

Chapter - 1

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INTRODUCTION

Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience and Tagore's Sishu Bholanath, Kheya, Sishu etc. so impressed me that I began to think whether I could embark on my Ph.D. dissertation on the children's poetry of both Blake and Tagore. The critical literature on both Blake and Tagore is vast and myriad. But what is quite amazing is the fact that till now no critical study has been presented on both the poets in relation to their poetry about children. Hence this present dissertation.

Since this dissertation has its main focus on the children's poems of William Blake and Rabindranath Tagore, we would present a brief overview on the geneses of children's poetry in both English and Bengali literature. When literature for the grownups is in "God's Plenty", literature for the children is not that way prolific. But the children in all parts of the world earnestly look for a literature of their own, which illumines the juvenile imagination and captures their fancy world. A good many classics like The Pilgrim's Progress (Part-I published in 1678, Part-II in 1684), Gulliver's Travels (1726), Robinson Crusoe (1719), the tale of Cinderella (first appeared in print in 1697), "The Sleeping Beauty", "Puss in Boots", "Little Red Riding Hood", The Water Babies ; A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby (1863), Grimms' Fairy Tales (1823), Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (published in 1865, withdrawn and published again in 1866), Through the Looking-Glass (1871), At the Back of the North Wind (1871), The Jungle Book (1894), The Second Jungle Book (1895), Treasure Island (published as a serial

in 1881 and as a book in 1883), Kidnapped (1886) and different kinds of folklores, romances, fables, fairy tales, sagas, adventures, illustrated histories, tales of fantasy etc. were written for children of all times. But so far as poetical compositions for the children are concerned, they are not that way vast and varied.

In the old English poetry, childhood appeared in 'Pearl', 'Purity' and 'Patience'. These three medieval alliterative poems introduced for the first time the theme of childhood in English literature. 'Pearl' has been preserved in the same MS as Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight, along with Patience and Purity. In 101 alliterative stanzas 'Pearl' depicts the intense grief of a father for his dead daughter. The child (named Pearl) may have lived for a short time on earth but goes into heaven by virtue of innocence whereas the adults have a passage of hardship and repentance before attaining salvation. Pearl gives her father a refresher course in the medieval conception of christianity. The innocent has enough grace when she has been duly baptised. She reminds him how christ gave his rich blood for purifying humanity. A righteous man with the help of Wisdom can win his way to salvation. A sinner, if he truly repents, will also find grace.

Henry Vaughan (1622-95) in his treatment of the theme of childhood has dwelt on the divine innocence and spontaneity, pure exuberance and feeling, emotional attachment and ventilation. His mysticism like Wordsworth's is grounded on his recollections of childhood. The spontaneous expression of going back to "That shady City of palm trees"¹ has found its fullest maturity in him anticipating Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" ("Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood").

John Locke (1632-1704) delved deep into the child's world. He learned from the children through their aspirations, disappointments, affections, and stubbornness about the children themselves. Locke's own candle was held up to shed illumination on the dark ignorance of his time as to how children's minds should be cherished and spared rather than roughly and peremptorily handled. He declares,

"Children should be treated as rational creatures."²

He undermines the foundation of a whole system when he says,

"Do not charge children's memories upon all occasions with rules and precepts which they often do not understand and are constantly as soon forgot as given."³

Again and again Locke comes back to the idea, children must have their liberty.

Like Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) did immense service by making a study of children's minds being different from those of their elders, and further he offered his ideas in a blaze of convincing enthusiasm which carried them much further than could his predecessors. He makes these fictitious young persons, Emile (1762) and Sophie vivid and humane. Best of all, the two children seem to be endowed with sufficient and natural common sense to resist some of the impossible experiments which Rousseau proposes to perform upon them.

