Chapter I

Introduction

In the new millennium, children’s literature has seen a proliferation of composite genres like the comic strip, the cartoon, the picturebook and the graphic novel along with Young Adult fiction, that engage with contemporary social/political realities, in addition to the prevalence of traditional genres like the fairy tale, the fantasy and the folk tale. Among the many sub-genres that have attained growing popularity is the picturebook, a composite artefact that encourages multiple meanings and divergent readings. Kimberley Reynolds avers that “the stories we give children are blueprints for living in culture as it exists, but they are also where alternative ways of living are often piloted in recognition of the fact that children will not just inherit the future, but need to participate in shaping it” (Radical 14). The “engagement of children’s literature with social practices” (Bradford et al. 6) was pushed in a new direction by the various upheavals experienced worldwide in the 1980s and beyond. Children’s texts “reflected and responded to historical moments” (6) such as the end of the Cold War in 1986–1987; the disintegration of the Soviet Empire in 1989; the end to apartheid in South Africa in 1990; the Persian Gulf War of 1990–1991; the civil war in Bosnia in 1992; and closer to home, the Kargil War in 1999 between India and Pakistan, and the civil war in Sri Lanka which ended in 2009. These events “prompted shifts in the social and political discourses” of the times
These texts attempt to make sense of and be sensitive to the bewildering world around the child living in the 21st century.

Blurring boundaries and creating hybrid genres; interrogating literary and artistic conventions, dominant discourses and ideologies, social constructs and stereotypes, mores and taboos; making new of the old with play, parody and intertextuality; and mixing modalities and retaining uncertainties, postmodernist picturebooks today attempt to shape the child into an active and alert reader. On the other hand, the picturebook creator influenced by postcolonialism “re-writes reality” (Myers 33) in stories about the ‘other’ in culture and nature—the ‘voiceless’ child, animal and tree; the suppressed sex; the challenged; the out-classed; and the out-caste—while wielding the appropriated language of the erstwhile coloniser, to reveal ‘other’ versions of truth, values and cultures. This dissertation attempts to explore the dynamic nature of the picturebook published in India in the 21st century. It intends to make a synchronic study of picturebooks published by Tara Books and Tulika in order to observe their power to interrogate ‘truth’ and transform young minds, using postmodernism and postcolonialism as reading strategies. At a broader level, it is the researcher’s attempt to discover how picturebooks in India in the 21st century are “changing the way children’s literature is perceived in culture by recognising the way books. . . for children have fostered and embedded social, intellectual and aesthetic change”; it is also an attempt to identify “the changes that are currently taking place—and those that are being resisted—in writing for the young” (Reynolds 23).
The “ability to envisage and engage young readers with possibilities for new worlds and new world orders,” according to Reynolds, is “central to the transformative power of children’s literature, both socially and aesthetically” (14). She asserts:

New visions may operate primarily at the levels of plot and content but . . . they may also inspire stylistic innovation, new narrative forms, and fresh explorations of the book as a medium, resulting in intellectual platforms from which to build new thinking. Such platforms are necessary but rare” (14).

Clare Bradford, Kerry Mallan, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum in *New World Orders in Contemporary Children’s Literature* use the term “transformative utopianism” which is based on the assumption that “works of fiction employ utopian and dystopian themes and motifs” with a transformative purpose: that is, they “propose or imply new social and political arrangements by imagining transformed world orders” (6).

Children’s literature has been a neglected area of study in the past, partly because it is mainly the province of “that culturally marginalised species, the female” who is generally the co-reader at home as well as the author of books for children in most cases (Hunt, *Understanding* 1999 1). The scope of this study is limited to picturebooks published in English by Tulika and Tara Books, where women remain the major stakeholders—be it as publishers, authors or illustrators. Apart from winning several awards nationally and internationally, their books have also been recommended for reading in schools by the education boards in India. Most of the picturebooks selected for analysis are those targeted at pre-literates, for whom reading is a ritual in which the parent sits close to the child and reads the story aloud. At times, picturebooks by other
Indian publishers or those published in other countries have been read alongside for a broader perspective. Before exploring the paradigm shift in publishing for children in India in the new millennium, it is necessary to explore the multiple and complex signification of the term ‘children’s literature’, which remains an area dominated by the adult—produced, discussed and judged by the adult alone.

1.1 **Problematising Children’s Literature**

An adult picks up a book from a store for a child. The book is written by an adult, usually for the reading pleasure of children. The child outside reads about the child portrayed within the book. Academicians and critics classify such books as ‘children’s literature’. They analyse, judge and recommend ‘good’ books for children. Children, they believe, must be given what they need, not what they want. These books must make children grow up to become good citizens, imbibing all the values adults want to instill in them. Perry Nodelman observes:

> What adults most frequently believe children need from their literature is education. Understood as innocent and inexperienced, it is argued, children know less about the world they live in than they might, less about how to think about themselves and others than they might, less about how to behave than they might. Adults thus have a duty to teach children what they don’t yet know, so, from this point of view, children’s literature is primarily a didactic literature. *(Hidden 157)*

Jaqueline Rose, in her seminal work *The Case of Peter Pan*, writes about the impossibility of adults studying children’s literature, maintaining that the child, both as
character and reader, remains a personal construct of the adult, most often influenced by
eighteenth century Romantic notions of childhood innocence. Despite the possessive
apostrophe in the phrase ‘children’s literature’, she believes that it has never really been
owned by children (16). Reynolds, summing up Rose’s argument, states that children’s
fiction has tended to be regarded as a “cultural safe-house” which preserves “an ideal of
the innocent child dating back to Locke and Rousseau”, in which writers refrain from
using ‘bad’ language or portraying sex and violence (Radical 5). Reynolds emphasises
the need to stop looking at children’s literature as an aesthetic of childhood innocence
and instead look at it as an aesthetic of transformation. Karín Lesnik-Oberstein also
reiterates, like Rose, that the real child can never be known, but agrees with critics like
David Rudd who state that the reality of the child out there cannot be denied. She cites
John Rowe Townsend who classifies adults interested in children’s literature as “child
people” and “book people”: the “child people”—educators, psychologists, librarians,
parents—claim to have knowledge of what children in general are like and base their
discussions of children’s literature on that supposed knowledge. The “book people”—
literary scholars and many children’s writers—claim to believe that children are too
individual to be known as a group and focus on evaluating books on their own terms,
recommending what they identify as quality literature. But as Lesnik-Oberstein points out
in her Introduction, the book people also imagine a generalised child, one who needs and
who ought to respond positively to the books they admire. Thus, “both ‘book people’ and
‘child people’ are ‘child people,’ ultimately unable to escape relying on the existence of
the ‘real’ child” (3). Studying ‘children’s literature’, as Rudd observes, will involve
“steering a course between, on the one hand, notions that there is an underlying
‘essential’ child whose nature and needs we can know and, on the other, the notion that the child is nothing but the product of adult discourse” (‘Theorising’ 16).

