Conclusion

In the concluding section, I briefly revisit the themes that I have traced in relation to ACK and related literature, and try to delineate the direction – in the form of a few more problematics – that this research could take or lead to. We have been looking at the career of a series of popular comic books for middle-class school-going children, a successful consumer item, its ‘brand value’ and readership patterns. Through close textual analyses of ACK’s visual stylistics and storytelling techniques, we have been trying to assess its cultural location as ‘children’s literature’. Also, we have tried to put ACK in the historical context of official and popular discourses of mid-late twentieth century India with particular emphasis on a thematic – the construction of child-as-subject. Here we explore the issue further in order to answer a set of questions about the hegemonic power of this discourse and its relation to ACK as a cultural product.

The construction of ‘childhood’ in India, as opposed to real, lived ones, is a heterogeneous, institutional discourse with a particular history of its own. Created and exclusively controlled by adult/s, it turns the child to a silent participant by default. The word ‘childhood’ would make little sense to a child, if at all – it is invested with a sense of loss and utopia only later – hence arguably outside the boundary of a child’s experience as such. The most common usage of the word pertains to an intimate, reflexive act of remembrance or a bio-sociological description, in a first-person account or omniscient narration of the biographies or classic realist bildungsroman. The discourse of childhood projects its (child-)subject with a similar degree of representational felicity as imaginative literature but claims a distinct approximation of ‘truth’, as ‘knowledge’ or ‘law’. Drawing on a selection of mid-late nineteenth century writings, as well as more
recent ones, on pedagogy, child health and child-rearing, I try to look at the genealogy of this discursive authority.

I would like to point out that few attempts have been made in that direction in recent years – a hiatus that calls for urgent attention. Although many articles or occasional books have dealt with the topic of childhood or its veritable subject – the child – whether as an addressee of the colonial education policy and legal-punitive measures (Sen), nationalist pedagogy that carries its ideological legacy into the ‘modern’ genre of adventure stories for young adults (Bandyopadhyay), as an implied party to the historical instance of racial encounter via the colonial experience unleashed upon the Indian sub-continent (Nandy), or from an ‘insider’s’ reflection on the theoretical postulates of ‘Indian custom/tradition’ vis-à-vis western pathology (after Freud) of cultural community-formation (Kakar), all treat the child-subject in service of, or as a produce

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1 The word is used here in two senses, as ‘topic’ of discussion as well as representing an ideological position or ‘subjectivity’. Apart from recent (roughly 1970s onwards) literature surrounding children’s rights, children usually find their place in public discourses mostly in their capacity to sustain (and further) the institution of the family. Street children, children belonging to the economically disadvantaged or the displaced are more liable to be considered under a wider question of human rights. Concerns with children’s education are, however, as old as one can imagine.

2 Satadru Sen, Colonial Childhoods.

3 Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, Gopal-Rakhal Dwandosamas.

4 A. Nandy, An Intimate Enemy.

5 Although both Nandy and Kakar adopt Freudian psychoanalysis as their primary tool, their difference is notable. Kakar’s book, titled The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India (New Delhi: OUP, 1978), indeed a dubious academic bestseller as the numerous translations in several Indian and foreign languages (varying widely and often beyond recognition, e.g., Moksha: Le Monde Interieur (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1985), French translation, and Hum Hindustani (Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009), Hindi translation, would testify, compromises academic rigor. Although Kakar’s attempt at constructing an ‘alternative’ non-western discourse within the discipline of psychoanalysis has its exciting theoretical recompense (e.g. the greater symbiotic bond between parent and child in a prototypically Indian case that prohibits the analyst from straightforward application of the ‘default’ Oedipal framework following the Freudian schema), his uncritical and inter-substitutive use of terms such as ‘Indian’ or ‘Hindu’ is surprisingly uninformed by historical rigor. However, Kakar is not the sole candidate to be criticized on that ground, although perhaps the most prominent Indian name on the list. Another notable scholar of comparative psychoanalytic practice (especially in India and Japan, and US), Alan Roland, is also susceptible to the same mistake. See Roland’s article ‘Sexuality, the Indian
borne out by, different historical and theoretical impulses. In Nandy and Kakar, for example, the issues of adult-child relation and childhood appear as part of some master-discourse – the nature of colonialism and an ‘originary’ Indian ‘ethos’ respectively. An article titled ‘Sons of the Nation’, by Pradip Kumar Bose, draws our attention to the rise of the discourse of childhood in response to a new discourse on family and nation in nineteenth-century Bengal. One could also mention Myron Weiner’s *The Child and the State* that, despite the title, discusses only child labor and education policies in India from a typically UN guidelines-inspired rights perspective.

I undertake my enquiry following some basic presumptions underlined by some of these works mentioned above. ‘Childhood’ is not ‘real’, in the sense an individual’s particular stage of life is, but an imaginary, a constellation of ideas articulated about an ideal child-figure. Nor is it singular or authentic, there cannot be any purported model of the ‘Indian childhood’. It is a multi-linear ensemble. If so, the child-constructs or configurations particular to different discourses at work are in a motion of constant relay. The discourse of childhood is a manifestation of the ‘social’ – the ‘social’ is played out through mutual ordering of multiple, publicly articulated discourses simultaneously present and acting

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8 New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992. The late Professor Weiner, a Professor of Political Science, International Relations and Policy Studies in MIT, has written a number of books on political, economic and cultural change in developing countries as well as more developed, ‘industrial’ ones such as Japan and US. The book does not discuss ‘child/childhood’ as a theoretical/cultural construct having its own particular history.
upon each other. My understanding of childhood takes the ‘child’ to be neither a subject nor an object, but a (discursive) function in a mathematical sense.

Theorizing ‘childhood’

Childhood as a subject of sociological investigation or knowledge-formation is relatively recent and usually thought of as ‘western’ in lineage. That is not to say that other cultures have been indifferent to children or people in antiquity did not have their particular ideas about rearing their young progeny. Nor can it be stated with any degree of finality that the lack of effort (until very recently) in other cultures to do a comprehensive documentation around the sociological figure of the child proves the non-existence of deeply-harbored ideas regarding childhood as such.

My argument pertains to a certain systematic growth of discourses (such as pediatrics, child psychology or child rights) and politico-economic moves or forms (such as the nuclear family, elementary schooling or juvenile court) that gather around the idealized figure of child-subject and her identity or perceived role in society in their institutional capacity. The discursive entity of ‘childhood’, an internally dissonant and heterogeneous structure, is a dispositif, commonly translated in English as ‘apparatus’. The

9 Freudian psychoanalyst and anthropologist Bruno Bettelheim notes in his study of Kibbutz community in Israel titled The Children of the Dream (New York: McMillan, 1969) that children grow in these communities without the active nurture by their parents at an very early age (even in some cases when they are 5 days old). They are taken care of by a female caretaker, changing every time when the children move from one house to another, first at two years, then at four, then seven and subsequently at twelve years of age. They learn mostly from their peerage. Bettelheim’s observations, though, by his own admission, are hampered by interacting through a mediator and lack of specific observable data.

methodological advantage of talking in terms of a dispositif of childhood lies in its contingent signification occurring from a particular arrangement/assemblage of mutually over-determining discourses at work\textsuperscript{11}. We can thus think of a totality, an inter-discursive plane where the discourses are in constant dialogue; their overlapping or concurrence can (and does) produce orientations of power and value, but such formations are as such unconscious and arbitrary.

