

Haun-Maun-Khaun: A Postcolonial Reading of the Cannibals in Some Fairy Tales from Colonial Bengal

Rituparna Das

Techno India University, Department of English, India

Correspondence: ritu.seasonflower@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper offers a postcolonial reading of some Bengali fairy tales, including selections from Folk-Tales of Bengal (the 1883 collected edition by Reverend Lal Behari Dey); Thakurmar Jhuli (Grandmother's Bag Of Stories), a collection of Bengali fairy tales by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder (1907); and Bengal Fairy Tales, a 1920 edited volume by F. B. Bradley-Birt (a work by the British diplomat serving in India, which alludes frequently to Mitra Majumder's text). It interprets the symbols and stalk images used in these texts in terms of the relationship of coloniser versus colonised. It argues that the depictions of the cannibal demons in these fairy tales have an emblematic significance akin to the expression of the anti-colonial resistance and the postcolonial reaction to the contemporary sociocultural scenarios of colonial India.

Keywords: cannibal; postcolonial; fairy tales; Indian folk tales; subaltern identity; allegory; children's literature; nationalist movement

In the Land of Ire, the belief in fairies, gnomes, ogres and monsters is all but dead; in the Land of Ind it still flourishes in all the vigour of animism.
(Jacobs, 1892: Foreword)

Bill Ashcroft, quoting Peter Hulme says that 'cannibal' has 'originally (been) proper name of the man-eating Caribs of Antilles' (Ashcroft, 2000: 26; Hulme, 1986: 16). The term 'Canibales' was first found in Columbus's journal, where he writes that the local Arawaks regarded a particular island with great trepidation saying: that this land was very extensive and that in it were people who had one eye in the forehead, and others whom they called 'canibales'. Of these last, they showed great fear; and he says that when they saw that this course was being taken, they were speechless, because these people ate them and because they were very warlike. To the question as to why the term "cannibalism" was taken as synonymous to anthropophagy, Hulme finds the answer lying in the complex struggle that was going on in the European mind in order to define the identity of the new world. The struggle was the rhetorical trope of idealisation and debasement between the concepts of civilisation and savagery. In the postcolonial context of representation, cannibals had always been associated with the inferior 'others', that is unknown and unfathomable and, therefore, dangerous.

In the book *Dinner with a Cannibal*, Carole A Travis-Henikoff writes 'a few people believe their ancestors practiced cannibalism, and some scholars deny its existence altogether, but the truth is we all have cannibals in our closets' (Travis-Henikoff, 2008: 24). Critics have various opinions regarding the possibility and plausibility of cannibalism. Some of them have rejected the medieval accounts of cannibalism, on the grounds that travellers' tales of 'Anthropophagi' were no more reliable than their tales of 'men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders' (Shakespeare, 1868: 15). Geoffrey Sanborn writes in the book *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader*

In the early-nineteenth century, a more common way of challenging the use of cannibalism as an image of bestial lust was to suggest another motive to act: either famine, vengeance, superstition, or desire to terrorise. (Sanborn, 1998: xiv)

This article aims to analyse the representation of cannibalism in Indian (namely Bengali) fairy tales of the colonial era; and, in doing so, highlights the complex symbolic significance of the usage of cannibal-human relationship as a narrative trope. My paper shows also that the ambivalence shown towards cannibalism in these fairy tales encapsulates the whole sentiment of colonial trauma and retaliation that the colonised Indians felt towards their imposed colonial realities. While the 'White Civilised' texts have taught them to believe that they are the uncivilised

barbaric cannibals to be feared and loathed, their reality points towards the other side of the narrative where the colonisers are the metaphorical cannibals who eventually devour them.

From the very beginning, human cannibalism has been practiced in different forms and they have been classified as survival cannibalism, endo-cannibalism, exo-cannibalism, medicinal cannibalism, or merely gastronomic cannibalism. There also have been examples of ritualistic cannibalism among the Aghoris, where the practitioner '(c)osmologically, sees everything as One, and therefore Aghorisⁱ eat human flesh, not because they are cannibals, but because it is part of an intensified ritual' (Kaliff, 2017: 62). But, in the colonial context it can be seen as an essential tool, employed by the colonisers, in order to justify the domination of the unsullied Western 'self' over the barbaric Oriental 'others'. Eric Cheyfitz says that 'beginning with Columbus, the idea of cannibalism developed not as an anthropological fact but as a political fiction that the West employed to justify its exploitation of Native Americans' (Cheyfitz, 1997: 143). It has often been noted that, in such context, cannibalism has been a false creation based on fanciful and opportunistic imagination.