Marah Gubar, on the other hand, has questioned the academia for not including under this umbrella term, the prolific amount of writing done by children, at times in collaboration with adults:

One of the key claims I want to make in my new book project is that children function not just as recipients of adult-produced texts but also, sometimes, as coproducers and enactors of child-oriented texts. We have simply chosen to ignore this latter kind of cultural artifact because the critical story we have been telling about children’s literature rules out the possibility that young people can function as artistic agents, participants in the production of culture. (452)

Rudd, like Gubar, refutes the theory that adults have agency, power and voice, and children do not: “In terms of children’s literature, though, it might still be argued that, unlike women and other minority groups, children still have no voice, their literature being created for them, rather than creating their own” (19). He maintains that children produce literature in vast quantities, oral and written, both individually wrought and through collaborative effort (sometimes diachronically), and in a variety of forms: rhymes, jokes, songs, incantations, tall tales, plays, stories and more. He asserts that the fact that children are seen not to have a stake in this is, once again, a product of the way children’s literature (in its texts and its criticism) has become institutionalised, such that—ironically—only commercially published work is seen to count; or, to put it another way, only adults are seen to ‘authorise’ proper children’s literature. Lesnik-Oberstein also
questions the confusing manner in which adults label books as ‘children’s literature’: “If it is a book written ‘for’ children, is it then still a children’s book if it is (only) read by adults? What of ‘adult’ books read also by children – are they ‘children’s literature’?” (“Essentials” 15).

Michael Benton points out that the child reader also remains a neglected figure in children’s book criticism. Reader-response criticism propagated by postulations made by Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish emphasises the role of the reader in making meaning. Benton maintains that “reader-response criticism accommodates both the reader and the text; there is no area of literary activity where this is more necessary than in the literature that defines itself by reference to its young readership” (98). Rudd goes further in affirming that the child, as reader, has agency. He posits that however monoglossiacal the discourse by the adult author is, a child can respond to it “from a new social and physical location” making meaning by revising it at times or through intertextuality (22). A child possessing agency, reading the discourse from her/his position and interpreting it independently makes for a doubleness of discourse; the book then becomes a product, of both adult-maker and child-reader. For Rudd, the problematic of children’s literature lies in the gap between the “constructed” child, that is, the implied child within the text, and the “constructive” child, the child reader who co-constructs meaning, in what he terms a “hybrid, or border area” (16).

The critic, then, must keep in mind the intention of the adult writer, the interactive text and the active reader. Peter Hollindale postulates that the critic retrieves the child within, in order to imagine the response of the child reader. In his book Signs of
*Childness in Children’s Literature*, he proposes that children and adults both have access to “childness” but they experience this in different ways, “not least because children are currently going through the stage of ‘being a child’ while adults are variously—often simultaneously—recollecting their own childhoods, responding to imperatives from the children they once were and who continue to exist emotionally within them, and possibly reacting to texts in the manner of children” (qtd. in Reynolds, “Child-oriented Criticism” 130). A childist critical approach that studies the picturebook from an adult researcher’s imagined experience of childness, simultaneously retaining an awareness of the multiple responses of the constructive child reader, has been adopted by this researcher in order to exploit the advantages offered by the positing of a dual level of readership.

All human beings are products of culture (socially constructed), but the positions they occupy in terms of power are different—this fact remains, unsurprisingly, a core feature of what is called ‘children’s literature’ (Rudd, “Development” 9). The hidden agenda of the adult writer who aims to indoctrinate the child using books as vehicles for orthodox or unorthodox ideas is deliberated upon by critics like Perry Nodelman, Kimberley Reynolds, Charles Sarland, Joseph Zornado and John Stephens. Perry Nodelman expresses this shared perception succinctly:

. . . the issue is still centrally about what adults desire for children—want them to know and not know, want them to be. What adults believe is good for children is essentially what is good for adults, and what I have identified as the literature children need might be better defined as the literature adults want and need children to need. (*Hidden Adult* 158)
John Stephens, in a similar vein, deduces:

Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience. These values include contemporary morality and ethics, a sense of what is valuable in the culture’s past (what a particular contemporary social formation regards as the culture’s centrally important traditions), and aspirations about the present and the future. (Language 3)

Since a culture’s future is invested in its children, “children’s writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould audience attitudes into ‘desirable’ forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular writers oppose” (3). Rose, along the same lines, posits that the primary function of children’s literature is to secure the child in culture: it is coercively normalising (20). But as Sarland expounds, borrowing Umberto Eco’s terminology, the reader does have the option of not subsuming the ideology of the text through critical readings which question the text or through aberrant readings, different from the ones envisaged by the sender (49). This researcher too is guilty of attempting to read picturebooks in order to gauge the transformative potential within them in the assumption that covert didacticism is generally prevalent in books written by adults for children.

Zohar Shavit, on the other hand, argues in favour of writers of children’s literature in Poetics of Children’s Literature when she discusses the difficulty of speaking to adults and children at the same time:
The children’s writer is perhaps the only one who is asked to address one particular audience and at the same time appeal to another. Society expects the children’s writer to be appreciated by both adults (and especially by ‘the people in culture’) and children. Yet this demand is both complex and even contradictory by nature because of the different and even incompatible tastes of children and adults. (71)

Nodelman considers this sort of doubleness, which Barbara Wall terms “dual address” (35), a central fact of children’s literature as a genre (208).

Reynolds opines that one of the “least recognised areas of creative enrichment and transformation” occurs in the way children’s literature both “incubates genres that have ceased to be used in adult fiction and participates in generic innovation. In this way it functions both as restorative—receiving and returning in rejuvenated form genres originally associated with adult fiction—and as a wellspring from which adult writers can draw” (18). The picturebook, for instance, as David Lewis professes, cannot be considered a genre in itself but a form that exploits genres. It “incorporates or ingests genres, forms of language and forms of illustration,” re-presenting them and, in the process, re-making them (65).

1.2 Defining the Picturebook

Picturebooks, comics and graphic novels are rich and complex media, combining image and text in different formats and playing on the interdependence of these signifying systems. Whereas comics are often devalued and considered one of the first
type of texts to be owned by the child who reads them independently, the picturebook is venerated as a medium for literacy development, as something that can help foster a child’s understanding, especially when shared with an adult (Gibson 100, 104). The picturebook, which incorporates two semiotic systems, the visual and the textual, frequently along with the oral, and at times including other modes like the aural and the musical as well, is a multimodal multimedia artefact that is available as a hand-held book whose pages have to be turned or as an electronic book viewed on screen at the click of a mouse or the touch of a phone keypad. Although fears of the physical book disappearing fast loom large in the minds of academicians and publishers, Margaret Mackey posits that the physical book will never go away because of the pleasures associated with tactility; from babyhood, she affirms, “we pay a particular kind of attention to what we hold in our hands” (“The Most” 109, 110). The dissertation, in fact, focuses on picturebooks that can be held by the young reader, in which the materiality of the book itself influences the meaning-making process.