The ‘apparatus’, pace Foucault, serves as a structure of relations between thoroughly heterogeneous elements and their shifting functions, as well as the totality composed of all these elements: “the said as much as the unsaid”\textsuperscript{12}. The two processes through which an apparatus functions are functional over-determination (among different discourses and institutions) and strategic elaboration (ideological action, ‘necessary’ administrative decision, legal definition etc.). An ‘apparatus’ is defined as the nature of the interrelation between these elements as well as an index of strategic, dominant function at a given historical moment that made such relations possible in the first place. That makes the term appear as a catch-all category. Being a pervasive and (yet) elusive historic-diegetic principle available to an expert, it might appear like an immanent presence or design\textsuperscript{13}. But such objections need not deter our enquiry at the moment. Suffice it to say that to look for a linked epistemic network is a call to revisit the development of institutional

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\textsuperscript{11} Foucault in his interview describes it thus: “… what I call an apparatus is a much more general case of the episteme; or, rather episteme is a specifically discursive apparatus” (p. 197, Power-Knowledge, italics original).
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. Architectural forms and administrative decisions are thus included alike within an apparatus.
\textsuperscript{13} Agamben’s initial discomfort arises from this – that virtually everything under the sun (discursive and non-discursive, as network of ‘meaning’/’power’, and as an incarnation of grand ‘historical reason’) can be clubbed under the same nomenclature. He then goes on to trace the possible origin of the term in Hegel and ancient European theology.\end{flushright}
power of discourses – not only their political nature of expression but how they gain or approximate *scientificity* over time. To draw attention to that process is to understand the historical development of a specific rationality, a form of power.

**Discourse of ‘childhood’ in India**

Before attempting to locate the different strands that are seen as convergent (for purposes of discussion) on the issue of the post-independence middle-class Indian childhood, let us begin with a simple observation that, however, holds a historical/historiographic implication of prime importance. I do not claim any originality as such in making this claim – it is indeed an extension of arguments offered in areas as different as medicine, visual arts or education – relating to recent Indian history. As noted earlier, the claim is supported by archival records dating back to the early nineteenth century. The argument should now be obvious to the reader: that the *colonial experience brings about a radical change in how we address the child* or how s/he is constituted as the subject of different corpus(es) of knowledge, each following uneven courses of development and often taking different directions, but nonetheless interrelated. Or, better still, the child-figure projected within these different cognitive-discursive practices (operating under the meta-sign of colonialism) put into play a mutually interdependent matrix – I am calling it a ‘matrix’

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14 One can think of the works done by the ‘subaltern’ historians in this connection. I persist in using the somewhat vague term ‘recent’ in implying the post-Mughal phase (I prefer it over a more loose ‘modern history’, a nomenclature still in use in the History departments and syllabi of some Indian universities), or roughly the colonial period onwards.
for lack of any better word – of what one can or should know and prescribe about the child as a genus.\textsuperscript{15}

I will try to explain the nature of this break by giving a speculative account of the status of child(-hood) before the onset of colonization. Of course, there is no comprehensive sociology to be found and we have to fall back on literature and religious mythology. In a world where miraculous births and suprahuman feats are aplenty, children as such do not figure prominently except as incarnations of divine personalities, their diminutive features and childlike action being subsumed under some predestined purpose (as in the stories surrounding the little Krishna, also called \textit{Gopala}, and \textit{Rama}). Krishna, however, is a special case because of the extraordinary affection (\textit{vatsalya}) and wondrous devotion (\textit{bhakti}) that the child-god has continued to generate.\textsuperscript{16} Episodes recounting his mischievous pranks, such as taming of \textit{Kaliya} the snake or killing of demons, form recurrent motifs in folk and high literature as well as other arts (dance, visual arts, film) – the presumed highlight being how divinity reveals itself though the diminutive figure.

The peculiar blending of adoration and worship both invokes and exceeds the usual parental affection. The search for any consistent picture of children vis-à-vis their parents or adults, or childhood as a social phenomenon (in the sense we understand), should be pointless because of the formal demands made by such texts upon the reader.

\textsuperscript{15} This assumption of universality regarding the child/childhood is crucial. All comparative examples and analyses, intended or not, take this as their springboard. No other group of human beings possibly forms such an (allegedly) homogeneous sample, whether one thinks of ethnic origin, religious following, politico-economic ‘class’, or gender.

\textsuperscript{16} Both are, of course, avatars of Vishnu. Turning to literature, compositions in the Pillaitamil (translated by Paula Richman as ‘Tamil for/to a child’) tradition of devotional verse are addressed to various child-gods such as \textit{Murugan} (Kartikeya), Prophet Mohammed, Baby Jesus and Virgin Mary. Here the poet, usually a male, often takes the guise of a loving maternal voice. The first ACK to appear was based on stories of Krishna, a self-evident choice in the words of Mr. Pai, and so were two early silent films by D. G. Phalke.
But is it really so? An intellectual’s perceptions about the myth surrounding the divine child as being so alien to everyday life of the populace might be incorrect after all. One can think of the ritual re-enactments of child-Krishna’s exploits\textsuperscript{17}, or countless songs and plays composed, \textit{to this day}, about them\textsuperscript{18}. The most recent, and ironic, proof is the figure of Ramlalla (‘Rama the child/boy’) who was at the center of a bitter communal controversy waged by the Hindu rightists. A makeshift temple at the disputed site in Uttar Pradesh was actually allotted by the state high court to \textit{Ramlala virajmaan} (the seated child Rama), describing the epic child-deity infamously as a ‘juristic person’ and was granted the legal right of being represented \textit{since he was a minor}! Such wonderful confusion between (or conflation of) communal faith and legal personhood is a living anathema to which the modern sociological idea of childhood can only be an implied witness\textsuperscript{19}. Such ironies, however, point at the persistence of the mythic as historical condition – that the latter is discursively constructed by containing the former.

The two great ‘Indian’ epics, generally speaking, do not devote particular attention to child-characters\textsuperscript{20}. The accounts of birth and rearing of four sons of \textit{Dasaratha} and

\textsuperscript{17} Breaking earthen pots containing milk and butter on the event of \textit{Janmashtami}, Krishna’s ‘birthday’, is very popular in parts of India. Streets of Mumbai city are thronged by people for the occasion.

\textsuperscript{18} One could add the godmen having their large cult followings. \textit{Baba Lokenath}, for example, a well-known figure in recent Bengali history with a large cult following, is seen as an \textit{avatar} of Krishna, and hence \textit{Janmashtami} is also celebrated as his birthday.

\textsuperscript{19} What such incidents tell us will vary according to one’s tool of understanding. Are we to subscribe to the efficacy of the Jungian ‘theory’ of mythic archetype and ‘primitive mentality’ of a community? Such observations are laden with racism, and certainly do not explain the action of an otherwise ‘modern’ citizenry. Rather it tells us something about the multiple genealogies of modernity and its signal product, the democratic state. However, we should not overestimate the points of relevance of the court ruling to our present theme. The apparent overvaluation of filial emotion harbored by a certain community is secondary here to a strategic, ideological move expressed in legal terms.

