

Rupkatha, Rupok-katha and Beyond: Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's Kankabati as a Postmodern Retelling

Sankha Ghosh

State Aided College Teacher-I, Department of English, Ramakrishna Mission Residential College (Autonomous), Narendrapur, West Bengal

Abstract

Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's novel *Kankabati* (1892) is a retelling of the folklore of Kankabati which was well-known in the late nineteenth century colonial Bengal. Mukhopadhyay's novel anticipates the early twentieth century attempts of anthologising and appropriating folk tales of Bengal (as exemplified in Dakshinaranjan Mitra's 1906 anthology of Bengali fairy tales titled *Thakurmar Jhuli*) which emerged out of the revivalist enterprises of contemporary cultural nationalism. Taking a cue from the self-reflexive distinction between the pre-modern 'hearing' of an oral tale and the new appropriation of the same by an author in the medium of writing—as suggested by the narrator of *Kankabati* in its prologue, this paper would aim at engaging with the workings of the author-function (in its Foucauldian sense) within the textual space of *Kankabati*. The self-conscious mediation of the authorial agency in the narrative seems to facilitate the construction of a hybrid narrative space comprising the elements of both the oral conventions of a traditional folk tale and a self-conscious narration loosely modelled upon social realism. This hybrid narrative space that emerges out of the transactional relationship between the orally disseminated folk tale and its literary appropriation in writing makes use of elements of parody. This paper will contemplate on the nature of these parodies by judging their effects through the lens of Fredric Jameson's understanding of pastiche. Thus, by borrowing its conceptual tools from the Foucauldian notion of author function and Jameson's understanding of parody or pastiche, this paper would attempt to read *Kankabati* as one of the earliest examples of postmodernism in Bengali literature.

Keywords: Nineteenth Century Bengal, Folk Tale, Author Function, Pastiche

Folklore and literary texts make use of two different mediums of cultural expression, the medium of orality and that of writing. Each of these mediums possesses certain distinct characteristics relating to the issues of authorship, textuality, target audience and mode of dissemination. For example, the

circulation of the literary text is historically determined by the arrival of the technology of print and the emergence of a literate, reading public. Despite many such differences, folklore and their literary retellings share a transactional relationship as they often reinforce each other as fields of cultural production. The literary retellings in a way determine the afterlives of folklores in different historical epochs as they involve the mediation of authors who attempt to reconstruct and thus exert control over the folklore culturally available to them. Therefore, an enquiry into the literary retelling of a folklore provides an insight into the conditions of its cultural reception as Jack Zipes observes, “[t]he key to comprehending the folk tale and its volatile quality is an understanding of the audience and reception aesthetics” as “[e]ach historical epoch and each community altered the original folk tales according to its needs as they were handed down over the centuries” (Zipes 7-8). Through an analysis of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay’s fantasy novel *Kankabati* (1892), this paper attempts to explore the nuances of a narrative space that emerges out of an ideologically encoded retelling of a folklore.

Kankabati is a retelling of the folklore of Kankabati which was in circulation in colonial Bengal in the late nineteenth century. The folklore of Kankabati narrates the journey of a sister who sails out on a boat to evade the advances of her incestuous brother. In this oral tale, the brother seems to correlate his libidinal desire with his sister’s appetite for food. He insists on marrying his sister Kankabati just because she somewhat naively ate the fruit brought by him. The fruit works as a phallic symbol in the original tale driving home its incestuous motif. Mukhopadhyay’s novel, at its very onset, points out the lack of credibility of the original tale and asserts that the authorial narrator would aim at purging this folk tale of its incestuous motif and narrating a literary tale which is plausible:

Thus goes the story of Kankabati. But is it possible to believe such a tale? Is it probable that a brother would insist on marrying his sister for the sake of a mere fruit? This is patently impossible! (Mukhopadhyay 3)ⁱ

The authorial narrator’s claim of narrating a plausible and civilising tale aligns Mukhopadhyay’s retelling with the revivalist enterprises of contemporary cultural nationalism endorsed by the Bengali *bhadralok*-s. The cultural nationalism of the native elites in the late nineteenth century Bengal which paves the path for future political resistance of the early twentieth century arises out of the fear of self-dissolution and the threat of losing one’s sovereign control over an indigenous way of life. This anxiety concerning the sanctity of one’s own culture owes its origin to a vigorous contestation with the coloniser over the control of the socio-cultural space. Partha Chatterjee in “Whose Imagined Community?” (1991) seeks to understand such revivalist acts as integral to the deliberate creation of a carefully constructed domain of national culture wherein the colonial ruler cannot seek to intervene:

The colonial state, in other words, is kept out of the “inner” domain of national culture.... In fact, here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a “modern” national culture that is nevertheless not Western. (Chattopadhyay 6)

While fashioning a renewed and reformed cultural domain, the native elites attempt a careful accommodation, exclusion and appropriation of indigenous discourses belonging to the precolonial era. The ones which run the risk of undermining the sanctity of the modern national culture are either excluded or appropriated through modifications. Mukhopadhyay’s attempt of constructing a sanitised, literary fairy tale out of the objectionable, incestuous contents of a folk tale is thus an exercise in historicising the precolonial, if not mythical past. This is an exercise encoded with a nationalist ideology. His novel seems to anticipate the similar early-twentieth century initiatives of anthologising and appropriating folk tales of Bengal as the ones undertaken in Dakshinaranjan Mitra’s 1906 collections of Bengali fairy tales titled *Thakurmar Jhuli* and *Thakurdadar Jhola* respectively. Dineshchandra Sen’s 1920 anthology of lectures titled *The Folk Literature of Bengal* can be placed along the same line. The rationale of such enterprises finds its expression in the passionate plea of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay concerning the importance of historicising the precolonial past in an oft-anthologised 1880 essay:

What is needed is a history of Bengal, otherwise Bengal has no hope. Who will write? You shall write; so, shall I; we will write together. Whoever is a Bengali, must write it. If our mother passes away, we seek happiness in recapitulating her memories. And this is the people’s mother, our birthplace Bangladesh. Is it not joyous to recount her story? (Chattopadhyay 337, my translation)

For Bankimchandra, the task of narrativizing the history of Bengal seems to bring together three different spatiotemporal frames—the colonised present (when the mother is dead), the precolonial historical past (when the mother was alive, and it is still possible to revive her memories) and the mythical past (relating to the origin of the birthplace). It is possible to find a similar convergence of different spatiotemporal frames in Mukhopadhyay’s novel which has been achieved through the mediation of the authorial agency. My paper would first examine the way it has been achieved and its implications.

The novel *Kankabati* opens with a self-reflexive acknowledgement of its constructed nature, that is, this narrative is a retelling of a familiar folk tale. The plot of the original Kankabati tale is placed in between the following narratorial remarks:

Everybody knows Kankabati. We have all heard the Kankabati tale as children.

[...]

I will narrate a tale that lies within the realm of probability.
(Mukhopadhyay 3)

These narratorial remarks have several implications. The first set of remarks which happen to be the opening lines of the novel point out the widespread popularity of the Kankabati tale and provide an idea concerning its target audience, the children. The next remark, an assertive and didactic one, which is the concluding line of the first chapter titled “Pracheen Katha” (ancient tales) informs the readers that the folk elements of the original Kankabati tale need to be reformulated as that tale happens to be implausible, therefore, unbelievable. By pointing out the difference between the act of hearing an oral tale and the task of narrativizing that tale in the medium of language, these two remarks underscore an overarching authorial attitude. The authorial narrator seems to suggest that the lack of plausibility might have been tenable in the domain of orality; however, a literary adaptation carries with it the obligation of following a realist narrative convention of plausibility. Moreover, the anticipation that the lack of plausibility might seem to be a childish (not childlike) quality in a children’s tale, and its retelling requires the mediation of an adult narrator might be attributed to the psychological legacy of colonialism which Ashis Nandy explores in his 1983 book *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. According to Nandy, the figures of the adult and the child are necessary hegemonic constructions which project the coloniser as the enlightened rational adult and the colonised as the irrational child; the colonizer adopts the former role and undertakes the task of disciplining the illogical childishness of the natives:

Colonialism dutifully picked up these [Enlightenment] ideas of growth and development and drew a new parallel between primitivism and childhood. Thus, the theory of social progress was telescoped not merely into the individual’s life cycle in Europe but also into the area of cultural differences in the colonies. (Nandy 15)