Eve Bearne, in her Introduction to the book Art, Narrative and Childhood speaks of the paradigm shift in how texts work to make meaning in the age of the “textnological revolution” (xiii). Lewis too observes that everywhere, texts are now routinely ‘pictured’. The world is awash with photographic images, icons and other kinds of visual signs in newspapers and magazines, on computer screens and television channels, the Internet and the CD-ROM, video games and advertisements. People now “unblushingly use the term ‘visual literacy’,” when a few decades ago the concept itself was undreamed of (62–63). Bearne sees children already ahead of adults in literacy practices offered by the three, very often four, dimensions of the “televisual, multimedia world” (xiii). Gunther Kress
refers to the current landscape of communication as a metaphorical shift from “telling the world to showing the world” the former characterised by the process of “reading as interpreting” and the latter with “reading as design” (137). The reader, in a digital age, navigates texts using the genre of the “display” instead of the “narrative”, prominent not just on computer screens, smart phones, advertisements and video games but in printed books like the MLA, eighth edition, as well (142). The “reading path is not at all ‘regular’, in the sense of a traditional page. . . It is established by the criteria of relevance that a reader brings to the page” (149). The demands of design require an imagination that can impose order on the representational world. The medium of screen plus the mode of image, thus, asks for an imagination of a different kind in the reader. The changes in the process of reading, Kress affirms, bring about a change in the way we think (149, 152).

Right from the time of cave paintings and Egyptian papyrus rolls 3000 years ago, images have been a primary means of communication. The aesthetic pleasure they induce as decoration and their capability to supply narrative meaning when read in sequence permit them to function as illustrations; a pleasure not accessible in written text alone. The “aesthetic interaction between image and idea has changed in form from cave wall to papyrus scroll to illuminated manuscript to printed book” (Kiefer 19). It is not surprising then that new forms continue to emerge. Judith Graham observes that today, illustrations are present, not just in children’s books but in books for all ages; in comics and magazines; in advertisements; on posters; on food and other packaging; in brochures; and on the television and computer screen (54). Reynolds affirms that “the word-image dynamic is particularly adept at giving expression to meanings and concepts that reside at
the edges of language—things for which the vocabulary and grammar that regulate verbal communication may currently be inadequate” (17).

Many critics prefer the term ‘picturebook’, as does the researcher, to other variations like ‘picture book’ and ‘picture-book’ to define books in which narration involves mutual picture-text dependence. Kristin Hallberg’s definition of a ‘picturebook’ or the ‘picture storybook’, referred to by Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott in their seminal text *How Picturebooks Work*, differentiates it from an illustrated book, as one in which there is at least one picture on each spread and that which functions as an “iconotext, an inseparable entity of word and image, which cooperate to convey a message” (6). Nodelman, on the other hand, prefers the term ‘picture book’ in his definition for “books intended for young children which communicate information or tell stories through a series of many pictures combined with relatively slight texts or no texts at all” (*Words* vii). Like Judith Graham, he refers to the pictures as “‘illustrations’—images that explain or clarify words and each other”. But unlike other illustrations which support a detailed text with relatively few pictures, “the pictures in picture books take up most of the space and bear the burden of conveying most of the information” (viii).

Whereas Nodelman uses the term “picture book” to denote both narrative and non-narrative ones, Nikolajeva and Scott, and Lewis choose to demarcate the narrative ones, at times wordless, as “picturebooks” (Nikolajeva and Scott 8; Lewis xiv) to highlight the composite nature of the “picturebook text” (Lewis xiv) in which the picture-text dynamics change the meaning of the whole as opposed to the meaning of the parts, although as Nodelman reminds us, the process of reading remains separate for the two modes—“we cannot both read the words and peruse the pictures at the same time” (viii).
Nikolajeva and Scott maintain that “the unique character of picturebooks as an art form is based on a combination of two levels of communication, the visual and the verbal” (1). The exceptionality of the picturebook, which involves the ‘reading’ of both pictures and words, has been discussed by many critics like Nodelman, Scott, Lewis, Margaret Mackey, Nikolajeva and Bearne. Lewis, borrowing a term used by Margaret Meek, describes this process as “interanimation”:

What the words do to the pictures is not the same as what the pictures do to the words. Roughly speaking, the words in a picturebook tend to draw attention to the parts of the pictures that we should attend to, whereas the pictures provide the words with a specificity—colour, shape and form—that they would otherwise lack. . . . The words are pulled through the pictures and the pictures are brought into focus by the words. (35, 48)

Nikolajeva and Scott observe that the reader turns from verbal to visual and back again, in “an ever-expanding concatenation of understanding”, which is why children read and re-read the same book. Actually they “do not read the same book; they go more and more deeply into its meaning” (2). Nikolajeva highlights the multiple interpretations that can be made by active readers of picturebooks:

Picturebooks are a synthetic medium, like theatre or film, where the overall meaning is assembled by the receiver in the interaction between the different communicative means. The function of pictures is to describe or represent. The function of words is primarily to narrate. Words are essentially linear (in our culture, for instance, we read left to right), while images are non-linear and do not
give us direct instruction about how to read them. The tension between the two functions creates unlimited possibilities for interaction between word and image in a picturebook. (“Picturebook Characterisation” 37)

Hypothesising the process of reading pictures and written text, Nodelman avers that the eyes move first to the picture, then to the words, then back to the same picture, after which the page is turned, as the interpretation of each mode paradoxically amplifies and limits the meaning of the other (Words 243, viii). To Nodelman, the skills required for reading such composite texts, especially the visual images, are not inherent but acquired through “a knowledge of learned competencies and cultural assumptions” (17).

The relationship between the picturebook, the adult reader and the child listener is visualised by Tamara Ellis Smith as a “vibrant triangle” (66). According to her, picture books are only fully realised in the presence of three requisite components—the story, the storyteller and the listener. The dual audience usually involved in the ritual of reading—the emergent reader, the child, and the competent reader, the adult—makes reading “an embodied experience” (68). Just as the child snuggles up tight to the adult, the child also, in essence, snuggles up close to the book. She lets “the words touch her, the rhythms of the words flow into her like music”. It is an experience that places both the body and the brain on equal ground. It is “reading without judgment” (68). Smith reiterates:

When a Vibrant Triangle picturebook—that which evokes a multi-sensory experience—is read aloud, that dynamic experience has the real potential to slip through a child’s skin and into her body. It nestles deep, sprouts wings and begins
to grow. It is the sense of self a child develops, and her sense of the world. It is a child’s sense of her place in that world. (69)

Picturebooks have been classified by critics according to the relationships that exist between pictures and words. Whereas Nikolajeva and Scott maintain that picturebooks could be symmetrical with two mutually redundant narratives, or complementary with words and pictures filling each other’s gaps, or enhancing with the visual narrative expanding the verbal narrative or the verbal narrative depending on the visual narrative, or running at counterpoint with two mutually dependent narratives, or syleptic with two or more narratives independent of each other (giving rise to irony or ambiguity in the case of the last two) (12), Lewis asserts that the same picturebook may depict relationships that move from symmetry to counterpoint and back again. No picturebook in that sense can be classified as one or the other. Instead, he maintains that the picturebook exhibits an inherent “double orientation”—a playing off of one perspective or view against the other—through “pictorialization”, the “promiscuous mixing together of words and images” (68). This ability of the picturebook to look in two directions at once, gives scope to various relationships between picture and written text. What other critics consider as characteristic of particular picturebooks, Lewis clarifies, is “immanent in all picturebooks” (68).