\textsuperscript{20} We might need to define the terms of narration in Indian mythology and distinguish it from its western counterpart. The epic genre, \textit{Mahabharata} and \textit{Ramayana}, is spoken of as the fifth Veda in \textit{Chandogya-}
Rama’s own twins do not occupy much space in Valmiki apart from their comely and radiant appearance, proficiency in Vedas and archery, and mutual bonding or loyalty. Nor is there anything more in Vyasa’s account of Kaurava and Pandava princes besides their mutual rivalry while playing games: the latter’s ‘natural’ aptitude in all branches of learning and Duryodhana’s murderous intrigues. The sons and daughters, in keeping with epic tradition, are always larger-than-life mouthpieces for some pre-ordained virtue or vice. They are anything but characters in a realist fiction, and even less representative of an ancient ‘Indian’ (a misnomer here) society, if one thinks of the literary form. The oft-used, and somewhat formal or impersonal, form of address ‘child’ used by an adult to greet a young person (in epics or later prakrit literature based on these stories, in Vasa’s plays, for example) is more a protocol of social etiquette among the upper classes.

However, a traditional practice of considerable importance is the institution of ashramic education, often referred to as the guru-shishya parampara. It is a sociological paradigm peculiar to the ancient Indian society although (usually) restricted to the upper caste male children. As part of the custom, they would leave their parental house to live

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21 Anthropological explanations have been offered occasionally, as in Iravati Karve’s Yuganta (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2006, originally published in 1967). Although Karve argues persuasively for a comprehensive segregation (and analysis) of the story, characters, (historical?) episodes and miracles, and ‘philosophy’ in the epic, it is next to impossible to arrive at a systematic and exhaustive exegesis – the encyclopedic, accretional nature of oral narration/composition will always come in the way. The section titled ‘Father and Son’ – an insightful, provocative and speculative reading – explores the possible filial relation between Vidura and Yudhisthira.

22 Although now reduced to an extinct tradition or a vestigial presence at best, it is commonly taken to be an ancient custom. In what used to be a gendered practice in most cases, young boys would arrive at his chosen guru’s residence, stay there for a considerable period past his puberty and be initiated in all kinds of learning thought worthwhile, at the end of which he would emerge as an independent individual. The field where this practice has partially survived in contemporary India is/are the various schools/gharanas of classical music.
with their designated teacher. Here they would look after the daily upkeep of the household, and receive lessons in formal and physical education. This apprenticeship was a crucial rite of passage to adulthood. There were strict and detailed instructions as to what a *dwijā* (a young Brahmin after initiation ceremony) boy can or cannot do – a strict codified regime of his daily routine, diet, bodily (and sexual) practice, permitted forms of entertainment and general attitude. The *guru* was held in the highest esteem and to be honored with a present (Manu makes a list of permissible gifts) when the young *shishya* graduated. Unquestioned devotion to one’s master was not only a guarantee of a worthy course of life on earth but the way to the most sought-after ideal ‘afterlife’: freedom from earthly bondage forever.

Although restricted almost exclusively to the *brahmin* caste in its scope, Manu’s text is a veritable encyclopedia of ‘traditional’ discourse of how one conducts himself in life. One can see the different social sectors at work – education, family, sexuality, monarchic governance, manners and custom – a ‘way of life’ in short. The text represents institutionality in a paradigmatic form, a detailed recommendation of the smallest details of behavior, and its legitimation or rationalization via the knowledge of sacred texts. Perhaps the most astounding thing is the supreme and totalizing power of a certain kind of knowledge, knowledge as power, a Foucauldian’s dream. But we should be cautious here. Manu notes in detail the respective punishments for failing to comply, or take liberty, with his prescriptions at every stage. Such directness signals a *different time:* it is hardly similar to the post-Enlightenment impulse to cultivate an inward-directed

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23 I have drawn upon the text of *Manusmriti* or Manu’s *Laws* for my purpose. Looked upon as an authentic source of Hindu priestly practice, it was translated in English by Orientalist scholars (William Jones, 1794). My own copy is a more recent translation by Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith (Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2000).
subjectivity that Foucault would diagnose as ‘modern’. Manu’s ideal audience has only a limited sense of ‘agency’ – they are conduits of a particular ethic.

We do not know how far Manu’s book is liable to be read as a sociological document, there is no existing record to indicate the actual extent of its influence. But we can guess that the ‘glorious past’ that became a catchword during the anti-colonial nationalist movement was not certainly as perfect – that social inequality, slavery, bribes, miscegenation or adultery were not infrequent. Although Manu is not bothered particularly about childhood as such outside the issue of education, there are a few recommendations. Male children were preferred because they would further the kinship line. If a child of two years died without cutting her/his teeth, s/he would be buried without his bones being collected later or libation offered. A child is clubbed with old or ill people in two cases: deserving the mercy of a king (because s/he could not have meant to offend consciously nor would be able to do so), and being an unreliable witness in a dispute or court-case.

We will jump a few thousand years to arrive at the colonial period mainly for lack of archival records. We do not have written records, or visual ‘proofs’ of the like that Aries uses, to draw even a tentative history of childhood or child-rearing from the medieval to early colonial period.

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24 The other option is to consider it as a set of ideal prescriptions. But even then, it is index of the then society.
Discourse of ‘child’/‘childhood’ in the 19th century: a look at Bengali journalistic writings

The nineteenth and early twentieth century shows an explosion of concern with child-rearing, family values and role of women. Much of these are instructional literature on daily care (such as bathing and dressing a child), hygiene and diet. We are often told that ‘child education’ is a new branch of learning, and scholars from Europe and America have much to offer us in this regard. The bulk of these literature is addressed to parents, mainly mothers who, we are told, are chiefly responsible for the well-being of the family and her children. There are occasional pieces that should be categorized somewhere between fantastic hearsay and instruction – biography as ‘lesson’ – not unlike a typical ACK issue.

One such article, titled ‘Her Majesty (maharajni) Victoria’s Education with her Mother’, ‘recounts’ the childhood of the then Queen, who lost her father at an early age. Her mother, ‘an extremely intelligent and responsible woman’, both took care of her young daughter’s health and education worthy of a future monarch. Maria Louisa (Bengali adaptation of Marie Louise) “would keep her daughter close to her bosom,

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25 Sometimes the writers present their material in an imaginary dialogue form, say, between a husband and wife or teacher and student. The presence of two kinds of writers is frequent: pundits of Hindu shastras and doctors, and the texts would often lengthy quotations by either of these two kinds of professionals. The kinds of authority (‘knowledge-power’) they invoked were opposite and complementary: of ancient ‘sacred’ texts and modern science. At times, such shastrik prescriptions were as openly class-conscious and prejudiced as Manu’s text. One such author quotes numerous shlokas to list the physical features or habits (as signs of vice) to be avoided in a nurse.

26 I have limited myself to a few examples from Bengali journals only. A recently published collection Samayiki: vol. 2, Pradip Basu ed., (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 2009), from which my examples are taken, also contains an article on child-rearing in China that was published in the journal Bamabodhini in 1883.

27 Published in Bamabodhini, 1868 from Samayiki, ibid, 631-633. The Bengali original reads ‘Maharajini Victoriar Matri Sannidhaney Shiksha Labh’. The word ‘Sannidhaney’ emphasizes a virtue that most of these writers recommended for the mother: always being close to her child. Modern attitude to parenting has not changed much in this regard.
would not even allow her to be bathed and dresses by chambermaids … When the baby was able to sit all by herself, she (i.e. Marie) would make her sit in a different seat close by and regularly feed her, but would never induce voracity (lalasa) by feeding her more than what was due (niyamotirikto). Thus she made her daughter learn to respect elders, to economize (mitacharon), and to govern herself (atma-shasan) from her very childhood.28 The list of such virtues goes on. It is specially noted that the princess learnt to save money and tried every by possible means to repay the huge debt that her father Edward had incurred on his death.

