

CHAPTER ONE

CHILD AND LITERATURE

1.1 Defining the Child and its Literature

It is necessary to define children's literature before we engage ourselves in understanding the literature. But any act of defining children's literature will be fraught with different viewpoints. Peter Hunt in "Defining Children's Literature" takes up this issue explicitly to incorporate the various questions and probable answers raised in the attempt to define it. Hunt begins by clearly stating that there cannot be a single definition of children's literature (2). At the same time, there will always exist a tension between the two opposing standpoints regarding children's literature being treated in the same way as adult literature. He puts forward the arguments of Rebecca Lukens and James Steele Smith to bring forth the contradictions that reign in this field. Lukens argues that "Literature for children differs from literature for adults in degree, not in kind . . . and writing for children should be judged by the same standard as writing for adults To fail to apply the same critical standard to children's literature is to say in effect that children's literature is inferior to adult's literature" (qtd. in "Defining" 3). On the other hand, Smith opines that "we can still get involved in the mistaken view that children's literature involves the same criteria of literary excellence as adult literature does" (qtd. in "Defining" 3). In another seminal work of Peter Hunt's, *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism* (1992), he defines children's literature as "an amorphous, ambiguous creature; its relationship to its audience is difficult; its relationship to the rest of literature, problematic" (1). This definition in a sense captures the problematic acts of definition and also relates the chaotic assumptions of the audience of this literature. Hunt tries to come to a middle point which can be taken as a working definition of children's literature where he says that definitions are made according to the purposes which they serve. Thus he defines children's literature, though disturbingly, "as books read by, especially suitable for, or especially satisfying for, members of the group currently defined as children" ("Defining" 15). If we accept this definition here, then we will have

to define the term “child” or “children”. Who is a “child” and what position does it occupy in the context of the genealogy of human beings or of literature as such. A working definition that we take up here would be the definition of child according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*—“a young human being who is not yet an adult” (“child,” def. a). This definition itself sees the child as an incomplete being—an incomplete adult whose existence is defined by a lack, thereby a transitory phase whose main aim is its maturation into an adult. As David Rudd emphasizes, the concept of the child as an “intrinsic referent” was never available to it but depended on the definitions and nomenclature that different societies, cultures and time periods have imposed upon it (3). The concept of childhood has also shifted perspective throughout the ages and it is not difficult to assume that childhood is in fact a socially constructed state of being. But at the same time, there are diverse reflections on this construct itself and critics are yet divided in their opinions. Philippe Ariès can be conferred the status of having started most of the twentieth century discussions on childhood with his seminal work *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962). He first proposed the idea that instead of childhood being a given notion, it was more of a social and historical construct. The idea was that the concepts and notions regarding children have changed considerably over a long period of time and along with it the attitude towards childhood as a distinct phase of life also changed. Earlier there was no proper method to keep track of the age of children and, as such, little agreement as to what constituted childhood. The child progressed from its helpless stage of infancy, where it depended on its parents for its well being to adulthood immediately and “belonged to adult society” (128). Thus, children were more often viewed as diminutive versions of adults and thereby there was hardly any necessity to visualize or understand them as any different from adults. But from the fourteenth century onwards there arose a trend to portray in “art, iconography, and religion (the cult of the dead) the personality which children were seen to possess, and the poetic, familiar significance attributed to their special nature” (Ariès 129) children began to be increasingly viewed as different from adults and this was most reflected in their clothes. It was most possibly in the seventeenth and eighteenth century that childhood came to be recognized as different from adulthood, and the idea of the child as a separate

entity also came into being. It is interesting to note here that most critics are in agreement that childhood and the child as a distinct identity emerged sometime in the 17th century. What was before that is very much a matter of debate and discussion. Neil Postman in *The Disappearance of Childhood* (first published 1982, the edition used here is of 1994) even argues that the concept of childhood surfaced only with the rise of print culture and, thereby, it is children's literature which created the child and not the other way round.

On the contrary, there are opposing views and statements which substantiate that the child existed before literature. The lacuna that the child experiences or that is imposed upon it because it is not an adult needs to be fulfilled properly and in its process of development the adult plays a pivotal role by imposing upon it what it considers to be "appropriate" for the child. One such means is literature *for* the child as an important and potent medium to make sense of the world and to mould itself as a prototype of the adult.

Gordon Wells in *The Meaning Makers* says:

stories have a role in education that goes far beyond their contribution to the acquisition of literacy. Constructing stories in the mind—or *storying*, as it has been called—is one of the most fundamental means of making meaning; as such it is an activity that pervades all aspects of learning . . . Through the exchange of stories, therefore, teachers and students can share their understandings of a topic and bring their mental models of the world into closer alignment. (qtd. in Pinsent, *Politics* 21)

Margaret Meek says, "children should discover in book learning not a fixed pattern of the world's events, but an imaginative engagement with different versions of the world and its inhabitants . . . This will probably mean that they will discover different ways of reading to learn"(18). Jerome Bruner in *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986) says that stories lend us a "map of possible roles and possible worlds" (65). Looking at it from this perspective, it seems that the child precedes literature. The definition of children's literature thus revolves around the concept of the child. John Townsend of course

propagates this idea by stating that children should exist before children's books come into existence. This statement emanates from the fact that instead of there being children there were actually what Townsend terms "miniature men and women" which in many ways corroborates the definition of child quoted earlier (3). David Rudd in "The Development of Children's Literature" says that these "miniature beings" came to be recognized as children through "increased representation in society's key discourses (e.g. church, education, family), through cultural forms like painting and literary works, and in various non-discursive ways too, such as by being given separate spaces (in schools, bedrooms, nurseries), distinctive clothing and other artefacts" (3).

