying to teach me history?”68. Again, there is a familiarized description in the very first panel: “a boy in the ninth standard of Dupleix school at Chandernagore” who “sat through his history class resenting every word his teacher uttered”. One can think of a young reader of 1980s going through multiple cases of ‘identification’. I say cases, because ‘stages’ might imply cumulative ‘progress’ that, to start with, would be nothing but a correlative of narrative sequence in particular ACK issue/s. If narration in Rash Behari Bose would indeed produce its perfect reader, then the cases already suggested would lead on to a (male) filial bond under the meta-symbol of motherland. The narrative contract is that of ‘becoming’ a staunch supporter of the Indian nation-state – inspired here by militant, and to that extent extreme, anti-colonial nationalism.

The appeal of militant nationalism accessed through popular discourse can be quite immense and ‘direct’, no less so if we take the impressionability of the intended readers

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68 No. 262, priced at Rs 3, script by Satyabrata Ghosh & Luis M Fernandez, and illustrations by Souren Roy.
into account. But readings can also be selective for the same reason, and itself an escape from the dictates of class routines and an act of ‘play’. Our next example is from Rabindranath Tagore\(^{70}\) where the boy-hero Rabi – demure, imaginative and having the privileges of an aristocratic, progressive, ‘joint’ family\(^{71}\) during the high noon of ‘Bengal Renaissance’ – grows up disliking the routine pedagogy of school education. The portrayal is particularly interesting for many reasons, especially the way young Rabi impersonates the schoolteacher punishing his students (PLATES 94 and 95). Different actors and/or figurations – the almost-tyrannical schoolmaster, the ‘innocent’ boy-child finding refuge in nature (quintessentially Romantic and Rousseauvian idea, and constituted by the pleasures of suburbia), and his imaginings (realist and iconic) – seem to add up to a self-referentiality, not the least because the imaginary demons/rakshasas of Ravi’s fantasy appear too familiar (the demons as illustrated in many mythological ACKs) to an intended ACK reader. This is a curious example of ACK representing (and looking at) an idealized child-reader constructed by itself – lonely and imaginative,

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\(^{69}\) On the same page where Bose is shown to protest the lessons of ‘effeminate race’, the last panel depicts the racist teacher, after ordering him out of the classroom, as saying: “And I’ll see that you’re kept out for good.” We are informed of the expulsion – technically a punishment for contradicting or questioning the teacher’s authoritative presence in the classroom – in the commentary-box. Is it a ‘message’ for or against observing discipline inside classrooms? One cannot be sure whether the invocation of nationalist spirit here would be a conclusive, single-dimensional, act of signification. A similar moment occurs in Kalpana Chawla, but with notable restraint. When a teacher cites ‘an Indian woman astronaut’ as an example of a null set, Kalpana responds: “Who knows, Madam! Someday soon, this may no longer be a null set.”

\(^{70}\) No. 136, priced at Rs. 3/-, n.d., with script by Kalyanaksha Banerjee and drawings by Souren Roy.

\(^{71}\) The evolution of the institution of family in India is quite different from the post-industrial revolution ‘West’. The emergence of bourgeois nuclear family (and attendant networks of expectation, care or individuation-within-society) is quite a phenomenon enmeshed in the history of colonialism, nationalist movements, and subsequent modernization in the post-independence era that broadly recast the ‘white man’s burden’ in the language of development and state-sponsored welfarism. The nuclear family has often been an integral part of the ideology of modern state where bureaucratic policies and their (at times ruthless) implementation have overtaken consensus in the ‘public sphere’.

247
sheltered and insecure, secretly vengeful but also innocent and aggrieved\(^72\). And one hardly needs emphasize that reading ACK in this case also creates an element of intertextuality or inter-visuality, a mirroring that constitutes the reading subject in the process. The traditional binaries of ‘pedagogy/education’ and ‘play’ trade places, something the ACK as a product would claim to have achieved in a different context and scale.

**Plate 94**

**Plate 95**

\(^72\) Particularly charged is the scene where young Tagore, in a fit of ‘play’, keeps hitting the railings of balcony with a stick in his hand, taking them to be students present inside a classroom. The inherent or ‘natural’ goodness of the child-hero is also a veritable concern in *The Rani of Jhansi* – thrown here in a moral crisis – where the prologue points out that she was “not aggressive by nature” but provoked by the British. This might appear to be gendered at some point. Rash Behari Bose, for example, actively pursues the martial course when he learns to smuggle chemicals and make (raw?) bombs while working in a research lab in his early twenties.
Our next, if somewhat contrasting, example is taken from *Pierre and Marie Curie*. At roughly the same time when young Rabindranath Tagore was busy enjoying the riches of nature, Russia-occupied Poland could hardly offer similar pleasures to its residents. The medium of instruction in schools was Russian. The first page shows the kids at play – born to a schoolteacher-father – having “converted their bedroom into the battlefield and their toys into weapons of war”, trying to defeat the Tsar’s army. The formative possibilities of play-acting that was to make a secret revolutionary out of little Manya as much as a passionate, if obsessed, student of physics, is eventually abandoned in the ACK narrative in favor of (a rather monological portrayal of) the heroine as a relentless pursuer of ‘modernizing’ discourse of hard science. The tentative nature of ‘experiments’ that leads to discovery of radium – nothing less than a secular ‘miracle’ – is downplayed in order to hold up the image of an extremely industrious and gifted ‘student’. This leads to awkward moments, such as one that shows Marie thinking while she writes a letter during (or probably towards the end of) her holidays: “I can’t believe Geography or Algebra ever existed, I’ve completely forgotten them”. Her expression, presumably reflecting her sense of fulfillment, appears rather pedantic. On another occasion, a like-minded student with whom she shares the “secret dream of a free Poland”, comments: “We must build up the intellectual level [sic] of our people” and Marie replies: “Yes, but how?”

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73 No. 435, October 1991, priced at Rs. 7/-, with script by Margie Sastry (associate editor at that point) and visuals by Souren Roy. That makes this ACK the last but one issue before they stopped regular publication of new titles because of sales reasons.

74 The utterance, rather pedantic, is presumably an expression of her sense of fulfillment.

75 *Pierre and Marie Curie*, p. 7.
The ACK issue on another premier woman achiever in the field of applied science, Kalpana Chawla, has similar moments. When she spends a bright summer afternoon with her friends, young Kalpana tells them about the subjects she is currently studying: “Aircraft Propulsion, Theoretical Aerodynamics. I just love Fluid Dynamics!” Her awestruck friend responds: “Ouch! Even the names are so heavy! How can you study them?” A similar scene occurs in the same issue on p.14. Another less gifted friend of hers browses through Kalpana’s bookshelf and exclaims: “Ayn Rand, Richard Bach, Salman Rushdie! Hey Kalpana, don’t you have any light novels that people like me can read?” To this Kalpana’s uncompromising reply is: “No, I guess not. Why don’t you try Alexander Solzhenitsyn?”