In spite of the squeamishness regarding the acceptance of cannibalism and the ghastliness associated with it, quite curiously of all places, it is in the children's literature where cannibalism appears in its most vivid and gory form. The fairy tales, almost all over the world, recognise, if not celebrate, cannibalism. In his book *Beyond the Looking Glass* Jonathon Cott says, 'cannibalism is an obsessive theme in the fairy tale... Some scholars have argued that it represents simply a vestigial memory of a time when human beings did in fact eat each other both ritually and in combat; or perhaps rather the vestiges of an attempt to exorcise that primordial hunger and the guilt it occasions...' (Cott, 1973: xiv)ⁱⁱ. However, fairy tale representation of cannibalism is a very interesting discourse as it is a curious blend of simultaneous acceptance and denial of the very core concept of cannibalism. In other words, it enters the dangerous trajectory of whether a human being is capable of eating another fellow human being and, if s/he can, how to place them in the cognitive reality of human civilisation. Cannibalism in fairy tales is neither conceived as a convention nor denied as an improbability; rather it is conveniently shoved off to the account of the 'others' who have been deliberately designed as the non-normative in the discourse created by the normative 'self'. By this, I mean the self that defines itself and others in terms of its own ideas of the good and the right: it justifies its actions, its beliefs about whom and what it is and should be, and it designates anything that is non-self as the 'others'ⁱⁱⁱ. These 'others' are always beyond the periphery of the coded norm of normalcy (Warner, 1998: 158).

In his seminal text *Morphology of the Folktales* Vladimir Propp says that often the fairy tales contain the same action ascribed to different characters and depending on the context of the fairy tale, in terms of time, place and culture, the role of the evil force can take different shape of witches, snakes, monsters or man-eating goblins. Indian fairy tales are no exceptions (**Propp, 1968: 27-28**). In Indian fairy tales, such ominous forces are depicted through the characters of Rakshasas or man-eating ogres. These ogres exist as the pariah to be feared and, ultimately, to be killed if human beings want to survive.

In Indian fairy tales, the identity of cannibals is not very clearly defined. Whether they are some sub- or super-human creatures (or they are just ordinary human beings with the habit of eating flesh of other human beings), we never come to know for certain. In spite of the fact that there are plentiful tales of these ogres, we never actually come to know the true identity of these cannibals, for the simple fact that none of these narratives is uttered through the voice of the cannibal ogres themselves. It is always the man talking about the man eater. Thus, in the Indian context, these cannibals always have remained as the subalterns—the marginalised ones deprived of any voice to speak for their own (**Gramsci, Introduction, 1992: 1-64**).

References to cannibals are found in texts from as early as the Vedic period. In early Vedic texts, there are mentions of *Yatu*^{iv} or *Rakshasa* (the cannibals). In verse VII, 104; and in X, 87, these two terms have been used interchangeably to signify the agency of physical harm to human beings. *Rig Veda X*, 61. 6 (1500-2000 BC) is replete with many such mentions (**Oldenberg, 1988: 174**). In the Indian version of *The Ramayana*, (700-400 BC) Valmiki narrates his story about the Rakshasas who come from the southern tip of India and attack at night when their powers are manifold. *The Ramayana* continues narrating the story of the victory over the Rakshasas when Ravana (the Rakshasa king) was killed in a duel by Rama, the Aryan prince from the north India. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Rakshasas transgress several codes of conduct defined by the Aryan norms. Sheldon Pollock describes these Rakshasas of Valmiki as 'creatures polluted by violence, blood and carnivorous filth, who kill and eat those they kill,' (**Pollock, 2007: 81**). Rama went to the southern part of India (Sri Lanka) to chastise and destroy these deviating creatures in the name of restoring purity and sanity.

The Ramayana depicts Rama as the Aryan prince of Ayodhya (northern India)—the definite white male 'self'. His wife Sita is forcefully abducted by the Rakshasha king, Ravana of Lanka (Sri Lanka). Sita is more of a symbolic figure than a real human being—she is the daughter of the earth and thus symbolises the land or earth itself. It is Rama's responsibility to

rescue Sita from the hand of Ravana and by doing so, Rama would be owning the right of the land that belongs to Ravana. Such imperial mission must be backed by a justifying narrative that fits the Aryan Rama as the righteous conqueror; whereas Ravana stands out as the dangerous and uncivilised 'other'.

The ancient Sanskrit texts glorify the role of Aryans, a group credited with preserving the earliest Vedic texts. Paula Richman says, 'Beginning in the late 1800s, some South Indian social critics identified Aryas as Brahmins and other high castes who colonised the South. In turn, they identified the creatures called Rakshasas in *Ram Katha* with indigenous inhabitants of the South whom they classify as 'Dravidian' (after the linguistic term). The critics and social reformers glorify Ravana as a great Dravidian monarch and depict as tragic his slaying by Rama, whom they decry as a land-hungry coloniser from the North eager to expand his kingdom by annexing the south' (Richman, 2008: 14-15).

Only a look at the counter narrative of *The Ramayana* would give us an altogether different picture where Ravana is either a great sagacious king of superior intellect and scientific knowledge^v or a benevolent and a peace loving king who values the lives of his people over anything else.^{vi} The Indian version, not only presents the binaristic trope of race, colour, community and the parameter of civilisation set by the high class Aryan conquerors; but also tells, perhaps, one of the earliest tales of colonisation in India. It is the narrative of the white Aryan Rama who was overriding the black Dravidians— a stronger and denser race in the South. The stereotyping of colonial discourse that Homi Bhabha or Edward Said^{vii} has pointed out in twentieth century, had already been an age-old practice - at least old enough to occur during the time of *The Ramayana*.