John Newbery (1713-1767) was a man, who, in the eyes of Dr. Primrose — a character in Oliver Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield — has written,

"... so many little books for children; he called himself their friend, but he was the friend of all mankind."⁴

His bustling energy in business enterprise, his interest in literature and writers, his deep and sincere love for children — all began to contribute to his truly astonishing success in matter of publishing books for children. The most significant passage among these books is contained in Nurse Truelove's New Year's Gift, published in 1760. "Innocent Pleasures of a Country life, or the Haymakers" is enlivened by lines that fairly dance themselves to a jig tune :

"In came the jolly mowers. / To cut the meadow down, /
with bottle and with budget / And ale that's stout and
brown."

(You see the picture of the budget, a small bag for bread and meat).

"Sweet jug jug jug jug jug/
The nightingale doth sing/
From morning until evening,
while they are haymaking"⁵

Cornelia Meigs opines,

"Thanks to Locke and to Locke's theory and to John Newbery's practice, books for children finally stood on their own feet. Literature for the young was to go back into the no man's land where it had wandered for three hundred years."⁶

It was Newbery's idea to attach the name 'Mother Goose' to the first important collection of ancient rhymes, some of them so long current in England that they are as old as literature itself. There can be much interesting study of their quaint and hidden symbolism, but their true charm, felt by every child almost from the moment that he is aware of words at all, is in their unfaltering rhythm and their compact and arresting variety of character and incident. No man who was the first in that sort of undertaking could ever have won success without having a deep understanding and love for children.

One Issac Watts (1674-1748) like Locke, learned about the nature of children's minds while being a tutor in a private family (when he was a very young man). Watt's Divine and Moral Songs for Children, published in 1715, belonged to the same age and surroundings that produced Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver's Travels. In the Divine Songs he introduces children to a happier life in religious belief than Janeway or Mather would have allowed them. Tribute has been paid to his "Cradle Hymn", which sings of every mother and child having an unusual appeal in his light verse :

"Soft my child, I did not chide thee
 Though my song might sound too hard,
 Tis thy mother sits beside thee,
 And her arms shall be thy guard."⁷

As printed in the Divine Songs, alternative words are offered in the place of mother, brother, sister, neighbour, friend so that the sleepy child will know most particularly that the song is his very own.

Between Issac Watts' day and the early years of the nineteenth century, very little verse was written specially for children. Nursery rhymes and rhymed alphabets, even if they were widely circulated in print, as to which the evidence is of a negative kind, were no more than traditional. Watts held a field which few people deemed worth tillage. It would be nearly true to say that between 1715 and 1804 no original poems for infant minds were uttered. Ann (1782-1866) and Jane Taylor (1783-1824), who used that title with good warrant, were in fact both the successors of Watts and the creators of the Moral Tale in verse. But in the internal there were writers who stand out as separate figures. They made verse, respectively, for and about children.

The earliest was John Marchant (fl. 1750), who, from the little that can be gathered from his works, must have been a strange fellow. He published some sturdy and even violent anti-papist books, and two very unusual volumes of verse for children — Puerilia : or, Amusements for the Young (1751) and Lusus Juveniles : or Youth's (1753). The interesting feature of both works is what he calls "other subjects". He saw a great deal — more than many children's authors before or since; and what he saw was usually within children's own little sphere of action. But he had no true imagination.

Nathaniel Cotton (1705-1788) wrote Visions in Verse, for the Entertainment and Instruction of Younger Minds (1751), a collection of odes on different aspects of human life. And the odes earned much popularity at that time.

The appearance of Lyrical Ballads in 1798 by Wordsworth (1770-1850) and

Coleridge (1772-1834) did much to influence the character and quality of children's literature and to bring a full awakening of the children's understanding which was indeed a necessity for a true literature meant for them.

In William Blake (1757-1827), who was their predecessor, juvenile poetry blossomed in full. His Songs of Innocence (1789) which represents, in contrast to his Songs of Experience (1794), the fullness of youthful glory before it has crossed that knife edge of difference between the thinking of the wholly young and the beginning of adult responsibility and knowledge.

