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LAL BEHARI DAY AND THE AMBIVALENCES OF FOLK NARRATIVES IN COLONIAL INDIA

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Abstract: Lal Behari Day's collection of folktales from Bengal was the first printed book of folk narratives from the region. His collection has exercised considerable influence on the subsequent compilation of Bengali folktales. The genesis of the book is associated with other similar compilations of Indic oral narratives in the second half of the nineteenth century by the likes of Richard Carnac Temple, William Crooke and Gaborn Henry Damant. Yet, Lal Behari's unique identity as a native Christian preacher had led to unique ambivalences in his collection of tales. The paper deals with Lal Behari's evasions and subversions, and ascertains their association with hegemonic discourses that shaped the colonial rule in Bengal.

Index Terms: orality, folklore, Bengal renaissance, colonialism, ideology

Lal Behari Day's *Folk-tales of Bengal* (1883) was the first printed book of folk narratives from the region. Lal Behari's (1824-1894) contribution to this genre, his compilation and translation of oral tales (collected from various sources) into English, is pervaded by ambiguities which mark the transformation of amorphous, oral narratives into ossified printed text. The vacillations and evasions in an oral genre are often variations in a culture which primarily followed the 'traditional' technologies of communication. Folktales often brew in an oral tradition, reshaped in each performance till they had been recorded in print. Eric Havelock has discussed about the semi-oral traditions of seventh century BCE Greece which had engendered the Homeric epics. He has also pointed how fifth century BCE Athenian culture, which was fast evolving its textual traditions, had received the 'poetic'/ 'Oral'/ 'Homeric' corpus.[1] Ludo Rocher discusses the remarkable interventions which textual criticism brought about to the oral and manuscript traditions of the *Purāṇas*, when texts which had lived vitally in the oral performance of the *paurāṇika* had been standardised by philologists by working out a *stemma codicum*. The bardic performance changes depending on various factors, including the direct intervention of the audience in the middle of the recital. Rocher sums up the situation[2]:

> … there must have been numerous living and real versions of each story. The fact that someone, at a certain moment, decided to write one version of the story down and insert it in a Puran manuscript, hardly justifies the view that this is *the* text of the story. Yet, that is the impression created by most of modern scholarly publications on the Puranas.

Lal Behari's collection of folktales bears traces of oral culture which is about to be ossified into a printed text; these traces jut out as tumultuous edges of metamorphosed magma. The myriad layers of historical accretion remain in an oral text in synchronic homeostasis.[3] Reception in print brings this into the domains of an analytical medium, hence initiating a process of diachronic historicisation. Yet, the margins of such a process of change often reflect ambiguities about archetypal formulations and evasions to demarcate the discourse(s) of power. In the preface to his book, Lal Behari asserted[4]:

> I heard many more stories than those contained in the following pages; but I rejected a great many, as they appeared to me to contain spurious additions to the original stories which I had heard when a boy. I have reason to believe that the stories given in this book are a genuine sample of the old stories told by old Bengali women from age to age through a hundred generations.

This confession about his ellipses from one of the most intriguing figures of the nineteenth century *bhadraloki* Renaissance is startling in its frank honesty. It makes us inquisitive about those 'many more' oral narratives that failed to share a place of glory in the Bangla literary canon along with the Dalimkumars, Phakir Chands and Prince Soburs whom Day immortalised in his collection. Why did those other narratives fail to be conceived of as 'genuine'? What was the nature of the 'spurious additions' that Day had detected in them? How does one decide upon the spuriousness of a folktale? How does Lal Behari's translation bear traces of hegemonic discourses that shaped the colonial rule in Bengal?

A cursory glance at Day's collection would give us an idea of what Day is hinting at. Apparently his Raja, with his queens Duo and Suo, lived in a world untouched by the Company and the Raj("Life's Secret"). The two thieves, unnerved by their ill fame, 'resolved to support themselves by honest labour' and chanced upon a jar 'full of gold mohurs' ("The Adventure of Two Thieves and of Their Sons: Part I"). A certain laird offers hundred *bigha*s of 'rent-free land' to a starving Brahman if he can cut a branch from a banyan tree haunted by a Brahmadaitya ("The Story of a Brahmadaitya").

While many of these stories do evoke references to socio-economic realities, the world that they refer to seems to be distinctly Sultanate and Nawabi Bengal (the mohurs, the 'rent-free' *jaigir*...). While explicit references to the Islamic myths are absent (we do not come across the djinns in any of the tales), we do encounter fakirs who occasionally visit Duo and Suo queens to supply nostrums for curing their barrenness ("Life's Secret"). There are also stray allusions to early European encounters, but these are decidedly ante-Raj in their connotations. For example, in "The Story of Swet-Basanta", a certain merchant's son falls in love with an infant girl who comes out of an egg, accidentally deposited in the wall-almirah (almirah - from Portuguese. armário).

What we do not come across are the *sahib*s, the *chhoto-lat*s, the *boxwalla*s, the *sepoy*s, the *jemadar*s and the rest of the Imperial entourage. Day's omissions make us ponder – what is so unfolk about the colonial experience after all? Why does a collection of folktales from the late nineteenth century consciously evade references to the one hundred and twenty five years of colonial legacy? How can a late-Victorian collection of folktales from Bengal, which was in many ways the heart of the Empire in India, never breathe a word about its colonial present and past?