Such an insistence upon the authorial/narratorial intervention in reorganising the folk elements of the tale and a reference to the target audience of the original tale bring into focus the literary adaptation’s self-awareness of being an authored text. The text brings within its folds the implicit suggestion of being mediated by an agent whose intervention is determined by the specificities of his spatiotemporal location, cultural identity and an awareness concerning the target audience. This narratorial intervention thus facilitates the workings of one of the features of author-function as discussed by Michel Foucault in “What is an Author?”:

...it [author-function] does not develop spontaneously as the attribution of a discourse to an individual. It is, rather, the result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call “author.” Critics doubtless try to give this intelligible being a realistic status, by discerning, in the individual, a “deep” motive, a “creative” power, or a “design,” the

milieu in which writing originates. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent.... (Foucault 110)

Here Foucault makes a distinction between the historical individual who brings the text into existence and the author figure who happens to be an interpretative construct. The latter is shaped as part of the critical discussions relating to the crux of the authorial intention, the bearings of his cultural affiliation and other identity markers upon the text. The narratorial intervention seems to anticipate and acknowledge this facet of an authored text. The self-reflexive remark that an old tale is being told anew through the mediation of an author not only draws the reader's attention to the constructed nature of the literary narrative but also acknowledges the ways in which this new tale and its implications would be attributed to an author figure rather than to folk wisdom. This self-reflexivity seems to emerge as a metafictional ploy characteristic of postmodern narratives. My attempt of understanding the civilising impulse of Mukhopadhyay's narrative as one among many similar attempts of cultural revivalism undertaken by the native elites is also anticipated in this remark. The caveat that despite its familiarity among children, an old folk tale is being narrativized anew is, in effect, a reminder of the fact that this retelling is being undertaken by a representative member of the native intelligentsia whose literary engagement might also be an ideological one. Let us look at the way this self-reflexive remark conditions one of the earliest critical assessments of the novel, Rabindranath Tagore's 1893 review of *Kankabati* published in the journal *Sadhana*. Tagore considers the book as a modern fairy tale suitable for children and finds a resemblance between Mukhopadhyay's novel and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in the Wonderland*. He praises Mukhopadhyay's writing as his novel aims at being entertaining to the child readers rather than imparting moral lessons; Tagore laments that the latter has been the case with the majority of the children's books written in Bangla. Tagore expresses an optimistic hope that Mukhopadhyay's novel would usher in a new kind of children's literature in Bengal. The ones which would be able to match up to the rich variety of the European children's tale. Tagore goes on to offer a substantial comparison between *Kankabati* and *Alice in the Wonderland* and considers the bipartite structure of Mukhopadhyay's novel as aesthetically less sophisticated than the narrative design of Carroll's novel. According to Tagore, the real and the unreal are seamlessly forged in the writing of Carroll, whereas, in Mukhopadhyay's novel, there is an irreconcilable divide between the two. It is significant that Tagore considers Carroll's *Alice in the Wonderland*, not the original *Kankabati* folk tale, as the literary antecedent of the novel *Kankabati*. This consideration is in a way conditioned by the narratorial remarks made in the first chapter of the novel which underscore two aspects—that the target audience of the original tale were children, and the present text is an authored, literary appropriation of that tale. Tagore does not directly allude to

whether Mukhopadhyay derives his literary inspiration from Carroll; however, his usage of Carroll's text as a constant reference point in the criticism of the narrative design of *Kankabati* may trigger a speculation that Tagore might have written this review article with the awareness that Mukhopadhyay was familiar with the body of children's literature written in English and this novel came out three years after Mukhopadhyay's visit to Europe. Tagore finds two major flaws in the narrative design of *Kankabati*—the first, concerning the irreconcilability of its constituent parts and the second, the psychological explanation offered at the end of the novel which attempts to rationalise the realm of fantasy as the dreamscape of its protagonist Kankabati. Tagore opines that the realist impulses of the first part of the novel forcefully clash with the impossibilities of the dreamscape narrated in the second part and derail the entire narrative:

It is as if a story was travelling by a train; suddenly, in the middle of the night, another train from the opposite direction came and hit it before anyone could realise. So, the entire narrative was derailed and died a sudden death. (Tagore 78; my translation)