Sarah Fielding (1710-1768), almost a forgotten writer and sister of the novelist Fielding, published one book for children, The Government; or The Little Female Academy (1749, second edition). Anna Letitia (Aikin) Barbauld's (1743-1825) publications for children — Lessons for Children, from Two to Three Years Old (1778) followed by Hymns in Prose for Children (1781) — comparing with Sarah Fielding's, were immeasurably greater and more tenacious. Mrs. Sarah Trimmer (1741-1810), combining her interest in writing for children with her belief that all children had a right to learn and read, undertook An Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature (1782). Mary Wollstonecraft's (1759-1797) Original Stories from Real Life (1788) deserves mention.

In this way, English juvenile literature has made its onward march enthusing the children with new ideas and forms. While writing about the children care should be taken so that an intelligent understanding of the child as a 'child' rather

than a 'miniature adult' appears to provide juvenile joy while radiating the child's imagination.

The previous section has highlighted the origin of English juvenile literature and its further development. In this section, we will try to show how the juvenile literature made its entry into Bengali literature and its further continuity. Bengali juvenile literature in fact got its proper installation in the second decade of the twentieth century. Naturally its idea and morale were based upon English language. That the English juvenile literature did a lot to stir the Bengali juvenile literature can hardly be denied.

The Western impact and especially the growth of Western education, rise of the educated middle class, a renewed interest in oriental learning, activities of the Christian missionaries and several other developments left their prints in different spheres of life. Through the spread of English education, liberal ideas of the West began to infiltrate first into Bengal and later on in other parts of the country. It heralded a new age of reason. A spirit of critical inquiry into the past and the growth of new ideas and aspirations for the future marked the new awakening. Raja Rammohan Roy was an embodiment of the spirit of the new age. His views and activities generated controversies in the realm of both ideas and actions that continued throughout the century. To a large extent, the Bengali press owed its origin to this ideological conflict and clash of mutually opposite plans of campaign. The different groups of men, caught in the intense cross-currents of ideas, felt the necessity of bringing out their own papers and journals

to propagate their respective views and ideas. Bengali juvenile literature could not escape the general trend of the time.

Nineteenth century juvenile literature completely depended upon translations, renderings and adaptations. English was not only its principal source of adaptation, but many renderings were possibly done directly from Sanskrit, Urdu, French, etc. into Bengali. The sole objective of the juvenile literature of the period was not so much to create interests among children but to use it as media of imparting education among children. Seven books were written either in prose or in poetry. As the prose was dull, so was the poem. Poems, published in a number of books and journals, were nothing but a reflection of moral scriptures :

"... the aim of literature for children, belonging to the major portion of the nineteenth century was the spread of morality and education."⁸

In order to have a clear-cut picture of the earlier phase of Bengali juvenile literature, it should be divided into three periods — i) The era of Calcutta School Book Society, ii) The era of Vidyasagar, and iii) The post Vidyasagar era. The former two phases had been dominated by both the society and Vidyasagar. The later one was a product of collective responsibility. The Calcutta School Book Society, founded on July 4, 1817, contributed much to the growth of Bengali language and literature.

Some important works other than poetry appeared in different forms and

themes while widening the horizon of juvenile literature of Bengal. Of these works the notable ones like Itihashmala by William Carey, Folk Tales of Bengal by Rev. Lalbehari Dey, Nitikatha and Manoranjonetihash by Tarachand Dutta, Betal Panchabinshati (an adaptation from the Hindi book Baitalpanchisi), Kathamala, Jivancharit, Bodhodaya, Akshyanmanjari by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Rabinson Crusore Vraman Brittyanta (The Travelogue of Rabinson Crusoe) and Shakespeare Krita Galpa (Tales from Shakespeare) published by Vernacular Literature Committee, Balakbodhketihash by Keshabchandra Karmakar, Nitibodh by Rajkrishna Bandopadhyay. Charupath, Part-I, by Akshaykumar Dutta, Nitiratna by Tarasankar Tarkaratna, Sishu Darpan by Aghorenath Tarkaratna, Hitakathavali by Ramnarayan Vidyaratna, Nitisar, 1st, 2nd and 3rd, Rome Rajyer Itihas, Greece Desher Itihas and Upadeshmala 1st and 2nd by Dwarakanath Vidyabhusan, Prakritik Bijnaan by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, Inano Ratnamala by Priyamadhab Basu, Kutshit Hangsashabak, Matsyanareer Upakshyan, Chindeshio Bulbulpaksheer Vivaran, and Hangsarupi Rajputra (adaptations from The Ugly Duckling, The Little Mermaid, The Nightingale and Swan Prince respectively) by Madhusudan Mukhopadhyay, Kankabati by Trailakyanath Mukhopadhyay, Chheleder Ramayan by Upendrakishore Roychaudhury show how the writers felt the need to enliven juvenile minds through such works meant absolutely for them.