The play-study dichotomy in this ACK issue reaches an unusual climax in the issue on Curies (see PLATE 28). Again, it starts as a little game. In a playful bid to distract little Manya lost in her book, her two sisters pile up chairs on her for “half an hour.” Perhaps to their delight and an ordinary reader’s wondrous amusement, she sits “motionless” for half an hour. Only after she has finished the “chapter”, she stands up and dislodges the pyramid of chairs. The commentary box in the following panel, however, concludes this little movement within the narration, should there be any doubt in the mind of the reader: “But this power of concentration helped Manya win a gold medal at the passing-out examination [sic] of her secondary school” (italics added). This routine everyday epithet – ‘power of concentration’ – is recognized and rewarded within the school education model, and such ratification, it seems, is the first and unfailing index of individual

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76 In all probability, this is too straight and naturalistic rendition of an anecdote. It is rather difficult to even speculate on what the nature of particular responses will be, more so because of the age of intended readers. The insistence on closure of narration/representation seems to throw up an ‘open’ moment in the text. I discuss the representational-cognitive potential (‘truth-value’) of anecdotes in chapter 1.
brilliance that later becomes harnessed to the cause of scientific and civilizational progress. One could perhaps also add that, by extension, reading these comic books is not simple fun either and certainly not sheer ‘play’.

The element or practice called ‘play’, we could say with J Huizinga, is ‘primordial’ – “it is a significant function”\(^{77}\) (italics original). The standard explanations of ‘play’ as ‘imitative learning’, ‘diversion from work’, ‘wish-fulfillment’ or ‘mere/sheer fun’ have not exhausted the immediacy, enjoyment or potential that it offers. Huizinga catches the paradox succinctly: “All play means something. If we call the active principle that makes up the essence of play, “instinct”, we mean nothing; if we call it “mind” or “will” we say too much”\(^{78}\). What is at work in play, so to speak, is the very opposite of usual utility or purposiveness of ‘work’: it is irrational, even un-self-conscious, but culturally persistent and socially valuable. Huizinga ascribes this peculiarity to an ‘influx of mind’ that breaks down or bursts over the ‘absolute determinism of cosmos’\(^{79}\). The cosmic dimension apart (that would introduce an operation in terms of grand, if Hegelian, categories), we could begin by noting that with children, reading is ludic activity. Performative role-playing is a dominant tendency or form of response – in that sense also it is political.

**The ‘playful’ child of Romanticism**

The point of affinity between (a child’s) ‘learning’ and ‘play’ is sometimes located in the lack of or resistance to determinism in activity or thought-structures – a major source of fascination from the normatively adult disposition. Child-as-individual (in-the-making,

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\(^{78}\) Ibid.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 3.
‘undersocialized’) is a being but not a fully-formed individual (and would not count as part of governible population where everyone is one and the ‘same’) citizen. To the noted German Romantic writer-ideologue Friderich Schiller at the turn of the nineteenth century (significantly, he couples child and ‘childlike nations’, reminding us of the ‘noble savage’), this was a strategic site: “Not because we look down upon the child from the height of our force and perfection, but rather because, from the limitation of our condition, which is inseparable from the determination, which we have once obtained, we look up to the boundless determinability in the child and to his pure innocence, we fall into emotion, and our feeling in such a moment is too evidently mixed with a certain judgment of melancholy than that this source of the same were mistaken. In the child, the predisposition and determination is represented, in us the fulfillment, which always remains infinitely far behind the former. Hence, the child is to us a vivid representation of the ideal, not indeed of the fulfilled, but of the commissioned, and it is therefore by no means the conception of its poverty and limits, it is quite to the contrary the conception of its pure and free force, its integrity, its infinity, which moves us. To the men of morality and feeling, a child will for that reason be a sacred object, an object namely, which through the greatness of an idea annihilates every greatness of experience; and which, whatever it may lose in the judgment of the understanding, gains again in the reason in ample measure”80 (italics original). This quality of indeterminability is the central paradox (and source of Romantic fascination) about the child: s/he is not-yet and everything-that-can-be, uninitiated and no less a being for that, but more – pure naïve

entity and living ‘presence’ of ‘nature’. As Schiller reflects in the ‘sentimental’ voice: “They are what we were; they are what we ought to become once more. We were nature as they, and our culture should lead us back to nature, upon the path of reason and freedom”. The Enlightenment principles remain valid as long as they do not impress upon us the instrumentality of ‘culture’, but the exodus back to ‘nature/child’ is no less cultural, but rarefied.

In civic-social terms, children are living proof to the cusp, or perhaps the blind spot, that exists between individual entity and (legally/juridically defined) personhood. The thrust of socialization and education is upon the importance of acquisition of the cultural skills (that start with language) as a part of necessary rites of passage. The ethical purchase, so to speak, of this socio-historical phenomenon (growth/maturation/‘subjectivation’) works both ways – as accumulation and loss. The ‘adult’ in a person grows (or outgrows) as the ‘child’ is relegated to deeper recesses of instinct or interiorized. The narrative genre that best exemplifies the cultural sign of childhood as an archetype or a trope of interiority is the ‘symbolic form’ of bildungsroman.

This image, in some sense paradoxical and transcendental in that it survives the individual growth of children as historical entities, complements the model of biogenetic development for many educationists. With the noted founding-figure of modern child-

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81 The Lockean idea of tabula rasa and consequent civic inscription is compatible with present-day sociological description of education as ‘symbolic violence’, pace Bourdieu.

