CULTURAL POSSESSION, LINGUISTIC POSITION AND IDENTITY: A READING OF *FOLK-TALES OF HINDUSTAN* AND *HINDUSTHANI UPAKATHA*

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Abstract

Translation, continuously interrogated and redefined as a process in relation to culture and ideology, becomes further complicated when conflated with colonial situation. Seen as an overarching metaphor for the unequal power relationship which defines the condition of the colonized (Niranjana), and the representation of the" subordinate position" of the native text (Bassnett and Trivedi), translation involves a anxiety-ridden and at times violent attempt at redefining self within the larger context of nation.

My paper chooses to focus on Srish Chandra Bose's *Folk Tales of Hindustan* (serialized in *The Modern Review* in 1907 and published in 1908 from Panini Publishers, Allahabad) and Shanta Devi and Sita Devi's translation of the English Source Text into Bengali as *Hindusthani upakatha* (1912). Bose chooses to render tales from northern India and even Persia to "foreign readers" ("Preface" n.pag) and assumes the pseudonym of Shaikh Chilli, the popular North Indian jester figure. The decision of Shanta Devi and Sita Devi, the daughters of the eminent editor of *Prabasi* and *The Modern Review*, to choose this English text over the popular *Thakurmar jhuli* [*Grandmother's satchel* (1907)] provides a significant site for exploration and the paper will attempt it through an analysis of the translational politics involved in the process.

This paper seeks to focus on Bose's Folk *Tales of Hindustan*, and its Bengali translation *Hindusthani upakatha,* to analyze how this the issues of culture, English as linguistic medium, Source Text (ST) and Target Language (TL) become instrumental in exploring issues like class, gender and reorienting nationalistic discourse.

Keywords: Translation, Colonialism, Culture, Ideology, Identity

As the breeze of English literary studies puffed the sail of colonial Bengali writers in English, descriptions like "olive" complexion and exclamations like "Go to Jericho" (Chatterjee, *Rajmohan's Wife* 2, 11) introduces very early the issue of "compatibility between culture and language" (Mukherjee, "Afterword" 149). In Reverend Lal Behari Day's (1824−1894) *Folk-tales of Bengal* (1883), a work described as "a genuine sample of old old stories told by Bengali women from age to age through a hundred generations" (Day, Preface ix), the characters use expressions like "my darling" and "Papa" (3, 119) that marks a new linguistic and thought make-up for the upper class educated section. It has been pointed out that the act of writing in English "is a quest for a space which is created by translation and assimilation and hence transformation of all three – the Indian text, context and the English language (Prasad 42). The cultural obfuscation is a disturbing manifestation of a hegemonic tendency which becomes even more complicated in the literary fairy tales in English Reverend Lal Behari Day's *Folk-Tales of Bengal*, Srish Chandra Bose's(1861-1918)   *Folk Tales of Hindustan* (1907) and Shovona Devi's *The Orient Pearl* (1915) where the author chooses to communicate in "English garb" as Shovona Devi remarks in her unpaginated prefatory remark, a possession marking the cultural antiquity and authenticity of a race accused of lacking history and morally degenerate. There is "something" crucial that eludes the reader in English, though there is hardly any clamour like: "I will accept nothing but *something*, give me the something which you promised" (Bose 34).

This paper seeks to focus on two works, Srish Chandra Bose's Folk *Tales of Hindustan*, and its Bengali translation by Shanta Devi (1893-1984) and Sita Devi (1895-1974) as *Hindusthani upakatha* (1912) and analyze how this the issues of culture, English as linguistic medium, Source Text (ST) and Target Language (TL) become instrumental in exploring issues like class, gender and reorienting nationalistic discourse. The first section of this essay, "Literary Fairy Tales and Colonial Politics" explores the various means in which the native intelligentsia and colonial administrators appropriate the genre of literary fairy tales. The second section focuses chiefly on Sita Devi and Shanta Devi's *Hindusthani upakatha* and concludes with the argument that the work needs to be acknowledged as a feminist agenda that steers away from the politics of colonialism operating through literary fairy tales.

