

**(RE)PRODUCTION OF LANDSCAPES: A STUDY
OF SELECT TRAVELOGUES FROM MAJOR
BANGLA JUVENILE PERIODICALS, 1883–1915**

(Synopsis)

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Research Question

A part of the title of this thesis is '(Re)Production of Landscapes'. The placement of the prefix within parenthesis alludes, first, to the fact that the form of landscape in art is already a reproduction of the physical landscape. In this thesis, I have sought, also, to focus on the element of 'land' in landscape. Land here refers both to the physical land as well as the land as nation – the Mother Land. This thesis has tried to understand the ways in which processes of production and reproduction with their gendered connotations are related to the processes of the formation of national identity and selfhood. This is done, as the title notes, through a study of select travelogues published in Bangla juvenile periodicals between 1883 and 1915. This thesis studies specifically travelogues written about places within India and as such, has surveyed existing scholarly work that deals with this category in particular.

In focusing on travelogues published in Bangla juvenile periodicals in the given timeframe, this thesis would also like to place these texts and their publication within the larger context of colonialism and the emergence and development of nationalism. The idea of nationalism, as it develops in Bengal with particular, was fuelled, among other things, by two significant events – the coming of the printing press and the establishment of the railways. In this sense, travel and writing and publishing about travel is intrinsically linked to the discourse of nationalism. This thesis intends to understand how the nation was 'imagined' for the child in the pages of these juvenile periodicals through the travelogues written about places within India.

It is not the aim or idea of this thesis to use history as bookends. Rather, these travelogues will be read within the processes of historical development(s) as they take place in Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Research Methodology

To use the word ‘history’ is to be aware of its many connotations and most significantly, the many omissions and exclusions its writing has performed across ages. For centuries, the glories of the hunt have been written by the hunters, often violently obliterating the possibilities of the existence of the voice of lions. This thesis acknowledges that in including some, it has had to omit many others.

The periodicals chosen for this thesis are based on the popularity they enjoyed in their own time – a conclusion derived from memoirs and autobiographies of women and men who were growing up in this timeframe. Another reason has been the longevity that they have enjoyed in terms of subsequent reprints.

It is important to note that these periodicals were mainly published by Hindu/Brahmo, middle and upper-middle class, upper caste men—the bhadraloks, and, in the rare instance of *Balak*—a bhadramahila. By extension, in delving into the readership of these periodicals, this research has concentrated primarily on analysing a Hindu/Brahmo childhood. The real existence of other childhoods, often not inscribed in print, remain absent from this thesis. Also, the periodicals, the travelogues, and the identifiable readership belong predominantly to an urban setting.

Instead of using a comparative lens that brings in juvenile periodicals published in England, this thesis has focused on the Bangla juvenile periodicals in and of themselves. The same is true of the way in which the idea of childhood and culture of travel in Bengal has been discussed in this thesis. It is only in discussing landscapes that this thesis takes into account the origins of this genre in English Art because of its close relationship with travel and empire.

Chapter Division

The thesis is structured as four primary chapters, bookended by this Introduction and a Conclusion.

Chapter One

The first chapter explores the ways in which categories of the child and childhood developed in Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Within that broader context, it also attempts to explore and analyse the history and development of children's literature in Bangla. In understanding the idea of childhood, the chapter argues that a universal approach is not to be adopted and focuses, instead, on the specificity of the context. In examining the concept, it takes into account the various terms used in Bangla to denote childhood and also focuses on the names of the periodicals to understand how their editors were constructing the idea of childhood through them. Within this context, it also focuses on articles on child-rearing and family published in other periodicals, looking at women as their primary readership.

In the next couple of sections, the chapter discusses the definition and characteristics of children's literature with specific reference to articles and works in Bangla and also provides a brief outline of the history of vernacular children's literature. It then extensively discusses the publication history of juvenile periodicals, especially those within the timeframe under the purview of this thesis.

This is followed by a discussion of the reading habits of those who lived through this period as children, based on their memoirs and autobiographies.

The chapter also takes into account nursery rhymes and fairy tales that had been passed on from one generation to the next before the advent of print. It seeks to understand the ways in which images of Bengal as well as contemporary life and events were documented in these oral texts.

