THE 'SWADESHI JINISH' FROM THE 'DIDIMA COMPANY':

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN *THAKURMAR JHULI* BY

DAKSHINARANJAN MITRA MAJUMDER AND NATIONALISM IN BENGAL IN

THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract

This thesis provides a critical analysis of the Bengali folktale collection *Thakurmar Jhuli (1907)* by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder linking it to the prevalent notion of Bengal folklore and Bengali nation of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. I focus on the ways in which the dominant scholarly and political ideologies of the time shaped the choice of tales in the collection. In particular, this study analyzes Majumder's writing in its historical context by drawing upon Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism and Herder's concept of romantic nationalism. Moreover, I discuss the content of this collection adopting Sadhana Naithani's idea of "prefaced space" and Maurice Bloomfield's "Hindu motif" to discuss the connection between Bengal folklore and nationalism of the time. Taking a folkloric approach of analyzing the content and context of the collection, I demonstrate that this collection by Majumder introduced a Bengali folktale genre named "rupkatha" against the colonial genre of folktales and fairy tales. In so doing, he also assumed a power position where he made representational choices in including and excluding the religious, linguistic and cultural elements of the people of Bengal. Finally, demonstrating examples from other Bengali folklore genres, the thesis asserts the importance of addressing the absence of Islamic elements in Majumder's collection, and the investigation of different versions of rupkatha to create a more complete sense of the genre.

Key Words: Rupkatha, Nationalism, Romantic Nationalism, Representational Choice, Prefaced Space, Hindu Motif, Absence of Islamic Elements.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

My childhood, like all Bangladeshi children of the 1990s, started with Bengali folktales and rhymes. In the absence of any distractions of the twenty-first century like social media and the World Wide Web, Bangladeshi children learned about these rhymes at the same time they learned to speak. My mother sang[1] the *ghumparani chora* (lullaby), "Ghumparani masi-pisi, moder bari eso / khat nai palong nai, khokar chokhe boso"[2] to my younger brothers when they were toddlers at bedtime. She sang the same for me when I was a toddler. For me, the stories that my Naani (maternal grandmother) narrated are the fondest memories of my childhood. For someone who could not read or write, her tales were masterful performances that transported me to the wonderful lands of mystic creatures, beautiful princesses and magic. I was not aware in my childhood that these were called the Bengali *rupkatha*[3]. Naani called them *Kissa*, and they kept me awake for hours into the night. Even after I started school and read many fairytales of the world, I waited for Naani to visit us. She would come to our small-town house with the seasonal delicacies she had made or grown in her village garden- mangoes and jackfruits in summer, Chitoi and Bhaapa pitha (traditional sweet dishes made with rice flour, jaggery, coconut and

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[1] Bengal folk rhymes performances become songlike with patterns of pitch, intonation, stress and pause. Majumder's folktale collection incorporated several Bengali rhymes within the folktale narrative to replicate the oral storytelling style on the written pages.

[2] See for more on this Bengali folk rhyme, Syed Mohammad Shahed. "Bengali Folk Rhymes: An Introduction". *Asian Folklore* Studies, 52, no. 1, (1993):149.

[3] Rupkatha is a term that was introduced by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder for the Bengali folktale genre. His folktale collection, *Thakurmar Jhuli* had a definitive subtitle "Banglar Rupkatha". Starting from there this genre is now known as rupkatha in Bengali culture. In the later part of my thesis, I discuss Majumder's purpose for using a Bengali term to identify Bengali folktales. It is also noteworthy that in the different Bengali translations of folktales from other countries this word is used as translational equivalent of "folktale" or "fairytale".

