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Translating *Englandey Bangamahila:* Seeking Relevance of Nineteenth-Century discourse of Freedom in Contemporary Worldview

Nabanita Sengupta

Assistant Professor
Department of English, Sarsuna College, Kolkata, West Bengal

Abstract

Nineteenth-century was a period of rising nationalist concern in Bengal. There has been a growing awareness of British imperialism and a desire for complete independence among the Indians. While English education in India has been responsible, to a large extent, for the rise of the nationalist concern, among the middle-class intelligentsia, the idea of freedom was further propagated among the masses by the books authored by Indians in this period. Krishnabhabini Das' *Englandey Bangamahila or A Bengali Lady in England* (1885) is one such work that nurtures the idea of freedom and can be located within the larger framework of nationalism in India.

Translation is a medium of sharing a text beyond its linguistic limitations, enabling its reach to a wider circle of readers. Translating Krishnabhabini Das' *Englandey Bangamahila* has been a work of revisiting the idea of independence through the eyes of a woman in the nineteenth century. It also becomes an important postcolonial activity that re-negotiates with the idea of imperialism and nation-building, and women's concerns in the nineteenth century, as it existed within the consciousness of this woman who belonged to a middle-class, orthodox, Hindu family but had a nationalist education due to her erudite and supportive husband. The proposed paper would look at the concept of the empire writing back, through the work of Krishnabhabini Das, and explore the importance of her thoughts in today's context, thereby validating the translation of her work within the contemporary context.

Keywords: nineteenth-century Bengal, freedom, translation, Krishnabhabini Das, women's studies, nationalism

Now that India has crossed 75 years of its existence as an independent country, it is justifiable to revisit the period that is germane to the idea of this politically independent India. It is also apt to once again engage with the term 'freedom' by looking at it through the lens of the past. Freedom has many connotations, and in the current socio-political situation, the term has gained relevance for multiple reasons. With political decisions that threaten individuals and identity politics playing a crucial role in determining a person's location within the socio-political and religious matrices in contemporary India, the term 'freedom' has once again gained currency. But it is imperative to understand the

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term in its philosophical, political as well as sociological relevance. In many ways, nineteenth-century nationalism in India can be considered to be the cornerstone of the political freedom that the country eventually achieves in 1947. Many nineteenth-century thinkers explored the idea of freedom in its various connotations. Krishnabhabini Das' text, *Englandey Bangamahila* (A Bengali Lady in England), published in 1885, is one such text that concerns itself with the concept of freedom in multiple ways. While the book upholds political independence as a goal for India, it also focusses on a more philosophical understanding of freedom by looking at the concept in terms of an individual's dignity and as a 'way out'[i] from social and religious taboos. Even after so many decades of India's birth as a politically independent 'Sovereign Socialist Republic', the issues that Krishnabhabini Das and many of her contemporary thinkers talked about, remain pertinent. If seventy-five is a milestone figure, then it can also be considered a point of retrospection and reflection of the past to understand our present. With that idea, this paper seeks to understand the concept of freedom in Krishnabhabini Das's text and how we can re-negotiate with her concepts through translation. Here, translation becomes a tool to disseminate the ideas located within the text, beyond the temporal and linguistically bound readership of the original.

Krishnabhabini Das was one of the few women of the nineteenth century who understood that the political liberation of a country could be meaningful only when the women too could come out of the purdah and make significant contributions to society. For her, freedom was almost synonymous with education, as she realised quite early that without it, women could never be truly liberated. Though written in 1885, her work still has relevance because the fight against patriarchy and the fight for women's education is still an ongoing process. In this context, it is important to revisit this text and understand the historicity of the nationalist movement and the role of women.