82 Bildungsroman as a form, says Franco Moretti, is typical of modern, i.e. post-industrial revolution, Europe where youth becomes a culturally privileged sign, of exploration, unpredictability, mobility, conquest and passion, over a more tempered ideal of spiritual maturity accompanying growth and old age. And yet, youth almost inevitably stands to lose or consume itself – hence the tragic sublimity. See F. Moretti, The way of the world: the Bildungsroman in European culture (London: Verso, 2000). The notion of ‘symbolic form’ (borrowed from Panofsky/Cassirer) is well applied to describe youth/child as a metaphor since this internally contradictory and incomplete state (we cannot think of childhood/youth without age/adulthood as its [bio]logical opposite), by that same gesture, signifies a mythical value for this genre.
oriented education Maria Montessori, who responds to the lessons of Freudian psychology/psychiatry and those in The Bible in turn, the idea of child as an uncorrupted being (often akin to the partly-secularized ‘soul’) is kept alive and placed within a new model of education. The objective is not too different from psychiatry though, namely that of ‘psychic care of the child’, of ‘normalisation’. In this religious-spiritual path, the teacher should attend to ‘discovery of the true child’. Soon after she invokes the figure of Christ who goes to help all men “in the form of a child”, Montessori says: “there must be a personality behind them [i.e. biological and attitudinal changes involved in physical growth that actualizes the ‘life’ of a ‘hidden soul’] if the child, the spiritual embryo, is following a constructive pattern in his psychic development. There is a hidden man, a hidden child, a buried living being, who must be liberated. Here is the first urgent task of education: liberation in this sense means knowledge, or indeed a discovery of the unknown”. Both the person of the child and his/her ‘liberation’ following proper educative method are imbricated here within an economy of spiritual fulfillment, an evangelical project. The ‘secret’ of childhood is revelatory as much the secret of adulthood lies in approving of other orders/registers of existence and willingness to accommodate. The ideal teacher in Montessori’s model grows out of an ‘inner preparation’, a corrective and ethical training in extending oneself, a search tied to the

83 M. Montessori, The Secret of Childhood (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936), 25. Cf.: “…at the origin of life, in the small baby, errors are constantly being made, deforming the natural psychological type (italics added) of man, and leading to an infinity of deviations (italics original)”. She continues: “The singular fact that we note in child conversions is a psychological cure, a return to normal conditions” … “And that which was called conversion (i.e. mental-biological growth) when it implied only the surprising fact, must, after the findings of a wide experience, be reckoned a normalization” (italics original). Ibid., 187. Her description of ‘conversion’ (moment of growth, achieving self-awareness) often displays a totalizing faith: “Children of excited fantasy become calm, depressed children rise up, and all advance together, on the same road of work and discipline, continuing a progress that evolves of itself, moved by some inner energy that, having found a way of egress, can display itself in outward act.” Ibid., 186.

84 Ibid., 126.
task of reaching out to children, to “be able to see the child as Jesus saw him”\textsuperscript{85}. Her words re-affirm Schiller’s telling observation on the child being a \textit{sacred object} as well as the Enlightenment project: the teacher being an author-pastor.

We have moved from the Enlightenment notion of the adult educator as exercising total parental authority over child-students to bring up a perfect ‘citizen’ to a more recent development where the adult is a humble facilitator oriented towards the child. This programmatic evangelism is a ‘modern’ attitude that Philip DeMause identifies with the historically the last mode of adult-child relationship, as the ‘helping mode’, collapsing the teacher, parent and pastor figure. Teaching forms a part of caretaking – of an essentialized child-figure at one remove from the Son of Man. For Montessori it is coupled with a firm belief in Darwinian theory of natural selection and insistence on mother’s breast-milk as an image of ‘nature’s perfection’\textsuperscript{86}. Hygiene is a moral prescription here and care a form of preservation. Montessori’s child is another incarnation in a long line, coming after the theological (Donatist-Pelagius debate), pedagogic (Enlightenment) and redemptive (Romantic) child. S/he is the inheritor of new scientific education and evangelical faith. Incidentally, Montessori was invited by the Theosophical Society of India, stayed mostly in Chennai between 1939 and 1949, and designed sixteen courses.

\textbf{A ‘modern’ ideology of childhood in the Indian postcolony}

We return now to the problematic we set out to address: how to conceive of an average child/reader/subject in the context of ACK as popular and consumable reading material.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 128-129.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 28-31.
We will draw on academic writings and some personal interviews in constructing a rough history of the average middle-class Indian prototype of such readership in the decades of 1970 and 1980s. To the extent this generation forms a mainstay of the Indian population at present, this account attends to a relevant history – how childhood as a networked site was formed around 1960s.

Satadru Sen uses the term ‘juvenile periphery’ to describe Indian childhood under the British colony. Looking at how reformatory, home and schools functioned as administrative apparatus in the hands of the colonial government, Sen traces the emergence of ‘native child’ as a specialized category. Racial superiority was translated through legal provisions and experiments, denoting the white man’s burden. The colonial understanding of child/childhood takes place within a larger anthropological-epistemological investment – what Bernard Cohn describes as an ‘investigative modality’.

The figure of the child is essentialized and progressively interiorized in literature and as with Maria Montessori, placed in a new sacral economy of education and care. Childhood, in other words, is (shaped as) an imaginary and its ‘content’ is supplied by laws and institutions surrounding the symbol ‘child’. The modern notion of childhood as a distinct phase having an autonomy (rationalization or lack of it, emotion, and ‘sensibility’ that for Rousseau is still in the clutch of sense-organs and yet to develop a

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‘common sense’ guided by reason) has not outgrown the interiorization of child as a middle-class preserve but has been informed by it. As Sen points out, there has not been any systematic attempt to study childhood as it evolved in recent Indian history – “the child drops fully formed into the [colonial] institution”\(^8^9\). This is the ‘inner child’ of post-Romanticism Europe rather than the contextually situated sociological variety, more so since India was part of British colony, itself a ‘periphery’. ‘Juvenile periphery’ then, would roughly stand in for the whole of native population needing care, guidance and containment, not the least because, as Sen shows, India became the testing-ground for correctional measures carried out on juvenile delinquents – again a possible metaphor for the recalcitrant native\(^9^0\).

The site of childhood was a particularly charged one in the colonial India. While ideas on education, civilizational progress or health from the metropole sought to cast Indian children in the British colonial mould and maintain a hierarchy by producing a cultural intermediary class, children’s literature flourished as a new form of writing. Bengali literature, in particular, was flooded with a host of writers in this ‘genre’. We have already mentioned the collections by the noted folklorist Dakshinarajan Mitra Majumdar. Majumdar’s own introduction to *Thakurdar Jhuli*, Rabindranath Tagore’s prologue to Majumdar’s *Thakurmar Jhuli*, and Tagore’s *Lok Sahitya* reiterate the importance of recovering these tales as part of an urgent need to preserve ‘living’, indigenous

\(^8^9\) Sen, *Colonial Childhoods*, p. 4.