Section 1.
Literary Fairy Tales and Colonial Politics
The vogue of literary fairy tales[1] emerges in late nineteenth century Bengal when the reconstruction of the national past becomes "a primary sign of the nationalist consciousness" (Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments* 77). According to contemporary fairy tale scholarship the tales are assumed to be "older than the 13th century when the Hindu revival was established in Bengal" (Sen, *Folk Literature* 34) and becomes a marker of cultural antiquity and claim of racial equality. In his introduction to *Folk-Tales of Hindustan,* Ramananda Chattopadhyay (1865-1943), views folklore as a science within which the "history of a story is often more interesting and more instructive than the history of a campaign" (ii) and can be used as a means of constructing an alternative historiography. He is critical of the comparative lack of interest among natives towards collection of folk tales unlike that of Grimm Brothers and observes that

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[1] Literary fairy tales are distinct from both oral folk tales and oral fairy tales and can be defined as a literary publication based upon "reworking of orally composed and transmitted tales" (Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales* 7)

without a search and expression of our cultural antiquity, Indians would continue to be treated as culturally inferior:

> We in India, however, have left even the collection of folk-tales to be done by foreigners for the most part, considering these stories to be unworthy the attention of so metaphysical a race as ourselves. But we must, if we want to survive, take our place by the side of the progressive races of the world in all departments of scientific study and research. (ii)

Collections of native fairy tales by British administrators include G.H. Damant's *Bengali Folktales from Dinajpur* (1872), Campbell's *Santal Folk Tales* (1891), Joseph Jacobs's *Indian Fairy Tales* (1892), William McCullogh's *Bengali Household Tales* (1912) and F.B. Bradley-Birt *Bengal Fairy Tales* (1916). These and ethnographic periodicals, like *Punjab Notes and Queries* have been described as one of the new means for "generation and communication of knowledge in colonial India" (Naithani, Introduction xxiii) and simultaneously highlights the average Britisher's studious ignorance of colonial culture, as William Crooke, the editor of *North Indian Notes and Queries* and writer of *Folktales from Northern India* observes:

> We've struggled, you and I, for fifty years
> To pierce the veil of mystery, that lies
> On India's past so heavily, and cries
> Aloud for rending with the searcher's shears.
> (qtd. in Nathani Introduction xxxix)

The fairy tales become a part of discursive exercise towards fashioning national identity and gender roles within the modern society as Tagore describes *Thakurmar jhuli* [*Grandmother's satchel*] as a swadeshi endeavour and prescribes it as a manual for the "modern grandmothers of Bengal"[2] (12). He praises the traditional rural women as repository of the oral folk tales while the modern educated women are rebuked for drifting away from the traditional feminine art. Tagore attributes the crisis precipitated by a cultural bankruptcy among educated women due to which they are increasingly unable to recreate the charm of oral telling and even "Our own *swadeshi* Grandmother Company is utterly bankrupt". (Tagore, "Introduction" 42-43). Tagore concludes with the suggestion that Mitra Majumdar's collection of fairy tales can become a manual for modern grandmothers of Bengal, connect women to authentic native culture and assign them a particular role in the transmission of culture.

Mitra Majumdar is also disturbed at the crisis caused by rapid erosion of indigenous culture and intrusion of western education. In his preface, Mitra Majumdar compares the fairy tales as a natural possession of the rural women in Bengal: "It would be wrong to say she knew them; it was as if the fairy tales were woven into the daily chores so much so that it would have been impossible to find one housewife ignorant of the tales, no knowing any would have been a matter of shame" (15). In the verse- prologue, Mitra Majumdar speaks of his role as collector and compiler of oral fairy tales and highlights his responsibility towards restoring the tales as a forgotten inheritance to the young mothers of Bengal:

> ("O
> Eldest wife and the youngest! They've made a return
> The fairy tales of yore, holding fast to your sari's end. . .