The significance of this text has been highlighted in several scholarly deliberations on nineteenth century Bengali women and travel writings. Jayati Gupta, in her work *Travel Culture, Travel Writing and Bengali Women, 1870-1940* includes a chapter on Krishnabhabini Das (54-69) which discusses extensively the life and works of this iconoclast woman and even includes excerpts from two chapters of the book in English translation. In an apt assessment of Das' work, Jayati Gupta says, "she is able to capture and analyse the superficial attractions of the life of an independent race as well as its inner strengths" (56). In another work on nineteenth century women's writings, Maroona Murmu also discusses the travelogue in detail, lauding Das for turning "the genuine patriotic gaze to the metropolis and the colony alike with her criticality" and for suggesting "ways for regeneration of the nation" (Murmu 278). Krishna Sen, in her essay, 'Provincializing Europe' also discusses Das' gaze, her eye for detail. She emphasises on the significance of this work as "one of the most detailed narratives about England from a feminine viewpoint" (23). Krishnabhabini Das also finds a mention in Himani Banerjee's article, 'Textile Prison: Discourse on Shame (Lajja) in Attire of Gentlewomen (Bhadramahila) in Colonial Bengal'. Mentioning her as a 'female reformer' Banerjee identifies the conflicting positionality of the women like Krishnabhabini Das, who, though advocating certain amount of economic independence of freedom, also advocated *griha* or home as the "female space and a woman's natural space" (183). Hans Harder lists her as one of the 'Travelogue celebrities' (6), though Das has only recently started receiving some attention that her work actually deserves. But what is important is the way her work is analysed by Harder, "Krishnabhabini's account betrays a very mature and independent mind that yields a nuanced depiction of life in

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London at the time" (6). Such critical engagements with Krishnabhabini Das's texts and the existence of two contemporary translations of *Englandey Bangamahila*[ii] highlights the importance of this text within the purview of nineteenth century gender and postcolonial studies. But what also comes across is the location of Krishnabhabini Das' work primarily within the corpus of nineteenth century travel writing. This paper tries to locate her work within the larger nationalist discourse of her times and explore the nation building agenda that remains at the root of her conception of this text. It is from this perspective that the paper tries to understand Krishnabhabini Das' engagement with the idea of freedom and relevance of her work in contemporary context.

For the purpose of this paper, I shall be looking at the concept of liberation through the lens of women's status in 19th century India and what it means in contemporary times. The paper is divided into three sections – women in nineteenth-century Bengal, Krishnabhabini Das and her idea of freedom, and the relevance of translating *Englandey Bangamahila* – to place the ideas in a cogent manner.

Women in Nineteenth Century Bengal

Nineteenth century is also the period that laid the foundation for women's liberation in the modern sense of the term. Social thinkers like Rammohun Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar had set the improvement of women's condition as an important social agenda through their writings and active involvement, and many others were joining hands. Nineteenth century nationalists considered improving the social position of women and ridding Hinduism of its orthodox and regressive practices to be two very significant areas that required attention. These had come to occupy centre-stage in social and intellectual debates of the times. In Bengal, particularly in Calcutta, the newly rising intellectuals were making a strong impact upon the society. Interestingly, as many nineteenth century texts show, this was a phase when three distinct social classes co-existed in colonial Calcutta – the baboo class, the English-educated intellectuals, and the orthodox Hindu community. Books like *Hutum Penchar Naksha* by Kaliprasanna Singha, *Alaler ghare Dulal* by Peary Chand Mitra, and many more, brought out the agenda, idiosyncrasies, and attitudes of each of these classes through sharp satires on the individuals belonging to these categories. Amid such heterogeneity, it was but unavoidable that women's issues would evoke varied responses from different quarters of society. Yet, in spite of all the debates around women's emancipation, some important work was being done towards improving the lives of women.