Day offers us other clues. He validates his work in the preface by informing us that it was Richard Carnac Temple, the British military and civil officer and famed folklorist, who had initially presented before him the idea of compiling the folktales from Bengal - remarking 'how interesting it would be to get a collection of those unwritten tales that old women in India recite to little children in the evenings.'[5] Richard Carnac Temple (1850-1931) was one of the distinguished 'administrator-scholar[s]' of the Raj. Born in India, he was the son of a civil servant. After graduating in Anthropology from Cambridge, Temple returned to India in 1871 as a soldier. Proving his valour in the Afghan wars of 1878-79, Temple went on to become the Cantonment Magistrate of Ambala in Punjab. In 1883 (the year in which *Folktales of Bengal* was published), he had founded the periodical *Punjab Notes and Queries*- a

'miscellany' which reflected his antiquarian interests. He was busy collecting ballads, stories, and folk-legends for his book on the legends of Punjab, the first volume of which would be published in the very next year.[6] He was also providing scholarly assistance to Flora Anne Steel, the wife of a British civil servant, whose collection of tales of Punjab and Kashmir would be published in the following year.[7] He would also be the co-editor of *Indian Antiquary* in 1884. Both Temple (the administrator-scholar) and Day (the Baptist-evangelist and educationalist) excavated folk narratives from two distant corners of the Empire in India. By doing so, they were participating in a wider colonial endeavour to discover the folk-narratives – an endeavour that had recently gained considerable popularity. To comprehend the causes for Lal Behari Day's omissions we have to take a closer look at the genesis of this Imperial game.

In 1868, Mary Frere published the *Old Deccan Days, or Hindoo Fairy Legends Current in Southern India*. Frere was the young daughter of Sir Bartle Edward Frere - the Governor of Bombay and one of the most accomplished Victorian statesmen of his age. Mary was once overcome by boredom and coaxed her *ayah*, Anna Liberata de Souza, to tell her those stories which the *ayah* told to her own children and grandchildren to 'amuse them sometimes.'[8] Anna Liberata was a Catholic convert from a Lingayat family of Deccan. Mary would take notes as Anna sat cross-legged and narrated her tales. These would eventually be shaped into the book, the first colonial compilation of 'Indian' folktales. Mary would contact Max Müller (1823-1900) while working on the text – an act which reveals that she had been conscious about the importance of the collection. Max Müller, on his part gladly pointed out to a 'Sanskrit original' for one of Anna's tales. This would help us to relate Mary's work to the intricate web of nineteenth century Indological research, scholarship and theorising .[9]

From 1872, Gaborn Henry Damant started serialising Bengali folktales from Dinajpur in the *Indian Antiquary*. In the first part itself, he narrated a familiar Duo-Suo story with the Duo Rani's lame son eventually succeeding in restoring his father's eyesight, while Suo's sons failed in the attempt (a story which closely parallels "Kalāvatī" in Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's *Ṭhākumār jhuli*).[10] In 1879, Malve S. H. Stokes – another young Englishwoman, published *Indian Fairy Tales*. Stokes's collection was drawn from her two *ayah*s in Calcutta and Simla, from a manservant and from her mother's retelling of tales told to her by another *ayah*. Stokes' father was the celebrated Celtic scholar Whitley Stokes, who prepared an index of folkloristic themes for her book. Thomas William Rhys-David's *Buddhist Birth Stories* came out in 1880, a translation of the *Jātaka* .

Following the trail of Day's compilation, a host of other folklore compilations cropped up from various parts of India. Rev. Charles Swynnerton published *The Adventures of the Panjab Hero Raja Rasalu and Other Folk Tales of the Panjab* in 1884 from Kolkata. In 1886 were published Temple's *A Dictionary of Hindustani Proverbs* and Knowles' *Folktales of Kashmir*. The tales of South India were collected by Mrs. Georgiana Kingscote, with the assistance of the erudite scholar Natesa Shastri in *Tales of the Sun or Folklore of Southern India* (1890). Andrew Campbell brought out the *Santal Folk Tales* in 1891 in which, among others stories, he compiled the popular Santal story of "Seven Brothers and their Sister" (pp. 106-110) – a story which later entered the popular Bengali literary Canon through Dakshinaranjan's rendition of it in the *Ṭhākumār jhuli*.[11] Swynnerton's *Indian Night Entertainments* (1892) was next in print. In 1894, William Crooke published *An Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore of India* – collaborating with Pandit Ram Gharib Chaube who, however, remained largely unknown.[12] Crooke wrote and edited several other books, most notably *The Talking Thrush, and Other Tales from India* in 1899, *Folktales from the Indus Valley* (ed. by Crooke, gathered by major F. McNair and Thomas L. Barlow) in 1902 and *Things Indian* in 1906. This list may be extended to the 1928 publication of Aurel Stein's *Hatim Tales, Kashmiri Stories and Songs* to which Crooke prefaced a learned commentary ("On the Antiquities in the Stories").

The ‘colonial folklorists’ shared a certain uneasiness about the complex procedure of narration and translation that gave shape to their material. The very fact that they were collecting folklore made them perceive the essential difference in their vocation from that of the Orientalists and Indologists. Max Müller could well study Sanskrit in France (from Eugène Burnouf) or study his texts in the East India Company collection in London. Monier Williams (1819-1899) could, without affecting his philological quest, spend his time teaching at Haileybury and Oxford. But for folklorists like Damant, Crooke and Temple such an academic life was implausible, as it did not suit either their career as ‘busy Indian official[s]’ (as Temple described himself) or their folkloristic pursuits. They had to be in contact with the narrators - a murky ill-defined swarm of balladists and rural bards from whom they ‘extracted’ their stories.

These narrators were essential for the tales to take shape, yet, for them the ‘administrator-scholar[s]’ expressed a certain degree of repugnance and disgust. As Temple goes on to elaborate in the preface to his book[13]:

> [M]any as the vices and faults of these people are . . . [t]he bhât, the mârâsî, the bharâîn, the jogí, the faqîr and all of that ilk are in truth but a sorry set of drunkards as a rule – tobacco, opium and a little food sufficing for their daily wants, and I have found out that a small payment, say one or two rupees for each separate song, and their keep in food and an abundance of their favourite drugs while employed, has amply satisfied them, and in some cases have been inducement sufficient to send other of their brethren to me.