Thus, according to Tagore, there exists a disjunct between the two sections of the novel and more importantly, the fantastical narrative's appeal to the child readers is undermined in two ways. Firstly, the realist impulse of the first section evokes elements of suspense and pity; the readers become so engrossed in the realist narrative that the transition into the realm of fantasy in the second section seems to be an abrupt jolt. Secondly, the projection of the fantastical as Kankabati's fever induced dream is a narrative failure since the events that take place in the realm of fantasy are not as incoherent as the ones in a dream; unlike the very nature of dreams, Kankabati has a limited agency in her own dream as many events in that dream narrative take place in her absence. For Tagore, an element of rapidly shifting, dream-like incoherence is an integral narrative element of children's tales which he feels has realised its full potential in Lewis Carroll's novel and is found wanting in *Kankabati*. Tagore's assessment posits an important implication that the authorial construct is palpable in the second section to such a degree that the fantastical in *Kankabati* does not seem to originate in the imagination of its child protagonist nor does it seem to evolve from her feverish dream. This implication may prompt us to consider the allegorical overtones presented in the second section of the novel and examine the way the fantastical world of *rupkatha* transforms into the realm of the allegorical and parodic or the world of *rupok-katha* in Mukhopadhyay's novel. The allegorical overtones would also present before us a necessary connection between the two parts of the novel which Tagore has considered as incompatible with each other.

The first part of the novel introduces the readers to the inhabitants of Kusumghati, a village, "nearer to the *banya* provinces than the urban areas" (Mukhopadhyay 6). The second chapter of the novel titled "Kusumghati" comprises a reference to its geographical remoteness from the urban areas as well as its difference from the city Calcutta in terms of its lived experience. The spirits

who inhabit the branches of “*ashasthwa*, *bel* and *bat*,” “witches in the shape of braided-old, women-with chains,” “murderous spooks in the form of innocent-looking stones” in the riverbed, humans transformed into tigers with the aid of a magic root—these are parts of the belief system of Kusumghati; however, such beliefs are ridiculed by the erstwhile inhabitants of the village who have now migrated to the city of Kolkata (Mukhopadhyay 6-7). This chapter draws out a comparison of the contrast between two sets of lived realities, that of the premodern village and the modern city born out of the cross-cultural pollination facilitated by the colonial regime. However, such portrayal of Kusumghati also anticipates the dreamscape of the protagonist Kankabati as described in the second section of the novel. It seems plausible that the fantastical narrative of the second section can manifest itself in the dream of Kankabati whose sociocultural location remains firmly rooted within the domestic sphere of the village household, unlike Khetu, the male protagonist’s, who acquires formal education and migrates to the city in search of a *chakri*. The plot of the first part of the novel revolves around Kankabati’s father Tanu Ray’s attempt to marry her youngest daughter Kankabati off to an aged Brahmin lecher, Janardan Chaudhuri. Tanu Ray intends to fetch a generous amount of money as dowry like the way he did while marrying off Kankabati’s elder sisters. Kankabati’s brother shares the same wish as his father as he knows that being the sole male heir, he will eventually inherit all the wealth his father accumulates. The brother’s incestuous desire of the original tale is thus transformed into a desire for the accumulation of wealth in this reformulated version of the folk tale. The marriage between Kankabati and her beloved Khetu too cannot materialise due to Khetu’s impoverished financial condition.

The accumulation of money or wealth motivates the plot of fantasy weaved in the second section of the novel. We find the most telling references to the relationship between money and social respectability on two occasions in the second section. The first occasion involves Khetu’s visit to Tanu Ray with a great deal of gold and money; the second occasion comprises Khetu’s recapitulation of his hardships while searching for a *chakri* at Kashi and his desperate attempt of saving as much money as he could, once he gets hold of one (Mukhopadhyay 100, 108). On the first occasion, Khetu assumes the form of the tiger, puts Kankabati on her back and pays a visit to the house of Tanu Ray:

The tiger paid his respects to Tanu Ray with a great deal of gold and money. He also presented his brother-in-law a great deal of money, and it was no wonder that the tiger was extremely well received.

[...]