Whatever way we look at it, we have to accept the reasoning which Rudd puts forward that children's literature (not considering whether it precedes or succeeds the child) is a product of culture and society, like all literature. Its producers and consumers being part of the same society are "culturally constructed" but "occupy different positions in terms of power—which, unsurprisingly, features centrally in what we call 'children's' literature" (9). But this is true in other forms of literature also since the producer, in many ways, occupies a position of dominance over the consumer. One plausible explanation put forward for a long time advocating the position of submission of the child is regarding its relative powerlessness in the choice of books. But as modern times have shown, the child is more and more the target of capitalistic modes of production. In such a scenario, the child enjoys a much superior position than its counterparts from earlier times and the internet has further reduced parental control over choice. This has actually led to a situation of near abolition of childhood itself and more and more concern is bestowed upon retaining childhood. It seems as if the circle has turned full cycle and children have inevitably become "miniature men and women". While the demarcation line has become thinner and thinner, it would be foolhardy to assume that childhood has disappeared completely. As discussed earlier, childhood being a social construct and with the society being in constant flux, the concept itself is undergoing a dramatic change. It is hardly remarkable therefore that children's literature today in fact delves into areas which were once never taken up for consideration. And at the same time, certain publishers even publish the same book under different categories as the recent Harry Potter phenomenon

has shown. Under such circumstances, any precise definition of what actually constitutes children's literature will be problematic because the definition will keep changing with the changes in society and society's concept of child. The impetus here is on children's literature's credibility as literature itself and the issues it takes up for consideration albeit considering its audience as primarily children. For such an analysis to take place it is necessary to trace its origin and development and understand the changes that have taken place over the years.

1.2 History of Children's Literature

David Russell in *Literature for Children: A Short Introduction* (1946) makes an interesting point when he traces the origin of children's literature to that of literature itself. He assumes that since all literature began orally, children's literature too began its journey in the rudimentary beginnings of literature itself. His assumption is that all Greek and Roman children would have known Homer, Virgil or Ovid and this proves children's enjoyment of adventures and fantasies. The Middle Ages saw the predominance of the Christian church and education was largely under the control of the church. However, education was available only to the privileged few and books were scarce and expensive. Literature for children was still limited to those available to their parents with epics like *Beowulf* becoming popular. Russell feels that the division in literature did not exist probably because "literature was rich with a childlike imagination, full of wonder, mystery, and excitement" (5). With the technological and social changes in the middle of the fifteenth century, printing became easier contributing to a growth in literacy. Despite the fact that books for children were not easily available, interest was gradually building up regarding children. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw a spurt of instructional and religious books for children, prominent amongst them being books like Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Booke Named the Governour* (1531), John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) and so on. The major influences of Puritanism and John Locke's philosophy of education in the seventeenth century had an impact on society's perspective of the child. While Puritans were never in favour of literature as a means of entertainment and in fact curbed its growth, they strived towards a larger literate society primarily for the cause of

religion. The *New England Primer* contributed towards introducing the young to alphabets with a religious motif. Chapbooks were also prevalent during those times but because of their content were outside the ambit of Puritan favourites. John Locke's famous essay *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) in fact is believed to have laid the foundation for future children's literature. He suggested that the child should be given "some easy pleasant book suited to his capacity" (qtd. in Russell 7) His status as an educational philosopher seems to have made his statements regarding children's education and books propel the rise of children's literature in the later eighteenth century. Yet the seventeenth and early eighteenth century still witnessed children enjoying the same books as adults and books like *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) still remain popular today as children's books (Russell 3-9).

Ostensibly, children's literature in its present form made its beginning through the efforts John Newbery (1713-1767). As the full title of his book *A Little Pocket Book* (1744) includes "Instruction and Amusement", he managed to incorporate the need of both parents and children in his work. Though he was in a way only reiterating what Locke had already said earlier and there were precursors like Thomas Boreman, Mary and Thomas Cooper and others who had published in the same lines as Newbery, yet he succeeded and posterity gives him due credit for one primary reason. He devised a formula which effectively satisfies both parties: "the encasement of the instructive material that adults thought their children would need within an entertaining format that children might be supposed to want" (Grenby 4). Locke was followed by a large number of thinkers who pondered over pedagogical concerns but it was mainly Jean-Jacques Rousseau who was a major influence in children's literature (Grenby 8). The Enlightenment in Europe raised concerns about the child and philosophers like Rousseau emphasized the need of proper nurture and care to raise a conscientious child. His *Emile* (1762) dealt with issues regarding moral education of the child and the necessity of a simple life. These ideas got transformed into the Romantic notions of the child as good, innocent, pure and closer to God. It thereby gradually eradicated earlier norms that viewed the child as associated with Original Sin and thus the need to be "cleansed" through baptism and other such rituals. While Romantic ideas laid importance on the

natural goodness of the child and childhood, it by implication also emphasized the necessity for proper care of the child so that it grows into a worthy individual. Therefore, a lot of chapbooks, nursery rhymes, ballads and similar works, mainly didactic in nature were published to instill in the child “proper” values. Interestingly enough, the majority of the writers were women. The didactic nature of children’s books continued for a long time but oral tales were revived and came out in the form of folktales. Charles Perrault, the Grimm brothers, Hans Christian Andersen, Andrew Lang and others reproduced a large number of folk and fairy tales for children which are appreciated even today. Surprisingly, many of these tales were originally never meant for children which had a generous dose of adult issues which could horrify any child (Chatterjee and Gupta 63). Rimi Chatterjee and Nilanjana Gupta in *Reading Children* (2009) make an interesting and apt remark about the retelling of folktales. They observe:

the idea that folktales are appropriate reading for children seems to be quite prevalent across cultures. There is perhaps an idea similar to ‘ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’—narratives from the ‘childhood’ of the race are regarded as suitable for the ‘childhood’ of individuals, thus re-enacting in miniature the making of the general in particular.(2-3)