Temple’s expertise in extracting stories from these bards was a part of the larger colonial game - a discourse of extraction and control. Temple often employs images that would blur the boundaries between his role as an administrator and his vocation as a scholar. His ‘catching of bards’ was rooted in a Foucauldian disciplining through Knowledge. His was the irrevocable voice that could stamp any balladist as ‘a most disreputable rascal’.[14] It was he who would decidedly ascertain that the bards were ‘always very ignorant and often stupid to boot’.[15] It was for him to reap the harvest, he was the bard-catcher[16]:

> If you know how to recognize them when you see them, and catch them when you have lighted on them, you will find bards still wandering over the countryside by the score, so the harvest to be gathered is a very large one.

The ambivalence of Temple’s position can be easily comprehended if we glance at the actual process of his extraction of the bardic tales. The songs and tales were rendered to Temple’s *munshi* Chaina Mal in Punjabi and were noted down by him in Persian. This initial note was then ‘corrected and explained by the bard, his explanations being marginally noted.’ It was then this Persian version was transliterated by Temple in the Roman script and subsequently translated to English. This translation was then revised by Temple in consultation with the *munshi*. It is evident from this complex gaming in various different languages that Temple’s stance of the all-knowing bard-catcher was at the best, illusive. The bards would have known very little Persian – which was primarily the language of Mughal court elites. Temple, on his part, seems to be not much familiar with Punjabi. Chaina Mal’s proficiency in both Punjabi and English seems to be a matter of speculation. He stands as the mysterious middleman in this entire colonial game. This intricate linguistic exchange was hence pervaded by a sense of miscomprehension and doubt, an incessant latent fear of slippage and chaos. This in many ways reflects the pervasive ambivalence in anthropological narratives born out of colonial encounters.[17]

Lal Behari Day’s omissions become a bit clearer as we comprehend the larger context in which his work was necessarily embedded. Yet, being a Bengali himself, language should not have been a hindrance for Lal Behari. The challenge he faced was often associated with the problem of establishing analogical parallels between the Bengali and English cultures; he suspected that much of what he would describe would seem unfamiliar to an English reader. This is perhaps the reason for the extensive use of allegorical parallels with European literature and a constant need to point out these parallels to his readers. For example, in the story “Phakir Chand”, the serpent who leaped from under the water of the tank ‘lay floating many a rood,’ an allusion to Milton’s depiction of Satan

in *Paradise Lost* (1:196).[18] In his earlier novel *Govinda Samanta*, Lal Behari's allusions are often quite extensive, especially when he tries to describe artefacts which he suspects his readers are unfamiliar with. For example, this is how he describes a 'Bengal plough'[19]:

> As some of our readers may not have seen a Bengal plough, it is as well to describe it here; and we do not think the object is too low to be described, especially when we remember that it exercised in antiquity the genius of two such poets as Hesiod and Virgil. The Calcutta cockney, who glories in the Mahratta Ditch, despises the scenery of the country, and plumes himself upon the fact of his having never seen in his life the rice-plant, may well be addressed in the language of the poet of the "Seasons"…

Day not only alludes to Hesiod, Virgil and Thomson (just after the extract, he quotes from Thomson's poem) – he also takes a jibe at the 'Calcutta cockney', the city-bred Anglophile, who is apparently dissociated from indigenous tradition and culture. Thus, the authentic narrative needs to weed away such 'aberrant' perspectives; perhaps, this is one of the reasons for Day's avoidance of references to the colonial experience in his collection of folktales.

Lal Behari's role as an emic compiler of tales is thus vested with ambivalence. His interactions with informants would be quite complex – he is both an outsider (a city-bred Christian convert from Alexander Duff's school) as well as an insider (born in Sonapalashi in the Bardhaman district). The informants often refused to submit to the gaze of our administrator-scholars. This fact was often left unrecognised by the folklorists themselves who self-consciously, or unknowingly, affirmed their gaze to be omniscient. In "Colonial Histories and Native Informants", Nicholas B. Dirks tells us about the resistance of people giving information on social customs to Colin Mackenzie and his assistants in various parts of South India in 1820-1821[20]:

> Knowledge was never imparted without suspicion and the direct invocation of some British authority. When British authority was not absolute . . . there were frequent difficulties . . .

The informants often intentionally misinformed the researcher. Often they feared that the researcher worked 'with an intention of exposing the secrets' of their way of life. This mutual mistrust, this mutual act of evasion, omission, gaming, deception – gave rise to the complex colonial discourse(s) that cannot be comprehended merely through a Saidian vision of unilateral hegemony. Sadhana Naithani exposes this inherent ambiguity, this essentially mutual re-framing, in her study of Temple[21]:

> What was the response of the folktale narrators to Temple's invitations/ commands? Was it the collector's choice that only stories of saints and mythical heroes were recorded, or is there a possibility of a judicious narration on the part of the narrator and of silent censorship on the part of the munshis?

We realise that answers to these questions are unknown, and also inherently unknowable. Many writers were rewriting each other through the folklorist's pen. We also realise that Day's evasions are buffeted by the paradoxical crisscrossing of the emic and etic strands of his unique position as a native compiler of folktales.

The ideals upheld by the Folklore Society (established in London in 1878) were of enlightened parochialism. Its journal *Folklore* voiced the late nineteenth century ideals of disciplining through Knowledge. Edward W. Brabooke's article in *Folklore* 12(1901) and Charlotte Burne's *The Handbook of Folklore* (1914) reaffirmed the 'empire theory' of folklore, voiced by E. S. Hartland in his Presidential Address in 1900. Hartland emphasised the 'practical advantages for the governors, district officers and judges of an enlightened mother-country in learning through folklore about the cultures of the native people under their dominions.'[22] Temple does not delude himself about the reason for amassing his collection. For him, this 'will enhance our influence over the natives and render our intercourse with them more easy and interesting.'[23] He was the distinguished Victorian who would subsequently give lectures on Anthropology in Cambridge in 1904. Temple surely affirmed to his 'White Man's Burden'. By collecting his book of Bengali folktales as a response to Temple's request, Day acknowledged his own position in the colonial paradigmatic discourse of control.