Barbara Bader’s definition of the picturebook has been cited by many critics like Judith Graham, Barbara Kiefer and David Lewis:
A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost an experience for a child.

As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page.

On its own terms its possibilities are limitless. (1)

It is fitting to conclude this section on the picturebook by restating Lewis’s postulations on the dynamic nature of the picturebook, bestowed by its unique form and the absence of a rulebook:

The picturebook is . . . not itself a genre. It is an omnivorous creature, ingesting, absorbing, co-opting pre-existing genres—other ways of speaking, writing, picturing—in order to make its texts, and as these genres change and mutate within society, so does the picturebook. It constantly renews itself by adapting to whatever languages and images are available to it and this gives the form an open-ended quality. We can never be sure exactly what the picturebook will do next as it is forever becoming and never completed. It turns its face to the unfinished future rather than to the preservation of the forms of the past. (74)

1.3 Postmodernism and Postcolonialism as Reading Strategies

India is considered a part of the Third World in an era of globalisation which is often described as the latest stage of imperialism. The term ‘Third World’ itself, which is
loosely used alongside the term ‘postcolonial’, is invested with suggestions of “lack”, “underdevelopment” and “difference”, and by virtue of nomenclature alone, if nothing else, it stands in a clearly hierarchical relationship to the West (Bahri 211). Gaining political independence from their British colonisers in 1947 did not alter the hardships of the ‘free’ citizens in India who continued to face gender inequalities, caste barriers, social prejudices and poverty at the hands of the ruling elite. As Frantz Fanon proclaimed in his celebrated essay “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the “national bourgeoisie” (153) that took over from colonial rule was a privileged caste that could make nationalism “crumble into regionalism, tribalism, and religious splits” (Lazarus 60). Even as Bangalore became the Silicon Valley of India, the government struggled with caste- and class-based factionalism. English, the language of the colonisers, may now be “the cultural, political, and economic *lingua franca* of the world” (Rivkin and Ryan 851) but poverty and lack of basic educational facilities did not help the majority in India gain upward mobility through the acquisition of English. Nevertheless, in multilingual India, English has become “one of the *Indian* languages, even the key professional language and certainly the main language of communication between the schooled sections of the different linguistic regions” (Ahmad 257). For a proper synchronic study of picturebooks in English published in digital India, it is only fitting that they are looked at in the context in which they are set.

Given that people around the world live in an era of radical change in which technology rules the day, in a condition of postmodernity where ‘realism’ is looked at with scepticism and metanarratives about truth, justice and progress are credible no longer, it is but natural that the aesthetic output of the world in these times reflects this
condition in a major or minor way. Literature, like its sister arts—music, painting and architecture—expresses it through its radical experimentation, especially in form. If we are now inhabitants of a virtual world where the real is that which is mainly constructed through “simulation”, as Jean Baudrillard has observed, then literature reveals this hyperreal world through its rejection of the illusion of realism and its sincere projection of fictionality (1). The philosopher, Jean Francois Lyotard’s postulations on realism and the “incredulity towards metanarratives” is reflected in the attempts in literature to write “petites histoires”, or micronarratives, ensconced in the local, moving away from overarching essentialisms. The characteristic feature of postmodernity, according to Lyotard, is that the power of the metanarrative as a legitimating, empowering force is on the wane. Postmodern subjects simply don’t believe in metanarratives any more. They instinctively acknowledge instead the rhetorical function of narrative, and appreciate that alternative narratives could be fashioned from the same group of events. Postmodernity, Lyotard argues, prefers little narratives, those which do not attempt to present an overarching ‘Truth’ but offer a qualified, limited ‘truth’, one relative to a particular situation (xxiv, 60).

Visual literacy spawned in the age of the internet, in which the display mode overpowers the narrative mode (Kress 142), influences the structure of contemporary fiction which Umberto Eco compares to a “rhizomatic” maze where “every path can be connected with every other one”. It has no center, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite (57). The display mode of the screen fashions the reader who is in control of the narrative, independently mapping the reading course, structuring it and making meaning the way she/he wants to, substantiating Roland Barthes’s proclamation
in “The Death of the Author” regarding the birth of the reader (*Image* 148). Whereas the author makes the text new using metafictional techniques, foregrounding that which traditionally remained behind curtains, the reader makes it new by applying her/his experiences, both lived and read, to internalise or resist the narrative.

While postmodernism expresses angst with no hope of a coherent world, contemporary picturebooks, David Lewis, points out, generally stay away from the postmodern label and can only be considered “postmodernist” at best. They do exhibit features of postmodernism—boundary breaking, excess, indeterminacy, parody and performance—but “they rarely unhook themselves totally from mainstream literary norms and none possesses the apocalyptic, endgame quality—that feeling of pirouetting gaily on the edge of an abyss—that is found in much postmodern art” (99). Such picturebooks, posits Karen Coats in her attempt at going beyond postmodernism, can give rise to the transmodern self:

. . . children’s picturebooks, modern or postmodern, aren’t angst-y, partially because children are viewed as not yet “finished,” so there is no reason yet to despair over what they have become. But more importantly, I think the reason why children’s books aren’t consumed with existential doubt or wholly given over to play and fragmentation is because we aren’t yet ready to assent fully to the claims of postmodernism. That is, we aren’t yet ready to give up on transcendence and make the fragmented, empty, saturated self the measure of all things. At the same time, however, we have lost faith in the self as inherently cohesive. The transmodern offers us a vision of the self as a constructed coherence, self-aware
and self-reflexive, but also culturally indebted and embedded and fully embodied. This, then, is authenticity for the self—not some inner pressure that drives us to become something we have been preprogrammed to be, but a thoughtful and critical responsiveness to our histories, our social stories, and our bodies. And I would contend that no other artistic product gives us a clearer picture of this self than the stunning collage art of contemporary picturebook artists. (85)

When Edward Said expostulated about the intellectual power and cultural strength he termed “Orientalism” exercised by the imperialists especially in Britain, France and the United States, it gave rise to contrapuntal readings of colonial texts and a rejection of essentialism in the study of texts written by the rest of the world. Knowledge of the Orient, Said posited, because “generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental and his world” (880). “The Orient” emerges as an effect of Orientalist discourse: “representation precedes and produces the reality which it can then claim merely to re-present, having obscured if not obliterated the earlier reality which, as a colonising discourse, it had begun by misrepresenting” (Lazarus 10). Said examined how “the knowledge that the Western imperial powers formed about their colonies helped continually to justify their subjugation” (McLeod 21–22). As Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia succinctly state:

Colonial discourse, then, is a system of statements that can be made about colonies and colonial peoples, about colonising powers and about the relationship between these two. It is the system of knowledge and belief about the world within which acts of colonisation take place. Although it is generated within the
society and cultures of the colonisers, it becomes that discourse within which the colonised may also come to see themselves, thereby succeeding in colonising their minds too (50).