I continue to quote: “Maria Louisa took every possible care to educate her daughter well. She (i.e. the Princess) learnt to speak English, German and French from her bed since she was five years old. … She learnt her first lessons from the pleasant (pritikor) words emerging from her mother’s smiling face (sahasyo mukhbinirgato) and caring heart. Later, when male and female teachers (shikshak o shikshika) were appointed to teach her daughter, she (i.e. the mother) did not leave the job only to them. Maria Louisa would herself be present each time and, after taking advice and help from the teachers, would lay down the rules (su-pranali) for (her) good education (sushiksha). She made a rule (niyam) that Victoria should study religious books every day. Victoria did not know then that she would become the Queen of England in future. Her mother took special care that her daughter is not bothered by the adulation of sycophants and spared the anguish of despair (nirasha-r jantrona) of not becoming the queen by harboring such hope and wish. When she (i.e. the princess) was just eleven years old, she exuded (lokshito) such powers

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28 Ibid., 632.
and virtues that are hardly found in a similar age. … Thus when Victoria was becoming knowledgeable (jnan uparjon) in all the areas required of the royal position (rajakiyo pad), there was no lack of concern (oudasyo kora hoi nai) with every requisite topic connected to general people (sadharon byakti somporkiyo abosyik bishoi) and task relating the well-being of the kingdom; she became worthy of the throne by learning all the essential issues (proyojoniyo sokol bishoi).\(^{29}\) The article ends with the transcript of a public speech that (reportedly) Marie gave on the occasion of her daughter’s attaining the formal age of adulthood. I have left it out for reasons of space, but she praises two individual qualities – religiosity and penchant for freedom – as inducement to unlikely (logically unconnected) public virtues for a country: discipline, industriousness and wealth\(^{30}\).

Presented like a long anecdote, this reportage-cum-essay is a form favored by quite a few authors. While this particular author chose the then Queen of England as an ideal example for the children(-subjects) of her colonies, others recounted similar short biographies of child prodigies of English and ‘American’ origin. Repeatedly, these essays talk about a (or ‘the’) ‘new’ technique or method of educating children, although its specificities are not always discussed. Thus another write-up: “Child-education is an oft-discussed topic (mostly) in America (amerikatei) nowadays. Consequently, many new methods (paddhoti) have been discovered there. Although none of these methods are identical, their essence (moolkatha) is the same. Chiefly, all of these methods try to prevent wasting children’s childhood (shoishabkal) through useless education (akejo

\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Religiosity in private life, however, is often taken as an inducement to discipline but here it is spoken of more as a matter of public morality than a ‘care of the self’.
The extent of precocity of the prodigies is then explained: “The elder daughter of Mr. Barle, Lina, is now sixteen years old; she studies in Radcliffe College; right now an ‘undergraduate’. His first son is also an ‘undergraduate’ of Harvard University. He is fifteen.”

Such examples might sound somewhat abrupt at first, but it is not my purpose to question their authenticity. And although the case cited last cannot be verified, a few of the prodigies named are historical characters\textsuperscript{32}. Still, one is struck by the use of ‘report/news’ form and its purported appeal among the then emergent middle class, to whom the print technology in itself was a thing connoting immense power: a gift of (western/modern) science, a public medium, an instrument of spreading valuable information and forming public opinion. Indeed print was a new access to ‘truth’, or a new platform for founding one, and posed a potential challenge to the earlier power equations of a thoroughly hierarchical society. In a new civil society on the rise, the shlokas and the reportage formed two different grounds of authority: of an ancient tradition-as-law and the ‘new world’. Yet, their mutual difference became secondary to a much larger phenomenon that had been inaugurated: the birth of a discursive regime. Here they had to complement each other, since the regime as condition of a new order – a democracy-in-anticipation – perhaps an even more powerful (and ironic) historical force than the hands of the colonial master that delivered it\textsuperscript{33}.

\textsuperscript{31} Published in Bharati, 1915, from Samayiki, 778-9.

\textsuperscript{32} Such as Norbert Wiener, a mathematician who received a Ph. D. from Harvard when he was seventeen. His father Leo Wiener’s success with the innovative teaching methods of his son is well-known.

\textsuperscript{33} One might add that perhaps there was a commonality between the two claims exemplified here by shloka or bachana (like the couplets known as ‘Chanakyashloka’ taught in schools) and ‘sensational news’ of the kind quoted above. For a less or uninitiated mass audience, structurally speaking, both had anecdotal value: a necessarily self-referential authority and model of extra- or supra-historical ‘truth’.
We can now proceed to identify the strands of a ‘new discourse of childhood’\textsuperscript{34}. Being a lately-found but widespread concern among a new and sizeable ‘print public’, it was developing systematically. As one might have guessed with the piece on Queen Victoria’s education mentioned above, the discourse of/on ‘childhood’ was connected with several others, namely, education, health/medicine/clinical(-ity), home/family, and religion/morality in public life. We could club these under an ideology of ‘care’ but it is just as important to name its constituent parts because of their individual histories\textsuperscript{35}. I will briefly discuss the issues specific to each of them and try to see how the fields are linked up.

We are told repeatedly about ‘new’ methods or techniques of education proposed by a set of ‘specialized’ (western) educationists. Among the names mentioned are Herbert Spencer, Locke, Montessori, and Froebel. The ‘kindergarten’ system is mentioned by several authors, especially what is considered to be his unique contribution: the ‘play’ method of instilling the first lessons in life. The timeliness of this ‘scientific’ method is connected to the two major, connected themes often mentioned by the historians of this period: ‘modernity’ and the ‘east-west’ binary. The preference for the ‘west’, an

\textsuperscript{34} Admittedly, my example refers to Bengali-language sources only. However, it can be safely said that the city of Calcutta, the then capital of the British Indian empire, with its thriving social and intellectual life, was a pioneer of sorts in possessing an active public sphere. Although one cannot conclusively ‘prove’ that the discourse concerning children/childhood first surfaced in the city of Calcutta (and Bengal), the claim is not unlikely. The number of articles on this subject is indeed astounding. I name a few, all included in \textit{Samyaiki}: ‘Children’s dress’, 621-622, ‘The Preservation of children’, 622-624, ‘A dialogue between husband and wife’ [on children’s hygiene, toilet habits etc.], 628-630, ‘The custom of rearing children’, 639-641, ‘A mother’s duty to her child’, 648, ‘The custom of child-rearing in China’, 652-653, ‘Advices to a mother’ 659-661, ‘Education in family’, 675-677, ‘An ideal mother’ (original: \textit{Prakrita mata}), 681-682, ‘New method of child education’, 778-779, ‘Mother and child of the future’, 799-801 etc. All page references are to this volume.