It is often very difficult to validate the reality of cannibalism in ancient India, as there is a very few written evidences available which can authenticate such presence for certain. C. V. Vaidya, scholar of ancient Indian texts, has pointed out that though there was a possibility of cannibalistic practices among the members of the Southern part of India, they were not ogres or the Rakshasas as mentioned in the early Indian texts. Since, most of the time, the narratives of the Southern part came filtered through the Northern Aryan voice, it has been quite a challenge to discern the reality of their existence. It is presumable that the cannibalism had been merely a cultural practice that was not practiced, if ever at all, for a long time (Vaidya, 2001: 9). However, the belief that cannibalism was a widely practiced reality, seeped into the Indian mass culture through different legends, folklores and, most unabashedly, through children's literature such as fairy tales. Stemming out of the partial need for

terrorising children, the widely circulated notion of cannibalism was also very convincing to the adult minds.

The tradition of Indian fairy tales had been an oral one—passing on to generation after generation and being circulated orally. They have not been documented until a very recent time, as late as nineteenth century. As is in the case of many oral narratives, the exact authors and the times of their origin are uncertain. They had survived as bedtime stories told by mothers and grandmothers until they were documented in nineteenth century. In the foreword to *Indian Fairy Tales*, Joseph Jacobs writes in 1894:

Though Indian fairy tales are the earliest in existence, yet they are also from another point of view the youngest. For it is only about twenty-five years ago that Miss Frere began the modern collection of Indian folk-tales with her charming "Old Deccan Days". Her example had been followed by many others. (Jacobs, 1892: preface)

Jacob further stresses that the origin of many of the European Fairy Tales can be traced back to the Indian fairy tales. It was during nineteenth century that the keen enthusiasm for collecting and documenting Indian legends and folklores became prevalent among the British colonisers. With Western education system introduced in India, and a large number of enthusiasts in Indian native culture and travel writing such as Mary Frere (*Old Deccan Day*, 1868) or Fanny Parkes (*The Journals of Fanny Parkes 1822-1846*) blooming up, a more than ever deliberate and apparent cultural assimilation between the colonisers and colonised was taking place. While the White colonisers were busy retelling the Indian tales suiting their own colonial fantasies, the Western educated Indian class was taking it upon themselves to put the narrative straight by writing them from their own perspective.

When Miss Frere, John Murray and Joseph Jacobs were narrating the stories that they had collected from India, they were telling the tales that had fascinated them as something remote and exotic coming from the enchanted land of Orient; whereas, when the Indians were telling the same stories, these stories emerged as a part of their childhood memory and of the memories of the upbringing of the whole nation. Their fairy tale land was exotic and fantastic, but it was, nevertheless, the land of their own. The names of the princes and princesses, the landscape, the language that the characters speak—all were part of their very own experiences. Therefore, it can be argued that when the man-eating ogres appear in Frere's *Old Deccan Day* or in Jacobs' *Indian Fairy Tales*, they appear as some exotic beings, no more improbable than the Indian thugs and dacoits (which were extremely popular among the Western readers during this time) were. The acceptance of cannibals to be a part of the

Indian society was as effortless a process as it was an important tool for branding the colonial subjects as the 'others'. What N. L Whitehead tells in his essay, 'Carib Cannibalism. The Historical Evidence' about the Carib Cannibalism, holds true in the case of the easy acceptance of the existence of the man-eating ogres in the Indian context: '(T)he existence of 'cannibals' on the frontiers of 'civilization' had been accepted since classical times and the writings of Herodotus and Pliny, and with sound economic reasons to accept them' (**Whitehead, 1984: 70**).

However, as a counter narrative, when the Indian authors started documenting and making the fairy tales of India available for the posterity, it could be read as an endeavour of self-assertion that attempted to overwrite the narrative of the White Western colonisers. Such construction is, no doubt, a complex rubric of both the acceptance and the denial of the cannibalistic myth. On one hand, the Western educated enlightened Indians could not deny the trope of cannibal ogres as the symbol of dangerous 'others'; on the other hand, they could not come to terms with that identity to be their own. Hence, at the site of such ambiguity, there emerged the cannibal ogres as an icon of anything that threatened the slowly forming identity of Indian nationhood. To understand these texts, produced at the site of colonial identity formation, one might not overlook their allegorical implications. Fredric Jameson in his essay 'Third World literature in an era of multinational capitalism' argued that:

(A)ll third-world texts are necessarily...allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or I should say particularly when, their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation... (Jameson, 1986: 83).