Yet, the recognition of this should not make us conjure a narrative of unilateral subjugation. Lal Behari Day, in many ways, personifies the complexities of the cultural trade that colonialism necessarily brought about. He was born in a Hindu family at Sonapalashi, a village near the town of Burdwan, on 18th December 1824.[24] His father, a businessman-moneylender in Kolkata, was a devoted Vaishnava. Lal Behari was admitted to the General Assembly Institution in 1834, where he fared exceptionally well in his studies. Alexander Duff (1806-1878), the first overseas missionary of the Church of Scotland in India, was the founder-Principal of the Institution. Duff had landed up in India in 1830. He believed that rational education was one of the surest ways of making Indians receptive to the Word. He opened his institution in Feringhi Kamal Bose's house located at upper Chitpur Road in Calcutta. In 1836, the institution was moved to Gorachad Basak's house in Garanhata. It was in Duff's institution that Lal Behari started attending the Sunday evening classes on the Bible and befriended Mahendralal Basak and Kailashchandra Mukherjee, two native Bengalis who had converted to Christianity.[25] Lal Behari's growing sympathy for Christianity was encouraged by teachers like Thomas Smith and his conversion took place in July 1843.[26] That was year of the Disruption and Lal Behari, though initially admitted into the Established Church, spent most of his life working for the Free Church of Scotland. Duff lost the mission property after the Disruption of 1843 and opened the Free Church Institution, called by the populace as the 'Duff College'. It was at this college that Lal Behari started teaching in 1844. He was subsequently licensed as a preacher in 1851 and was ordained in 1855.[27]

Day served as the Headmaster of the Behrampore Collegiate School and then the professor of English Literature in the Government Colleges at Behrampore and Hoogly from 1867 to 1889. In 1877, he was made a Fellow of the University of Calcutta.[28] Day would be an enthusiastic member of the Bethune Society (established in 1851) and the Bengal Social Science Association (established in 1867). He shared, along with Duff and Ram Mohun Roy, the belief in the Macaulayian doctrines as outlined in the Minute for the introduction of English education in India (1835). However, he also wrote papers that reflected his proto-nationalist views – especially those that he read before the Bethune Society. These papers – 'Primary Education in Bengal' (1858), 'Vernacular Education in Bengal' (1859), 'English Education in Bengal' (1859), 'Teaching of English Literature in the Colleges in Bengal (1874) – reflect upon issues that were variously discussed in the nineteenth century renascent Bengal about the importance of vernacular and primary education.[29]

Lal Behari Day's involvement in the Baptist cause is indeed symptomatic of the essential ambivalence in the *bhadraloki* discourse of late nineteenth. As an urban intellectual and a missionary, he recognised the futility of the feudal zamindari model. His novel *Govinda Samanta* (1874) mirrored the abuses perpetuated by the Permanent Settlement of 1793 and the tyranny unleashed on the ryots by the zamindars of Bengal. The 'ryot's degradation' in the 'zamindar's Katcheri' and the pangs of Hindu widowhood were all sympathetically portrayed. This was the well-known liberal-urban stand – but for Day this was also the rationale for his conversion and the analysis of the irreversible degeneracy of the Mughal-Hindu social system. This is however tinged by Day's recognition of his own Bengali identity, by the irrevocability of his native birth.

Duff and his colleagues would not allow Lal Behari and other natives to join mission councils. The native missionaries were members of the Presbytery and of the Calcutta Missionary Conference, but had little control over the affairs of the Mission. The Europeans in the Mission got salaries that were at least two and a half times more than that of the best-paid Indian.[30] Day, along with his native friends, staged a protest and threatened to leave the mission. They even drew up a memorial to be sent to the Foreign Mission Committee in Edinburgh. Lal Behari was branded by Duff as 'the Ringleader of the Cabal'.[31] This experience of discrimination must have played a critical role in shaping Day's conception about his identity and about the essentially paradoxical allegiances that he was subjected to. This would affect his tales in a remarkable way.

Lal Behari would provide one of the earliest written catalogues of Bangla's ghosts (*bhūt*s), in his novel about the exploited ryot. There is the indubitably Muslim *bhūt* called Mamdo. There is the "Brahman" *bhūt*, *brahmadaitya*, who inhabits the banyan or the bel tree (Aegle marmelos) and lives a spirit-life of unblemished purity. The Kayastha, Vaishya and the Sudra obviously become commoner *bhūt*s and live a life of plebeian squalor. These are the skinny fellows, unusually tall and thin. These are lascivious and impure, and do not dare to frequent a mandir. Then there is the *skandha-kātā* - these fellows had their heads chopped off when they lived as humans. They prowl the marshy lands. And who could have possibly left out the *petnī*, the overtly voluptuous malodorous female shade? *Shānkchihnī* also lurks nearby - the chaste white-sari clad apparition who waits at the shades of trees during midnights, for an unsuspecting victim.[32] Lal Behari, through Govinda, would often identify himself with these folk beliefs – maintaining the fictive veil of narratorial objectivity.