Authors from the Third World had to resist falling into the entrapments laid out by the First World who set the rules and disseminated knowledge, especially about the ‘Orient’. New literatures from countries with a history of colonialism are now actively engaged in a process of questioning and travesty colonial discourses. Postcolonial literatures are “actively engaged in the act of decolonising the mind” (McLeod 25).

Although transculturalism and transnationalism are bywords in the era of post-postmodernism, the experiences of the Third World countries as colonised countries raped of their past—their culture, their values, their languages, their individuality—led to the emergence of counter-discourse of a different kind in those countries. Finding themselves colonised in every way possible—in terms of land, bodies and minds—they had to find avenues to regain their identities. If they had to be comfortable in a transnational world in which identity is plural, as Homi Bhabha avows, they had to first become familiar with “the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present”. In that sense, transnational histories of migrants, the colonised, or political refugees become the terrains of future world literature, in which cultures recognise themselves through their projections of “otherness” (941). In the article “Sharing Ideas and Experiences”, Deeya Nayar, Radhika Menon and Sandhya Rao affirm that the need for culturally relevant books is an understandable postcolonial phenomenon: “To be aware of their surroundings, their people, their country as it is today, not only their
heritage. For to grow up strong in one’s own culture surely gives one the confidence to accept others openmindedly, neither too aggressive nor defensive.”

This dissertation attempts to study picturebooks published in India, in the light of the postmodern condition, and the influence of the postcolonial attitude. It will discuss picturebooks as counter-narratives of realism and ‘truth’ especially in design and form but also in the way they break taboos and challenge stereotypical constructs and dominant ideologies in theme and content. The “writerly” texts, as Barthes terms it, engage the active reader as a co-constructor of meaning and more importantly encourages not just verbal literacy but also visual literacy, the need of the times (S/Z 5). The dissertation will also analyse picturebooks in English as postcolonial counter-discourses—writing back to the empire appropriating the coloniser’s language, but also re-establishing identity through an Indian world view embedded in an Indian way of life, using a language that is now one of their own. Celebrating differences within a multicultural, multilingual India leads the child reader from appreciating the local to enveloping the global; secure in the knowledge of the self and the world around her/him, eager to embrace differences as a migrant in a globalised world of multiple identities. Understanding and empathising with harsher Indian realities enhances the child’s ability to discern the problems of a disparate world in need of rectification. The potential within a child to become a responsible citizen of the world in the future can be tapped by the writer seeking a transformation of the mind. In that fervent hope, children’s literature remains unashamedly didactic.
The following section looks at the course taken by children’s literature in India, from early times to the modern, especially focusing on the growing popularity of the picturebook as a sub-genre. It also explores the social context in which children’s literature in India took root. The Indian child and childhood as social constructs, the importance of orature especially in agrarian India, the advent and appropriation of the English language, and the influence of patriarchy on gender, class and caste are also discussed. The publishers that bravely ventured into a neglected territory, especially the two publishing houses of the picturebooks under study, are also dealt with here.

1.4 The Indian Picturebook Story

The synergy that existed in pre-colonial India between centuries-old oral narratives and comparatively nascent written literature, re-emerged in a new format—the picturebook—towards the end of the 20th century. The influence of the oral on the written with regard to language, plot, structure, spontaneous improvisation and subversion lent vibrancy and a unique identity to the Indian picturebook—Indian not just in theme and content but also in form and design. In fact, this “convergence of literacy and oral creativity, so deeply embedded in India’s social practice,” is considered one of the most challenging by postcolonial critics discoursing upon ‘writing back to the empire’ (Devy 38). Indian picturebook publishers of the 21st century like Geetha V. strongly feel the need to “anchor” the reader in their own culture while giving them the freedom to explore the unfamiliar (Interview). As “picturebooks open windows to cultural contexts that exist both within the narratives contained in books and outside them,” there should ideally be a
marriage of the local and the global—the familiar and the unfamiliar—in them (Menon and Rao 16).

While many Western publishers hesitate to collaborate on foreign books that may ‘traumatise’ their readers, Radhika Menon, Managing Editor of Tulika, and Sandhya Rao affirm that each narrative is suffused with its culture, and children across the world have no problem in making a leap of the imagination to see it literally before their eyes.

“Images that sensitise one set of children are perceived as traumatising another”. . . But “understanding the context,” they maintain, “puts matters in perspective”. However, such “difficult themes need to be conveyed with compassion and care” (17). If generations of Indian readers who grew up on Enid Blyton could enjoy her books in spite of having no idea about the ‘scones’ eaten by the children in the books and the ‘meadows’ they roamed across, then any child seated with a book anywhere in the world could fly on the wings of imagination and savour it all.

1.4.1 The English ‘Legacy’

English, the language of globalisation, has become a pan-Indian language after the British colonisers introduced it as the medium of education in India for their own personal ends. R. K. Narayan, one of the first Indian writers to introduce idiomatic English into his stories based in South India, bore, like many others of his generation, the trauma of figuring out an alien civilisation portrayed in textbooks written in English. In this regard, Shashi Tharoor makes a pertinent observation with reference to the freedom fighters of India:
The English language was not a deliberate gift to India, but an instrument of colonialism, imparted to Indians only to facilitate the tasks of the English. . . .

That Indians seized the English language and turned it into an instrument for our own liberation—using it to express nationalist sentiments against the British, as R. C. Dutt, Dinshaw Wacha and Dadabhai Naoroji did in the late nineteenth century and Jawaharlal Nehru in the twentieth—was to their credit, not by British design. (218, 219)

In fact, the higher education system initiated by the British in India left the graduate “westernized enough to be alienated from his own Indian cultural roots” (223). On the other hand, Menon and Rao note that the current generation of educated Indians straddle both worlds comfortably; they speak and think in English but at the same time, they also watch films and television serials in their native languages (20). Tharoor admits that English was “undoubtedly Britain’s most valuable and abiding legacy to India, and educated Indians, a famously polyglot people, rapidly learned and delighted in it – both for itself, and as a means to various ends,” political and pleasurable (237). The demand for books in English by a large section of children aspiring to learn English as a language of empowerment is recognised by publishers like Tulika who also publish bilingual books in Hindi and Tamil which allow the reader to slip into the narrative written in English by first reading it and comprehending it in the native language. Both Tara and Tulika bring out their versions of picturebooks in many Indian languages alongside the ones written in English.
1.4.2 Defining the Indian Child and Childhood

It is true that the media explosion on the Internet; online and stand-alone gaming; movies available on discs and through sharing sites for home viewing; television channels dedicated to children’s programmes; music; events and content aimed at ‘young adults’ supported by technology like the iPod; and the plummeting prices of digital systems are changing the landscape of the child’s world. At the same time, the real condition of children in India remains largely dismal. Rimi Chatterjee and Nilanjana Gupta maintain that:

The child in India is yet to leave behind the state of being a drudge or plaything of adults—parents regard children as their ‘property’, child marriage still happens in spite of all the laws, and child labour is all around us. The realities of child abuse are mostly swept under the mattresses of large and unwieldy families where the authority of age and gender remains very much in force, while the children of the poor are without any kind of security or shelter from exploiters both in their homes and outside. Education too remains a luxury, so that reading matter for children is accessible mostly to the rich, and the middle class is still deeply prejudiced against encouraging children to read for pleasure as opposed to ‘studies’ (16–17).