It is a historical fact that the bulk of juvenile poetry in comparison to the prose writings of other kinds was definitely very slender. But Madanmohan Tarkalankar was a great scholar and above all a poet. In the first part of his

Shishushiksha appeared the first original juvenile poem of the century :

"Birds are tuning, night disappears

Buds in the garden bloom into flowers."⁹

It has been informed by Krishnakamal Bhattacharya's Puratan Prasanga that Kamakshyacharan Ghosh compiled a collection of poems named Ratnasar Samgraha, first published in 1859. In 1863 was published a book of poems, Kavita Kaumudi, first part, by Harishchandra Mitra. The second and third parts were published in 1867 and 1875 respectively. Tinkari Mukhopadhyay wrote Laghupath Paddya in 1864.

During his days of hardship, Michael Madhusudan Dutta also composed a number of moral poems for children in order to earn money. In the opinion of Jogindranath Sarkar, the biographer of Madhusudan,

"The moral poems were composed by Michael in 1870

The moral poems were written according to the system of Bangala Kathamala in the ideal of Aesop's Fables ... some of them have gained popularity having found their places in the text book of the boys."¹⁰

After two years of their publication, a long narrative poem composed by the famous dramatist Dinabandhu Mitra was published in 1872. It is said that the storehouse of Bengali juvenile poems had been enriched by this poem. Kavitamanjari, written by Haricharan Dey, was published in 1868. After three years, in 1871, Kavitamanjari was published by Gopal Chandra Dutta from

Chinsura. Jnanomanjari, a collection of shorter poems for children, by Hemchandra Chattopadhyay, was published in 1873 from Dacca. The poems, especially the moral ones, were also for children. In the same year (1873) was published another book of juvenile poems, Kavitamanjari. Some of them had moral undertones and others were of narrative kinds.

In the 19th century there was an observable silence in the writing of poems for children. The humming of conventional rhymes or lullabies might have overpowered their creative destiny. In 1881 was published a book of poems entitled Shishu Kavita by Rajkrishna Roy. Frequently, the 19th century children's literature gave birth to two or three poems for children. In order to teach the whimsical boys and girls, Rajkrishna Roy wrote that collection of thirty short poems, Shishukavita. The book includes poems on book, pen, paper, inkpot etc. A poem entitled 'The Pen' bears witness to the above statement,

"... For you only I write with my pen

This book Shishukavita consciously again."¹¹

Mozammel Haque wrote a number of juvenile poems and in 1889 published a small book named Paddy Shiksha. He is the first Muslim literateur in Bengali children's literature. In the same year, 1889, Galpaswalpa by Swarnakumari Devi was published. Here, the authoress's aim was also to spread moral education among the boys and girls. Both prose and poems were included there. One of the poems is on noon. The last three lines of the poem, 'The Noon' exhale the serenity of noon and soothes one's heart :

"A Cowherd while keeping his kinē in the distant field /
plays the flute under the shady grove."¹²

This era augured well with the publication, Hashi O Khela compiled by Jogindranath Sarkar in 1891. In the preface, the author wrote,

"Though there was no scarcity of text-books for the boys and girls in our country, no readable or prizeable book containing pictures for children has yet been published. In order to overcome this scarcity, to some extent, Hashi O Khela is published. If it draws public interest, I hope, Chhabi O Galpa, another readable juvenile book containing pictures, will be published."¹³