Tanu Ray said: ‘Babaji! Surely you are famished after having traversed such a distance. However, all that we have is some rice and curry, and that is not your food. So, I suggest that you eat up an old cow that is uselessly occupying space in our cowshed. (Mukhopadhyay 100)

Tanu Ray who had earlier been instrumental in banishing Khetu from the village now seems to be awestruck by the re-appearance of Khetu in the shape of a tiger. He is so very content with the gold and the money he has received that the same person, who used to take pride in his Brahminical origins, is now intent on committing a sinful act like offering a cow to appease the tiger. This changed attitude seems to serve as an allegory of a socioeconomic shift from the feudal agrarian economy to the quasi-bourgeois economy that characterises the societal reality of the late nineteenth century Bengal. The first section of the novel is dominated by the affluent *zamindar*-s (landed gentry) like Tanu Ray and Janardan Chaudhuri. They seem to represent the privileged land-owning class whose financial well-being was secured at the onset of the nineteenth century through the implementation of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. In the second section of the novel, Khetu seems to represent the English educated Bengali *bhadralok*, the representative of the native bourgeoisie, a class which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. Unlike the *zamindar*, the *bhadralok* is the prototype of a self-made person whose prosperity is not validated by bloodline but his formal education and *chakri*. Khetu's return in the shape of a tiger, a symbol of hypermasculinity, and Tanu Ray's intention of appeasing the tiger even at the expense of his religious piety can be attributed to the declining social prominence of the land-owning class and the growing predominance of Khetu's newly acquired class identity. Another allegory of the growing prominence of the modern, city-bred *bhadralok* can be traced in the attitude of the members of the Skull, Skeleton and Co. Skull says that he despises the English educated gentlemen like Khetu who "have erased out *devata* (gods) through your [the likes of Khetu] determined scepticism, you conspire to finish off *apadevata* (spirits) in a similar fashion!" (Mukhopadhyay 113). The members of the Skull, Skeleton and Co. are *bhoot*-s or spooks. The Bangla word *bhoot* not only refers to the spooks but also to the past. This dual meaning of the word *bhoot* inaugurates an allegorical reading of the social transition. At the literal level, this suggests that a city-bred individual like Khetu considers the existence of ghosts as fictive constructs of superstition. At the level of an allegory, the disbelief in *bhoot* suggests that the prominence of people like Tanu Ray and Janardan Chaudhuri now belongs to the spirit of a bygone era; their existence is now threatened by the wake of the *bhadralok*-s.

The strain of social allegory seems to be more poignant in the second section of the novel once we come across the most absurd among the non-humans either commenting on the most plausible contemporary social concerns or representing certain aspects of societal reality. I will refer to three such instances wherein the allegorical overtones seem to downplay the absurdity of the fantastical aspects of the tale. In the chapter titled "The Mosquito Lord," the mosquitoes' act of sucking blood assumes the connotation of the oppressive nature of the colonial regime. The mosquito king's boastful assertion and a series of absurd questioning allude to the way the hegemonic rule posits an obligation of accepting one's oppressor as the king:

The mosquito said: ‘Pay attention child! All these men and women you see in the land of Bharat are the property of one or the other mosquito. You [Kankabati] must have escaped your mosquito master’s clutches when you arrived here! ... To which mosquito master do you belong? ... Do his children or kinsfolk share any proprietary rights, where you are concerned? (Mukhopadhyay 136)

In the chapter titled “The Sati,” the witch Nakeshwari puts forward the ideology of the Hindu revivalists concerning the practice of widow immolation:

...remember that this land of Bharatbarsha and its people are shaped and conditioned by their religious customs and beliefs. Here declarations such as ‘I will follow my husband unto death,’ even when uttered unthinkingly, in a fit of despairing sorrow, are taken up literally, and such women are forced to perform the act of *sati*!

[...]

Nakeshwari intervened: ‘While it is true that the Europeans have banned sati, such customs are enjoying a fresh lease of life, and enlightened men nowadays are rooting enthusiastically for the revival of every such obsolete custom. (Mukhopadhyay 162)

Another instance, wherein we find the destabilisation (in the garb of fantasy which suspends the question of veracity) of the binaries of black/white, dark skin/fair skin, Englishman/native is Kankabati’s encounter with *Byang Mashai* in the chapter titled “*Byang Mashai: The Toad*”:

...she suddenly sighted a strangely attired toad, and was quite taken aback by such a creature. The toad wore a hat on his head, and pantaloons from waist onwards, and was dressed up exactly like a European gentleman. In fact, the toad was no longer recognizable as an amphibian creature, and apart from his skin colour (which no amount of scrubbing with soaps was capable of lightening) and lack of shoes (which the toad had not yet been able to buy), he resembled an arrogant *saheb*... (Mukhopadhyay 122)

The parodied representation of the toad here draws the readers’ attention to the interchangeability of identities that develops as an offshoot of the practice of cultural hegemony in the colonial context.