In spite of the argument against Jameson's endeavour of drawing a homogeneity among all the third world texts (especially as put by critics like Aijaz Ahmed^{viii}) my paper argues that, if not all texts, the fairy tales mentioned in this context can be read as the allegory that is employed to express the complex colonial relationship of the time. In other words, in these texts, cannibalism becomes a complex narrative site where the colonisers and the colonised exist simultaneously; and the identity of the cannibal ogre is a fluid site of ambiguity. These fairy tales, while being read as subversive anti-colonial texts, present the cannibals as the bloodthirsty colonisers - who is eroding the health of the nation by sucking out its wealth and resources.

Perhaps, two of the most important contributions in the field of Indian fairy tales, are *Folk-Tales of Bengal* by Lal Behari Dey (1883) and *Thakurmar Jhuli* or 'The Granny's Bag of Tales' by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder (1907). Both the books are compilations of the fairy tales, circulating through oral tradition in Bengal. While Lal Behari Dey's version is written in English, Mitra Majumder's text was produced in Bengali—the language that these tales were originally orally circulated in. Mitra Majumder's text was published in 1907 and the preface to the book was written by, none other than Rabindranath Tagore. In the preface, Tagore writes in no uncertain terms that the 'foreign influence' has already ruined the aesthetic beauty of Bengali, even more, the Indian storytelling. He says:

In our country, what is more 'swadeshi'^{ix} than the granny's bag of tales? But alas! Of late, this fascinating bag (of tales) was coming from the factory of Manchester. For the children of this generation, the 'fairy tales' of the foreign land was becoming the only available option. The (fairy tales) company of our country's grandmothers seems to be totally bankrupt...in the pen of foreign hand, there might be tales (katha) but no beauty (rup).^x Mr. Mitra is a genius. He has kept the traditional language and style of Bengali fairy tales intact (author's translation of Tagore, 1907: 2).

Tagore, in his preface, with his natural humour, has also advised to open a school where the nation's grandmothers must learn the art of telling original Indian fairy tales, and by doing so, help building the mind of the nation. The obvious implication of the preface is to unlearn the Western narrative that has so long been constructing Indian consciousness. It is an endeavour of redefining self, beyond the stereotypical construction by the Western 'others'. Same holds true in the case of Dey's collection of fairy tales. Dey compiled his version after being inspired by Captain R. C. Temple, who had suggested, 'how interesting it would be to get a collection of those unwritten stories which old women in India recite to little children in the evenings...' (Jacobs, 1892: xi) Though each of these books has been written in different language and under the influence of seemingly different inspirations, they have one singular purpose, as quite visible in their prefaces, and that is to tell their own tales in their own voice. Both the books have overlapping stories and they often share stalk characters, episodes, and props: for example, ogress magically turning into beautiful queen; sleeping princess captive in the castle of ogres; golden and silver sticks causing one to sleep and wake; half-human-half-ogre prince; and so on. Among the many other stories, the obvious reference to Rakshasas are in *Kiranmala*, *Neelkamal ar Laalkamal*, *Dalimkumar*, *The Story of Rakshasas*, *Sonar Kathi Rupa Kathi*, *Heap of Bones*, *Boy with Moon on Forehead*.^{xi}

Kiranmala is a story of two brothers and one sister, Arun, Braun, Kiranmala; whereupon the two brothers go to the 'maya pahar' - or the magic mountain - to bring back the magical tree that produces diamonds and pearls for fruits and flowers. Both Arun and Braun go to the mountain, but they never return back, as they have been turned into stone by magic of the ogres. Seeing her brothers not returning for long, Kiranmala goes to the magic mountain disguised as a prince. She is attacked by the man-eating goblins who appeared as beautiful women to lure men and eat them. Seeing Kiranmala, they chant a litany that goes something like:

Hum ham hai

E dake rajputra toke gili!

E dake rajputra toke khai!

(One calls 'prince let me eat you'; another calls, 'prince let me devour you') (Ibid)

But as Kiranmala was a princess, not a prince, she was immune to the traps set by these Rakshasas. The threat of being devoured by the ogres signifies the threat of effacement that has been the fate of Kiranmala's brothers. Such threat of loss is almost synonymous to the threat of castration, as Lacan says, in the hand of the 'others': in this case, the Western 'others'. The White colonial narrative essentially presents the colonisers as the Male and the colonised as the effeminate 'others'. The discourse of colonial narrative, as Kate Teltscher rightly points out in her work, is based on such 'lack'. Teltscher elaborates further as to how the Indian males had been ridiculed, especially during the 1880-90s, because of their supposedly weak and mild dispositions, (contrary to the Western masculinity) — a lacuna that the masculine Englishman would fill. Thus, the effeminate native 'was the necessary anterior moment to the construction of the masculine Englishman' (Teltscher, 1997, 121-2).

Even in her disguise as a prince Kiranmala possesses the 'lack' or the lack of phallus (as Lacan would put it, the Symbolic Castration)^{xii} and this 'lack' is her strength that makes her immune to the threat of castration. Finally, when Kiranmala brings the jewel-producing tree (which can be interpreted as the restoration of the lost phallus), she ascertains that there would be no further threat of loss in the hand of the cannibal ogres. In her dual gender identity as a successfully cross-dressed prince, Kiranmala represents 'a third space of enunciation' (Bhabha, 2012: 54) that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. In her very portrayal, she represents the cultural liminality and occupies 'the outside of the inside; the part in the whole'.