Certain social aspects hence remain a constant feature of almost all tales. Gabi R. Katthofer in an article titled “Imagining Home: Spatial Identity Constructions in Nineteenth-Century German Fairy Tales” from Chatterjee and Gupta’s book carries forward this argument. He says that folktales created a certain idea and body of culture and tradition which led to the idea of nationalism. The child became an essential member to be introduced into this construct for the child represented not only the malleable form to be moulded as desired but also a means of carrying forward a suitably created tradition (96-97).

The moot point therefore remains that whatever might be the position of the child in a particular period of time, the emphasis is always on the growth and development of the child into an adult who subscribes to the norms of society. The literature of any period is

therefore only a reflection of the adult's own ideas, concerns and consciousness rather than that of the child. Thus Victorian England segregated the gender appropriate readings laying emphasis on creating the "angel in the house" for girls through books that upheld domestic values. The boys, on the other hand, read adventure books which emphasized the role of the hero fighting all odds and charting newer and newer territories which subtly instilled the imperialistic views of the era (Chatterjee and Gupta 6). Jacqueline Rose in her seminal work on children's literature titled *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1993) stresses that throughout history literature has always addressed a child supposedly "there" and it involves minimal difficulty. She rests her case on the fact that children's literature or fiction "sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims, unashamedly, to take the child *in*" (original emphasis) (2). While Rudd does not dwell on children's fiction as impossible, like Rose, he categorically rejects Townsend's view that children's books serve the child's "own particular needs and interests" but instead proposes that the child's needs were in fact an adult construction which keep changing over a period of time. He also reverses Townsend's earlier statement by saying that it is in fact children's books which created the child as we know it today, using adjectives like innocent, natural, helpless, pure and so on. He calls for such an understanding of children and children's literature as it makes us "avoid being seduced by tabloid notions of 'real' children (frequently white, middle class, male constructions) and what they are 'really' like"(Rudd 3).

1.3 Children's Literature in the Context of India

Rudd's argument makes sense in the context of Euro-centric or Anglo-American literature. But will this argument be equally applicable in the context of nations which were once English, European or American colonies? In a once colonized nation like India, is the concept of the "real" child one that the erstwhile British Empire created or is there an "Indian" child to be found in Indian children's literature? The answers to these questions remain elusive mainly because the concept of a child or, for that matter even an adult who can represent a unified concept of "Indian", is elusive itself. At the same time, what we understand to be children's literature per se is again an import of the colonial

times. Like the novel as a genre gaining importance in India, children's literature as a genre also gained momentum in India and was recreated in the hands of certain Indians. India and Britain were in close relationship during the formative years of children's literature in India, and so nineteenth century British children's literature was suffused with images and visions of India creating a mystical and mythical ambience. Margaret Eckman in "Ideology and The Child: A Comparison of Canonical and Non-Canonical Children's Literature Featuring British India", says that the nineteenth century saw the British involvement in India along with the growth of literacy in Britain. The demand for books led the publishing houses to sell books based on the British Empire and many of them included stories for children. The Empire proved to be a treasure trove for literary publication. Even those who were never outside Europe could find material for writing in the depictions of colonies written by other British citizens. The exotic colonies being under the rule of the British Crown, children could easily transport themselves there in their imaginations or believe that they could go there too. At the same time, the colonies were an important means for imparting to children the imperialist culture. The books based on colonial India inculcated in the children beliefs and ideas of behaviour as the citizens of Britain. The superiority of the British portrayed in the books also imbibed in the children the necessity to respect any form of authority which include parents and teachers. Eckman goes on to add that the Victorian children's novels were in many ways helpful in teaching the children how to conduct themselves as members of a superior race (5). Clarissa Rowland in "Bungalows and Bazaars: India in Victorian Children's Fiction" says that India served as a basic metaphor not only regarding plot but also for the large scale changes in education and travel of the nineteenth century (192). It also served as a convenient place to deport parents when the story line demanded attention on a certain child or children without the interference of grownups. There are numerous instances of such fiction and some of the prominent ones she discusses throw light on the fact that India suddenly became a catch-phrase for novelists, a locus of luxury and hardships all at once, which teaches and needs to be taught too (if not anything else, at least Christianity) (194). In India, the feeling was reciprocated with a free adaptation of English stories without any necessity of cultural relevance.

With the advance of time, the need was felt to create an indigenous children's literature without the hangover of British colonial rule. But an important question needs to be asked now: why this need was never felt earlier? Was this a need created only through interaction with the British or was this a real need? Was not there anything called children's literature in India before the British came to India? Manorama Jafa in an article titled "The Indian Subcontinent" in *The International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (2004) says that while folktales and folklores abounded in the subcontinent, entertainment specifically in the form of literature meant only for children was never produced. Though the child was an integral part of the family yet it was never considered a separate entity. Children's literature as a distinct category developed only recently. She distinguishes three phases in the development of children's literature in the subcontinent. The first is of course the oral tradition with its rich content of mythology, folktales, legends. The Sanskrit and Pali-Puranic collections, Panchatantra, Hitopodesha, Jataka tales, Brihat-Katha, Kathasaritsagara were the staple diet of stories on which children were fed from the earliest of times. The second phase was the phase of initial interaction with British children's literature, which had adaptations and translations mainly. The third was of course original works by Indians. We are not much concerned here about oral literature or translations and adaptations; the thrust here is mainly on original creations and how they came to exist (799).