Lal Behari's experience as an Indian convert made him assert a critical sense of difference from European counterparts, a reality which often gave rise to his characteristic ambivalence. His nuanced depiction of rural life in his novel and his collection of folk narratives were essentially visitations of these imprints from his past life, imprints that intensely haunted him. In his *Journal* of his preaching tours, Lal Behari recounts his visit to his native village after his conversion; his description bears indelible marks of this acute awareness of ambivalence of his identity[33]:

> The sun had declined from his meridian height when I saw the tall trees of my nativity looming through the distance. The scene of my childhood; the fields thickly covered with grain, sugar-cane, and cotton; the raised and high embankments of my native tanks (ponds), covered with mango- and palm- trees and the stately asvatha (*Ficus religiosa*), intertwined as these were with my boyish associations, produced on me feelings not to be described. When I stood before the door of my own home, to me as familiar as the face of an old friend, instead of being greeted with rejoicings, I was welcomed with cries and tears. The report of my coming had gone forth before I reached the village, and the whole neighbourhood had come out to greet me. On every side nothing was seen or heard but lamentations, mourning, and woe. Scenes like these – scenes created by causes little understood by foreigners on account of their connection with the inner texture of Hindu manners – occur to every native convert, and constitute, after all, his chief privation, and the influence of which is felt by him more than the loss of the wealth of Ormuz, India, or the late discovered Eldorado of California.

Ashis Nandy's analysis of the psychological paradigms involved in the rise of the nationalist discourse hints at similar paradoxes that many other Bangla *bhodrolok* intellectuals/ artists had to jostle with during the nineteenth century Bengali Renaissance.[34] Much of Nandy's reading relates to the ambivalence in the 'new definition of masculinity and normality'. It is also associated with an acute perception of disjunction between the necessarily androgynous cultural archetypes of South Asia and the gendered identities of the Victorian Imperial discourse. This led to the perception of the natives as childlike – who required cultural 'taming' through the Western, modern and/ or Christian hermeneutical devices in order to mature into adulthood. This also necessitated the repression of the childish – the 'unwilling to learn, ungrateful, sinful, savage, unpredictably violent, disloyal' traits in the native psyche. This is reflected in the manner in which both the Victorian-Edwardian discourse as well as the incipient Indian nationalism viewed the South-Asian traditions and wrote its histories. As Nandy explains[35]:

> The colonial ideology handled the problem in two mutually inconsistent ways. Firstly, it postulated a clear disjunction between India's past and its present. The civilized India was the bygone past; it was dead and "museumized". The present India, the argument went, was only nominally related to its history... Secondly and paradoxically, the colonial culture postulated that India's later degradation was not due to colonial rule - which, if anything, had improved Indian culture by fighting against its irrational, oppressive, retrogressive elements - but due to aspects of the traditional Indian culture which in spite of some good points carried the seeds of India's later cultural downfall.

Lal Behari, in the preface to his book on Bengali folktales, expresses this acutely problematic position of paradoxical affiliations – of writing the tales of the folk who were at once the ossified stereotypes to be viewed from a distance (even if sympathetically), of giving a voice to the old women and little children of a bygone nostalgia-tinged childhood; of identifying intimately, yet, of objectifying out of sheer necessity.

Lal Behari begins with such an act of problematic reminiscence[36]:

> In my *Peasant Life in Bengal* I make the peasant boy Govinda spend some hours every evening in listening to stories told by an old woman, who was called Sambhu's mother, and who was the best story-teller in the village.

Day later reveals to us that Sambhu's mother was not a fictional character, but someone from whom he had heard his own childhood stories. In *Govinda Samanta*, Lal Behari tells us Sambhu's mother 'was about fifty years old, a widow, who supported herself by spinning thread and selling it to weavers'.[37] Lal Behari vividly describes her oral performances of folk narratives in evening conferences at her house, attended by the children of the village[38]:

> The old woman sat in her hut before a dim lamp, the oil of which was supplied to her every evening by one or other of her infantile audience… [S]he incessantly turned the charka which went round merrily… When describing a pathetic or an awful scene she would drop the handle of the wheel from her right hand, and the carded cotton from her left, and make gestures suitable to the narrative…Sambhu's mother's stories were usually on three subjects – kings and queens, ghosts, and the travels of four friends… [T]he most popular of all her stories were those about ghosts… When describing the approach of a ghost, she would lower her voice into a whisper, and when the ghost spoke she always spoke through the nose. On such occasions the young listeners always got frightened; they drew towards each other and towards Sambhu's mother… When the last story of the night was a ghost-story, the children were afraid to go to their homes singly…These ghost-stories, volumes of which are heard by every Bengali boy, produce two effects on his mind – they strengthen his idea of the supernatural, and make him timid and cowardly.

Though Day appreciates these oral narratives, he also associates them with a pre-colonial past – a past which is necessarily irrational and at present, only recoverable in reminiscences of childish, retrogressive innocence. Thus, while collecting folk narratives for his compilation, he initially fails to find someone who could narrate those tales to him[39]:

> But where was an old story-telling woman to be got? I had myself, when a little boy, heard hundreds - it would be no exaggeration to say thousands - of fairy tales from the same old woman, Sambhu's mother…but I had nearly forgotten those stories... How I wished that poor Sambhu's mother had been alive! But she had gone long, long ago, to that bourne from which no traveller returns, and her son Sambhu, too, had followed her thither.

This passage reveals the intense feeling of unalterable change that characterises the late nineteenth century *bhadraloki* discourse. The lost childhood typifies this lack – which is half-resented and yet, accepted as irrevocable. This disjunction is expressed by the transformation of the essentially cyclical world-view of the South Asian traditions to the irreversible travel to that 'bourne from which no traveller returns.' And there has been an act of appropriation – Sambhu is made to symbolise the pre-modern (as a foil to Day's Reformist Baptist) discourse by his very absence. The Bengali folktales hence are tales of the past, references to the present are but 'spurious additions'.