\(^9^0\) Sen draws our attention to the education of children from ‘royal’ families in princely states, brought up very differently. The educational career of princely children was oriented towards producing different ‘natives’, something between the standard orientalist description of ‘ancient Maharajah’ and an otherwise irredeemable lot. In bringing these together, a different translation of ‘noble savage’ was founded.
‘tradition’. These stories, as in the case of numerous Bengali journals (e.g. *Sakha*, *Sathi*, *Balak*) that addressed a new generation, varied among moral tales, recollection of fairy and folktales, popular science and adventure stories. The stories complement the cultural interiorization of child-figure by coming up with narratives full of optimism where young heroes explore and conquer new lands, and emerge as modern empowered subjects.

The closely guarded frontier of the family that, *pace* Partha Chatterjee, acted as a major cultural apparatus for the nation to emerge in the nineteenth century envisaged its children as the flag-bearers of new India. The indeterminability that Schiller identifies with children, acts here with a redoubled rage: the child is congealed in imagination and invested with a hope – a dream already dreamt for them by adults. Written in 1944, Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* lends an authoritative voice to placing India in the history of the ‘great nations’ of the world. It is instructive for our purpose to take a look at the account given by the Congress leader and first prime minister of independent India, born in an elite Kashmiri Pundit joint family and educated in Harrow and Cambridge during the first decade of nineteenth century. He articulates the national project of ‘writing’ Indian history as a public enterprise and conscious process: “… lack of historical sense did not affect the masses, for as elsewhere and more so than elsewhere, they built up their view of the past from the traditional accounts and myth and story that were handed down

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91 The generic confusion or cross-over regarding ‘children’s literature’ that we discussed towards the beginning of this chapter is visible case of *Thakurdadar Jhuli* which is called ‘*kathasahitya*’ and ‘*bangaponyas*’, likening it to lore and novel. Such nomenclatures underscored the importance of this literature for adults as a locus of identity under threat from ‘modernizing’ project of an alien rule.

92 For a detailed discussion of the ideological ethic served up by adventure stories in the changing pedagogic context of Bengal, see Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, *Gopal-Rakhal Dwandosamas* (Kolkata: Papyrus, 1991)

from generation to generation. Nehru points out that for Indians of that epoch, this mixture of fact and fiction becomes ‘symbolically true’ as well as the “basis for future thought and action.” The ground of swadeshi historicization for this eminent public intellectual location is never without the moral authenticity of the subject-in-waiting – an impassioned assertion of rediscovering ethno-cultural ‘roots’. There is a possible homology, indeed an ideological affinity, between such organicist myths of (racial) origin and ‘natural’ purity of children.

**A new investment in ‘Indian’ childhood**

The new child of free India, thus conjured up, was a pitiable creature and an apparition of grand optimism. S/he was initiated in modern scientific rationality, and would usher in a strong nation-state. My submission is that between late 1950s and 1960s, there was an active interest on behalf of the Indian state in pedagogy addressed to ‘youth’ – a ‘national’ populace that would include children and adolescents. Four important national-cultural bodies are founded by the then Congress government, led by Nehru himself: Sahitya Akademi (1957), National Council of Educational Research and Training (1961), National Book Trust (1957) and the Publications Division (under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting). Children’s Film Society of India came up in 1955. There is a new insistence on a model of ‘value education’ and concern with a civil/civic

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religion, a task that ACK takes seriously. Next, we look at a few official documents of the Government of India during the post-independence period in support of our argument. ACK, need we remind ourselves, was initially published by India Book House Education Trust – a body formed and named so probably owing to legal reasons but nonetheless, an enterprise professing a noble cause.

The immediate historical context of ACK is, however, different from the Nehruvian enthusiasm in nation-building. I would claim that the ideological calling of nation/‘Indian’ tradition being a persistent one since the fifties, the formulaic utterance and insistence on the same is a characteristically seventies’ phenomenon. It is the last call to believe in a project (‘unity in diversity’) that is by then a more or less spent force. The ardent call for a single Indian nation, at least the way ACK seems to reiterate it, is rather naïve and – this is a point we will come back to – textbookish. Given the new nuclear family situation where older sense of collective is found wanting, the school-going middle-class child is often left to fend for him/herself. New urban and suburban families during the seventies did live under considerable stress. Unemployment and food shortage were visible realities, inflation and illiteracy showed no signs of holding back. In terms of global balance of power, too, India was often on the receiving end. The assurance for infrastructural facilities for an all-round development became more or less identifiable by then as ‘political’ rhetoric mouthed by political party leaders. The Thatcherite

95 I do not see any ground that ACK might have gained by rote nationalism – that would be to take its ‘mission’ literally – if not corroborate the official line. The ‘tags’ (e.g., ‘Mirabai, The Touching Tale of a Great Devotee of Krishna’ or ‘Ellora Caves, The Glory of the Rashtrakootas’) are re-worked token mnemonic one-liners from an earlier oral culture as well as summary outline-cum-subtitles reminiscent of early English novels. The individual tales from different parts of India certainly opened up new story-content for individual readers, but a story from Assam or Punjab was no different from a story from outside India. The later decision to include stories involving foreign characters is thus not surprising for a product that initially prided itself on an indigenous cultural capital.
nationalism of Indira regime was a mixed outcome of growing centralization of political and economic power (that culminated in the Emergency) and populist measures hurriedly doled out that consolidated the hands of the matriarch further. The Indian pulp that these comic books could offer has an affinity with the political instability of the time. As representative artifacts, they were crudely political in response to the troubled state of Indian realpolitik and the general helplessness and unease of the common man. But the mode of representing it was paradoxical – by effacing politics from the surface, by offering wondrous tales of an once-glorious India. The pulpiness that I refer to here arises from the desperate attempt to cling on to this phantasmagoria that ACK pushed hard to its young readers.

In some sense, ACK was the last attempt to celebrate the Nehruvian hope of bringing forth a strong, unified nation-state, taken to its logical extreme. The splendor of Indian heritage – in contrast with the then socio-economic situation on the ground – came from a will to believe in the dream of ideal republic, even if occasionally in bad faith. Epic grandeur thus is turned into exemplary lessons of civility books. The ideological critique of ACK as being carefully constructed (and hence exclusive in principle) around a Hinduized humanist value-system is a liberal corrective of considerable importance. But the sheer ambition of it, its regularity as representational form, is what lends particularity to ACK as popular literature for children. The documents on education in independent India that we examine will, apart from giving us a fair idea of how the state

\[96\] Nandini Chandra points out, quite correctly I believe, that the personality of the founder-editor clinched the issue. Pai’s dream-project is a dream in the Freudian sense as well: any attempt to corroborate the content and the (narrative) form has to take into account both the unlikeliness and missionary urgency of furnishing high literature in a bounded format.
looked to call upon its citizen-population, allow us to see how such policies were translated in popular stories for children.