milk) in winter. For me and my younger brother, the main attraction was her Kissa. Wrapping her in our arms from both sides, lying in bed at night, we demanded, "Naani, tell us a Kissa." and she started, "এক দেশে ছিল এক রাজা।" "Ek deshe chilo ek raja" (There was a king in a land.). We never stopped at one and would keep asking, "Tell another," and she told another. Naani had large repertoire of tales. Those tales had both ordinary and marvelous characters and creatures in them. Some tales were about some faraway land of the kings, queens and their many princes and princesses. The other tales had the ordinary peoples from village. Birds and dogs could speak, and a snake lived in the belly of a princess. One of the stories had a *bhoot* (ghost) who stole and ate all the *poa pitha* (one kind of deep fried sweet made of rice flour and jaggery) made by the peasant's wife. In another story there was a mother and her dimwit son who did all the ridiculous activities at his in-laws' house. So, when I first read the rupkatha books of the different writers like Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder and Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury[4] I found many similarities with my grandmother's tales. Though none of the Kissa my Naani told was same as the tales in the books, I could find many familiar themes, characters and motifs in those books.

Folklore as a cultural object and a field of study has served various nationalist needs of different nations of the world. Folklore collections and nationalism both give prominence to the people and "the field of folklore studies has, since its incipience, been bound up in questions of nationalism" (Gordon 2021, 12). The term "folk-lore," is different in meaning from the French-inspired term "popular antiquities," and was coined[5] by William Thoms in 1846 to introduce an

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[4] Chowdhury published a book titled *Toontoonir Boi (The Book of Toontooni)* (1910) containing animal stories that he collected from his relatives and villagers of Mymensingh district.

[5] The usage of the word can be found in Old English usages in the form of the Anglo-Saxon compound noun folclār. Mazo (1996) says "Thoms's article was not the first appearance of the word in the English language. The question remains as to whether Thoms appropriated the Anglo-Saxon word or whether he did in fact independently coin the term. Here we can only speculate. On the one hand, Thoms certainly had some familiarity with Anglo-Saxon texts…On the other hand, he did not, insofar as I am

English word for the study of England's "old manners, customs, and popular superstition, before they had been all swept away." (Thoms 1876, 42, cited in Emrich 1946, 360). Thoms defended the word as an English word ("a good Saxon compound") which was not borrowed from Latinate origin, and was "original with him" (Emrich 1946, 372). This proves that this worldwide accepted word was introduced as a means for identifying the investigation of the national folklore of England. The name spread and the representations of the orally transmitted folklore in the form of written and published collections served many nationalistic purposes for many countries of the world. While it was used by some nations to subjugate others, it also empowered many subjugated nations to claim their cultural individuality. Nationalism is an idea and a movement that started at the end of eighteenth century to promote the common shared history of a group of people and its aspects of distinctiveness. While nationalism emphasizes the idea that the people should rule the state, folklore reveals the common origin of the culture, tradition, and belief of the people that makes them worthy to rule.

Rupkatha was, some argued, the outcome of the intellectual current in Bengal of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Publishing rupkatha collections became "a political act aimed at challenging the hegemony of the British colonial education system and its impact upon the children of the literate classes… shaped by the intellectual, cultural and political forces of the time and its milieu" (Chakraborty 2020, 15). By the end of the nineteenth century, the urban educated class of Calcuttta started to "question the viability of applying western categories to assess the merit of Bengali literature and culture … [and emphasized bringing back] all that was

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aware, work with any Old English material; Furthermore, the texts in which the term folclār appears are relatively obscure and no editions were published before 1846. Thus it appears that, although Thoms cannot be said to have introduced the word folklore into the English language, he can still be credited with coining the term (if not for the first time);" (107-108). See more in, Jeffery Alan Mazo, "A Good Saxon Compound", Folklore 107, no.1-2 (1996): 107-108.

'traditional' and 'authentic' in [Bengali] society" (Ghosh 2000, 153-154). This was a shift from the Bengali literati's previous attitude towards the language and practices of the common people of Bengal. The language and culture that was considered by the intelligentsia before as "obscene," "vulgar," and "womanly" was redefined as the "national" language and culture by the same group (ibid, 152). Rupkatha became the proof of "authentic cultural heritage," "national literature," and "women['s] voice as the representative of the voice of tradition"[6] (ibid) of Bengal for the educated class. The orally transmitted tales from rural Bengal were transformed into the national folktale tradition of Bengal in the rupkatha collections of the early twentieth century.