The pluralistic contours of India—that it is a country made up of many cultures, languages, peoples—is evident in the many lived realities of the Indian child, whose experiences are shaped by gender, class, caste, economics, politics, geography and history. That there is no generalised, universally applicable understanding of child and
childhood is an acknowledged aspect of children’s literature. A diachronic study by Kimberley Reynolds reveals the gradual change of outlook in Britain about the nature of the child and the kinds of childhood experienced by different children. Earlier in Britain, the child was simply looked upon as a small adult. There was no literature specially created for and addressed to the child. Instead, the child partook of the pleasures of listening to all kinds of discourse ranging from sermons in church to bawdy folk tales outside (Children’s Literature 1–2).

On the other hand, in India, within the closely-knit joint family system, the child and the parent were considered the younger child and the older child respectively of the head of the family, a “benign autocrat” (Menon, “Negotiating”). There was not much of a childhood to begin with as child marriage and early parenthood pushed the Indian child into adulthood too soon. While the boy child of the rich, upper-caste household did enjoy a privileged childhood, being sent to the best teacher—either a Muslim teacher, the ‘maulvi’, or a Hindu teacher, the ‘pandit’—irrespective of the religious denomination they themselves belonged to, the girls of the rich families and the boy child of the trader and artisan classes did not receive the same sort of education. The rich girl child was given an informal education at home by a family member or by semi-professional teachers, whereas the boy child of the trader and artisan classes received apprenticeship along with basic literacy skills (Menon, “Negotiating”). The girl child of the lower economic strata probably received little education other than being trained in housework and becoming a substitute mother for her siblings. While the upper class boys enjoyed the privilege of reading, the girls, even in the richest households were discouraged from doing so. The “taboo against reading and writing for women in orthodox households was
maintained by superstitions such as the belief that a literate woman’s husband would die leaving her a widow, . . . denied all but the most basic nourishment and all pleasures” (Gupta and Chatterjee 10). In spite of this, some girl-children or women (there was no clear difference demarcated between the two terms), learned to read and did read.

As in Victorian England, “the Indian idea of the child inhabited a paradoxical space, a being both innocent and exploited, to be protected as well as coerced. . . The child was simultaneously the future of India and the person most thoroughly excluded from the debates about where that future should go” (Gupta and Chatterjee 9). The idea of childhood remained a cruel joke, especially for the girl-child who was married off at a very young age. But the twentieth century has been witness to changes in the way the child is perceived. With more impetus given to women’s empowerment especially through education and the abolition of child marriage, girls as well as boys grow up with memories of a happy childhood for the most part. This may not be the case for children belonging to the lower economic strata as even today the percentage of school dropouts amongst children belonging to this class is quite high. Forced to work either outside or within their homes, these children are denied a childhood that is their birthright. In 2009, an important landmark, the Right to Education Act, passed by the Indian Parliament, made education a compulsory and fundamental right for all children between 6 and 14 years of age. Today twenty-five percent of every class in a school must consist of children from disadvantaged groups in the neighborhood, and the institutions must provide them with free elementary education.
1.4.3 The Trajectory of Children’s Literature in India

The system of education that had existed in India, the ‘gurukul’ system, though not accessible to all, gave importance to the individual, catering to the needs of each rather than assigning a superficial uniformity given by the British to an examination-based education system which flourishes even today in spite of its many discrepancies. This skewed perspective has been transferred to the area of children’s literature in India too. Menon speaks about the influence of the “textbook culture” on the production of children’s literature in India:

. . . children’s books in India seem to belong outside the realm of literature. They are more in the category of textbooks whose role is to inform and hone skills. And in a country where the textbook culture in schools is a continuing legacy of its colonial history, and has a stranglehold on the education system even today, children’s books are accepted only as an extension of text books. . . . The perception of childhood in India and the Indian educational system and pattern have wielded a strong influence on the growth and development of children’s publishing in India. (“Negotiating the Space”)

As Gupta and Chatterjee observe, in most Indian languages the term ‘reading’ is synonymous with ‘studying’ (17).

While pre-colonial times saw the child seated alongside the adult, listening to folktales, watching performances from *The Ramayana* or *The Mahabharatha*, or listening to songs sung by the Bhakti poets, and colonial times saw the child given patriotic doses
of ‘Indianness’, post-colonial times see the child as a separate entity who needs to be given sanitised literature in a palatable form. Until relatively recently, “the bulk of writings for children consisted of retellings of folk tales, classical texts and stories based on the lives and exploits of famous persons in history” (Gupta and Chatterjee 13). The children's book scene in India has witnessed revolutionary publications from the Children's Book Trust, Amar Chitra Katha and the National Book Trust. The books range from picture books to read-aloud stories, historical fiction, mystery and adventure stories, tales from everyday life to biography, environment and information books. The *Amar Chitra Katha* series is notable in that not only have these comic books enjoyed immense sales but they have also helped spread awareness of India’s cultural heritage, mythology and history (Agarwal). Anant Pai, the creator of the series, was dismayed by the fact that children were still reading comics and stories only written and produced in the West. These indigenously produced comic books probably remain “the most successful example of an Indian children’s literature” (Gupta and Chatterjee 15). Nevertheless, many among the generation that grew up in the 60s and 70s took to books from the West which were far more creative and vibrant than the spruced-up Indian myths, folk tales and historical tales, even though the characters were “Amanda and Michael and Dustin of the golden hair and blue eyes” (Menon and Rao 21).

Publishers today, on the other hand, are well-aware of the need for attractive children’s books set in the child’s own social and cultural milieu, in English as well as in other languages. Scholastic, Penguin Puffin, Ratnasagar, Kitabghar and Diamond as well as several new publishers like Ponytale Books, Duckbill, IndiaInk, Red Turtle, Tarini Publishing and Radical Books have now entered the scene. Katha, Tara, Karadi Tales,
Young Zubaan and Tulika have published attractive picture books as have Children’s Book Trust, Hemkunt, Frank Brothers, Vikas, Sterling, and Government organisations such as the Publications Division and the National Book Trust. Several non-governmental organisations like Pratham, Room to Read and the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children have “done a commendable job in publishing low-cost, attractive children’s books, in different languages, to reach the non-privileged child” (Sinha).