‘Value’ education: a look at Education Commission Reports

I will start with a quotation from the first University Education Commission (1948-49) report, headed by S. Radhakrishnan: “there are many who feel that morality can take the place of religion … virtue and vice are determined by the direction in which we move, by the way we organize our life. Unless morality is taken in a larger sense, it is not enough. If we exclude spiritual training in our institutions, we would be untrue to our own historical development … when one has done his duties as a garhasthya, a householder, has been a good father or mother, a good provider for the family, a good citizen, there is still the beauty and mystery of the universe …” (p.299). We continue: “There is no state religion… Each one is at liberty to approach the Unseen as it suits his capacity and inclination. If this is the basis of our secular state … it is to be deeply spiritual and not narrowly religious … We must civilize the human heart. Education of the emotions and discipline of the will are essential … Religion is a permeative influence, a quality of life, an elevation of purpose. Our institutions, if they are to impart religious vitality, should have simplicity and an atmosphere of consecration that permanently influence lives … How can we build values into the human mind? … The best method is by personal example, and books read from day to day. In the early stages, these books should contain not moral lessons but lives of great men given as things of supreme human interest, lives
which exemplify the living of great thoughts and noble emotions. These books must be written with dignity, beauty and tenderness” (p. 300-301)97.

One could locate the impulse for ACK, some NCERT books (‘Builders of Modern India’ series, for instance), and a host of books published by NBT and CBT in these pronouncements. The ‘personality cult’ literature prescribed by the report and the ACK biographies would be very similar in intent. A sympathetic understanding of religion (Radhakrishnan was an authority on Hindu scriptures) is regarded as par excellence quality of citizenship. In the report by the Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) headed by A L Mudaliar, three locations are identified where religious and moral values take root: home (mentioned as the ‘dominant’ factor), school and local population. But instead of following the Radhakrishnan committee’s appreciation of ‘the Unseen’ mysticism and ordering/disciplining of personal life as praxis, this report advises bureaucratic methods, such as ‘inspiring’ talks by speakers selected by headmasters in school and what the report terms as ‘dwelling’ (inculcate an understanding of?) on ‘great lives of all time’, and recommends religious instruction classes beyond school hours – a typical ‘civics’ class in secondary schools introduced during the mid-1970s.

The prescriptive religion is not institutional (the Indian state cannot afford to be biased towards one community) but syncretic and ‘cultural’. The abstraction, putatively based on certain generalisable principles, marks an important shift. It is a virtual revision and reallocation of the place of religion in society by making religion a post-facto sociological/anthropological category. Such an anthropocentric approach changes the

97 The preescription is to study ‘great books’ of Humanities and literature. Harvard University’s proposal for a compulsory course in Humanities for two years is cited in favor of the argument.
object itself. Rather than being a (pre-) given imperative, religion here is secularized and to be constructed according to the need of a politically sovereign state. It sets up a set of rationalized principles of ‘faith’ in place of a belief-system espoused almost by default (by dint of being born to a specific community, i.e. the child of a Muslim is Muslim). In other words, we are looking at a process of (re-)sacralization and a discourse of public norms that individual young members should adhere to. ‘Disenchantment’ with life, to use the term after Weber and here contextually inseparable from the experience of colonialism, is sought to be amended by invoking the recursive mythos of spirituality. Its relevance to the present discussion lies in the imaginative approximation/appropriation of a different time within the ‘here and now’ connected by narration, as in the ACK stories.

The stand is further clarified in case of the Kothari Commission (1964-66) report where scientific rationality has its unlikely companion in (somewhat loosely defined) ‘spirituality’. The concern with religious and moral education and their modalities are, however, persistent preoccupations of policy-formation since the colonial period. We will briefly refer to some of the documents from this period. Both the Despatch issued by Court of Directors in 1804 and the Charter Act (of East India Company) in 1813 stressed

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98 I mean to include the impact of communal violence and partition on the daily lives of individuals that immediately followed the historical experience of colonialism, as also the general economic distress during the time when these reports were being composed.

99 I draw on the treatise titled Documents on Social, Moral and Spiritual Values in Education by B R Goyal (New Delhi: NCERT, 1979) that cites Selections from Educational Records 1781-1839 (New Delhi, 1920) and the report by Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), Government of India, titled ‘Report of the Religious Education Committee’, 1946 (Delhi: Publications Division, 1947). Dr. Goyal is a Professor of Education and former head of the Department of Educational Research and Policy Perspectives, NCERT, New Delhi. For a detailed analysis of education policies during the colonial British India, see Gauri Vishwanathan, Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India (New Delhi: OUP, 1998).
a neutral position in matters of religion. Although missionary efforts (or at least some) received state support, no appointments in public institutions were to be made to propagate religious education. Lord Moria’s observations in 1815, significantly, recommended furnishing village schoolmasters (‘humble and valuable class’) with “little manuals of religious sentiments and ethical maxims conveyed in such a shape as may be attractive to the scholars, taking care that while awe and adoration of the Supreme Being is earnestly instilled, no jealousy be excited by pointing out any particular creed”100. The allusion to teachings in Christian religion was partially echoed by Wood’s Despatch, 1854. Although private schools were to receive financial grants against a strict observance of non-interference in religious instructions in schools already receiving such aids, government institutions could pursue ‘voluntary’ lessons in Christianity beyond school hours. The Education Commission (1882-83) extended the teaching policy followed in government schools to include municipal and local schools, with an emphasis on primary-level teaching, but employment of personnel for teaching of any specific religion was discarded. Just five years later, the Resolution of the Government of India (1887) expressed hope that the number of schools imparting religious education would increase and public schools would follow suit – organizing classes beyond usual teaching hours. The Education Policy of 1921, sent as a circular to provinces, again emphasized the official religion-neutrality alongside tolerance for (particular) religious instruction in Government schools. The Policy removed a number of prevalent restrictions to that end, e.g. regarding utilization of teachers or school premises, and recommended addition of effective learning hours spent in such classes held at the beginning or end of school hours

100 Goyal, Documents, 48.
to the total time spent under prescribed curriculum. Private schools were to impart religious instruction subject to a ‘Conscience Clause’, allowing parents to withdraw their children from religious observance without forfeiting any other benefits of the school. A Religious Education Committee headed by Reverend G. D. Barne was formed in 1946, probably in a bid to reckon with wide communal differences and bloody riots that were ravaging the country. The report concluded that, considering the prime importance of spiritual and moral values, such teachings that are common (i.e., agreed upon by all members of the committee) to all religions should be an integral part of syllabus. Additionally, every school should arrange an assembly for meditation before teaching hours would begin. Another important recommendation was to leave the task of teaching the fundamentals of different religions to home and community, although state schools could actively undertake the same, subject to ‘sufficient’ demands made by parents/guardians. But the expenditure towards the last was not to be met from public funds.