That this distancing had been the dominant trend among folklorists of Bengali must be recognised. Upendrakishor Roy Choudhury (1863-1915) published his *Tuntunir bai* in 1901. He soon came up with another collection – the *Galpamālā*. His stories revisited the world of Mymensingh folk traditions – a world to which he had been acquainted since his childhood. This seems to be an otherworldly fairy-world were the twitty-bird punishes the powerful king ("Tuntuni ār rājār kathā"), where the sub-altern (jolā) marries a princess ("Bokā jolā ār seyāler kathā"; this follows a similar plotline to "The Match-making Jackal" in Day's book), where tigers long to marry maidens ("Bāgher rādhuni", "Bāgh-bar"). Gupi and Bagha accidentally land up in the marriage ceremony of the *bhūt*s ("Gupi Gāine ār Bāghā Bāin"). This was also the arena in which *the child* was to be written down,

disciplined through knowledge, classified and labelled by the safe disjunction of a folk narrative. In the very first tale compiled in the *Galpamālā*, the narrator would observe[40]:

> Most people are a bit stubborn in their childhood. Don't be enraged by my words. Even if one were enraged, it wouldn't be a discomfort for me... It's from my own experience that I say these words. The children suffer from a malady. They often disturb others by doing things which were unasked for, yet, if someone orders them to do the same work - the sweetness of the labour vanishes for them instantly.

Similar trends continue in the *Popular Tales of Bengal* (1905) by Kasindranath Banerji. Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar (1877-1957) would perhaps lend a permanent edifice to this stereotyping of the folk narrative in his immensely popular folklore collections - *Ṭhākumār jhuli* (1907),*Ṭhākurdādār jhuli* (1909), *Ṭhāndidir thole* (1909) and *Dādāmaśāyer thole* (1913). Dakshinaranjan was brought up by his paternal aunt, Rajlakshmi Devi, at Mymensingh (he was also, like Upendrakishore, steeped in the Mymensingh lore). The Bangiya Sahitya Parishat was established in 1893 by a group of intellectuals (headed by Ksetrapal Chakraborty and L. Leotard) who devoted themselves to rediscovering the indigenous Bangla literature. Dakshinaranjan began to write essays in the journal of the Parisat and took up the task of overseeing his aunt's *zamindari* at Mymensingh. Writing about a quarter of a century after Lal Behari, Dakshinaranjan shares much of the nostalgia[41]:

> there was such a joy in every nook-and-corner of the sylvan-hamlets of Bangla, such an ecstatic ambience. Maa used to tell us innumerable fairy-tales. - To claim that she knew those stories would be a mistake, fairy-tales were inseparably connected to her daily household chores; there wasn't a housewife who didn't know the fairy-tales, - not to know them was something to be ashamed of. But who stole that magical wand so brusquely[?]

Dakshinaranjan, like Lal Behari, hankers for the genitive Mother but also realises that he has to look for other substitutes. Lal Behari's description of his Gammer Grethel (alluding to the iconic German peasant-storyteller of *Grimms' Fairy Tales*) makes interesting reading[42]:

> After a great deal of search I found my Gammer Grethel . . . in the person of a Bengali Christian woman, who, when a little girl and living in her heathen home, had heard many stories from her old grandmother. She was a good story-teller, but her stock was not large; and after I had heard ten I had to look for fresh sources.

It is interesting to note that Lal Behari's prime-narrator (he also heard stories from others) was a converted Christian woman, much like Mary Frere's ayah Anna Liberata de Souza. It is also interesting to note that she defies in many ways the prototypes that Lal Behari tries to fit her in. She is neither Shambhu's Mother nor Gammer Grethel. She evidently had belonged to syncretic social structures – unlike the archetypes that Lal Behari is alluding to. This obviously gives us a source for the 'spurious additions' that Lal Behari censors and is probably the reason for her stock being not 'large' enough. Dakshinaranjan's narrators were 'old women from the village' ('pallī-grāmer vṛiddhā') but they offered stories that Dakshinaranjan found to be grossly unfinished.[43] Both Dakshinaranjan and Lal Behari hence share a distinct ambivalence vis-à-vis their narrators.

So what were Lal Behari's omissions? We can understand these effectively only by reliving one of such tales – the legend about the ghost of Warren Hastings. It is collaborated by an account in the *United Services Journal* (published by the United Services Institute of India, volume of 1946). The initial written statement by Mr. Paul Bird was recorded on 25th July, 1884 (about the time Temple, Day, Crooke, Knowles were busy in compiling their tales)[44]:

> One evening, just at dusk, I was returning home from office in my buggy, with lamps lighted. It was dusk, but under the shadow of trees that overhung the avenue approaching Hastings House, it was pretty dark. I was driving pretty fast, when I heard what appeared to be a runaway coach coming from Hastings House towards me. I immediately checked my horse and peered ahead to see how to avoid the coming danger, but as the noise did not seem to get any nearer, I cautiously proceeded, and when about a hundred

> yards from the house, distinctly saw the reflections of my lamps on the panels of the carriage in front of me, proceeding the same way. I kept my eyes on the panels, so as not to run into it.

This legend was quite vivid in the memory of the residents of Kolkata and rumours about several sightings had subsequently spread among the people. It is said that one of Hastings' 'old black bureau' was accidentally misplaced while he left for London. This chest contained 'some highly prized papers and miniature portraits'. It is assumed that these papers would have been of great help to Hastings in proving his innocence during his impeachment in the British Parliament. Hence, the ghost returns to his Alipur residence, riding a phantom coach to search for his lost papers every New Year's Day. It rushes up the staircase in evident haste. Other 'ghost sightings' - like that narrated by Lady Braid-Taylor (the wife of the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, who stayed in the haunted house for several years in 1930s and 1940s) – describe a permanent resident spirit who often derives a sinister pleasure by asserting his presence. As she narrates the butler's reactions after one such chilling encounter[45]:

> My brother and I have worked here for 14 years and we have seen him for many times. In uniform he comes, and they say he is the old Warren Hastings. The chauffeur will never take the car down the drive to the garage after midnight. Yes, I expect it was the "Shaitansahib". He has done it before.

What these narratives suggest is that the legend about Hastings's ghost was quite popular among the people and it cut across the coloniser/ colonised lines of the Kolkata society.