Such duality of existence is further problematised at the site of the cultural collision between the coloniser and the colonised, as is seen in the hybrid identity of the half human-half cannibal characters such as Neelkamal, Sahasra Dal and the seven brothers of Dalim Kumar. In the story *Neelkamal ar Laalkamal*, Neelkamal is a miscegenation between human and cannibal ogre. Neelkamal can be identified with the 'looking-Indian-thinking-British' hybrid race (to whom I refer as the Brown Sahib^{xiii}) coming straight out of Macaulay's minute (1835). These Brown Sahibs were the privileged group of people whom the White colonisers found useful and therefore, treated, almost, as one of them; they were also revered by most of the Indians who considered them as their superior by the sheer virtue of their western education and accessibility to the White community. Nilkamal, similarly enjoys the best of the both worlds. Like ogres, he can digest iron peas and is well received both by his human and ogre relatives. Laalkamal and the rest of the human clan consider him to be their saviour. Perhaps the most significant privilege that he enjoys is that the Khokkoshes – the demi-ogres – are afraid of him. These Khokkoshes have an interesting connotation as they emerge as doubly subaltern in the discourse of the fairy tales. Khokkoshes are inferior to the Rakshasas, and therefore are doubly marginalised. The Khokkoshes can be interpreted as the *Adivasis* and the tribal communities whose struggle has been kept out of the mainstream anti-colonial discourse. Rea through Frantz Fanon's lens, Neelkamal symbolises the comprador class that would eventually don on the white mask of the colonisers and repeat the similar cycle of hegemony; where the Khokkoshes would be kept under his control and human beings will be dependent on him for their protection.^{xiv} Neelkamal saves both his and his half-brother Laalkamal's life by killing the hierarchically inferior cannibals, Khokkoshes. 'The Khokkoshes die bleeding black' (**Mitra Majumder, 1907: 58**): the very mention of the colour of their blood in itself is racialised. Black represents the skin colour of the tribal people such as Santhals, Mundas, Kuis and the Dravidians of southern India.

Neelkamal ar Laalkamal, also reflects the contemporary insecurity and vulnerability in terms of loyalty to one's nation. While the British Raj was proactively propagating loyalty to the British throne, the Indian nationalist sentiments were also growing stronger in regard to the formation of India as a national identity. Published during the peak of British Raj, *Thakurmar Jhuli* is dealing with a far more delicate business of unconscious adherence to one's root than is visible on the surface level. Such a dilemma is very prominent in Neelkamal's final choice of adherence—a choice that would abolish either his human clan or his ogre clan. Both Neelkamal and Laalkamal goes for their final adventure to the land of ogres; the land of Neelkamal's ogress mother. As the two brothers enter their kingdom, the ogres chant the famous lines: 'haun maun khaun: manusher gondho paun'

(meaning haun maun Khaun, getting the delicious smell of human beings for a meal).

Neelkamal's old ogress grandmother welcomes her grandson with the usual grand-motherly affection—something that the title of the book also celebrates.^{xv} Yet, tricking the grandma ogress, Neelkamal discovers the way to put an end to the lives of all the ogres. The life of the ogress queen exists within two bees: killing them would mean the destruction of the whole ogre clan, including Neelkamal's own mother, grandmother, and all his other maternal relations. In the identity of Neelkamal, the question is raised as to where the final loyalty of the newly emerging India must reside. On one hand, there is the non-dynamic Laalkamal—the race of human being who needs Neelkamal's protection in order to save themselves from getting devoured (symbolising the orthodox India that refused to adapt and evolve with the changing time) – and on the other, there is the clan of cannibals who would continue wreaking carnage if not stopped by Neelkamal (symbolising the oppressive British Raj and their exploitation of common people). Whichever side perishes, Neelkamal would metaphorically lose a part of him, but he would remain physically unharmed: the cannibals cannot eat him as human being (he represents the Western-educated elites who were aware of the true nature of the British Raj and, therefore with their weapon of knowledge, invincible), the human beings cannot kill him as cannibals. But Neelkamal's decision is governed by the promise of the final prize—the prize promised, not to any ogre, but to a human prince—the kingdom and the princess. Neelkamal destroys the ogre clan and is declared the king by the side of the human prince Laalkamal. Nevertheless, in spite of being established as a human ruler, the blood of ogres would continue to flow in Neelkamal's vein, in the same fashion as the neo-colonialism has continued to flow in the veins of the post-independence India.