\textsuperscript{35} To take one example, unlike Donzelot’s account of what happens in the French society since the 18th century, psychiatry was to become an active and specialized field (as a profession mediating, and infusing, the clinical in everyday public life) much later in India – at least as far as child-rearing/child care was concerned.
axiomatic (and utopic) symbol denoting power/authority which the writers almost obsessively turn to, becomes clearer in a host of anonymous ‘references’ and quotations, typically starting as: “An English writer/educationist says …”. The child prodigies are living examples of what children could become, if properly tutored. The parents of these precocious children insist that the key lies in right method, and not the innate exceptionality of these children.

One also comes across terms such as ‘physiopsychology’ (sharirmanobidya) that, we are told, is a specialized branch of learning in ‘modern western science’. This new branch of learning tells us that, contra popular belief\(^\text{36}\), a child’s body, mind and brain develop at a much faster rate in the first seven years. Hence, indulging in excessive affection for their darling child (as the parents usually do) by deferring education is actually behaving irresponsibly towards the child’s growing up. A consistent emphasis is on avoiding ‘bad education’, often synonymous with ‘prejudice’ (sanskar). Parents are advised to be patient and teach by setting examples rather than scold and physically punish their children, and hence the next logical step is parents’ education. The two basic components of a child’s education is formal/school education and good or virtuous behavior (sadgun). The unwelcome traits in case of a boy-child are willfulness, lying, selfishness, laziness and avarice\(^\text{37}\). In educating a girl, however, a healthy balance should be maintained between school education and the customary ‘feminine demeanors’, e.g. humility, kindness, patience, religiosity, homemaking and related arts\(^\text{38}\). One Indumadhav Mullick,

\(^{36}\) Meaning the ideas ‘prevalent’ at that time among the populace, the middle class who were in the process of being exposed to ‘new’ education.

\(^{37}\) The list could well remind us of the objections of orthodox Christianity to a sinful child, as proposed by St. Augustine of Hippo.

\(^{38}\) The author uses the word ‘shilpakarjo’.
having returned from a trip to Europe and Chicago, also advocates ‘co-education’ that has paid dividends in the west.

We encounter a number of terms, with specific reference to this ‘project’ of childhood, many of them possibly for the first time. Some of these are: ‘child character’ (shishu charitra), ‘child preservation’ (shishu rakshan) and ‘child preservation centers’ (that would house trained nurses and offer lessons in informal labor suited to children, such as sewing, dyeing, drawing or doll-making), ‘juvenile prison’ (chokra jail), ‘child education center’ (shishu shikhalaya) etc. The word ‘child education’ itself (or its variant, ‘child education theory’) seems to be quite recent, the opportune pairing at least, as is another Bengali word: ‘shishu binayan’.

‘Discipline, punish and educate’: inaugurating a modern regime of ‘childhood’

‘Binayan’ would connote both education and discipline. And if it sounds like ‘importing’ Foucauldian ideas to an unlikely place and context, we better think again. An article bearing the same title (‘shishu binayan’) starts by mentioning two kinds of punishments usually handed out to children: expressing strong disapproval (bitrishna) and scolding.

39 I. Mullick, ‘Womankind and (the) child’ (Ramani jati o shishu), Bharat Mahila, 1908, Samayiki, 707-709.

40 Incidentally, the words ‘child’, ‘childish’, or ‘childhood’ all occur in Old or Middle English, going by the OED. Terms such as ‘child-nature’, child-literature’, ‘child-culture’, and ‘child psychology’ belong to the last two decades of 19th century, while some others such as ‘child welfare’, ‘child-mind’, ‘child care’ and ‘child-centered’ enter English vocabulary in the early twentieth century. The word ‘child-faced’ to describe a colored person (‘negro’, actual use) is recorded in 1906. The archaic and literary variant ‘childe’ was used to denote a person of genteel descent, usually belonging to the family of a knight as in Childe Harold or Childe Roland.

41 Not to be confused with what we refer to as ‘primary school’. Mullick, ibid., talks about ‘child study society’, a hostel-like organization, where children are taught according to their capability and inclination determined through designated ‘tests’.

42 ‘Shishu binayan’, published in Bamabodhini, 1884, Samayiki, 653-55. Two other articles bear the same title: the term must have been popular because of its novelty and philological economy, i.e. connoting two senses at the same time.
The first, we are told, is much more effective. It is followed by a story, both an anecdote and an *exemplum* as in a sermon, where a man, on coming back from his business in a foreign land, is pleasantly surprised to find a coconut laid out on his lunch table. When he asks his wife, he is told that their son picked it up from their neighbor’s garden. Then the son appears and starts, enthusiastically, to recount the same story. But his father sees red, and throwing away every food or thing that had to do something with the coconut, acts as if everything in the kitchen has been desecrated. Then he vomits out whatever he has eaten by forcing a finger into his mouth, and ensures that everything touched by that coconut is thrown out. Not satisfied, he makes his wife cook again by applying cow’s excreta. This incident, we are told, was quite effective as a lesson. The mother and son would not dare touch anything taken without (the owner’s) knowledge or consent ever after.

After this sharp moral tale, the anonymous author lays down the various ways or *rules* of dealing with offenses committed by young (male) children. S/he proceeds with great care. The first rule: a boy may not be rewarded every time he does something good, but his wrongs should *never* go unpunished. The reason is clear – because being good is not virtuous in itself but the *norm*. Second, a teacher has to identify a boy’s particular weaknesses for things, such as food, dress or hairstyle, and choose punishments accordingly (one who prides himself on his hair should go bald etc.). The third rule, and this forms the theme for the rest of the essay, is physical punishment – mainly flogging. The author advises discretion because this is surely the last resort. The first caution,

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43 The word ‘*shashan*’ is repeatedly used. For example, the wife in the story just recounted was entrusted by her husband with the ‘responsibility to rule over’ (*shashanbhar*) the boy-child, and the failure is referred to as not to be able to be ‘keep him under her rule’ (*shashanadhiney rakhitey paren nat*).
however, is not to flog the guilty in public, *lest he loses all self-respect and becomes ungovernable*. Next, the author tells us, in a commending tone, about the practice of flogging in English schools where, at a pre-appointed hour, the guilty boys are first reminded of their respective offenses, and then flogged hard.

Here comes the next moral tale. There was a troublesome boy who was particularly insubordinate, having withstood quite a few sessions of flogging. Then an ingenious plan was devised by the school authorities. In the middle of the next flogging session, a teacher suddenly went up to hold the cane and requested to be flogged instead so as to save his student. The tearful eyes of his loving teacher did what hours of painful caning could not do for the boy – to awaken his conscience. He became particularly obedient and attached to the teacher. The story has an ideal, if predictable, ending: the boy grows up as an “extremely well-educated person” later. An advice given earlier by the author seems to be the moral of the story: one has to be dispassionate and desire the boys’ well-being in order to think of the right measure. Significantly, we are left wondering as to what this measure is about – punishment or welfare? Here lies the ambivalent efficacy of ‘discipline’. Its way lies, as in both the stories, through punishment, but more importantly, by establishing its legitimacy in being accepted as justice. The mechanism of discipline has its own ethic (‘socialization’, in this case).

The stories recounted here are significantly modern in transferring the onus and agency of action onto the person who would otherwise look like victims of a system. The child is no longer an entity who is only at the receiving end; he must see the role he plays in his maturation. The move is doubly effective: he must see that he is not alone in a world whose demands are contrary to his willful ways, he can do so by acknowledging the
responsibility and for his own good. He is thus born as a social subject. His membership can only be voluntary and must be, social rules do not become objective norms otherwise – they are willed into existence.