Another tale refers to technological devices – 'half plate Sanderson camera with a Ross lens and a Thornton Picard behind lens shutter'.[46] The Jones of the narrative ('let us call him Jones') is a photographer who ventures to take a photograph of Mr. Smith, his wife and Smith's sister-in-law. When the photograph was developed, however, another young woman stood between the two ladies. She was Mr. Smith's first wife - whose desire to be photographed was left unfulfilled by her sudden illness and demise. There are scores of other narratives popular in different regions of India – of New Year's Eve ghost in Lucknow, of the ghosts of the Indian Mutiny, of the British Ghosts in the hill stations of Simla and Ooty, of Hasan Khan Djinni who materialised mangosteens for Mr. Cogan in Kolkata. There were stories about a ghost-ridden trees in Indian forests, from which 'long, nude, grey bod[ies] shaped like that of a man' look on the observers 'with an expression of malicious glee'.[47]

William Crooke, our famed 'administrator-scholar', had himself recorded the tale *of Momia wala Sahib* who used to capture young boys. There was also the lore about *Dinapur-wala Sahib*, who 'was believed to have a contract from the government to supply the hunted heads to some museums in England.'[48] There were also legends about George A. Grierson – whose authoritative account about Bihar peasantry is considered as one of the cornerstones of Imperial ethnography. As Grierson was collecting data for his book, it was rumoured among the peasantry[49]:

> Grierson Sahib was counting boats and cattle in order to take them away for the Government's war in Egypt. He was counting the wells because he was aware of an imminent famine when these would be set aside for the British families. Children were being counted to be buried in the foundation of the bridge that the government was constructing over the Gandak river. Adults were being counted for use in war.

Temple also found himself to be the subject of 'rumours' at the Ambala Cantonment. We had earlier witnessed the doubts created by ethnographic projects like the one of Colin Mackenzie. We now come across the lore that such doubts often gave birth to. These tales were evidently suppressed, both by the British ethnographers as well as by the nationalist folklorists.

Why were these tales suppressed? To reason that these reflected the darker side of the colonial game and hence were suppressed, would be simplistic. There were other tales too – which, though upholding the glory of the

Imperialist regime, were never collected in folktale collections. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, a veteran nationalist poet, tells us about one such oft-repeated fiction[50]:

> My mother used to talk about Queen Victoria as the mother of the country. I remember her sixteen servants used to sit around her every evening in the courtyard, and she used to talk about Queen Victoria and praise her and say she is doing so much for the poor.

To compile such a tale would not have demeaned the Raj, it would have brutally exposed its mechanism of control. It also defies the stereotyping of Indian folklore as a corpus of stagnant, fossilised ore that could be conveniently mined by the miner-ethnographer. On the contrary, the narratives were vital – a fact that violated the normative constraints that both colonial ethnology and nationalist folkloristics constructed and sustained.

The perception of Indian folktales as representing cultural past, rural simplicity and unadorned childlike innocence is still pervasive. This opinion still dominates the academia and more importantly, sustains the illusion of stereotypical cultural identities. National folklore festivals, upholding the cause of national unity, 'extricate performances from lived contexts' and suppress hybrid syncretism as inauthentic. As Kirin Narayan explicates[51]:

> ...the bearers of folklore continue to be conceptualized as "them" - villagers or at least a lower social class - who will perform for metropolitan audiences. Such cultural productions are clearly marked by a vested interest in maintaining the exotic for cross-regional domestic as well as foreign consumption. Here then, "the folk" is a restricted category for whom lived experience at the crossroads of regional and global cultural currents is denied. They are muffled and frozen in a pristine past that becomes increasingly commodified.

Sipra Mukherjee has discussed Lal Behari's evasions in his Bengali novel *Candramukhīr upākhyān* (1859) from the context of his ambivalences as a Christian missionary preacher in India.[52] It is imperative that we take into consideration a wider context of his evasions and remain aware of the precariousness of Lal Behari as a narrator of tales. The extent of subversion pervading his tales is quite astounding – protagonists mutilate their friends and their own children ("Phakir Chand"); a *rakṣasī* befools a Brahmin by introducing herself as his long forgotten wife, perhaps ironically alluding to *kulīn* polygamy ("The Story of the Rakshasas"); starving mothers kill their infants ("The Boy whom Seven Mothers suckled"); a step-mother discovers her step-son touching her breasts while she had been sleeping ("Strike but hear"). Two thieves send their sons to be taught by a distinguished 'Professor of the Science of Roguery' ("The Adventures of Two Thieves and of their Sons"). As ghosts swap places for husbands, wives and lovers – the remnants of the banished pasts return to haunt the narrator and his listeners. The following excerpt from "A Ghostly Wife" reflects the fear of heterodoxical, subversive communion with these shades as colonial present(s) and past(s) seem to blur inextricably[53]:

> One night the Brahman's wife had occasion to go to the tank, and as she went she brushed by a Sankchinni who stood near; on which the she-ghost got very angry with the woman, seized her by the throat, climbed into her tree, and thrust her into a hole in the trunk. There the woman lay almost dead with fear. The ghost put on the clothes of the woman and went into the house of the Brahman. Neither the Brahman nor his mother had any inkling of the change.

In *Govinda Samanta,* Aduri's extra-marital affair with a Vaishnava *vairāgī* (and their eventual marriage after her husband's death) are associated with heterodoxical congregations at Agradwip and as well as her fit of demonic possession.[54] Yet in Day's works, these subversions are counterpointed by his evasions which ossify the Indian village as a pristine, otherworldly arcadia. Lal Behari would not let us listen to those 'spurious additions' to his tales. Today, we would rather ask him to recount for us these narratives that he had censored. The roots of our complex postcolonial identities might be traced back to them. Their preservation would explicate the *haunted* narratives of our past and present – they would make us decipher our own prejudices and transgressions, our compromises and confessions.