The realm of fantasy which is later attributed to the dream narrative of Kankabati in the concluding chapter of the novel is replete with many such instances of allegorical and parodied versions of social customs and commentaries on the same. It is also significant that the realm of fantasy does not serve to fulfil Kankabati’s wish of reunion with her beloved Khetu. Instead, her dream narrative ends with Kankabati, being unable to bring back Khetu to life, embracing the fate of a *sati*. The union of the lovers rather takes place outside the dream narrative as the domain of the narrative realism is inexplicably transformed once Kankabati wakes up from her delirious state. This conclusion seems to violate the

convention of traditional fairy tales and its fairy tale like quality is further brought under scrutiny once the authorial narrator returns in the epilogue of the novel:

And what came next? Well, we cannot keep repeating ‘what next’ as this book has already assumed considerable girth, and there is no telling who’ll pay for it! So I am forced to end the narrative, right here and now! (Mukhopadhyay 171)

This open-ended conclusion is a further violation of the conventional narrative closure of literary fairy tales. Like the remarks made in the opening chapter of the novel, this too alludes to the constructed nature of the text, the kind of control the authorial narrator is capable of exuding as he suggests that he can abandon this tale at any point he wishes. This remark might take us to another feature of the author-function as suggested by Foucault:

[I]t [author-function] does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects—positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals. (Foucault 113)

Following Foucault’s observation, one may find the workings of “several selves” in the dream narrative of *Kankabati* as the (absurd and fantastical) narrative happens to be as much authored by Kankabati’s delirium as it is authored by the authorial narrator’s allegorical and parodic impulses. As we noted the convergence of three different temporal frames in Bakimchandra’s essay on the history of Bengal earlier in this essay, the allegorical interventions of the authorial narrator in *Kankabati* facilitates a similar convergence of the mythical past (as realised in the acknowledgement that this is a retelling of an oral tale and the fairy tale like qualities of the literary tale), the national/precolonial past (as expressed in the desire to purge the original tale of its indecent aspects) and the present (realised in the allegorical and parodic impulse of the authorial narrator). These transpositions facilitate the creation of a ludic narrative space which makes a back and forth movement between narrative realism (as articulated in its historicising the ever-changing societal reality of the colonial world) and the absurdity of fantastical realism (the adoption of the task of transforming a folk tale into a literary tale of fantasy). This ludic narrative space makes the parodic and allegorical interventions of the authorial narrator possible; but the garb of fantasy removes the polemical edge from the parodied representation. Thus, the conflation of different temporalities in the ludic narrative space renders the allegorical and the parodied representations as postmodern pastiches which do not aim at generating the “general effect of parody,” that is, to “cast ridicule”; but their employment involves “the wearing of a stylistic mask” which facilitates the neutral practice of such [parodic] mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive” (Jameson 4-5). The self-reflexive narrative strategies of Mukhopadhyay’s novel thus resist its categorisation as a fantastical fairy tale or a social satire (like the

contemporary prose *naksha*-s and the dramatic *prahasan*-s). The novel emerges as a postmodern “historiographical metafiction” which is “intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Hutcheon 5). The reasons for the parodies being devoid of their satirical edge and the impossibility of having an answer to the question relating to the future course of events are the same—the novel aims at capturing the elusive nature of the phantasmagoria of a colonial society whose ever-shifting codes render the familiar as the fantastical.

Notes

¹All excerpts from Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay’s *Kankabati* are from Nandini Bhattacharya’s translation of the novel. All quotations from other Bengali texts are in my translation.

Works Cited

- Chatterjee, Partha. “Whose Imagined Community?” *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton UP, 1993, pp. 3–13.
- Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra. “Bangala-r Itihas Sambandhe Koyekti Katha.” *Bankim Rachanabali*, vol. 2, Sahitya Samsad, 1955, pp. 336–40.
- Foucault, Michel. “What Is an Author?” *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 101–20.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, 1988.
- Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1993*, Verso, 1998, pp. 1–20.
- Mukhopadhyay, Trailokyanath. *Kankabati*. Translated by Nandini Bhattacharya, Primus, 2016.
- Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. Oxford UP, 2005.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. “Rabindranath-krito Kankabati-r Samalochona.” *Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay-er Kankabati*, edited by Bijanbihari Bhattacharya, Oriental Book Company, 1961, pp. 77–80.
- Zipes, Jack. *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*. The UP of Kentucky, 1979.