Another interesting half-human-half-ogre hero, Sahasra Dal, appears in the next story, *The Story of Rakshasa*. Both the stories share certain narrative similarities; however, the latter is more complicated in terms of its projection of human-cannibal relationship. Instead of one, there are multiple man-eating ogresses, surfacing at different stages of the story. Spanning three generations, the story can be discussed as an ultimate allegory to the progress of colonisation in India. The story runs as a parallel to the history of British colonisation in India. The story begins with an ogress who befriends a human family and marrying the man, starts living with them: the early stage of British East India company's mercantile ventures. To strengthen her position among the human beings, she lures her newly found husband and his first wife with sumptuous wealth: exchanging gifts to the Indian maharajas and zamindars. The first phase of amicability turns sour as one day the human wife of the Brahmin finds out

the reality of the ogress wife: the colonial expansion and atrocities becoming grossly abject during the early and mid-nineteenth century. In spite of a long peaceful cohabitation, the ogress wife does not hesitate twice to kill and feed on the same family that has once accepted her as their own: the brutal suppression of uprisings and revolts of mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century. The character of the ogress in Sahasra Dal's father-in-law's house, is particularly interesting. She is cunning and politically powerful—enough to manipulate Sahasra Dal and create a rift between the brothers. This reminds us of the 'divide and rule' British policy in the Indian subcontinent where the colonial rulers deliberately wanted to create differences among different socioeconomic communities in India.^{xvi}

Champa Dal, the human brother of Sahasra Dal, has been thrown out of his own land by the cunning manoeuvre of the ogress. Champa Dal represents the rightful owner and the protector of the land who ultimately has been overthrown by the outsiders who obtained power through their guile. He loses not only his position in the court but his wife, Keshavati, whom the ogress kidnaps in order to appease Sahasra Dal's lusty appetite. Keshavati (the name literally meaning: the one with the lustrous hair signifying fertility) can be read as a symbolic representation of the fertile land. Champa Dal emblematically loses both Keshavati and his rightful ownership of the land. Champa Dal represents the doubly marginalised voice of the non-elite and non-Western-educated Indian mass—the ones who did not get their rightful space in the history of Indian National movement, until a very recent time. The marginalised narratives of the tribal and the *Adivasi* movements like Tilka Manjhi Movement, Sambalpur Revolt, Kherwar Uprising, Santhal Rebellion contributed to the major portion of the Indian independence movement, yet their stories have never got its deserved credit. According to these rebels, they are the 'children of the land' (Bhumi Putra) their culture and tradition have not been diluted by any external influences; they have been unjustly overthrown and deprived of their legitimate right; thus, they ought to be restored to their rightful places ^{xvii}. In his final odyssey in the quest of Keshavati, Champa Dal reaches the land of ogres where, again, we find the character of the affectionate ogre grandmother. She has kept the princess Keshavati captive and treats her as her own grandchild. Though she has not been eaten by the old ogress, Keshavati knows that she is not one of them. The strong sense of binaristic identity of 'us' versus 'they' becomes prominent in the following conversation:

The old Rakkhashi came where the princess was lying, and rousing her with the gold stick, said —

" Grandchild, how is it that I smell a human being here? "

The princess replied:

"It may be it is I whom you smell, satisfy yourself by eating me up."

The Rakkhashi said, " Nonsense, thou, the apple of my eye, must not say so" (Bradley-Birt, 1920: 183).

The 'smell of a human being' is a signifier that holds different meaning for Keshavati and the old ogress. For the captive princess, it signifies the presence of Champa Dal or the promise of deliverance from the tyranny of the ogress; for the ogress, it is a threat of encroachment upon her own territory. Keshavati tries to cover up 'the smell' by owning it as her own; whereas the old ogress tries to negate it by reinscribing the identity of Keshavati to be one of their own.

The final moment of the story is a symbolically pregnant one. In the court of Sahasra Dal, Champa Dal appears as a minstrel poet and narrates the history of their old time—the history that has been wiped out from Sahasra Dal's mind by the narrative presented by the ogress. However, by recounting their past, Champa Dal can revive the feeling of fraternity and expose the reality of the ogress. Realising her imminent exposure, and as a final attempt to save her own life, the ogress discards her disguise of a beautiful woman and tries to eat everyone present in the court. The same moment of exposure happens in the story *Sonar Kathi Rupa Kathi* where the prince brings the parrot which contains the ogress's life in the court. Both the oral narrative of Champa Dal's past and the parrot signify the wilful cognition that is mandatory in order to see through the facade of the colonial charades. At these points, when the ogresses attempt to eat everyone in the court, cannibalism emerges dialectically as a point of difference between the queen and the rest of the courtiers, and also as a counter-active measure against the agency of power (residing in the parrot or in the oral narrative of history) that overrides the version of history created by the colonial discourse.