The article on Queen Victoria’s education, on the other hand, highlights the importance of a mother’s care in child-rearing – indeed one can talk in terms of a rising discourse of ‘motherhood’. Its additional significance lies in Victoria’s own career as a successful mother and queen, and popular representation in contemporary popular literature and visual arts as an incarnation of ‘Mother India’ – being more of a symbolic solicitation for better rule on part of a subject-population. For our purpose, Victoria’s education presents an exemplary union of formal or ‘institutional’ education (her felicity in several languages and classical literature) and education in human values. The latter, we are told, is better obtained from within one’s family and something that even the best formal education cannot do – build one’s character. The insistence on character-building assumes its historical importance in placing the individual, family, society, and finally one’s ethnic and national identity in the same signifying chain.

The family, considered as a fundamental social unit, is linked with several other discourses. The relative merits (and demerits) of the ‘joint family’ set-up are often discussed. Multiple parenting, we are told, might result in lack of individual care needed for a child in spite of its apparent advantages for adult members. The education of women as mothers is linked to a growing concern with (what we might call) ‘home management’. There is an insistence on preservation that only starts with saving money; it is part of a general principle of economy (of parental adoration, indifferent or harsh remarks or unbecoming of a responsible adult, eating or spending on fashionable clothes)
that goes into building a healthy and morally strong fulcrum of an individual and a population (*jati*) as a whole. The discourse on health, even when it is expressed in the language of specialization (daily care during pregnancy, for example) is directly connected with need for education and utmost loyalty to the preservation and wellbeing of the family unit. These, in turn, are related to the importance of the institution of sexuality – a Protestant insistence on the sacredness and regularity of marriage and procreation. This was a ‘progressive’ stance from the considerations of child care: ‘child marriage’ was culpable and more children would lead to lesser care for each.

The discourse on character-building brought together the issues of clinical care and value-education along liberal humanitarian ideals. The three major authorities/professionals on child care are teachers, doctors and church fathers, the last because of their charitable work in promoting public health and education in remote areas or among ethnic minorities. The discourse on childhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal was a significant founding moment. The child as the proclaimed addressee, however, was less a historical figure than an ossified symbol.

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44 The systematic administration of a foreign, colonial authority might have been a key factor in forcing this realization of diverse communities adding up to a single subject population – an Indian *jati*. Another culpable habit, reportedly, was a ‘new’ proclivity to luxurious food items (such as tea, coffee, lemonade) and irregular eating habits, as was the excessive popularity of the bad and cheap ‘novels’ among women!

45 There is a consistent concern in some of these articles with sexual activity only for pleasure, children born outside wedlock leading to their neglect or abandonment, and an increasing number of child deaths.

46 Perhaps for the first time we get to hear about a new profession – the ‘family physician’ – among the ‘middle class’ or at least those who could afford it. It is a new expertise directly contributing to the institution of family.

47 Literature written for children is not always neatly accommodated into the apparatus because of its individualized and representative features. We fail to explain the fantastic tales and folk creation myths, stories about ingenious thieves and naughty boys, and nonsense verses composed by, say Upendra Kishore Raychaudhuri and Sukumar Ray, when the dominant emphasis was on producing a generation of national children and docile bodies. The assertion of the ludic (over the pragmatic) provides a
S/he was the promissory herald of a new narrative of a modern race rallying around another new-found cause – a modern nation born under the sign of British colonialism.\(^{48}\)

**Lessons closer in time**

Let us return to 1960s, a period out of which springs forth a popular entertainer like ACK. If the period discussed above represents founding moment of the modern Indian discourse on childhood, 1960-70s was the next critical juncture. However, any idea regarding historical inevitability, progress or logical maturation is to be avoided. What I try to look at, by comparing these two vantage points, is how the apparatus of childhood is shaped, or how the child, as an imaginary vector of desire, is formed as a historical reality. Unlike what the authors of the articles just mentioned, the ‘new’ (or ‘recent’) experience does not have to be placed on a hierarchical scale with the ‘old’, although it does not mean there have not been shifts in thought around an ideal child or childhood. If anything, the recent experience is likely to be more complex, because ‘child study’ as a discipline has developed and the traditional binaries of the ‘west’ and the ‘east’ do not operate as they did in nineteenth century colonial India.

By early twentieth century, then, the stage is set for a ‘modern’ discourse on childhood. Let us note that the word ‘modern’ here connotes a set of practices amenable only to the educated middle class in urban areas or townships and guided by a ‘western’ frame of liberal humanitarian values that became more or less synonymous with the avowed public

\(^{48}\) That explains a dominant trend in popular printed pictures quite typical of this time: a bonny baby-face (whose sex cannot be deciphered) portrayed against the map of India or surrounded by contemporary luminaries. The child-icon has an indexical equation with the map – s/he is as inexhaustible as a symbol as the marked territory is sovereign.
ideals or ethic of the independent Indian nation-state. The last is best exemplified by the features that are associated with the Nehruvian era: a ‘progressive’ nation-state advocating reforms in order to become a self-sufficient, governable and ‘developing’, political unit. The political sovereignty was a starting point of introducing a strong bureaucracy, controlled economy, industries, infrastructures such as transportation and energy, and effective governance – all characteristic of a technocratic welfare state. A growing child, one might say, would again serve as its best metaphor just as it did in the century before.

I will pause briefly to return to the theme we set out to address, namely, the cultural construction of childhood and explain it within the western historiography of childhood. Since the publication of Aries’s book, and particularly in the last two decades, there have been a remarkable rise in publication in this area, indeed a ‘specialization’ now, that may be dubbed, roughly, as ‘childhood studies’⁴⁹. A consistent feature, or a dominant one at any rate, of this literature is to either contest a specific historiographic claim (question the model of childhood given by Aries, especially his use of paintings), or its specific historicity (examples of the same model can be found elsewhere, or earlier). Coming from different disciplines, these works often implicitly (and at times explicitly) refuse to allow the interrelation between discourses, institutions and official proclamations. Thus, the two educational psychologists van Sledright and Brophy insist that their experiment

⁴⁹ My own enquiry can also come under the same disciplinary rubric, except the fact that I consider it, as well as the recent publications as constituting but one part of the aforesaid apparatus – as a document. UN policies, NGO appraisals or recommendations, government statements, court judgments relating to children in general or particular cases, journalistic accounts, coffee-table writings, dedicated websites and blogs, visual and commercial art (advertisements), toys, children’s clothing and fashion, TV programs, video games, institutions such as pre-school ‘homes’, pediatrics and related business (‘baby food’ and/or ‘nutrient’), and the list can go on – each has equally important story to tell. Put simply, the point is to see how their respective representations of child/children relate to, determine, or dominate each other.
with kids studying fifth-grade US history “has only small resemblance to disciplinary history”\(^{50}\), or a book by Roger Cox, who teaches Social Studies, is said not to have on state policies and current debates on child care as its ‘focus’, “but examines the ways in which broader cultural forces such as religion, literature and mass consumption influence contemporary parenting”\(^{51}\). Another edited volume is eager to define (or justify?) the lately-founded topic/discipline of ‘childhood studies’ without bothering to define the concept it addresses or to contextualize historically, a construct that has been around, at least in its present institutional capacity, for little upwards of a century\(^{52}\). The editor approaches the subject as neatly divided into historical, socio-cultural and rights/policy perspectives.