One can see how Radhakrishnan and Mudaliar commission reports continue to articulate concerns prevalent from the colonial period, and the official terminologies do not change very significantly either. In the former, there is a bid to reclaim the objectives of erstwhile (colonial) policy as arising from within the Hindu Brahminic custom of varnasram. While official religion-neutrality is retained as an imperative trait of modern democracy, it signals a moment of strategic political adjustment for the independent Indian state. Much of mid-19th century British ideas of education held ‘culture’ being a

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101 Goyal, having looked at the minutes of the meetings, notes that there was a wide difference among the members of this committee as to the scope and modality of teaching religion in classroom for spiritual and moral edification.
unifying factor, as Gauri Vishwanathan points out, and the ‘benefits’ were linked to
hegemonic mechanism of colonial education as state apparatus\textsuperscript{102}. Here the addressee is
the independent Indian population but the discourse of public education aims at a similar
function. The notable absence is that of missionary Christianity that played instrumental
role in moral education up to early 19\textsuperscript{th} century and is replaced by a Hinduized, syncretic-
humanist ‘religion’.

We now examine the Kothari Commission report in some detail, because of a number of
reasons. Its time-line (1964-66) makes it especially relevant for the literary product we
are concerned with that starts publication in 1967. It is also generally agreed that this
particular commission, beginning at the end of the third five-year plan and in the same
year as Nehru’s death, is a landmark of sorts in the official history of educational
initiatives in India – at least for the next twenty years\textsuperscript{103}. By its own admission, the
Commission was “to advise the government on the national pattern of education … for
the development of education at all stages – ranging from primary to post-graduate stage
and in its all aspects besides examining a host of educational problems in their social and
economic context” (italics mine, to indicate that it was the first time in the history of

\textsuperscript{102} Vishwanathan refers to ‘Filtration Theory’ of English education that, for the Utilitarians likes of
Macaulay and J S Mill, was a twin instrument for cutting down cost of education and producing
cultural intermediaries. The actual benefit of English-language western education was a hotly debated
issue between orientalist scholars and executive rulers/judiciary in the British parliament. Congress
statesmen of India joined the fray a little later – notable among them are Raja Rammohun Roy and
Dadabhai Naoroji.

\textsuperscript{103} The National Policy on Education, adopted in 1986 during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi as the Prime
Minister is the next important effort to bring in decisive changes. A child-centric approach, promoting
open university system for a more inclusive distance learning targeted at non-formally educated adults,
de-linking of formal degrees from job criteria, establishing rural universities, proposal for continuous
evaluation at secondary level, insistence on technology-based education through public media and
introduction of management studies are some of the ‘new’ features of the 1986 policy. Critical issues
of gender, environment and ‘backward’ majorities as well as religious minorities also receive due, if
rote, emphasis.
independent India that it was done). The report, in addition to directives on the curriculum, system and structure of educational institutions, teachers’ recruitment and training, and issues of educational planning and finance etc., suggests a national enrolment policy for jobs in different sectors to accommodate the student population till 1986.

The report refers to the historical significance of its own context at the very beginning. I quote: “The destiny of India is being shaped in her classrooms. This, we believe, is no mere rhetoric. In a world based on science and technology, it is education that determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of the people. On the quality and number of people coming out of our schools and colleges will depend our success in the great enterprise of national reconstruction whose principal objective is to raise the standard of living of our people.” It soon explains the situation by giving demographic facts: “the population of India is now about 500 million, and half of it is below the age of 18 years – India today is essentially a land of youth. Over the next 20 years, the population is likely to increase by another 250 million. …The total student population which is now about 70 million will be more than doubled in the next 20 years; and by 1985, it will become 170 million or about equal to the total population of Europe.”

The first two concerns voiced by the report relate to self-sufficiency in food production and the imminent need to increase national income. Acknowledging that the situation at hand is alarming, made worse by the caste system, the report continues: “the social

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105 Ibid., p. 3.
difference … is tending to widen … and seems to have extended its sphere of influence under the heavy democratic processes of Constitution itself. The situation, complex as it was, has been made critical by recent developments which threaten both national unity and social process. As education is not rooted in the traditions of the people, the educated persons tend to be alienated from their culture. The growth of local, regional, linguistic and state loyalties tends to make the people forget ‘India’. The old values, which held society together, have been disappearing, and as there is no effective programme to replace them with a new sense of social responsibility, innumerable signs of social disorganizations are evident everywhere and continually on the increase. These include strikes, increasing lawlessness and disregard for public property, corruption in public life, and communal tensions and troubles. Student unrest, of which so much is written, is only one, and probably a minor one, of these symptoms. Against this background, the task to be attempted – the creation of integrated and egalitarian society – is indeed extremely difficult and challenging.106

Two distinct political crises, threats to the state’s sovereignty from outside its territory to be more specific, mentioned here are the wars with China and Pakistan. Although the recent loss of human lives and financial distress following these wars explain the worries, it is somewhat surprising that the report sees the ‘student unrest’ in such a small light – especially when there was a notable concern in the public sphere107. The UGC had

106 Ibid., p. 5.
107 Bigger unrests were to follow in late 60s and early 70s, although intermittent and restricted to Communist blocks in West Bengal, Orissa, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, later spreading to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and often turning violent. Reportedly, there were more than two thousand demonstrations by student organizations all over India – a good twenty-five per cent of which were violent. For further discussion, see Philip G Altbach, ‘Student politics and Higher Education in India’, Daedalus, 97.1 (Winter 1968), L and S Rudolph, K Ahmed, ‘Student Politics and National Politics in
already commissioned a report on ‘student indiscipline’ in 1960. Humayun Kabir, the noted educationist and also the then Minister of Education had authored a book titled *Student Unrest: Causes and Cure* (Calcutta: Orient Book Company, 1958). Students’ agitations surrounding various issues ranging from language policy, unemployment, corruption and police atrocities to wider differences in political ideologies are known to any student of post-independence Indian history, and it reached a particularly high and significant point around the time when the Kothari Commission report was being prepared. Acknowledging that the great expectations of the Indian public are to be met by harnessing economic development through a dedicated and knowledgeable leadership as much as generating an awareness of the essential values to ‘a way of life’, the report continues: “[i]f this grand change is to be achieved without violent revolution (and even then it will still be necessary) there is one instrument, and one instrument only, that can be used: EDUCATION (capitalization original)\(^\text{108}\).” It suggests several remedial procedures, e.g. common school system, technical education involving work-experience, promoting knowledge regarding agriculture/ agro-based industries (in the wake of the much-hyped agricultural ‘revolution’ in parts of north India)\(^\text{109}\), vocational education,

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\(^{108}\) *Education and National Development*, 8.