As stated earlier, through the gradual interaction with the British there arose a need to create a literature specifically aimed at children which satisfies solely their tastes. But one important question that reverberates from the earlier statements is who is a child in nineteenth century India? Is the definition of child similar to the Eurocentric definition already discussed or is the Indian child any different? There is a need to infuse a sense of "Indianness", but what is this concept of "Indianness"? Is this only a sense of inculcating oneself with a nationalistic consciousness and, if so, is early children's literature wholly a campaign for nationalism? That does not seem always to be the case and at the same time when we consider later children's literature, particularly those written in the colonial language, English, we find that that the issues have changed quite a lot. But there remains a lot of grappling to introduce a particular Indian flavour which distinguishes it from

western children's literature, particularly those written in English. Like Indian Writings in English, children's literature also seems to struggle with issues of authenticity, especially with regards to language. Here we have to go back to the question of the concept of the child in the Indian psyche, especially in the nineteenth century and how this concept led to the development of children's literature.

1.4 The Indian Child in Society and Literature

Sudhir Kakar in *The Inner World—A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (1982) makes a detailed analysis of the development of the Indian child in history and literature.¹ In the Indian literary tradition, classical Sanskrit literature is one of the earliest to describe children and childhood. The child that we find in these descriptions is more of a wish fulfilment—a couple's or more often a father's—longing for progeny that carries the lineage forward (implying therefore a son more than a daughter). Literature thereby abounds in waxing lyrical about the joy of a father who realizes his dream of parental happiness through his off-spring. The child is thus more of an object of adoration rather than an individual with the capacity to feel or react; its separate identity is never carved out of that of its parents, more importantly that of its father. King Rama's love for his two sons Lava and Kusha and Prabhakarvardhan's love for his son, Harsha, are beautifully rendered in verses by Bhavabhuti and Banbhata respectively. It is only in Kalidasa that we find any mention of the love and affection of a father for his girl child in the depiction of sage Kanva's love for his daughter Shakuntala. Not only Sanskrit literature but medieval regional literatures like Hindi also abound with rich accounts of children and childhood. The Bhakti movement, particularly the songs of Surdasa on Krishna's childhood and that of Tulsidasa on Rama's childhood, portray a detailed description of childhood, especially that of the male child. These verses provide a fertile ground for an understanding of the Hindu notions of childhood and visualizing it as the parameter of a concept of a utopian childhood universally acknowledged. Not only is the child emphasized in Bhakti literature but also the mother is given due importance in depicting her bond with the child. In all these descriptions, the child remains the cynosure of all adult eyes—the *gopis* of Gokul, the citizens of Ayodhya and so on and so forth. But

this constant affection is more often than not viewed as the basic need of the child to be the focal point of the world around it. In other words, this literature emphasizes the centrality of the child in society rather than its marginalized status (Kakar 200-204). Looking at childhood from the perspective of traditional India, we realize that the early stage of childhood was quintessentially considered to be one of the most cherished phases of an individual's life as opposed to the importance of adulthood in the west. In western social relations emphasis is given to sharing of space and time between father and son to strengthen the bond. Such a system does not exist in India where nurturing of relationships does not need an extra effort. But as always, the girl child remains beyond consideration, literary or societal. The necessary values that need to be inculcated remain confined to domestic skills and to be a "good woman". She remains for the most time of her childhood within the "zenana" quarters with hardly any contact with the outside world. The advent of the various Muslim dynasties affected the importance of elementary education. It remained confined to the upper classes amongst the Hindus and the aristocratic Muslims only could afford education at home. For the rest, there were maktabas situated in mosques. The girls, be they Hindus or Muslims, remained on the periphery of education. During the early Muslim rule and even later up to the eighteenth century we do not find any mention of children's literature and it is only in the nineteenth century that we find any specific mention of it (Bhakhry 14 - 15).

Emulating the west, many factions of India felt the necessity of creating a literature specifically meant for children. The sense of a cultural revolution making its presence felt across the country made the radical thinkers infuse a sense of "Indianness" into the population. And what better place to begin with than the malleable mind of the child? But the question again arises as to who was a "child" in nineteenth century India? Victorian England was in two minds regarding the position of the child, at once protected and exploited. So too in India, the child was hung between two different mindsets. At the same time, unlike the west, the Indian child was not perceived to be a direct outcome of the fall of man. But in the present India, as in traditional India, the dichotomy was between the boy and the girl child. The boy was the centre of attraction of the whole family and flooded with affection and attention. The child, especially a boy, was the

future of the family, society and of the nation too. But his first encounter with public life per se occurs during his wedding, often conducted at a very early stage in life. This makes the concept of childhood farcical and, for the girl child, cruel too. The Age of Consent Bills were themselves unsure regarding the demarcation line between a girl and a woman and more so as to the existence of any such difference. But the idea of “boyhood” was firm and early twentieth century saw the flourishing of *addas* which acquired a literary merit too. These were depicted with a lot of humorous amusement in the works of Bengali children’s writers. While the upper class boy would receive education, the girl child suffers the same fate as her counterpart from earlier times. The taboo against education was maintained on superstitious grounds. This was not so much the case in the lower strata of society but, being financially insecure, the families invested in the education of the boy who was seen as the future bread earner (Chatterjee and Gupta 9-10). Thus it can be categorically said that when children’s literature first made its beginnings in India, it was essentially a gender biased literature aimed specifically at the male child, who represents not only the hopes and aspirations of the family but also of the nation. In such a context, the concept of national identity and Indianness reinforces itself to be treated seriously in the works for children. And to a large extent this can be seen to be the accepted trend in the early writings when children’s literature in India made its beginnings mainly through the Bengali writers. Though other regions of India also produced children’s literature, it was primarily in Bengal that we see a head start basically because of the close interaction of the Bengalis and the British.