One very important development was the setting up of schools for girls, providing them with an opportunity for learning. This is also the period when we find several women starting to write - both their personal histories as well as their concern regarding various social issues. Most of these women were self-taught, sometimes with help from their husbands or other members of the family. Rashsundari Devi's *Amar Jibon* (My Life) in 1868, the first autobiography by a Bengali woman, or Kailashbasini Devi's *Hindu Mahilagoner Heenabostha* (Dismal state of Hindu Women) in 1863, the first book-length collection of essays by a Bengali woman, are examples of pioneering work that set the stage for subsequent writings. These early narratives by women became a part of a discourse through which, it was possible to get a closer look into the lives mostly spent in the *antahpur*, or the interiors of the houses. The political agenda of nationalism which was primarily a male arena, was intersected by these narratives by women and gave rise to an alternative and significant discourse of the nineteenth century. They provided an added perspective where women's education became synonymous with their freedom,

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which was then merged with the larger discourse of freedom for the motherland. So, women then were fighting for two kinds of freedom – one the larger ideological concept of a free nation or India as an independent political entity, and another, more immediate, their freedom from patriarchy.

As a part of the British civilizing mission, a section of the British intelligentsia had directed their attention toward the condition of women in India. The rising Indian nationalists too were concerned with the status of women in their society. Their concern was driven primarily by the bitter criticism from the West by authors like James Mill who ranked India low on the civilizational scale due to the position of women in the society. The missionaries had also concerned themselves with women's education and were one of the earliest to work towards this (Chakraborty 88; Chatterjee, K. 768). Women's question and the nationalist debate got merged in the nineteenth century but it was not from a purely benevolent desire for the upliftment of women. It would seem that criticism from outside, coupled with their own awareness of Enlightenment philosophies of the West made the Indian males concerned with the degenerated condition of the women in Indian society. The discourse of nationalism was condensed into a powerful dichotomy of the inner and the outer (Chatterjee, P. 121) and the women's question became a tentative solution to the search for an alternative ideology that could be a response to both Western modernity as well as Indian spiritualism. I mention the word tentative because it was a solution that contained a complex web of reactions of its own which posed a threat to the very idea of Indian nationalism. As Tanika Sarkar explains, as colonised race, there was a sense of disenfranchisement among the Indian males. The anti-colonialist nationalist discourse criticised the West as the disenfranchising agency but when Indian women started to write their own narratives, they located the Indian men within the same discourse of colonialism and disenfranchisement concerning women. So it took the edge off the male nationalist critique of western imperialism (Sarkar: 2001, 548). It is within this larger and more complex debate that we need to locate women's writings from Bengal in the nineteenth century. Krishnabhabini too falls within this genre of women's writings. Education provided the women with the tool required to voice their own selves and helped women's narratives to develop a trajectory of their own, irrespective of the larger political debate of the century.

Krishnabhabini Das and her idea of freedom vis-à-vis *Englandey Bangamahila*

Krishnabhabini Das, a Hindu housewife belonging to an orthodox, middle-class family accompanied her husband Devendranath Das during his second trip to England. In 1885, she published an account of her experience there, in the form of a book *Englandey Bangamahila* or A Bengali Lady in England. The book was not any anecdotal narrative of her personal experiences in England, but a comparative and critical study of the British and Bengali cultures and lifestyles. Her travel account seems to follow the 'usual trope' of the 'backward East' and 'progressive West', engaging with the 'stock-in-trade nationalist question' that her fellow travel writers, mostly males, have already engaged with (Sen 23). But in spite of that, it was a very important document not just of the nationalist history but also of women's awakening. In this book, Krishnabhabini engages with the question of freedom at multiple levels – social, religious, economic, political, and gender. It will be interesting to see that most of the issues that she spoke about remain a cause for concern even today.

Women's liberty occupies the central attention of her narrative. She does not just talk about freedom but tries to embody it as much as she can, through her lived experiences.

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The very journey of Krishnabhabini Das breaks several stereotypes – she does not just step out of the threshold of her house, but also crosses the tabooed *kala pani* in spite of being forbidden by her father-in-law. As a woman, she transgresses both social and religious conventions. Not only that, but she also leaves behind her six-year-old daughter to travel with her husband which again is an act that does not conform to the motherhood ideology of the nineteenth century nationalists. This act locates Krishnabhabini in a complex relationship with respect to the woman's question in the nationalist framework. Though apparently, she followed the trope of the nationalist discourse, there are multiple points of divergence in both her lived experiences as well as in the book written by her.