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[2] All translations from the original text, except otherwise mentioned, has been attempted by the researcher.

This lost treasure belongs to you, it's your satchel
I've only collected and tidied them before restoring them in your hands." (18-9)
Such views reflect the shift, palpable since the last quarter of nineteenth-century, towards "an inner domain of sovereignty" or inner core of society which is represented by the rural non-elite female tellers who becomes emblematic of "one's true identity" (Chatterjee, *Nation* 118, 120).

Reverend Lal Behari Day, a student of Rev. Duff's General Assembly's Institution and later a professor in English and a Christian missionary, locates himself as a member of the learned native intelligentsia who expresses his cultural rootedness and identity through works like *Bengal Peasant Life* (1874) and *The Folk-Tales of Bengal* (1883). In his preface to the collection of folk tales he mentions familiarity with the "*Mährchen* of the Brothers Grimm, to the *Norse Tales* so admirably told by Dasent, to Arnason's *Icelandic Stories* translated by Powell, to the *Highland Stories* done into English by Campbell" (Preface vii-viii) and lays claim for racial and cultural equality on the basis of a more ancient cultural possession: "that the swarthy and half-naked peasant on the banks of the Ganges is a cousin, albeit of the hundredth remove, to the fair-skinned and well-dressed Englishman on the banks of the Thames' (viii). He recollects the figure of Sambhu's mother, the "old story-telling woman" (viii), from whom he heard thousands of fairy tales and acknowledges his indebtedness to Richard Carnac Temple[3] (1850-1931) for the latter's suggestion of bringing out a collection of native folk tales and fairy tales. However, his central thesis is on racial equality to be proved through his collection of "genuine sample of the old stories told by old Bengali women from age to age through a hundred generations" (ix). Thus, literary fairy tales become an interesting tool for asserting a sense of identity.

Folk Tales of Hindustan, written by Srish Chandra Bose, is a near-forgotten text which was serialized during 1907 in Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *The Modern Review,* published from Allahabad. Its date of appearance coincides with the publication of Mitra Majumdar's *Thakurmar jhuli* in Kolkata. Srish Chandra Bose graduated from Lahore Government College in 1881 and joined the profession of teaching. He was proficient in various languages including Urdu, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Latin, French and German and translated Panini's *Astadhyayi* into English in 1891. He regularly contributed to *Prabasi* and *The Modern Review* edited by Ramananda Chattopadhyay. In his introduction to *The Folk-Tales of Hindustan* Chattopadhyay remarks that the "writer of the Folk-Tales of Hindustan is simply contributing materials for the folklorist" (ii) thereby indicating his role in the nationalistic programme. In his preface Bose remarks that the tales "are given as narrated by village folk, with slight omissions and alterations to suit the needs of juvenile readers" (ii), and he attributes authorship of the tales to Shaikh Chilli[4], a popular folk figure of northern India in order to emphasize the authenticity of the tales and identifying the folk origin to emphasize the element of "natio"[5] in the native origin of the tales.

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[3] Captain Richard Carnac Temple and William Crooke are both interested in the study of Indian folklore and Temple initiates and edits the journal *Punjab Notes and Queries* in 1885 which publishes folk tale collections of North India and then hands it over to Crooke.

[4] Sufi Abd-ur-Rahim Abdul-Karim Abd-ur-Razak, popularly known by the name of Sheikh Chelli. (www.wikipedia.org)

[5] Timothy Brennan related the modern-state to "the 'natio'− a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging" (Bhabha 45)

However, Bose does not confine the tales within any geographical context and the reference to "Hindustan" moves towards a redefinition of strictly nationalistic boundary. While the concept of "Bharat" rests on "Brahmanical tradition" (Clementin-Ojha 4), the term "Hindusthan" was already used in Persia in the third century B.C. to refer to the land lying beyond the Indus River and recalls the historical trajectory going back to the Greeks. Bose chooses tales that move along the western boundaries further to Persia and also to the south-eastern Asia that affirms the migratory nature of the tales and recall the notions of diffusion and migration of oral folk-tales and fairy tales. Bose was associated with Ramananda Chattopadhyay's editorial ventures and hence familiar with the migrant Bengali readership and a pan-nationalist culture. *Prabasi* plays a seminal role for readers both within and beyond the provincial limits of Bengal and is a response to the contemporary trend of the Bengali professionals—civil servants, magistrates, doctors and teachers—moving beyond Bengal.