Over the last decade or so, some dramatic changes have taken place in children's publishing. The entry of large multinationals like Scholastic, Dorling Kindersley, Disney and a host of American comic books/magazines and many waiting in the wings, have drastically changed the economics of children's publishing. High-quality imported books are available at such special prices that Indian publishers find it difficult to match them. Besides, foreign publishers are actively looking at publishing books specifically for the Indian market—given their production network and numbers, this means higher standards of production and design, a welcome trend. Older and established publishing houses like Penguin, HarperCollins, Frank Brothers, Ratna Sagar, Orient Longman (now renamed Orient Blackswan), Macmillan, Navneet and recent entrants like Neve, an imprint of BPI publications, are concentrating more on their children's books departments. Sky Music has burst on the scene with audio books, their USP being a strong Indian identity created through choice of stories, the music track and songs, and celebrity narrators. Menon opines that:

Book clubs, book fairs and co-publications would all give children's book publishing a much-needed boost. But the dangers of market pressures lurk very
real—the market is fragmented, the school and public library network that is the mainstay of children's publishing in the developed countries is non-existent, and children's books are completely marginalised in the media and the book market. ("An Overview")

She points out that although India has been referred to as the ‘cradle of children’s literature’ because of its rich oral traditions, the current scenario doesn’t look as glorious, with three kinds of books being published for children—“socially-conscious, melting pot and culturally relevant”—with the fewest in the culturally relevant category ("An Overview"). Socially conscious books are those that are didactic, lacking in believable plot and characterisation, and frequently reinforcing the very stereotypes they hope to overcome and worse, creating a new set of stereotypes. The melting pot book focuses on the universal, ignoring subcultural differences. The culturally relevant book holds the greatest promise of presenting realistic images both in words and pictures to young audiences. Although one may argue that socially conscious books can also be considered as culturally relevant ones, what Menon tries to point out is the presence of didacticism and stereotypical elements within them that weigh them down. Gifted writers like Sankara Pillai, Arup Kumar Dutta, Poile Sen Gupta, Paro Anand, Swapna Dutta, Sandhya Rao, Vayu Naidu, Zai Whitaker and Kalpana Swaminathan have written books “whose narrative voices are strong and distinctive” and have created books with “imaginative integrity” (Menon “An Overview”); books that are enjoyed both by children and adults.

In agricultural India, the common way of imparting knowledge, instilling values and passing on pearls of wisdom to the unschooled majority was through stories. Every
evening, in a land without TV and theatres, the community would gather in the village square to listen in raptures to the revered story-teller who would bring in many of his own twists to an age-old story made refreshingly new, weaving in asides on current events and contexts. Just as the wise Vishnu Sharma’s *Panchatantra*, woven around charming animal tales of intrigue, wit, greed, and friendship, gave King Amarshakti’s sons practical education, so did stories narrated to the masses who got entertained while internalising the profound wisdom concealed within these stories. The story was recognised as “an ideal tool to impart knowledge and wisdom and to shape ideals and attitudes in accordance with social values. After all, a story was easily understood by all, and it entertained. It was a veritable sugar-coated pill of sorts” (Berry, “Social Change” *Bookbird* 49).

Stylised performances of episodes from the epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharatha* interspersed with spontaneous improvisations drew crowds for the same reasons. Be it in prose fiction or drama or poetry, this ability to play with a familiar text, introducing many intertexts along the way, makes Indian literature multi-layered and complex. Narratives are never “constrained by the idea of unity of place or time or theme. They are stories to be told and retold, flexible in plot and accessible to audiences of varying social, religious, and ethical persuasions” (Devy 36). But, although the stories and songs included the precolonial child in the world of the adult, they also “maintained and reinforced class, caste and gender hierarchies” (Menon, “Negotiating the Space”). On the other hand, picturebook publishers today aim to “provide a platform that cuts across divisions of class, gender, caste, race, nation, technology, power” (Menon and Rao 22). Being sensitive to cultural differences, they portray “multiplicity”—many Indias made up
of several societies that exist simultaneously side by side. Such books that “reflect an engagement with cultural contexts help young readers find their way” (20, 22).

Tara Books, an independent publishing house based in Chennai, was started in 1994 by Gita Wolf, who envisioned a space for book building which focused on the visual arts and gave preference to Indian tribal and folk art, much of which is women’s everyday art. Unabashedly feminist, the team at Tara is interested in exploring both traditional women’s art and contemporary renderings of women’s creativity. Their current core team of eighteen comprises not just writers and illustrators but also designers and artisans in handmade books—screenprinted books being a signature product of Tara—who look upon the physical book as a cultural artefact. Wolf expounds on their focus on the handheld book: “It is a time of change—in the way people read books. While I am personally very comfortable with e-books, Tara’s immediate future is more in exploring and experimenting with physical books” (Interview Foreword). In fact their website opens up with the slogan: “Pushing the boundaries of the book form in an age that is busy writing its obituary”. Armed with the belief that design itself creates meaning, they break barriers—experimenting, innovating and collaborating with like-minded artists and writers from across the world. Although most books are bought by lovers of visual art, their books defy strict genre classification; their titles range from picturebooks through graphic novels to photography and book art, a majority of them addressed to both adults and children. Published primarily in English and Tamil, they are now looking at publishing in Hindi and German. They have sold the foreign language rights to nearly 60% of their titles to around 120 publishing houses from around the world.
As a publishing house, Tara has won the London Book Fair International Publishing Industry Excellence Award in 2014, the BOP Bologna Prize for Best Children’s Publisher (Asia Region) in 2013, and the Johannes Gutenberg Award for Excellence in Printing in 2007. It has also been longlisted as Publisher of the Year, 3am Magazine, UK in 2012. Their books have received more than 55 awards in various categories. Some of the notable ones are the Honour Book, South Asia Book Award in 2016 for *The Boy Who Speaks in Numbers*, the Fifi Brindacier Prize for Promoting Sexual Equality in 2013 for *Drawing from the City* (French edition), the BolognaRagazzi Award in 2010 for *Do!*, the BolognaRagazzi Award in 2008 for *The Night Life of Trees*, the Golden Cube Award for Best Book Design in 2006 for *Sophocles’ Oedipus the King*, the Outstanding Book of the Year (Best Book Craftsmanship), the Independent Publisher Award in 2002 for *Sophocles’ Antigone* and the Book of the Month, Society for Youth, Literature and Media, Germany, in 2000 for *The Mahabharatha*. They have also been included in the USBBY Outstanding International Books honour list in 2015 for *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit*, the South Asia Book Award in 2014 for *Gobble You Up!*; the White Raven’s Catalogue of World’s Best Children’s Books in 2013 for *Excuses, Excuses*, the Notable Book, American Library Association, in 2012 for *Sita’s Ramayana*, the White Ravens Catalogue of World’s Best Books for Young People in 2011 for *I See the Promised Land!* and the USBBY Outstanding International Books honour list in 2009 for *Elephants Never Forget*.

Retaining the relevance of the physical book in a dizzying world of rapidly-changing technology is taken as a challenge by those at Tara:
A book can no more be a stable, bounded form of communication. It has to literally open out, involve the child reader in worlds that are outside the scope of the book and allow and enable her to journey into areas of enquiry that are suggested, but not entirely explored in the book. In a sense, books have always done this. But now, given the sheer literality of communication in our times, books have to consciously adapt themselves to meeting the needs of a curious young readership. Graphics and visual aids need to be built into the book. Its very design should be stimulating. Books should invite the child reader not merely to read and reflect, but to hold and touch. (Tara Editorial)

V. Geetha, Editorial Director of Tara, affirms that story-telling as part of narrative in a book is enjoyed by adults as much as children; that “images as much as words tell stories, in fact different kinds of stories, allowing for a range of voices to be heard, without the mediation of language, which means that non-literate voices too could be heard, and understood” (Interview Saffron Tree). In keeping with this line of thinking, Tara works with authors, artists and designers from a variety of social and economic contexts. They, like those at Tulika, presume that “the book works only when text, art, design and its making intersect in equal measure to create and communicate meaning,” as Geetha points out. She asserts that “there are worlds that open out, outside the pane of a smartphone, a tablet and a computer screen” (Interview Saffron Tree).