1.5 Development of Children’s Literature in India

1.5.1 Bengali Children’s Literature

The earliest form of literature for children in Bengali can be traced back to the magazine *Digdarshan* (1818) which was published by the British missionaries Carey, Marshman and Ward of Srerampur. Though didactic in nature, these type of works laid the foundation for future works. The School Book Society came up in 1816-17 through the efforts of the Srerampur missionaries and the main aim of societies like these was the

furthering the spirit of Christianity rather than literature itself. The early efforts of the society led to the publication of six works. These works like *Itihas Katha*, *Niti Katha* and such similar works did not have much literary value but despite that they were important in the sense that they were paving the way of literature for children. The new epoch in literature can be said to have started with the publication of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's *Betal Panchavimshati* in 1847. Vidyasagar's language infused a new spirit into the literature and led to the publication of many more books later on. But the necessity to imbibe literature with pleasure and also make readers aware of the diversity of life around them has not yet come into the writings. The moralizing attitude towards literature seem to be have ended with the publication of Jogindranath Sarkar's collection of poems and stories titled *Hasi o Khela* which primarily aimed at providing pleasure to children.² The exposure to western influences that the Bengali stalwarts like Rabindranath and Abanindranath Tagore had helped them to take them as templates and lace it up with Indian legends and tales. The necessity to infuse "Indianness" led to the retelling of classics like *Shakuntala*, legends like *Rajkahani* and tales of heroism like *Katha o Kahini*. All these writings emphasized the valour and courage of our legendary heroes thereby making the child conscious of and also internalizing India's glorious past. Along with it there were adaptations of Swedish writer Selma Lagerlöf's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* by Abanindranath Tagore titled *Buro Angla*. Rabindranath Tagore also wrote a dance drama for children named *Balmiki Pratibha*, several plays and stories. Children's literature soon became a flourishing industry in Bengal with a prolific output which included some very recognized names in literature of that period of time. These included Lal Bihari Dey's *Folk Tales of Bengal* (1874), Dakshina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar's *Thakurmar Jhuli* (1901), Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri's *Tuntunir Boi* and *Ramayana for Children* (Chatterjee and Gupta 11-12). Children's literature in Bengali has made much progress in the later part of twentieth century and can boast of such well known names as Satyajit Ray, Lila Majumdar, Kishore Bharati, Sukhatara, and Ananda. This literature is significant too in the sense that it is probably the only children's literature in India that has specialist writers writing on certain specific aspects of children's literature. Thus we have a group of authors like H. Kumar Roy and S. M. Mukerji for adventure

stories, Y. N. Gupta and S. Banerji for historical narratives, myth and fairy tales for Sita Devi and Shanta Devi. Animal stories are the domain of Sukumar Dey and J. Roy and Amamath specialize in science fiction.

1.5.2 Assamese Children's Literature

Like most children's literature, Assamese children's literature has also its origins in oral tradition and *nichukanigit* or lullabies are most prominent examples of this tradition. The American Baptist Mission first published a collection of Assamese folktales by Mrs. Eliza Brown. The important contributors to children's literature in the nineteenth century are Gunabhiram Barua and Padmabati Devi Phukanani. Lakshminath Bezbarua's importance in Assamese children's literature is all pervasive and his *Buri Air Sadhu* (1912), *Kaka Deuta Aru Nati Lara* (1913) and *Junuka* (1913) have still remained the milestones in children's literature from Assam. Translations have also played an important part and therefore there have been significant translations like Jnanadabhiram Barua's *Dadair Paja* (1930) and *Venichar Saud* which are Assamese versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Merchant of Venice*. There have been a number of children's journals too the first among them being *Lara Bandhu* which was edited by Karunabhiram Barua. *Akan* (1915), *Maina* (1923), *Pakhila* (1933) are other children's journals. A lot of renowned authors have tried their hand at children's literature and these include among others Nabakanta Barua, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, Lila Gogoi. Prominent contributors to children's literature are Premadhar Dutta and Anata Deva Sharma and their premature death has meant a big loss for Assamese children's literature. The biggest contributor to children's literature in Assamese till date probably remains Bhabendranath Saikia whose works like *Xantaxistha*, *Hrishthapushta*, *Mahadushta*; *Morom*, *Moromor Deuta* remain in the mind and heart of every Assamese child.³