The dynamics of the coloniser vs colonised relationship get even more interesting when we are presented with a proposition that it is not in the hand of the Western-Educated Indians or the culturally miscegenated "Brown Sahibs" that the deliverance of the country lies; rather, it is the youth, awakened to the nationalised sentiments, who can bring end to the colonial atrocities. In the next story, *Dalimkumar*, we see that Pashabati, the ogress disguised as a beautiful princess, devours the seven half-

human-half-ogre brothers of Dalimkumar; however, she could not harm the pure-bred human, Dalimkumar. With the Swadeshi movement prevailing all over the country (Trivedi 2007) there had been a strong sentiment for products made in India—be it a daily usable commodity or any cultural product; a strong notion was being grounded that only a national hero who could withstand the unjust treatment by the British Raj and emerge fortified, could salvage this near-extinct species called Indian. Dalimkumar can be read as a prototype of a similar kind of national hero as he too has undergone severe ordeals in the hand of the ogres (including a threat to his life as the pomegranate seeds containing his life almost reaches the hand of the ogress queen and he was struck blind by the monstrous snake who aimed to devour him) and emerged victorious by putting an end to the exploitation that the ogress queen and Pashabati were hurling.

The necessity of creating a nationalist icon had also been evident in the celebrated texts of Indian nationalist movement such as *Nil Darpan (Indigo Planting Mirror, 1858)* written by Dinabandhu Mitra or *Anandamath (The Abbey of Bliss, 1882)* written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Pather Dabi (The Right of the Way, 1926)* written by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. *Nil Darpan* was banned, instantly after its publication, by the British Government. The text constantly refers the British indigo planters and the colonial rulers as blood sucking ‘giants Rahu’ ‘indigo giant’ (Dinabandhu Mitra, 1861: 59), deceiving cobras who do not hesitate to bite a child considering its mother’s grief (Ibid: 7), and ‘Cobra de Capello’ (Ibid: 101). By the side of delineating the colonial rulers as the archenemy, the texts like *Nil Darpan*, anticipates the advent of some national heroes like Torapa or Nobin Madhab who would fight the vice of empire out of their lives:

...with his pure blood, (our eldest babu) has extinguished the fire of tyranny of the giants, the Indigo Planters (Dinabandhu Mitra, 1861: 93).

Anandamath – one of the seminal texts to fuel the Indian nationalist movement – created the icon of Mother India who is still celebrated as the incarnation of the country till date. The protagonist in *Anandamath*, Mahendra is a nationalist hero who fights against the injustice of British colonial rulers by tactfully building up his anticolonial project of helping the nationalist monks (the story is written in the backdrop of Sanyasi Rebellion of 1770s). In the similar fashion, Sabyasachi Mallick in *Pather Dabi* tricks the British government by his remarkable intelligence and physical prowess. Both Mahendra and Sabyasachi possess fascinating expertise to outwit the colonial rulers. They are erected as iconic figures who are idealised and trusted by the common mass and are almost as

fascinating as fairy tale princes are. Their singular aim has been to put to an end to the oppression and injustice of the British Raj; and their fights are, in many ways, similar to the fights of the fairy tale princes against the cannibal ogres.

The story *Dalimkumar* can also be read as an interesting parallel to the Indian colonial history. The chess match between the ogress Pashabati and her sisters and seven brothers can be read as a representation of the Battle of Buxar that formally began the rule of British East India Company in India. Pashabati puts a condition before the seven princes that, if they should win the match, Pashabati and her sisters will surrender themselves to the princes; otherwise, the princes will lose everything. Similarly, the battle guaranteed either of the two possibilities: the British East India Company losing their ground in India or the Indian ruling power being formally abolished. As Pashabati and her (apparently weak) sisters could defeat the seven able bodied princes, ten thousand British soldiers defeated the forty thousand Indian soldiers in the battle. The battle ended with the Treaty of Allahabad which offered the Diwani rights (rights of the Imperial Tax Collector) to the British East India Company (1765). This allowed the Company the right to collect tax from the eastern provinces of Bengal-Bihar-Orissa. It resulted in the amassing of a huge fortune by the Company that 'forcefully and oppressively collected tax' from the poor Indians and, by doing so, 'completely drained the economic system' of these provinces (**Prakash: 1998: 322-323**).

Another very poignant allegorical interpretation can be made of the episode of Dalimkumar's ascension to the throne. Dalimkumar has been chosen by the royal elephant to be the king of a land which has no king. Whoever sits on the throne and marries the princess of that kingdom dies that very night. Dalimkumar instantly finds out the reason behind these deaths: on the wedding night, a hidden snake used to come out of the princess's nostrils and eat the groom. The snake symbolises the deliberate hindrance in the path of any possibility of finding a ruler: in other words, the possibility of India's self-governance. Dalimkumar mutilates the metaphorical snake (the cobra de Capello like the Indigo Planters) and by doing so, he ascertains the future of the kingdom—in the same fashion as Kiranmala does by acquiring the magical tree. In fact, snake as the destroyer of human ruler has been a recurrent motif in many of these fairy tales. For example, in the story *Swet and Basanta* a similar snake occupies the body of the princess of the kingdom, and every night it creates a vacuum on the royal throne. This trope re-enacts the drama of the Indian National scenario where the British Government politically maimed the Indians by not giving them any access to the important positions in their own governance. In these tales, the restoration of lives and the kingdom by killing the cannibal snakes or ogres (symbolising restoration of identity

and one's own land), therefore, has been provided as the only desirable and possible solution to the National crisis that the country was facing during that time.