The team at Tara is also making an attempt to bridge the gap between child and adult by creating books that can be read by people of any age group. Tara’s focus remains on the well-designed book in which Indian art and craft predominates while the story is
narrated in words at times or by pictures alone. The local and the global are brought together in collaborated works like the Kanchil series in which the author is from Indonesia and the artist is from India. Similarly, Tulika also introduces Indian art and craft in illustration and design innovatively but primarily aims at the child reader who seeks the pleasure of a story. The attempt to forge an Indian identity in the books is problematised by Menon and Rao:

In India, with a plethora of forces constantly exerting their influence on every aspect of life, only a flexible and creative approach can point the way to being inclusive. We have to remember that there is no one Indian type or experience or child or individual or, indeed nation. (20)

Although much of the inspiration for books have come from the West, Western models are of little use when it comes to issues like stereotypes and taboos, and even the use of language which are all inextricably linked to society and culture. So too, the use of the English language that influences the style and perspective of an Indian writer, often scoffed at for being Western and rootless, is actually the wellspring of a unique “translated” sensibility. By relating to an Indian language and its culture through English and vice versa they marry the local and the universal. In fact, engaging with narratives first in English and then in nine different Indian languages permits those at Tulika to acquire a point of view that is objective rather than subjective, that enables them “to explore literature which reflects the connectedness between regions, languages and cultures, while at the same time retaining distinct individual voices” (Menon and Rao 16, 19, 20).
Tulika is the brainchild of Radhika Menon and Sandhya Rao who started the small independent publishing house in Chennai in 1996 with the aim of creating books that conveyed an ‘Indianness’ that was contemporary and inclusive, a diverse and plural culture in every respect. Along with Katha and Tara Publishing, they entered the scene with a definite focus on the kind of books they wanted to publish. They were ready to experiment, take a chance, create a niche and step away from the conventional. Menon is clear about the kind of books they wish to publish:

I am convinced that we must produce books, both traditional and contemporary, that reflect the Indian reality in content, style, visuals and production. This is the voice that must speak to young readers everywhere because this is our voice, our language. Books born out of our particular multilingual, multicultural experience can and should be a strong voice in an increasingly multicultural world. (Menon, “An Overview”)

Innovative and bold, they use photographs, collage, watercolour; they balance fact and fiction; they throw in humour; they translate; they use verse; and they do bilingual texts apart from bringing out books in English and nine Indian languages (Menon “An Overview”). They do not see illustrations as secondary and writing as primary, as many other publishers do; Menon avers that the pre-occupation with the written word is not surprising in a country where books for children are seen as necessary only for improving reading/writing skills and general knowledge. They publish baby board books, picture books, bilingual books, fiction, non-fiction, read and colour stories, teacher resources and e-books. Their books are published in English and also in Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam,
Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali. A majority of their authors and illustrators are women and many of the books counter gender stereotypes as well as many other social constructs ingrained within a predominantly patriarchal country, although Menon maintains that there is no agenda that they seek for in their selection of manuscripts (Interview Saffron Tree). Reynolds observes in her study of British children’s literature that by the end of the 19th century, women had come to represent the largest body of writers for children. Initially attempting to imitate male writers, women over the next century and a half, realised the freedom and space children’s literature gave them for rebelliousness and subversion. Adopting the voice of the child allowed them to locate their own positions as women in a male-dominated society, as well as escape the pressure to write like a man (Children’s Literature 28–29).

Having published more than 2000 books over the last twenty years, Tulika has won several accolades, both nationally and internationally. Recipient of the Publisher of the Year award in 2014, the Honour Award in 2007, the Uttam Bal Sahitya Award in 2007 and the Certificate of Appreciation from the University of Wisconsin in 2003, they have also received more than 40 book awards. Some of the notable ones in this category are the Honour Book (Non-Fiction), The Hindu Young World-Goodbooks Awards in 2016 for Gender Talk – Big Hero, Size Zero, Bal Sahitya Puraskar by Sahitya Akademi in 2015 for Mayil will not be Quiet, the Honour Book, South Asia Book Awards, USA, in 2015 for Bhimrao Ambedkar: The Boy Who Asked Why, the Outstanding International Book, United States Board on Books for Young People, USA, in 2013 for Out of the Way! Out of the Way!, the Darsana National Award for Best Children’s Book in 2013 for My Facebook Friends, The White Ravens Outstanding International Book, International
Youth Library, Germany in 2011 for *Same and Different*, the Vermont Red Clover Award, USA in 2010 for *Ismat’s Eid* and the Outstanding International Book, United States Board for Books for Young people, USA, in 2009 for *What Shall I Make?*

Menon affirms that when good writing, imaginative illustrations, good editing, good design and good production come together, it brings forth a good book: “When books focus on just one aspect they do fall short” (Interview *Saffron Tree*). Always open to new talent, more than 50% of the 200 authors and almost 150 illustrators they have worked with are first time writers and illustrators. Apart from collaborating with online publishers like Juggernaut, Tulika has also received a boost in sales of books from government organisations like the CBSE and NCERT which have selected over a hundred of their books for circulation in schools.

Open to innovation and translation; keen to challenge expectations and break stereotypes; and attempting to be inclusive in the selection of authors, illustrators and audience on the one hand and in the choice of narratives and representations on the other, both Tara and Tulika aim to depict slices of life suffused with Indian world views.

### 1.5 Chapterisation

The following chapter looks at the strategies adopted in picturebook creation in India in an age of postmodernity. The various postmodern literary devices that are applied to encourage active reading and the many ways in which these books break boundaries are also analysed. The chapter closely studies picturebooks challenging the given—constructs, ideologies, metanarratives and stereotypes. Picturebooks that are
transcultural, those that interrogate history and those that build empathy in an age of anomie are also dealt with in this chapter. The potential for various literacies latent in such picturebooks is also emphasised.

Chapter III analyses picturebooks as postcolonial literature. The appropriation of the English language and the subversion of dominant discourse, the foregrounding of Indian culture and world view, and the centering of marginalised minorities are topics of study in the picturebooks selected. The destruction of the environment in India as another form of imperialism is also the subject of discussion in this chapter.

The findings on the nature of picturebooks published in India in the 21st century are compiled in the concluding chapter along with a discussion of the relevance of this research to the field of children’s literature, the role of women in publishing it and the need for further research in this area. The importance of adding children’s literature to the syllabus in Departments of Languages across India is also emphasised. The lacuna in picturebook publishing that is partially filled now and the need for greater efforts in promoting quality picturebooks in India is also stressed in this chapter.