Notes

1. Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato*(Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press, 1963), 36-48.

2. Ludo Rocher, "Orality and Textuality in the Indian Context," *Sino-Platonic Papers* No. 49(1994):21.

3. I use the term 'homeostasis' as used in Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002[1982]), 47.

4. Lal Behari Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1883), ix.

5. Ibid., vii.

6. Richard Carnac Temple, *Legends of the Panjab*, vol.1 (Mumbai: Education Society's Press, 1884). The subsequent volumes were published in 1885 and 1900.

7. Flora Anne Steele and Richard Carnac Temple, *Wide Awake Stories* (London: Trubner and Co., 1884).

8. Mary Frere, *Old Deccan Days, or Hindoo Fairy Legends Current in Southern India*, 3rd ed. (London, 1881 [1868]), xi.

9. For an overview of the issues involved see Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968).

10. Gaborn Henry Damant, "Bengali Folklore from Dinajpur", *Indian Antiquary* 1(1872):115-120.

11. Francis Hindes Groome, the eminent British folklorist, noted this story's similarity to a gypsy legend in the *Gypsy Folk Tales* (1899). Dakshinaranjan's rendition would appear in *Ṭhākumār jhuli*(1907) as "Sāt bhāi campā".

12. See Sadhana Naithani(ed.), *Folktales from Northern India* (Gurgaon: Shubhi Publications, 2005).

13. Temple, *Legends of the Panjab*, vol.1, x.

14. Ibid., viii.

15. Ibid., xi.

16. Ibid., vii.

17. See Talak Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (New Jersey and London: Ithaca Press, 1973).

18. Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal*, 18.

19. Lal Behari Day, *Govinda Samanta* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1874), 17-18.

20. Nicolas B. Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Narrative Informants: Biography of an Archive," in Carol A. Breckenbridge and Peter Van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 297.

21. Sadhana Naithani, "The Colonizer Folklorist", *Journal of Folklore Research* 34 (1997), 1-14.

22. Richard Jobson (ed.), *History of British Folklore* (London: Routledge, 1999), 332.

23. Quoted in Charles Morrison, "Three Systems of Colonial Ethnography: British Officials and Anthropologists in India", in Heinrika Kuklick and Elizabeth Long (eds.), *Knowledge and Society: Studied in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*, vol. 5 (New York: JAI Press, 1984), 150.

24. Radharaman Mitra, *Kalikata darpan*, vol.2 (Kolkata:Subarnarekha, 2004), 105.

25. Gerardine Macpherson, *Life of Lal Behari Day* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), 35-39.

26. Ibid., xiv-xv.

27. Information about the early activities of the Free Church of Scotland in Bengal has been obtained from the online article, "From Krishna Pal to Lal Behari Dey: Indian Builders of the Church in India or Native Agency in Bengal 1800-1880" by Eleanor Jackson. This article can be accessed at :

    http://www.multifaithnet.org/images/content/seminarpapers/FromKrishnaPaltoLalBehari.htm.

28. Mitra, *Kalikata darpan*, vol.2, 111.

29. Ibid., 113.

30. Jackson, "From Krishna Pal to Lal Behari Day."

31. Macpherson, *Life of Lal Behari Day*, 70-71.

32. Day, *Govinda Samanta*, 105-108.

33. Excerpted from Lal Behari's unpublished *Journal of the Preaching Tours* by Gerardine Macpherson, *Life of Lal Behari Day*, 51-52.

34. Ashis Nandy, "The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age and Ideology in British India," in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, in the omnibus edition *Exiled at Home* (New Delhi: Oxford India, 2005), 1-63.

35. Ibid., 17-18.

36. Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal*, vii.

37. Day, *Govinda Samanta*, 125.

38. Ibid., 126-127.

39. Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal*, viii.

40. Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury, 'Sahaje ki baḍalok hawā jāy?', in *Upendrakishore racanāsamagra*, vol.2 (Kolkata:Reflect Publication, 1987), 108. [my translation]

41. Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, *Ṭḥakumār jhuli* (Kolkta: Mitra and Ghosh, 1976[1909]), 15. [While translating, I have maintained Dakshinaranjan's punctuations, as they are vital in getting a taste of his fluid, consciously tonal prose]

42. Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal*, ix.

43. Mitra Majumdar, *Ṭḥakumār jhuli*, 16.

44. Quoted in K.R.N. Swamy and Meera Ravi, *British Ghosts and Occult India* (Kolkata: Writer's Workshop, 2004),14.

45. Ibid., 16.

46. S. Mukherji, "His Dead Wife's Photograph", in *Indian Ghost Stories* (Allahabad: A.H. Wheeler and Co., 1914), 1-10.

47. Swami and Ravi, *British Ghosts and Occult India* (Kolkata: Writer's Workshop, 2004), 102-103.

48. Sadhana Naithani, "Of Ghosts and Colonizers," in *Sites de resistance – Strategies textuelles*, eds. Madhu Benoit, Susanne Berthier-Foglar and Linda Carter (Manuscrit, 2006), 139-141.

49. George A. Grierson, *A Bihar Peasant Life* (Kolkata: The Bengal Secretariat Press, 1885), 4.

50. Quoted in Zareer Masani, *Indian Tales of the Raj* (London: BBC Books, 1987), 82.

51. Kirin Narayan, "Banana Republics and V.I. Degrees: Rethinking Indian Folklore in a Postcolonial World," *Asian Folklore Studies* 52, no.1 (1993):190.

52. Sipra Mukherjee, "Conversion without 'Commotion': Rev. Lal Behari Day's *Candramukhīr upākhyān*," in *Asia in the Making of Christianity*, eds. Richard Fox Young and Jonathan A. Seitz (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 189-212.

53. Day, *Folk-tales of Bengal*, 192.

54. Day, *Govinda Samanta*, 100-111, 128-134.