Given the near-impossibility of ever offering an all-inclusive or exhaustive study of childhood in a single work, let me clarify my own position. It is culture-specific, by which I mean it is a contested ground between races, generations, classes and sexes. Childhood as ‘dispositif’ does not privilege one discourse or institution involving children’s participation (those can start with ideological apparatuses such as school or family) over the other, but tries to examine how they interact, influence or dominate each other at a historical juncture. The ‘rationality’ of these founding moments lies in setting off deployment of power and facilitating paradigms of subjectivation. Thus the insubordinate English boy in the article discussed above forces a crisis, a potential

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breakage, in the disciplinary power of school education by refusing to acknowledge his
guilt (a technique learnt from church confession). The intelligent trick of his teacher,
staging a temporary reversal of roles, is both a punishment and an act of compassion.
There are at least two important outcomes of this paradoxical, almost masochistic act: the
operation of power changes direction, and it becomes explicit\textsuperscript{53}.

I will look at two books both of which, incidentally, have the same title: ‘Our Children’.
There is no particular reason for this choice; it might well have been some other books or
articles in Hindi or some other Indian language. The general nature of these books as
sociological documents (none of these two authors is a specialized professional who can
claim a privilege in matters concerning children) seems preferable because they tend to
present a popular understanding available and accessible to a wide cross-section of the
populace. In other words, it is more directly connected than formal-professional
expertise, which has a language of its own (say the managerial lingo or acronyms used by
NGOs/ UN as well as various government ‘schemes’), to the formation and deployment
of knowledge around the child-figure since the nineteenth century.

The first book, written by Flora H. Williams, was originally published by ‘The Southern
Publishing Association’, USA (place not mentioned) in 1946, had been ‘enlarged and
adapted for India’ by the author’s own association, and, in 1969, was in its fifth print
(fourth reprint) since 1959. In India, it had been published by Oriental Watchman
Publishing House in Puna\textsuperscript{54}. It is profusely illustrated with black-and-white photographs

\textsuperscript{53} The usual practice of exercising this power is no less complex, but it is internalized. The confession is
not a punishment in the strictest sense – it is willed. The caning that accompanies it has a ritual value.

\textsuperscript{54} It was translated in other Indian languages as well. I am aware of a web blog where members
nostalgically talk about having read the book in Malayalam, for instance. But the English edition does
not provide such information.
(three in color) of Indian children in various moods at work or play, natural ‘sceneries’, temples and monuments, and occasionally even an old man sitting on a bench. The photos, most of them good portraits, add to the appeal of the book (even a young child or adolescent), though they do not consistently complement the written text; hence my conjecture that it must have been a popular coffee-table material for a feel-good reading, touching upon issues of general awareness.

The first sentence in the ‘foreword’ reiterates the same concern that Erasmus, the Dutch humanist scholar, reformist priest and philosopher, writing in mid-16th century, expressed: “Into the hands of parents is given a gigantic task, for on the training the child receives at home depends the result as seen in the man or woman produced.” The solution is also offered at the end. We are told that since all children like stories, and if a story is properly told they learn with pleasure – the children ‘admire’ the virtue in the hero/heroine and shun the villains.

The book is divided into short sections, each starting with a discussion (targeted primarily at parents) on a specific virtue that need to be cultivated in children followed by a short story expounding that particular quality (to be told to children or read by them). Even a quick glance at the topics listed in the ‘contents’ page would tell us a lot: ‘Obedience First’, ‘Falsehood or Imagination?’, ‘Temper Control’, ‘The Beauty of Unselfishness’,

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55 The photographs mostly show a smiling face, children happily playing with their friends or siblings, or mothers/parents playing with their children.

56 F. H. Williams, Our Children, ‘Foreword’. Two pages after the ‘foreword’, there is a typically epigrammatic quotation from Alexander Pope: “‘Tis Education forms the common mind; just as the twig is bent the tree’s inclined.” The book is targeted primarily at parents. Erasmus’ treatise is described as: “A treatise of schemes and tropes very profitable, for the better understanding of good authors, gathered out of the best grammarians and orators”. The theme is also described in a nutshell: “Wherunto is added a declamation. That children even straight from their infancy should be well and gently brought up in learning”. Desiderius Erasmus, The Education of Children, e-book accessed at Project Gutenberg, originally published in 1550.
‘Good Manners and Courtesy’, ‘True Pride’ etc. The discussions are done in a tone of gentle and intimate advocacy, thus different from the strong urgency often found in the nineteenth-century writers who are often dismissive of the ‘old’ habits and ways and anxious to introduce the ‘new’. But the overall vision of the better and ‘coming’ society in 1960s is the same, and this is my argument, as that of a ‘late Victoriana’. Williams, significantly I think, does not offer a story only on a single issue – sexuality – in the section titled ‘Training for Purity’ which is also the longest section in the whole book. Her moral vision is revealed also in a rather strong, symbolic visual, a pair of handcuffed hands with the caption: ‘bad habits are bonds hard to unloose’. In another such unusual example, a ‘story’ on the importance of learning good manners, a girl, who is mocked at by her friends for insisting on good manners, remarks: “Well, if growing up should make some folks agreeable, it’s a pity we can’t grow up very quickly.”

Tara Ali Baig, the author of the second book, is more a name to reckon with in recent Indian history. She was a bureaucrat, writer, philanthropist/ social reformist/ social worker in the field of ‘women’s lib’ movements and children’s rights. Close to the power blocks, especially the Nehru family, she held bureaucratic posts even before independence. Later on, she was involved in setting up the Indian Council of Child Welfare (the single largest agency in promoting development services for children with 29 state/union territory councils) and later became its President. She introduced SOS Children’s Villages, an internationally networked non-governmental organization that provide education, financial help, and relief work (e.g. running charity homes, sponsoring children, facilitating adoption of orphaned or abandoned children) to economically and physically disadvantaged children and their families, in India. She held important
bureaucratic positions throughout her career (most notably becoming the first Asian as well as the first woman President of International Union of Child Welfare) and received numerous awards for her social work. Baig’s career alone is an ample index of how ‘childhood’ has travelled, or exists at multi-linear levels of biological stage, nostalgia or pure ideation, notion, field of specialization, profession, and an industry with career prospects and international network, a parallel governance with a unique form and language of sovereignty, of ‘rights’ and ‘policies’. We will see how.

The book opens with a set of terms (International Year of the Child observed by the UN, International Union of Child Welfare, Charter for Children, UN Declarations of the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, or National Plan of Action for the Child) that, says Baig, have drawn attention “to the imperative of recognizing the fact that ‘programs for children should be an integral part of economic and social development plans’”\(^57\). It seems to be an advancement on the regime of knowledge about the child-subject that had emerged at least a century before. Child welfare, being a state and international affair, is now formalized as law. ‘Growth’ is no longer a question of parental concern and choice, or even good parentage – the personal and the state cause must concur. Childhood is now formulated as a ‘sector’, fully codified and stratified. The earlier language of moral responsibility, still an individual cause oriented towards the historico-political ‘project’ of the national community, is here universalized and juridical – it is now bound upon everyone – no longer a matter of subjectivity but compulsive subjection.