In his preface Bose refers to the admiration expressed for his work in *Review of Reviews* and Shanta Devi and Sita Devi highlights this credit in their preface to *Hindusthani upakatha* "After reading the tales, the well-known figure, the late editor of *Review of Reviews,* Mr. Sted observed in the October 1907 edition of the periodical that these folk-tales are as delightful as the *Arabian Nights*" (n.pag.) The analogy with *Arabian Nights* is significant not only in highlighting its imaginative quality but in setting the locus away from the eurocentric paradigm. Thus, *Folk-Tales of Hindustan,* with its meta-Bengal approach, displays a nationalistic politics that is distinct from the contemporary canonical collections of literary fairy tales.

Section 2.
Translational Politics in *Folk-Tales of Hindustan* and *Hindusthani upakatha*

Srish Chandra Bose encouraged the daughters of his friend Ramananda Chattopadhyay, Shanta Devi (1893-1984) and Sita Devi (1895-1974), to attempt a translation of his *Folk-Tales of Hindustan* into Bengali. Educated at the Bethune School and College, the sisters belong to the early group of Bengali women receiving institutionalized modern education and establishing themselves in literary careers. Shanta Devi stood first among women in the B. A. Examination in 1914 and Sita Devi graduated from the Bethune College in 1916 with Honours in English. They had been praised as representatives of "intellectual countrywomen" (Thompson, "Preface" xvi), and were well aware of the linguistic politics of translation. Shanta Devi translated portions from George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* as *Smritir Sourav* [*Fragrance of memory*] (1918) *,* Sita Devi translated *Udyanlata* [*Garden Creeper*] (1919)*,* jointly authored with Shanta Devi, as *The Garden Creeper* (1919), and her own novels *Pathik Bandhu* [*Companion of the Road*] (1920) as *The Knight Errant* (1924) and *Banya* [*Flood*] (1933) as *The Waters of Destiny* (1934) *.* The sisters also translated *Tales of Bengal* (1922) which carries an introduction by E.J. Thompson, praising the intense individuality of the two sisters despite the strong intellectual presence of their father Ramananda Chattopadhyay. They also aided Tagore with translations:

> Tagore would ask his school teachers to translate pieces from English into Bengali and then ask Sita to translate them back into English. Sita would perform well in her task and so he would give her considerably difficult Bengali and English pieces to translate. Later, he would say "My teachers cannot translate well like you." (qtd. in Datta 81)