In the nineteenth century masculinist nationalist discourse, motherhood was a significant trope with the figure of Mother India at the core. For the goddess-worshipping race of Bengalis, motherhood became the only 'viable symbol' that could bridge the 'social, religious and political domain of the colonial society' (Bagchi 66). The 'new patriarchy' that Partha Chatterjee talks about, maintained its control over a woman's body by glorifying motherhood as the ultimate fulfilment of a woman's life and by determining her supreme contribution to the cause of nationalism by giving birth to able sons. While the Empire produced the binary of the energetic, virile British male coloniser symbolised by the figure of a lion as opposed to the effeminate, weak, Bengali male; the symbolic representation of the country as the mother figure and the nationalists as the sons of that Supreme Mother became a way of reclaiming one's identity through a very powerful feminine. Within this 'sacrilised' and 'feminised' country (Sarkar: 1987 2011), motherhood gained a political urgency and gave rise to a new set of prescriptions and proscriptions for women. Krishnabhabini's breaking out of her family to follow her husband, and leaving behind the child becomes an act that subverts this nineteenth century nationalist trope. Interestingly, this trope of motherhood is supplanted by another Hindu mythical narrative of Sita accompanying her husband in exile[iii], prioritising the role of a dutiful wife over the self-sacrificing mother. That this decision spelt doom in Tilottama, the daughter's life, is another study of deep-rooted patriarchy and beyond the scope of the paper here. But this decision endowed Krishnabhabini with an agency that is otherwise denied to women.

As a woman, Das flouts the tradition further by spending hours in the British Library, as she herself mentions in the Preface. As a woman, the keeper of the domestic space, she breaks the norm and ventures into a space that has been predominantly occupied by males. The book that she produces contains several references from contemporary or older British and foreign authors who had been writing about England. In one of the chapters, she translates a long passage by one of the British authors because she felt that it gave an accurate description of a British polling day (Das, 242-244)[iv]. She also makes generous use of information, primarily empirical data from Hyppolite Taine's *Notes on England* to arrive at conclusions completely on her own[v]. All of these point to her erudite nature and scholarship that was not expected in a woman from her background. It also located her within the public discourse where a woman was not conventionally expected or accepted.

A Bengali Lady in England structurally adheres to the nationalist mode of writing that was prevalent among her contemporaries. In absence of any particular model of an Indian woman's description of her life abroad, that preceded her writing, she follows the available ones by contemporary males. But she differs from the dominant narratives of her times due to her critical engagement with women's issues and her spirited evocation

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of the need for women's freedom. Though women's education and their status in society had become an important nineteenth century concern, very few texts of her times, with a conscious nation-building agenda focused so deeply on this. Her chapter on 'British Women' (143-1659) is a comparative study of the lives of women in England and Bengal. There is an element of exaggeration when she says, "England provides a lot of opportunity for women's education. There is no dearth of good schools or colleges for girls in cities here… women can get the same education as men' (145). There are some more such instances where Das' eloquence on British women's independence is more than the actuality. But readers can understand the agenda behind such eloquent eulogising regarding women's issues. Firstly, coming from an orthodox Hindu family where women were not allowed to even step out of the house, English women and their visibility in the public spaces must have left a deep impact on her. Secondly, she has a conscious agenda behind writing this book and exaggeration becomes the tool that aids her in her self-imposed task of emphasising the need for women's education and upliftment.