As the child is directly placed within the state economy, planning, education and employment, it is suddenly a new ball game. Observe how Baig puts it: “The

International year of the Child, 1979, … [has spread] … a far greater awareness of the vital source to the nation that a child actually is, provided the right investment is made in its growth and development.\textsuperscript{58}, and a few pages later, “… the investment in child is thus not an academic exercise, but a pragmatic one. People … must recognize that the child population … is dependent only temporarily. Like anything else, a factory or a dam or orchard, it is unproductive only for a certain period and then becomes economically worthwhile.\textsuperscript{59}.” This new economics, with its calculations of profit and loss, demonstrated with statistical data of child population, mortality, growth, cost of education, and prospective employment rate, is a scientific discourse. The ‘new’ child has been plugged into a fully networked \textit{mode/system of production} with its attendant utility as human resource. Baig calls our attention to the particular shortcoming of Five-Year plans, described as “costly experimentation minus the fundamental recognition (that)… relates, in the final analysis, to the cost of making a man (italics original)\textsuperscript{60}.” She terms it, two pages later, as ‘scientific humanism’, an integral part of Nehru’s vision of the modernized infrastructure of a ‘scientific state’\textsuperscript{61}. She sees the task as an achievable target: “Making a man is a long and exacting process, and it does effectively require four, not one, Five year plans (italics added).\textsuperscript{62}.”

The new managerial discourse is not to be simply described as a logical development of the nineteenth-century situation, although that might be an apt historicist explanation. It is

\textsuperscript{58} Baig, ibid, 1.
\textsuperscript{59} Baig, ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{60} Baig, ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{61} Two historical instances where it has been achieved, according to Baig, are the Russian Revolution of 1917 and Mao’s China.
\textsuperscript{62} Baig, ibid., 6.
equally important, I would argue, to consider the direction in which it has travelled, that
the decisive novelty of the discourse of ‘child welfare’ lies in having constituted a
scientific rationality that, being included within state policies and recommendations of
international bodies, is now an intrusive, inclusive and legally bound episteme. The
apparatus is the rationale itself – its particular concatenation and hardening – as well as
its various forms (law, policy), institutions (family, state, the UN, various NGOs),
modalities (education, management, planning, investment, active interference in public
life) and language (new, specialized ‘technospeak’ such as the ‘whole child’ or the
‘special child’, programs such as ICDS, PHC or SOS\textsuperscript{63}, purported indexicality of
statistical datum). Children’s ‘rights’ is a double-edged phenomenon where the question
of personal or moral edification is sublimated through systematic, and productive,
mechanisms of power.

\textbf{Summing up: whither ACK?}

Both ACK and Tinkle, the latter allowed more space to its readers but never any sound
alternative as social subjects, subscribe directly to the well-educated child-citizen
paradigm that received a fresh political boost during the Emergency. The goal of the
(clinical/ideological) population control measures was towards a more governable
population. It was ostensibly healthier because it could be better linked to economic,
educational and development model of a stronger state, and child labor or child mortality
due to unhygienic care were either cited as the chief reasons or visible symptoms of

\textsuperscript{63} Integrated Child Development Service, Primary Health Care, and Save Our Souls (applied here to mean
the institution/program for orphaned children’s welfare, the SOS villages), respectively. The ‘whole
child’ is a pure neologism that, ironically, also sums up the new, totalizing discourse: the child
constituted as an object/subject of clinical, educational or ‘development’ programs. Such terminologies
signal a whole new set of bureaucratization, equally important for the state, NGOs, or the UN.
underdevelopment as political unit. Indira Gandhi’s photograph, sometimes with his illustrious father or with her own sons, would often appear during the 1980s in the opening pages of popular children’s magazine such as *Chandamama*. Quotations from the letter written to her by her father would appear, not unlike the article on Queen Victoria, as signatures of a successful adulthood that could originate only in a happy childhood. It was the unequivocal attestation of the importance of growing up in an educated and well-knit family.

The rise of children in India as consumers, again a process dating back to the nineteen century, projecting their future as healthy, modern, and successful adults (food, stationeries, or toys would play the right catalyst), has not changed its basic character since. As targets, they are no different from adults in this respect. ACK could become the perfect choice for parents in supplying them a series of illustrious lives as models of familial and humanist values learnt at home – its hegemonic potential lies in lending the biological growth the inevitable circularity of (good) childhood leading to adulthood. The addressee of ACK is less a child than a little adult. If it tried to create more discerning readers, it was an attempt at producing better, and less childlike, persons.

If a comic book series, having itself established as a brand, retelling ancient epics in cheap, colored, thin paperback format were selling in English and other Indian languages in thousands every month, what does it tell us about the middle-class, school-going children in the mid-late 1980s? Let us remember that according to the 1981 Census, the literacy rate during the last 10 years had risen from 29.45% to 36.17%, and the number of

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64 See the ‘archive’ of www.chandamama.com.
illiterates had also risen from 372 lakhs to 419 lakhs\textsuperscript{65}. In the base year of the Sixth Five-year Plan, i.e. 1979-80, the enrolment at the primary stage stood at 83.72\% of 6-11 age-group population, and 40.16\% at the middle stage or the 11-14 age-group population. However, it might not give us a clear indication of the total readership of these comic books, for various reasons. Children aging up to 7 years were counted as illiterates (by default) in the census because they might not possess the required formal skills. But a small percentage of this population might have been familiar with ACK, directly or indirectly (as listeners while their parents read out these books). Also, by this time a sizeable population residing outside India was reading these books.

The most remarkable thing about ACK, in the end, is its hegemonic power – something that has already been suggested by academic commentaries. But instead of criticizing it as a sure sign of ‘political incorrectness’ (which it unarguably is), one could note the overbearing urgency for a literature of pleasure to live up to the official ideals of becoming an ideal adult. The urgency, it should categorically be pointed out, is structural and unconscious. The obvious ideological potential of ACK might be all-too-banal, but we need to remember that ideology is an imaginary relation to one’s conditions of existence that produces concrete subjects out of individuals – it is productive and powerful. Without the awareness of the historical development of an institutional discourse around the child in India, we would not be able to grasp the beauty of this banality. Only then we are able to see the link, that ACK as popular literature for consumption could have been both popular and valuable only by giving (a particular, and in this case, comic book) form to the institutional imaginary. Anything less would not

\textsuperscript{65} Census in Assam could not be undertaken in 1981 because of political disturbances. All records of the state of Tamilnadu were lost in heavy flood.
have made it acceptable to the educated, middle-class, nuclear family with a secularist outlook for strong, but familiar and pragmatic, ideals of a stable citizenry.

However, the extent of ACK’s influence over its target readers is an issue that cannot be settled easily. It will demand a different set of research tools of detailed and comparative analysis; even then the question of interpreting the readers’ responses will remain crucial. But ACK’s survival in the present market, which has taken middle-class consumption to an altogether new level that does not cringe before nationalist ideals, is a testimony to the persistence of the discourse of childhood that is fast losing ground. In doing so, it has taken on, or shall we say realized its potential in terms of, ‘new’ grounds. This ‘new’ valence, not altogether new in terms of the product but its reception, in the globalized market is that of an emblem of India, as cultural token. Consequently, its ‘value’ is closer to its price where it may be placed and judged against, say, a miniature of Taj. But it is too early to say whether it will adapt itself to the values of new middle class family, a generation of parents who were themselves brought up on ACK. It will largely depend on the (per)mutations of identity politics spurred on by a host of economic, social and cultural movements known as ‘globalization’ for an erstwhile ‘third’ world.