Thus, the whole paradigm of cannibal-human relationship as depicted in these tales revolves around the dynamics of the existential threat and the agency of power to destroy it. It operates on a mutually exclusive level where the both cannot exist together. Yet characters like Neelkamal, Sahasra Dal and seven brothers of Dalimkumar are the archetypal of the conviviality at which the postcolonial world order was gradually aiming. They signify the possible coexistence of terms which are not only binary, but mutually exclusive: the food and the eater. Their body is the site of such impossible cohabitation that would generate a unique identity. They, too, speak of the possibility of the third space that Kiranmala occupies in her un-gendered self. In this newly ascribed third space, cannibalism is no more a compulsion of anthropophagy, rather it is the catalyst that unifies these two otherwise-polarised existences of 'food' and 'eater'; and by subtracting man-eating from 'cannibalism' it mutates into the reclamation of one's own space and agency of power. Nevertheless, to conclude we can look into the fairy tale poem 'Ruptarashi', (from *Thakurmar Jhuli*) that ends with a promise of deliverance from the tyranny of the Rakshasas from the far off 'unknown land'. It gives us a glimpse of the hope that had been cherished by each colonised Indian. What appears as a harmless prattle for children, might be actually allegorising the Indian nationalist sentiment that had gradually been manifested, in a greater form, in the Indian independence movement.

The poem goes:

Haun maun khaun! I hear the call of the Rakshasa!

Who knows which unknown land they are from!

Who knows how far their land is!

But one thing is certain! Their clan will be destroyed

In the hand of the prince of our land,

Such is the prophecy written in the letter of Ruptarashi! (Mitra Majumder, 1907)

Rituparna Das works as an independent scholar, alongside teaching students English and cultural studies. Completing a PhD at Calcutta University, India; she has published on different aspects of cultural studies in various national and International journals and books, and as a poet and short story writer, published in various magazines and literary journals. Rituparna has delivered invited lectures and workshops at universities including Graz, Austria, Cambridge, and Montreal. She presently supervises PhD candidates in various cultural studies fields. Rituparna also acts as secretary of an Indian NGO dedicated to the welfare of under-privileged street children and women of West Bengal, and as an animal activist, has helped shelter more than 150 strays. Rituparna is a proud member of Soka Gakkai, striving for individual happiness and promoting world peace through value creation and Kosen Rufu.



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ⁱ Aghoris are the practitioners of the extreme form of Tantra

ⁱⁱ See Perrault, Charles. (1993) *Complete Fairy tales of Charles Perrault*. New York: Clarion. pp. 1-165; Afanasyev, Alexander Nikolaevich. (1855) *Russian Fairy Tales*, New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, (2013) pp-1-672; Hearn, Lafcadio. James, Grace. Chamberlain, Basil Hall. (1918) *Japanese Fairy Tales*, New York: Boni and Liveright. pp. 1-160

ⁱⁱⁱ See Bauhn, Per. (2000) *Normative Identity*, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield International, pp 1-176.

^{iv} In Atharva-Veda Yatu Vidya is considered as an occult practice that is associated with tantric practices. However, in *Rig Veda*, it has been considered to be a devilish practice. (Singh, 2010: 24)

^v See: Premachandra, Asoka. (2015) *Ravana , The Story of The Most Distinguished Lankan Monarch*, Mulleriyawa, Sri Lanka : Asoka Publishers

^{vi} See: Pattanaik, Devdutt. (2017) *Bhil Ramayana : Ram Sita ni Varta, Hanuman in Lanka* (Penguin Petit) Penguin Random House India Private Limited

^{vii} See: Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (1978) New York: Pantheon Books

See: Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*, (1994) London and New York: Routledge

^{viii} See: (Ahmed: 1987: 3-25)

^{ix} Officially proclaimed in 1905, Swadeshi is the Indian nationalist movement that professed using things made in India and discarding anything imported from outside

^x In Bengali, fairy tales are known as *Rupkatha*, *Rup* meaning beauty, *katha* meaning tales.

^{xi} Some of the stories are found in both the books with slightly altered characters and details; for the convenience of analysis, I omit the tales that overlap each other and mainly analyse the texts which have significant symbolic representation of cannibalism.

^{xii} See: (Sullivan, 1982: 6-20)

^{xiii} Term used by Varindra Tarzie Vittachie in the book *The Brown Sahib*, originality published in 1962

^{xiv} See: Fanon, Franz (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press

^{xv} Thakurma means the grandmother who is shown telling her bedtime stories to her grandchildren while they go to sleep.

^{xvi} The essential concept is to create internal strife among the native Indians in order to draw advantages, see Stewart, Neil. (Winter, 1951) *Divide and Rule: British Policy in Indian History. Science & Society*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 49-57

^{xvii} See: Calman J, Leslie, (2019) *Protest in Democratic India: Authority's Response to Challenge*, New York: Routledge