1.5.3 Malayalam Children's Literature

Children's literature in Malayalam gained momentum only after independence but pre-independence there were also some developments. It can be said that when the committee

for compiling of text books began in 1867 then the production of children's literature in Malayalam started. Raja Verma became the president of the Text Book Committee in 1881 and he brought about distinct changes in children's books production. With an intention to instill moral values, he encouraged others to write too for children. Matthew M. Kuzhiveli can be conferred the status of writing deliberately and consciously for children. He not only translated famous English books for children into Malayalam but was also the first person to bring out an encyclopedia in Malayalam addressed to children. But unlike Bengal, the literary output was mainly pedantic in nature. It gradually progressed some decades later and resulted in the publication of a series of fairy and folk tales and classics, both of the East and West. Despite the state progressing much in literacy, children's literature still remains only a poor relation and oral narratives remain the main source of literature. But the ray of hope is held out by the large number of children's magazines published every year. Chanda-ama, Thaliru, Balarama are a few of the well known names.⁴

1.5.4 Marathi Children's Literature

Children's literature in Marathi can be said to have started with the publication of the magazine *Balbodha* by Vinayak Kondadev Oak in 1881. Vasudev Govind Apte started a new children's magazine *Ananda* in 1906 which remained very popular with children. Following *Ananda's* example there were other works also. Apte was also instrumental in the overall development of Marathi children's literature and thus he wrote a large number of children's books which include abridged and simplified versions of great Indian classics, a collection of fantasies named *Chittaranjan* (1949) and a book on nature titled *Ka wa Kase?* He can indeed be called the father of Marathi children's literature. P. K. Atre was another name to reckon with in Marathi children's literature. Atre's main aim was to instill in children a love for learning and literature and he was quite successful in doing so. His *Navayuga Vachanmala* textbooks were given a long run in majority of schools in Maharashtra. A. S. Sane writing under the name Sane Guruji was very much influential in imbuing in the children the nationalistic fervour and patriotism that was the call of the day then.⁵ The publishing houses like Mouji Prakashan and Popular Book

Depot brought out many important children's books. Another important aspect of Marathi children's literature is the development and rapid progress of children's theatre. Renowned figures like Vijay Tendulkar and C. T. Kanolkar have produced many plays for children and this phenomenon reflects on the well-developed tastes of children for theatre in this region. It is also reflective of newer options in children's literature (Sheoran 131).

1.5.5 Hindi Children's Literature

Though Hindi is the national language, yet children's literature is yet to make much progress. Interestingly, modern Hindi literature and children's literature developed almost simultaneously. *Bal Bodhini* was the first children's magazine which began publishing in 1874. In Hindi, more than any other language, poetry flourished better than prose so far as children's literature is concerned. Bharatendu Harish Chander was one of the fathers of children's literature in Hindi. Maithli Sharan Gupta, Ram Naresh Tripathi, Sohan Lal Dwivedi were some of the known figures of Hindi children's literature. After independence, children's writings gained momentum and many adult writers started to work on it seriously. While traditional Sanskrit classics still formed a large portion of the array of children's literature, translation of "World's Classics" were also taken up. Adaptation also paved the way for children's literature and many classics were so adapted as to suit the child reader. Hindi children's literature developed on well-planned lines and as such there was a large stock of literature on varied subjects. The National Book Trust, National Publishing House, Children's Book Trust, Atma Ram and Sons, Rajpal and Sons, and Arya Book Depot are well-known publishing houses for children's literature in Hindi. Children's magazines like *Parag* and *Nandan* are also very popular. But at the same time, the output remains limited and largely didactic in nature. Scant interest is shown in developing the various genres and publishing houses are also reluctant to take up challenging topics. Despite this, Hindi children's literature occupies a better standing than its regional counterparts. A few of the popular authors include Anand Prakash Jain, Jai Prakash Bharti, Vishnu Prabhakar, Yog Raj Thani, and Ved Mitra (Sheoran 133-134).

1.5.6 Indian English Children's Literature

The pervasive problem with Indian children's literature is that mythology and folktales have satisfied the need without any original children's literature being produced. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan specifically says that, other than the *Panchatantra* "imaginative literature intended specifically for children is not part of Indian literary tradition" (101). In fact, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha*, *Jataka Tales* continue to flourish in the Indian market and as Navin Menon says, any visit to bookstalls in India will give proof that these works and their retellings have become the staple fare of the day (29). The problem with Indian English children's literature stems from two facts. The first is of course the easy availability of western children's literature, which in a way not only suffices but also kills the necessity of producing indigenous Indian English children's literature. The second and more important fact is the question of language. This question will be discussed presently but it is necessary to add here that language functions as one of the important means through which the development and probably the stunted growth too of Indian English children's fiction can be traced.

The pre-independence period is an initializing period so far as the present position of Indian English children's fiction is concerned. But if we look at it from the concept of positioning the child within the locus of children's literature in India, especially from the perspective of the colonizer and the colonized, then we find that the notion of the child performing the nation is set within the literature produced during this period. It is imperative to go through the arguments put forward by Supriya Goswami in *Colonial India in Children's Literature* (2012) to vouch for these facts. Goswami argues that "British, Anglo-Indian, and Bengali children's literature of empire celebrate children and their ability to become transformative agents of change" (4). She also argues that the children in British and Anglo-Indian literature act as agents that corroborate the Empire's power in India. Conversely, Goswami argues, Bengali children's literature situates the children as performing agencies of change who can effectively subvert the colonizing process (4). Goswami looks at a number of children's texts written during the period like Mary Martha Sherwood's *The History of Little Henry and his Bearer* (1814), Barbara

Hofland's *The Captives in India: A Tale* (1834), Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* (1894 and 1895), Sara Duncan's *The Story of Sonny Sahib* (1894) and finds that these texts in fact locate the British or Anglo-Indian child within the early conflicts of the British Empire with India. These texts see the colonial enterprise as one which is at constant threat from the Indian natives and the child is placed within the discourse of colonial liberating mission of the native (9). The first children's writer in English in India was Dhan Gopal Mukherji. His books include *Kari the Elephant* (1922), *Jungle, Beasts and Man* (1923), *Hari, the Jungle Lad* (1924) and *Ghond the Hunter* (1928) displaying the intricate knowledge of wildlife in India (Srinivasan 33).