\(^{109}\) The All India Radio, the only available public mode of telecommunication owned by the government, played a vital role in the success of ‘Green Revolution’ – an event that increased agricultural produce through modern farming techniques applied experimentally to large landholdings, and was instrumental in providing the way for a new rich agrarian class – thus furthering national progress at the expense of economic inequality (and according to the recent Greenpeace labs’ research findings, also environmental vulnerability).
and, importantly, stressing the need of making the boy-scout or NCC-type community service obligatory, starting at the primary level\textsuperscript{110}.

The report continues to voice, rather painstakingly, two major (and interlinked) concerns: that of national integration and ‘value education’ geared to building ‘character’. None of these is completely new or unexpected, but the tone of urgency is. Hindi and Sanskrit assume their importance, as the official language of administration and ancient heritage respectively, solely to bring about the feeling of unity among otherwise diverse national population\textsuperscript{111}. One is reminded of the many a coercive state policy and bloody battle taking place around this period over the issue of language and state territories being reorganized on that basis. The unusually high vulnerability on the part of a seventeen-year old democracy, overpopulated and almost hopelessly diverse, comes through even in the positive attitude, not to speak a very detailed program, to manufacture grounds of public consent. We are also provided with a curious piece of information. The report says that there was little or no effort to promote national consciousness or unity as part of school education before 1900. It was done outside the school system (at that point under the British administration) between 1900 and 1947 as part of the freedom struggle. Clearly, we are meant to identify the rise of this consciousness as more or less

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{110} The National Cadet Corps, a civic paramilitary body with its insistence on drills, uniforms, discipline and training in camping and use of arms, was introduced as part of university education in 1962 – the year also noted in the textbooks of Indian history for the Chinese ‘invasion’. The military motif can effectively stand in for the kind of obligation to nation/state that forms the thematic of the report. Militia has been intimately connected with citizenship since classical Europe. Filial bond, rigorous discipline, laws of reward and punishment, self-control, order and insignia, noble calling of ‘selfless’ duty to one’s mother/fatherland, and above all the metaphors of sacrifice and martyrdom – every practice and semiotic code involved in the military apparatus function as in a miniature nation-system. The solemn codes of commitment and service might also remind us of ritualistic action in many religious communities.
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\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{111} Of the international languages (apart from English), Russian is mentioned specifically, probably because of diplomatic alliance and ‘socialist solidarity’. India’s position during the Cold War period is well-known.
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coterminous with the history of the Indian Congress party which started operating officially from 1885.

We will end this section by going back to the report once more. I want to draw attention to the sheer hypostatic quality, call it fantastic or nonsense, of the language in which the ‘solutions’ are proposed – partly a matter of bureaucratic rhetoric but primarily a semiotic excess. I quote: “She (India) should learn to harness science but she must also learn not to be dominated by science. In this respect India has a unique advantage with her great tradition of duty without self-involvement (anakaki), unacquisitive temperament (aparigraha), tolerance, innate love of peace and reverence for all living things. Too often are these precious assets forgotten, and we tend to relapse into moods of pessimism, fears and forebodings, discord and destructive criticism. A new pride and deeper faith … are now needed. Atom and Ahimsa, or to put it differently, man’s knowledge and mastery of outer space and of his own self are now out of balance. … Man now faces himself … the choice of rolling down a nuclear abyss to ruin and annihilation or of raising himself to new heights of glory … India has made many glorious contributions … the grandest of them all is the concepts and ideal of non-violence and compassion expounded by Buddha and Mahavira, Nanak and Kavir, and in our own times Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi and Gandhi …

1.87. The contribution of Europe doubtlessly is the scientific revolution. If science and ahimsa join together in a creative synthesis … mankind will attend a new level of purposefulness … Can India do something in adding a new dimension to the scientific

\[112\] The word finds its way here with a nod to Mahatma Gandhi, the eponymous father of the nation and identified as the chief spokesman for ahimsa. It was, according to Gandhi’s autobiography, his favorite word from The Gita – the book he cites repeatedly as a major inspiration. I am grateful to Prof. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay for pointing it out.
achievement of the West? This poses a great challenge but also offers a new opportunity … especially to the young people who are the makers of the future …

What is the function of such grand elocutionary address – a hyperbolic purple patch otherwise out of sync with a set of bureaucratic plans and pragmatic recommendations? Surely it is pointless just to dismiss it as a wanton display of loaded ‘philosophical’ ideas? My own reading is that such overshooting serves to create a sacred master-code – here the ‘excess’ plays its part – that forms the basis of rule. We see here a hegemonic discourse, not merely a substantive one although apparently it is socio-historically situated (designing a method of education to bridge the Orient-Occident binary), because to deny it and call its bluff would be sacrilegious or transgressive. The coming together of atom and ahimsa might not ‘mean’ anything (but only figuratively, as an imaginary) by itself, but it marks out, by evoking a normative ‘tradition’, a discursive core that will both control and generate subsequent meanings (individual articulations by subjects). We might recall here what Achille Mbembe, writing on the mechanism of institutional power in the postcolony, has to say: “In the postcolony, the commandement seeks to institutionalize itself, in order to achieve legitimation and hegemony, in the form of a fetish. The signs, vocabulary, and narratives that it produces … are officially invested with a surplus of meanings which are not negotiable, and which one is thus officially forbidden to transgress.” To sum up, it is not the directly oppressive aspect of power

113 Ibid., 38-39. In between the report quotes the English translation of a shloka from Keno-Upnishad by Sree Aurobindo and ends the chapter by quoting a section from a speech by Nehru on the same theme – i.e. the ideal ‘union’ of Western scientific attitude and ‘Indian’ spiritualism.

114 See A. Mbembe, ‘The Banality of Power and Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony’, in Public Culture 4.2 (1992), 1-30. Italics original. He also points out that to complement and ensure the operation of this hegemonic discourse, the state machinery makes systematic use of brutal oppression and pain – “the basic goal being the production of an imagery”. Mbembe restricts himself to examples from African postcolonial states such as Togo, Congo and Cameroon, but his initial observations can
that we see here – it is a set of recommendations on education in any case – but its institutional capacity to mobilize and contain consent even when it betrays a foundational fiction.