And again, praising the literary qualities of the book, Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Falgun 1301 B. S. (1894) in the pages of "Sadhana",

"By compiling the book named Hashi O Khela, Jogindrababu has stood on complement being received from both the children and their parents."¹⁴

This book included the compositions (both prose and poems) written by Upendrakishore, Pramadacharan, Rajkrishna Roy, Navakrishna Bhattacharjee, Jogindranath Basu etc. Some of them have been enjoyed by the children of today for their easy reading and realisation. One of those written by Navakrishna Bhattacharjee spread from mouth to mouth like the lullaby sung by the Bengali mothers and its humming is yet to be heard.

In this long list of the children's literature of Bengal, the name of Avanimdranath Tagore needs special attention. In Shakuntala, Avanimdranath's serious attempt to spread very rapidly the colloquial tongue in the domain of children's literature became successful. It was published in 1895. In 1896 was published his Khiner Putul — the original creation in Bengali literature for children. Both its theme and characters express a new feeling. Though the book hinges on a real incident (historical character or ancient event) however one feels the impression of the Ramayana while reading the work. Hanuman played an important role in rescuing Sita, but in Khiner Putul, the lamentation of Duorani has been thrown off by the 'Mukhpura Hanuman'. (the monkey whose face is burnt). Among those writers of rare qualities belonged Avanimdranath who expressed themselves being as if children themselves.

Now appears Rabindranath Tagore. In the beginning, Tagore's Sishu was not a separate book of poems. Many of them were published in the last phase of the nineteenth century. But the peculiarity remains in the fact that the poems included in Sishu have satisfied more the mothers than their children. These poems have followed the style of a lullaby poem.

In 1896 was published Ranga Chhbi by Jogindranath Sarkar, but it was a wonderful reflection of his Hanshi Ō Khela :

"Just as one should have the premonition of the rest of the day at the fresh radiation of dawn, so the identification of the whole work will be possible by going through any one of them."¹⁵

Only for this reason, a portion of them is to be mentioned.

"Why do you call on, hey
Bird from the wood?
Come to the golden cage and I
will keep you for good."¹⁶

And again,

"Mum has said, 'Don't torture
Anyone in life',
So I want you little bird
In my love alive."¹⁷

On 16th September, 1897, was published Hansi Khushi (Part One) by Jogindranath Sarkar which became a milestone in the world of Bengali juvenile literature and education. The eternal soul of a child responds to the humming of the rhymes. Jogindranath's Khelar Sathi was published in November, 1898. It also contains fairy tales. But Jogindranath's remarkable contribution to the store-house of Bengali children's literature lies in his collection of Bengali rhymes.

The collection entitled Khukumanir Chhada was published in 1899. In the preface to the collection, with special reference to the role of juvenile literature, Acharya Ramendrasundar Trivedi wrote,

"The unacknowledged mystery of a large part in human life remains in this literature. In order to evaluate the nature of human adolescence, often we should have to take refuge to such kind of literature."¹⁸

And again,

"The people who have got leisure will find a curious comparison between the 'rhymes' of the Bengali boys and the 'nursery songs' of the English ones."¹⁹

It is to be noted that Acharya Ramendrasundar was the first one to introduce the term "Sishu Janapriyo Sahitya" (Popular children's literature). Before him, none in the nineteenth century had used the term. Jogindranath's further contribution to the Bengali children's literature is the implementation of nonsense rhymes, evident in Hanshirashi, (published in 1899). There is the common belief that Sukumar Roy is the innovator of this kind of verse. But actually it is not. Rather, Sukumar followed the trend left behind by Jogindranath.

In this way the stream of the nineteenth century Bengali children's literature got its sustenance from the creations of numerous writers. That Bengali children's literature to its credit enjoys a very commendable position, no less intended to that of English literature for children, is evident from the history of Bengali children's literature studied in this chapter.

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