If pre-independence English language children's literature saw the Empire as an uneasy place of existence constantly at threat from the native, the post-independence scenario tried to subvert that very fact with the prime motive of instilling in the child pride and love for the nation. The Indian child formed a perfect vehicle for the instilling of Indian nationalism, the promise that Nehru envisaged in the nation could only be realized through the child. The ideology of the fledgling nation can best be represented through the fledglings of the society that is the children. But at the same time, the nationalistic leanings cannot be realized through borrowed literature. The problem of children's literature is therefore well encapsulated in the following statement:

There was not enough indigenous literature for children in India apart from the epics and folklore and myths and legends. They were brought up on Western writings. . . . As a result these children were conversant with Western life styles than with the way of life of children in other parts of their own country. (Shankar 260)

This statement in a sense encompasses the whole concept of building up an effective genre of children's writings in India which was to a large extent conceptualized through Shankar Pillai's efforts. The publishing scenario received a boost through Shankar's sustained initiatives but it is imperative to explain how English children's literature can be contextualized. Meena Khorana in her detailed analysis of the publishing sector in

post-independence India says that at that time there were no publishing houses for children's books. The immediate period after independence focused more on the production of text books rather than children's books and therefore in 1961 The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was established to publish good and appropriate text books for children (Khorana, *Life* 94). The irony of children's literature in India lies in this very fact that the nationalistic concerns emphasized more on textbooks production rather than children's literature per se and the situation prevails even today. Khorana further says that till a proper publishing industry was set up, English children's writers restricted themselves to children's sections of some leading English-language newspapers. But in spite of the overt nationalistic ideals in relation to children's literature, it was English language publishing that developed earliest (*Life* 95). The Children's Book Trust (CBT) was set up in 1957 by Shankar Pillai and it was exclusively meant for children's books publishing. Most of the books brought out by CBT were in English and later on they were translated into some of the major Indian languages. The books were kept low priced to cover a large audience and were made available keeping in mind the diversity of children's age groups. CBT's endeavours are noteworthy because it continuously strived to upgrade itself and therefore encouraged new writings and writing skills. It is through CBT's initiative that Arup Dutta's *The Kaziranga Trail* came to be published in 1979 and which, in a way, set a benchmark for others to follow (Jafa 799). With the initiative from the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, The National Book Trust (NBT) was set up in 1957 and started publishing books specifically for children from 1969. The NBT aimed at publishing low-priced books promoting national integration. Thereby translations of regional books were also promoted. In order to promote literary works of Indian authors in their own languages the "Nehru Bal Pustakalaya" and "Aadan Pradan" series were started in 1985. NBT has done laudable work in publishing translated works, information books, text books and taking up new projects for the development of children's literature (Srinivasan 36-37). The Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC), founded in 1981, is a registered voluntary organization representing writers and illustrators for children's books based in Delhi has its members bringing in professionalism hitherto unseen. It also publishes a

quarterly magazine called *Writers and Illustrators*, bringing out research-oriented articles and reports of various seminars and conventions on children's literature. It was only in the late 1970s that Indian English Children's literature started flourishing. India Book House started off with the 'Echo' and the 'Cheetah' series and also the very popular *Amar Chitra Katha* was launched to cater to the comic reading audience. As the need for the retold series began waning and the English reading generation started craving for something original, newer and newer publishing houses joined the fray. Many names like Vikas, Roli Books International, Thomson Press started publishing in the late 1970s and later on other established publishing houses like Puffin, Rupa, and Harper Collins have also started bringing out original works by Indian authors. Again, renowned publishers like Macmillan, Orient Longman and Oxford University Press have brought Indian editions of foreign publications. Along with them, there are also indigenous publishing houses like Katha and Tara are doing a lot of creative work in this area (Srinivasan 42-44).

1.6 The Issue of the English Language with respect to Children's Literature

Is English only a language in India or are there other issues attached to it? This is the question that needs to be answered before we engage in an analysis of Indian English children's literature. More so, India being home to a large number of languages, why is it that this language receives so much attention, be it positive or negative? India has a long history of invasion and from time to time various rulers have brought and assimilated a variety of languages into Indian culture. English is, in this sense, the last language to come to India. The place of the erstwhile official language during Muslim rule in India, Persian, was taken over by English in 1837 but Hindi was also used in some forms of official communication (Das Gupta 43). There have been various arguments put forward at different periods of time which have tried to formulate a distinct division in the history of the English language in India. These divisions nonetheless accept that the two major sections in the development of the English language in India are the ones before and after independence. The pre-independence period has to trace its origins to the initial encounter between the English and India when trade and commerce first opened up

communication between the two nations. The gradual increased importance that English started gaining in India can be assigned to the Charter Act of 1813. Gauri Vishwanathan says that the act paved the way for the missionaries to engage themselves in working more zealously as it revoked the strict restrictions on missionary activities in India. At the same time, it also reposed a lot of responsibility on the East India Company to take up the initiative of educating the natives. The English language thus came to be established through the necessity of imbibing the natives with an idea of English language, culture and, especially, religion and thus texts like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Bacon's *Novum Organon*, and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* became potent tools in the process (43). The Wood's Despatch, Macaulay's minute, and Bentick's education policy paved the way for the establishment of the English language in India and Indians too, especially educated Bengalis, were interested in receiving English language education.