Unlike the nationalists of her times, she did not consider women's roles limited only to motherhood but firmly believed that everyone should contribute towards nation-building. "It makes me happy to think of these [British] women who did not get married to be led by others and served the world with their own strength. But in India, let alone spinsters, even the married women do not come forward to serve the country" (156). There are many such examples throughout the text which look at the women's role in a larger context, beyond the limited spectrum that the nineteenth century nationalism can offer. She is also extremely critical of the role of the Bengali males regarding their treatment of Bengali women. She says, "Apathy from men and superstitions within the society are responsible for Hindu women's degradation and misfortune" (151). In a verse that she includes in *A Bengali Lady in England*, she exhorts her fellow women to come out of their imprisonment –

> 'Come sisters! Let's break out of prisons
> or counsel our dear brothers
> to untie the fetters that bind
> the Bengali women's feet' (157)

So, it is not the colonial rule only that Krishnabhabini Das criticises; she is equally or may be slightly more, vocal about the kind of imprisonment that her fellow women had to face from their society. She, unequivocally, makes the Bengali males also responsible for the dismal status of these women.

Not just limited to her concern about women, she is also keenly aware of the exploiting colonial practices and the need for the country to be delivered from those. She particularly mentions the extortionist policies of colonial Europe - "it sends shivers down the spines to even think of the amount of wealth these ships extort from other countries' (266). Krishnabhabini's idea of freedom includes financial independence too, as this chapter on British commercial enterprises shows. Though she narrativizes freedom from the standpoint of a woman from the colonies, a doubly marginalised existence, freedom for her goes much beyond the political to attain a more all-encompassing and philosophical perspective.

The book contains an agenda, which she lays out in the Preface itself – "Here, you will only find the differences that exist between an independent life and an enslaved one"

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(33). It is a narrative built with a particular kind of readership in mind. Her readers are the colonised people of Bengal or India in general, and the women in particular, who are leading a doubly colonised existence. This freedom that she talks about is also a state of mind and that is what she wants the Indians to achieve because it is only then that India can achieve success.

Postcolonial, post-independence India has been referred to as a 'transnation', which cannot be bound by the homogenising politics of the principles of the nineteenth century nationalism. The utopianism of Nehruvian brand of nationalism fails miserably in the initial decades of independence itself (Ashcroft 13). Krishnabhabini constructs her idea of freedom within the larger design of building a strong national character which can be critiqued in the light of the postcolonial celebration of heterogeneity. Yet, what is important is the contemporary relevance of her basic premise of freedom – education, deliverance from superstition, gender equality, and personality-building qualities like integrity, industriousness, etc. According to her, 'qualities such as efficiency, capacity to work hard, perseverance, spirit, courage, etc, have made them [British] civilized and prosperous' (113). She further mentions, 'for the British, work is like their constant companion. They love to work; the reason could either be weather or their natural propensity' (113-114). There are many such illustrations where she points out at the superior virtues of the British. Not only that, she criticises Indians for the lack of such virtues – 'it is due to our own faults that we Indians are being dominated by the British' (113). The fact that she locates all these qualities within British race and lifestyle and wishes the Indians to imbibe them can be an exaggeration. But it was, as I mentioned earlier, her tool to find a role model for a race, that according to her, needed to be awakened from stupor. It is also important to note that she is also a bitter critic of imperialist activities of British, their greed for wealth, their racism, and their extravaganza – 'tender virtues of love, affection, humility, kindness, and charity are rarely present in the hearts of the English people' (108); and a few lines later, 'the two great faults of the British are extravagance and alcoholism' (108). Such passages balance her discourse and make her an impartial narrator trying to come to an understanding through her narrative.

Her idea of true liberty, particularly in the context of women, still holds relevance if looked at from the perspective that even today we need government policies like '*beti bachao beti padhao'* and '*kanyashree'* for girls' education. While the rate of crimes against women points to our collective failure at giving women their due space in the society, general corruption and indolence point to the relevance of Krishnabhabini Das' understanding of freedom as a philosophical concern that was based on more holistic development of human character. In a multilinguistic country like India, revisiting this work through translation becomes an act of re-negotiating with her idea of freedom in a larger context.