Chapter Two

The present work is concerned with only the kinds of travel writing that documents the real journey of the traveller/author to a real destination. However, for the purpose of tracing the socio-cultural history of travel in Bengal, this chapter will look at literary representations of travel in early modern Bangla literature, primarily the mangalkabyas, and specifically the *Manasa Mangal* and *Chandi Mangal*. It will also

briefly discuss the travels of Chaitanya and the earliest-known travelogue in Bangla – *Tirthamangal* by Bijayram Sen.

This chapter will discuss the development of the technology of transport and its implications in the context of the development of travel and travel writing.

The railways contributed significantly to the rise and boom of tourism as an industry in Bengal and aided in the emergence of the Bengali as a tourist. The ‘family tour’ was a significant part of this new kind of travel. Children began to become a more visible part of both travel and travel writing – as travellers, travelling companions, readers, and even authors. This chapter intends also to focus on the figure of the child within the context of the culture of travel in Bengal and Bangla travel writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Chapter Three

The chapter on historical landscape begins with a discussion on the category of ‘landscape’ with reference to W. J. T. Mitchell’s theorisation of landscape as ideology. Based on this theorisation, it then proceeds to discuss the relationship between landscape and empire. This section elucidates upon the relationship between travel and nationalism and how, in the (re)production of historical landscapes, the past (Hindu and glorious) intersects with the present in a temporal as well as spatial sense.

The chapter also notes the production and importance of images of ancient sites, particularly in the picturesque mode, that were born from these travels. This section also contains a brief account of the history of archaeology in the nineteenth century.

Within the broader context of understanding or discovering the nation through its history, this section then turns its attention to history textbooks that students encountered in colonial institutions. This brief study endeavours to understand the kind of image of their own nation that students were made familiar with at school. Within this backdrop, the chapter then discusses the historical landscape re(produced) in the travelogues published in juvenile periodicals.

Chapter Four

The chapter on natural landscape begins with a discussion of picturesque landscapes. It discusses the origins of the picturesque landscape in British art and then, the ways in which the mode was used in representing the British colonies and its intrinsic relation to travel. It then brings into focus a discussion on Indian landscapes with particular references to the Bombay and Bengal School of Art. The focus of the rest of the chapter is on understanding how the travellers from Bengal were (re)producing natural landscapes in their travel writing. The significant aim of the chapter is to understand how 'land' becomes an important element in the idea of the landscape.

The discussion of travelogues begins with a detailed analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's *Chhinnapatrabali* – a collection of letters written by the poet at various stages of his life to his niece Indira Debi. Although never published in any juvenile periodical, and indeed, never published as a book until many years after Rabindranath's death, the text has been included in this chapter because the recipient and reader of these letters was a young girl and indeed, in case of the first few letters at least, the author was also a young man. The letters of *Chhinnapatrabali* address many of the key questions about landscape, nation, and travel and provide a suitable point of entry for the discussion of the travelogues published in the juvenile periodicals.

The following section of the chapter focuses on the element of land in landscape within the broader context of the Permanent Settlement Act. It takes into account the many famines that ravaged rural Bengal over the course of the nineteenth century as well as the (contradictory) construction of the image of a lush, green rural Bengal as the real Bengal. Within this context, the chapter then turns its attention to a study of geography school texts published in the nineteenth century to examine how the topography of Bengal was introduced to students at school.

The next section focuses on travelogues written about holidaying in the mountains, in the northern parts of both Bengal and India. This is followed by a discussion of travelogues that focuses on journeys where the natural landscape of a pilgrimage site is given more importance than its religious aspect, which can be read within the broader context of the emergence of secular travel and the (re)production of secular

landscapes. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of travelogues that represent the sea-scape.

Conclusion

This thesis has focussed on travelogues written for children in Bangla juvenile periodicals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to see how the nation was 'imagined' and (re)produced for young readers. By doing so, it has attempted to a small gap in the wider field of research on cultures of travel and travel writing within the broader context of the relationship between travel, empire, and landscapes.

The conclusion to the thesis also looks beyond its immediate concerns to other periodicals published in the course of the twentieth century, the development of photography and representations of landscape, as well as the changes in modes of travel.

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