If it seems that we have digressed from the topic of ‘children’s literature’, this detour has a reason. I suggest that the modular form of affect, including the element of pleasure, evoked by ACK is similar to what these reports would most recommend, although individual/partial responses will not, and need not, always be similar. By ‘modular’ I mean a certain orientation in epistemological or hermeneutic scope, however ordinary or ‘banal’ – whether or not we use the term after Mbembe. Indeed, my contention is that the irreducible banality – crudeness, predictability or repetitiveness when one thinks of the ACK comic books – ensures their popularity. It is also the central problem that any analytic would focus on in order to understand the laws behind their function, their success in terms of sales records or cultural appeal. It is simply not enough to point out what is wrong or how ‘exclusive’ they are – the critique can only start from there – but appreciate the nature of their representational authority. ACK, as part of an average middle-class child’s article of pleasurable reading in the seventies and eighties, was successful on at least two counts. One, because of its range of translations and effective network of distribution, ACK became a viable replacement to orally transmitted reserve of stories within family and the larger context of community. It represents a democratic move. ACK as children’s literature takes after the kind of extra-curricular reading material advocated by official policy, a lesson in pleasure. That is no small achievement when we understand its full implication. The practice of storytelling often taken up by the

be extended to relate to postcolonial formations as such, and have been. For a critique which do so, see the essays in Public Culture 5.1 (1992), 47-122, and Mbembe’s rejoinder in the same volume.
elderly womenfolk (as Tagore and Nehru refer to) – a gendered matrilineal labor by all means – finds a technological successor.

**‘Indian’ English**

One important upshot of ACK is the way it sets a standard of English language usage. Targeted originally at English-medium schoolchildren, it uses idiomatic forms of address and teaches manners of genteel upbringing. The young Chandrahasa, recently turned orphan, thanks the kind neighbors when they offer him food and addresses both as ‘mother’. He asks a group of boys playing with marbles: “May I join you, please?” When a vassal sees the lonely boy wandering through a forest, he enquires: “What are you doing here alone, my child? Whose son are you?” Hyperbolic language (a loose vector of the ‘literary’) is used also in critical moments. In *Malati and Madhava*, based on a play by the 8th century court-poet Bhavabhuti, the heroine is taken in by a *shakta* tantric priest (called a ‘sorcerer’ because he practices black magic, and named Aghor after a certain Tantric sect who are traditionally known for cannibalistic practice) to be sacrificed. Malati, already dejected because her marriage was arranged by her father (as in many such cases, a diplomatic compromise) with someone other than her love-interest, is dazed at this point but remarkably composed. When being tied to a pillar, she comments: “Cruel father, you would sacrifice me to gain the king’s favor. But these evil ones have forestalled you.” Madhava seizes upon the *tantric* with these words: “Desist, vile wretch.” On another occasion, Madhava addresses a friend who has collapsed on the ground: “Alas, dear friend! Has death claimed you?” When one compares ACK with similar products, say, from Diamond Comics, the difference in terms of readership becomes
clear. The latter aims at telling simple, funny stories where coarse humor delivered in an intimate conversational flavor is aimed at instant communication with a localized north Indian audience. English remains a ‘foreign’ and alien language, powerful in a different sense. In the adventures of Chacha Chaudhury, English language is provincialized to an extreme where compositional or grammatical correctness of English is secondary to its token value as vehicle of power. ACK brand of English occupies the other end of the spectrum. It does not destabilize the linguistic polarity of public sphere in post-seventies India but attempts to bring the Anglophone schoolchildren within the fold of reformulated national imaginary of Indian ‘tradition’.

But at least equally important is how ACK introduces a certain version of ‘Indian’ English, occasioned mostly by the nature of stories. In Chandrakhasa, the old king addresses the elderly royal priest, probably the kulpurohit, as ‘Revered Sir’ and in turn is always referred to as ‘O King’. Expressions like ‘Ah, my Queen’ or ‘O Venerable One’ might remind us of English court plays which were translated in local languages and put on stage during the nineteenth century. Profuse sprinkling of Hindu Sanskritic names (sometimes indexical) such as Dustabuddhi, Madayantika, Vritra or Hritadhwaja, Dravidic such as Tiruppan, Tachcholi Othenan, Persian like Humayun or ‘Jahanpanah’,

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115 Arvind Rajgopal uses the notion of ‘split public’ to describe the linguistic divide of the media (Hindi/local language vs. elite English language) around the Babri Musjid-Ram Janambhoomi dispute.

116 The priest attached to the dynastic line or royal patrilineal family who performs rituals.

117 All the letters in ACK are in capitals, so there is no way to discern. These capitalizations are mine. ‘Sir’ never existed before the spread of English language – the typical address of a native towards colonial master.

118 The noted Bengali dramaturge Girish Ghosh translated and adapted Shakespeare’s plays. Local-language adaptations of Shakespeare and Brecht, in particular, are popular even today.
or an occasional Lachit Barphukan, introduce a variety simply by their onomatopoeic quality. The ACK reader is also produced through this play of linguistic-onomatopoeic ‘difference’.

It is worthwhile to think about what Bakhtin calls an ‘intentional hybrid’\(^\text{119}\). ACK English presents a peculiar case where parodic image of a (purportedly) ‘lost’ Indic speech or its vestige as it were, results in idiomatic archaisms. Clearly, it is a deliberate artistic decision to construct those ‘traces’ specifically for that purpose, as ‘token’ expressions. This new lingo is interesting if we remember the social evolution of the colonial masters’ language in India. English was always, since its introduction, a language of power and still is. It is the language of European civilization, science, bureaucracy, the culturally privileged or the elite, and (lately) an access to globalization. Despite having an official language for the country (which is no more than a formality; large parts of Indian population, e.g. those in southern and north-eastern states, still do not consider Hindi as second language\(^\text{120}\)), ACK’s initial target audience, too, was the English-educated middle-class at the helm of affairs. The archaisms in ACK are important as gestures since it was not really possible to represent the ‘lost’ language, if that ever existed. To go back to Bakhtin, there is no real second language-consciousness in ACK – merely fabricated ‘samples’ to create. ACK English, in that respect, is an imperfect intentional hybrid that


does not easily come under any defined category. This hybrid language was taken up by mythological teleserials aired on national channels and (literally) brought home to an even wider audience.

121 The Bollywood-MTV Hinglish, evolving since the nineties, would be a better example of an intentional hybrid.

122 ACK’e retelling of epics and mythology coincided with the transmission of the TV serial based on the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata during mid-late 1980s.