Relevance of Translating Englandey Bangamahila:

Translation is one of the most important means of communication across cultures in a multilingual community like India. Though India had a rich culture of translation since ancient times, nineteenth century significantly altered its course by adding a 'false value-structure' to the action (Devy 17). Speaking of translation in pre-colonial India, G.N. Devy argues that translations were much more 'free flowing', particularly the ones from Sanskrit to other vernaculars, as they tried to 'liberate the scriptures from the monopoly of a restricted class of people' which made their work a means of 'reorganising the

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society'. With nineteenth century, this view of translation was replaced by a colonising enterprise of translation with a strict hierarchy between Source and Target Languages. English entered India as a language of the ruler but over the years metamorphosed into the lingua franca of the country. Still, English has been viewed with suspicion, and authors writing in English or translating into it have had to face uncomfortable questions. But in postcolonial, post-globalised India, translating from other Indian languages into English has attained its own significance. In absence of a pan-Indian acceptability of any language, English still has a wider reach. Though it has often been blamed as being elitist, and not reaching across classes, it is undeniable that English has attained cross-cultural reachability. Discussing the role of English in India and thereby of English translations, N. Kamala says, "the most appropriate audience for Indo-English literature in India is, therefore, the general Indian reading public who read in English for the pleasure of rediscovering their cultural heritage or to place a particular work in the context of other Indian language-literatures" (Kamala 257). With migrations across states and even countries, a break with one's mother tongue has also given rise to a community of urban Indians who do not have reading access to their mother languages. Though this is not a piece of encouraging news for any linguistic community, it is a reality that we cannot overlook anymore. Translations in English, therefore, become the only way for these people to stay connected with their culture, just as it helps other cultures to remain interconnected with each other. So English translations help in providing a continuum in which to locate the texts and read them within their contexts and beyond. The 'shameful' history of the emergence of English in India as a result of colonialism, can be counter-explained by looking at it as that 'we have learnt and made, another language our own' (Kannan, 49).

From the perspective of postcolonial revisiting then, the act of translating *A Bengali Lady in England* becomes a significant action. Since the act of translation is associated with the act of close reading, rendering the text in English also highlights the key points of its discourse once again. This important text, which like many others was lost in the alleys of history, is identified and accorded a new readership. This new readership is different from the original and more heterogenous as it stretches across diverse linguistic communities with no access to the original Bengali. In nineteenth century, similar texts were being written in other parts of the country too, as a part of their response to British colonialism as well as patriarchy. Women such as Pandita Rama bai, Savitribai Phule, and many others were making their voices heard in various languages. Translating these texts of the nineteenth century gives one a collective idea of the position of women in various parts of the country and their responses. This is the only way to form a corpus of women's texts from this very important epoch of Indian history.

Contemporary translation theory places the significance of translation in translating culture. With the 'cultural turn' in translation studies, propagated by scholars like Susan Bennett and Harish Trivedi, translations have been endowed with the task of keeping the cultural core of the text intact during rendering a text from one language into another. What comes naturally in one language system may not find its exact counterpart in another. For example, Krishnabhabini mentions '*sasthi pujo'* a religious practice of Bengal, or '*pithe'* a popular Bengali condiment in a very matter-of-fact manner, both being very commonplace in Bengal, the English translation requires elucidation of both these words in the form of footnotes. Cultural translation, therefore, necessitates such referencing of unknown concepts, traditions or objects, because literal translations fail to account for them. Such referencing, in the form of footnotes, glossaries, or endnotes, also

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highlights the cultural practices that might otherwise not draw much attention in the original. By underlining these cultural references, translations re-negotiate with the idea of cultural identity as well. The readers of the text in translation have to encounter these culturally loaded words or concepts during their readings. So, in spite of being translated into a different language, the text maintains a connection with its original culture. It is within these practices of cultural communication that one can develop the idea of a cross-cultural dialogue across various linguistic communities that constitute India. These open up dialogic spaces across cultures and help in bridging the gaps across languages.