The Chattopadhyay sisters looks back at *Hindusthani upakatha* as a part of their early literary career, though they are engaged in translations almost through their entire literary career. Shanta Devi recollects in *Purbasmriti* [*Recollections from the Past*]*:* Meanwhile, I graduated and was fortunate enough to receive the Padmabati medal. . . .It was around this time that we two sisters translated *Hindusthani upakatha*. I don't remember the exact year.(12) They choose to redefine prevailing trend in the translational politics with regard to colonial literary fairy tales by prioritizing the mother tongue but the choice of the tales of northern Indian and Persian reflect the contemporary phenomenon of migrant Bengalis. They grew up in Allahabad, and were involved with the publication of *Prabasi* which carried biographies and photographs of these accomplished Bengalis outside the territorial frontiers of the Bengal province, and translations feature like Jyotrindranath Thakur's translations from Maupassant and other French writers. *Hindusthani upakatha* explores beyond Bengal in Bengali, participates in the nationalist folklorist venture but the choice of and the translational negotiations with *Folk-Tales of Hindustan* indicates a consciously developed ideology at work. They chose as their Source Text, a work that uses the coloniser's tongue to communicate the colonised culture so that terms like "salam" (1), "biradari" (6), "bhut" (9), "Rakshas" (86), "zenana" (106), "faqir" (137) remain untranslated, while the Sanskrit "saptadvipa" is parenthetically glossed as "seven-islanded" (45) and Persian "Kam-Aql" as "Little Intellect" (22) possibly for the "foreign readers" ("Preface" n.pag). There are instances where the Source Culture and Source Language jostle with the Target Language: **"**He went to a shoe-maker and said: 'Sir, give me a pair of shoes. We shall not have to haggle about the price. I will make you happy (main tumko khush kar dunga);' meaning, of course, that he would pay a fair and reasonable price" (29). As Shanta Devi and Sita Devi turns the tales into Bengali, they consciously avoid expressions in Bengali male-authored English collections like "my darling" (Day 3) and "Papa" (Day 119). Thus, "O Mamma," (Shaikh Chilli 1) is translated into Bengali by Shanta Devi and Sita Devi as "ogo bacha" (" o dear"; 3) and the surprise of the maid servant "O *Begam*, some great misfortune has befallen us, as *Mian* is running here barefooted and striking his bare forehead"(Shaikh Chilli 3) is rendered with the intonation and words that almost evoke a contemporary middle class Bengali household: " ogo ginnima go, na jani ki sarbanash hayeche go, babu khali paye kapal thukte thukte bari phirchen". The greeting "Ram Ram bhaiya" ("Ram, Ram, brother"; Shaikh Chilli 7) is culturally annotated: "Hindusthanira Ram-Ram baliya parasparke namaskar kare" (Shanta Devi and Sita Devi 7) ["Hindusthanis greet each other by saying 'Ram-Ram' "]. While the choice of Bengali provides a centripetal thrust towards the native culture, the female fairy tale protagonists like Hira and the Chinese bride of Vikramaditya are contrasts to their counterparts in native Bengali folktales where ideal women engage in actions like that of Sita, Savitri and Behula.

Sita Devi and Shanta Devi, already praised by Tagore for their translational skills, prefer *Folk Tales of Hindustan,* a text with meta-Bengal moorings in terms of theme and language, over a text that becomes canonical and has been praised by Tagore as a "Swadeshi endeavour", and considered a representation of authentic Bengali culture and tradition by Dinesh Chandra Sen, Auroindo Ghosh and Swarnakumari Devi, Thus, *Hindusthani upakatha* is representative of a crucial intellectual and artistic choice by two early twentieth century women graduates of the Bethune College who choose to translate a text that uses the colonizer's language but draws upon folklore mostly from northern India and Persia, thereby making the translational negotiation with Source Language (SL) and Source Culture (SC) an interesting exploration.

Thus, *Hindusthani upakatha* can be seen as a significant work emerging during a phase dominated by nationalistic programmed of constructing identity and fashioning space for the "bhadramahila". By avoiding the canonical *Thakurmar jhuli* , Sita Devi and Shanta Devi moves away from this "process of subjection/subjectification" (Niranjana 124). Their proximity to Tagore never affected their literary individuality. Possibly aware of Tagore's chastisement of educated women for their inability to continue the uncorrupted fairy tale, their translation appears, interestingly, during their stay at Santiniketan. Shanta Devi and Sita Devi does not engage in any eulogization of the native female fairy tale teller through a retention of the term *upakatha* [folktale] that prioritizes the folk and implies an inherent element of translatability as it circulates and disseminates in a horizontal cultural plane. Shanta Devi and Sita Devi's dissociation from the prevailing contemporary fairy tale discourse thus can be seen as a strategy of redefining the authorial responsibility of colonial fairy tale writer.

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