It is the post-independence period that saw the actual hold of the English language over India. The language controversy was raging in India for a long time, and after independence the national leaders conceived of Hindi as the official language of India hoping that the language would forge communication across various communities and also give rise to national integration. The knowledge that one language policy is difficult to implement in India made the leaders adopt a time-frame during which Hindi will gradually take over English in all respects. But this vision never saw the light of the day and therefore English and Hindi still continue their status as official languages. Jason Baldrige in "Reconciling Linguistic Diversity: The History and the Future of Language Policy in India" says that the supporters of Hindi did not foresee the problems that can arise in implementing one language and thus the outcry, especially in the south, that arose after the attempt in 1965 to make the linguistic change over from English to Hindi. Before Hindi could replace English as the sole official language of the union, cries of "Hindi never, English ever!" rang out loud and violently in the city of Madras (now Chennai), finally leading to the present status quo (Das Gupta 237). English and Hindi both continue to be the official languages of India. The educational scenario is ambiguous too in this respect since Hindi becomes an optional subject after a certain standard, while English remains as a compulsory subject even up to undergraduate level.

The idea of a language that caters to a large public is also complacent in itself, looking at the reality of India. English as a language is accessible to a very small adult population and to a yet smaller child population. The irony of the situation seems obvious enough—a supposedly link language for a literature meant for all children remains a very elitist one. The “English medium” education that creates a group of children who could read and understand the language remains available only to the upper and middle classes of the society. The ghost of Macaulay’s minute still haunts the Indian educational system. More than encouraging these children towards a literature which reflects their own culture, the English education actually creates a cocoon where children are happy in the world created by the likes of Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl or E. Nesbit. Authors and publishers who choose to produce children’s literature in English know very well that their consumer reach is miniscule compared to the whole reading population of India. While there are claims that this literature has started growing or reaching out to the masses, yet the reality remains that the popularity (if there is any) of Indian English children’s literature is mainly an off-shoot of Indian English literature. The debate regarding the use of English in Indian literature continues even today with both sides putting forward their own views. But it assumes an even greater importance in the context of children’s literature, which was originally meant to foster nationalism. Considering the content of much of this literature, it remains cultural constructs of a nation divided between its urban elite and rural poor. The idea of nation-building thereby seems out of context since the literature, instead of creating a world of mutual inclusiveness, actually leads to larger social exclusion. The use of the language thus remains problematic considering its long lasting influence on the mind of the child.

How does English as a language then come into play with regard to children’s literature? At the same time, is the perpetuation of nationalism the prerogative of language only? If yes, then does children’s literature in English remain an anachronism? Would it then be wrong to assume that Indian English children’s literature is after all an elitist ideal and children who can understand English language should be satisfied with western imports only? The answers to these questions lie more often than not in the answers given by Indian English literature to corroborate its stand as an Indian literature in itself. One of

the major defenses of Indian English usage is what Bill Ashcroft et al term in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) as the appropriation of a colonial language for the purpose of decolonization (38). For a long time, Indian English literature has been abused for being urban centred in its focus and elitist in its reach. At the same time, there was hardly any critical acclaim for this literature and though pioneers like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao wrote prolifically there was not much market for this literature either in India or abroad. Things seemed to take a dramatic turn with the advent of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Anita Desai makes an apt remark in this regard in "From the Cave to the Bazaar":

The picture changed abruptly, dramatically, in 1981, when a book called *Midnight's Children* appeared on the scene like a thunderbolt and the author was sent to India on that until then unknown exercise, a book-tour. It was the combination of a book that proved that Indian English was a language in itself, capable of presenting serious important ideas with vigour and vitality (G.V. Desai had done the same in *All About H. Hatterr* but it had been a flash in the pan and led nowhere) and of the author as a personality, that changed the Indian scene overnight. Not only was a whole generation of young writers like Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth and Upamanuyu Chatterjee energized and given confidence by the success of Salman Rushdie's book, its language and ideas, but all the discouraged defeated publishers sat up and took notice of them. And the combination of these two phenomena—a new generation of Indian writers, addressing Indian subjects and items in a language taken from Indian streets newspapers, journals, and films, and a class of enterprising business who decided they were worth publishing—marked the '80s and '90s.(7)

The sudden spurt in the writing also threw up many issues that had not previously been thought of or were not considered to be topics to be treated in literature. Rushdie is remarkable in the context of children's literature, too, for he ventured into it with issues hitherto not treated properly in this literature. His work brings in a sophistication and finesse that was previously unknown in Indian English children's literature.

1.7 Finding a Home for Indian English Children's Literature

If we see Indian English children's literature as an off-shoot of Indian English literature, primarily fiction, then we have to understand the concerns of both types of literature. The concern for finding home has remained a persistent one in Indian English literature and various authors have at different points of time taken up the issue of home. Indian English children's literature too takes up this issue, albeit from a different perspective where the individual child's search for home and the necessity to live up to the expectations of home form the crux of the writing. How the child relates to the concept of home and what the child does to secure home are important issues in the works taken up for consideration here. In the process, the authors try to negotiate their own positions and conceptualize a home for writing itself. If home is a cherished place then the question arises as to why home is relinquished? And in the process of finding home again, does the perspective regarding home change, or is home re-acquired with pride and love? In the case of a child, what roles do parents play in securing or losing home? These are questions that underline the texts taken up for analysis in the next chapter.