Postcolonial revisitation through English translations is also an act of the Empire writing back. Rendering a work in English translation provides a window to an international readership, particularly the West, putting the work on the global literary map. But apart from that, it also helps in the formation of an identity of the self. There are several passages in *A Bengali Lady in England* where the author is highly critical of British thoughts and lifestyle. The fact that a woman from the colonies had such a keen perceptivity and the courage required to criticise the ruling community is bound to have an impact on the collective spirit of the community. Reading this work within the larger corpus of Indian writings translated into English adds to the formation of postcolonial responses from across the country. By putting the text out for international and national readership, this postcolonial spirit is further celebrated. In a way, the English translation of *A Bengali Lady in England* also ensures that the critique of imperialism reaches its home, the point of its origin. This writing back to the Empire becomes an important postcolonial engagement and a way of destabilising the myth of a superior West.

As the country today grapples with the idea of a unified identity, postcolonial translations of texts like these can be one of the ways of archiving and highlighting a past in which the country was bound together by its stand against imperialism. Though the concept of 'One India' is intangible in many ways due to the multiplicity of languages, cultures, ethnicity, etc, a body of translated texts from Indian languages can be a celebration of the diversity that India is. It is within such diversities that the idea of India lives and not within the idea of the nation as promoted by thinkers like Benedict Anderson and others. Such translations present a better and holistic picture of India through its rich literary heritage.

Conclusion

India can never be fitted to suit the idea of 'Nation-state' that has its origin in the culturally homogenous countries of Europe. At its best, India can be understood as a single political entity with an assemblage of diverse cultures and languages, an idea that took its current shape during the nationalist movement and came into reality in 1947. In the contemporary situation, where overt identity politics clashes with hyper-nationalism, a cogent identity of India comes under threat. Though it is a given that there cannot be any 'single' idea of India or that there are multiple 'Indias' located within India, what is required is an acceptance of this diversity. A healthy and vigorous cross-cultural interaction can help in reducing inter-linguistic or inter-cultural animosity. Translation helps in building this interaction by making the 'other' familiar. Renegotiating with this nineteenth century text also places the work in the contemporary chain of thought. It is only expected that Krishnabhabini Das' idea of freedom will gain a larger significance when explored under the vast and interconnected corpus of the nineteenth century writings. As we celebrate the seventy-fifth year of independence, it is texts like these that help us understand social realities by looking at them from a historical perspective.

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Krishnabhabini Das' dream of a free India is questioned by the contemporary status of women in particular and the larger society in general. It makes us pause and rethink our goals and achievements as citizens of a free country. Translation, therefore, adds a new life to *A Bengali Lady in England* and opens its scope for a wider range of political discourse.

Notes

[i]The term 'way out' has been taken from K. Narayan Chandran's essay, 'The Meaning of Freedom: Azadi Alas!' in which he borrows this term from Kafka's 'A Report for an Academy' to mean 'freedom' in a particular but limited connotation.

[ii]Translation is a process and there are multiple translations of several iconic texts. The fact that there are two translations of this book available, highlights the relevance of this work in the contemporary context. Somdatta Mandal's translation of Krishnabhabini Das' *Englandey Bangamahila* was published in 2015 while my translation of the same appears in 2020.

[iii]Mentioned in two obituaries to Krishnabhabini Das and recollected in an anthology edited by Aruna Chattopadhyay – one was by Sarojkumari Debi, published in 1329 (BS) in Bharati and the other by Khemankari Devi, published in *Prabasi*. The fact that both of them compared Krishnabhabini Das' visit to England to Sita's exile, point at the self-fashioning as Sita as a strategy to counter the dominant trope of motherhood as prevalent in the 19th century.

[iv]All the references to the text of *Englandey Bangamahila* has been taken from my translation of this book, *A Bengali Lady in England.*

[v]Krishnabhabini Das drew many empirical facts from Hyppolite Taine's travel writing, *Notes on England (Sur l'Angleterre)* but the conclusions she arrived at were completely her own and very different from that of the French scholar. In spite of her extreme marginality, as a woman and a subject of the Empire, she has a keen intellectual faculty that could look through the dazzling superiority of the West. A detailed discussion of Krishnabhabini Das' use of Taine's work is available in my Introduction to the translation of *A Bengali Lady in England* (19-27).

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