In dialogue with such assertions, I engage in an analysis of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder's Bengali folktale collection named *Thakurmar Jhuli* (1907) to enter into the commentary on nationalism and folkloristics. *Thakurmar Jhuli* is the most prominent title in the list of Bengali folktale collections. Since its first publication, it has become a household name in Bengali society. Besides its folkloric value, this collection is also valuable for its connection to an important political moment in the history of colonized Bengal. This collection that documents Bengali folktales called rupkatha in the language of the people of Bengal, Bangla bhasha or the Bengali language, is also an embodiment of the anti-colonial and nationalistic ideologies of an early twentieth century political movement called Swadeshi Andolan.[7]

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[6] Sudarshana Sen (2019) discusses how the female storyteller's voice is overpowered by the male collector's "maleness" or male perspective of the appropriate gender roles expressed through the tales in Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli*. The Grandmother in these stories plays the role of a teacher and a patriarchal agent inside the household who teaches the young children their expected gender roles in Bengali society through these tales. This aligns with my argument that it is the Bengali literati who is establishing their ideologies through these tales claiming them to be a traditional cultural element of the Bengali society.

[7] "Swadeshi" is translated as "indigineous", "of one's own country," and "Andolan" means "movement" or "protest".

Majumder, being the first to introduce the rupkatha genre to the educated readers of Bengal, played the most important role in Bengali nationalist folktale genre creation. Majumder became famous for publishing fourteen tales that he recorded from oral performances by different inhabitants of Mymensingh, a district of the province named Bengal in his *Thakurmar Jhuli*. The stories presented both mundane and marvelous in them. These tales documented Bengali rural life, folk beliefs and rituals, and colloquial language in course of narrating the marvelous adventures, fantastic occurrences, comical incidents and animal fables, which were unknown to or looked down upon by most of the Bengali educated people of the time. It is significant to mention, Majumder became interested in publishing rural folktales under the influence of the contemporary scholarly tendency of finding authentic Bengali cultural specimen to construct Bengali national identity. Though Bengali collectors had been publishing Bengal folklore since the early nineteenth century, their motive behind colleting folklore started to take a nationalist turn during late nineteenth century. Majumder published rupkatha stories at the time of an early twentieth century political movement happening in the British colonial province of Bengal, Swadeshi Movement. The main agenda of the movement was to oppose the British colonial decision of dividing Bengal administratively. This movement influenced some nationalist thinkers, and they felt that folklore was the best example of how the people of Bengal were more alike than different, and emphasized that more Bengal folklore should be collected to unite all Bengalis against the colonial decision of division. It is no wonder that, these tales became important to the prominent nationalist writers and folklore collectors like Rabindranath Tagore and D.C. Sen, who were trying to increase interest and love for Bengal's own culture and tradition among the educated Bengalis of the time to create a sense of national unity. Majumder gave the swadeshi enthusiasts resources to have a strong claim on national identity based on

shared cultural heritage with these tales. On the other hand, a closer look into the editorial choices that Majumder made regarding the language, themes and motifs of the tales shows how he was influenced by the ideological biases of the same swadeshi scholars.

Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli* has been of interest for different scholars from different disciplines. Some approach it as a literary text, discussing its symbolic and structural value using different literary theories, whereas others discuss it in relation to the broader historiography of Bengali children's literature. Their discussion ranges from the presence of ancient Indian Myth (Niyogi 2016, 22) in the tales, its significance in constructing the genre of Bengali children's literature (Gangopadhyay, 2013) to criticizing the Bengali scholars' treatment of this collection as juvenile literature, and undermining its folkloric value (Flora 2002, 24). Some call it a "book written from a male perspective through a supposedly female voice" (Sen 2019, 80) to socialize the Bengali child into the norms of Bengal society. In these different discussions, the scholars discuss the transformation of oral tales into written literary tales with a purpose of reconstructing, representing and reorienting national tradition to fulfil a broader socio-political nationalist and anti-colonial goal directly or indirectly. Debosmita Paul's (2015) analysis of the collection is particularly important for my thesis. She called the collection a "looking glass" of the nationalist and anti-colonial ideologies of the Swadeshi movement that also carried "the flaws inherent in the movement" (153-154). She argued that this collection was Majumder's production of Bengali children's folktales derived from an indigenous source, but the tales also represented the gender and class/caste biases of the Hindu upper class. Topics like the production of rupkatha as a literary genre using oral folktales, conceptualization of a Bengali imagined nation and the different biases of the Hindu dominating class hidden in the tales are touched on by Paul which I will investigate closely in my research. Though Paul mentioned the "flaws" of the Swadeshi

ideology and its reflection in *Thakurmar Jhuli* (1907), she did not elaborate on these flaws, which I will argue using the historical context and the content of the collection. The concept of "bhadralok bias" against the Muslim versions of Bengali folktales is discussed by Giuseppe Flora (2002) in his analysis of the impact of social contexts on the early twentieth century Bengali folkloristics. Here, Flora discussed the flaw in details with reference to the historical contexts but kept the content of the collection out of analysis.

In my research, I look at Bengal nationalism of early twentieth century from a folkloric point of view to bridge the gaps between content and context in the current scholarship. I base the argument on Benedict Anderson's (2006 [1983]) theory of nationalism and Herder's romantic nationalism. I discuss the historical context of the folktale collection to analyze how the political ideologies of the dominant classes influenced the depiction of Bengali nation and national folklore. I also want to extend my investigation into the suppressed voices in the conception of indigenous Bengali folktale. As my approach is folkloric, I look closely at the tales in the collection and the recurrent motifs in these tales using Maurice Bloomfield's articles on Hindu literary, religious and cultural motifs. I also make use of Sadhana Naithani's (2001) concept of "prefaced space" in order to situate the collection in relation to the collector, and other dominant scholars' opinions about the importance of the collection for Bengali nationalism.

I discuss the folktale collection *Thakurmar Jhuli* in the context of Swadeshi Andolan, the nationalist movement of 1906. The socio-political context is critical to my study of the collection, its importance in developing the rupkatha genre, and the perception of a national folktale. Folklore study in Bengal gained prominence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Different folklore genres were explored by the British colonial officers and educated Bengali scholars. To discuss the development of Bengal folkloristics requires the

inclusion of political, cultural, and religious factors. Starting as a colonial project of knowing the colonized people, and representing a version of the people and culture of the colonized Bengal, folklore in Bengal served various needs of the different times of different collections. I begin by discussing the social, political, and cultural changes due to the British colonization of Bengal from the eighteenth to early nineteenth century. I aim to present a picture of the various changes that Bengal society went through because of the intervention of the British colonial government in Bengal politics. Understanding the changes in social class structure, and the new educated class's involvement in the "Anglicization" and "nationalism" of Bengal is necessary to understand the development of rupkatha as a Bengali indigenous folktale genre. Next, I discuss Majumder's rupkatha collection with Benedict Anderson's definition of nation, considering the Swadeshi Andolan context. I also analyze the collection from the notion of romantic nationalist folkloristics to discuss how Majumder contributed to the swadeshi need for creating a common tradition of the Bengali "folk" who could become a nation in their own right. It is important to consider these historical aspects that informed the ideologies of the collector, Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder, and identify the contradictions and biases prevalent in his representation of Bengali rupkatha. In the next chapter, I analyze the several Hindu motifs that are found in the tales in this collection using Maurice Bloomfield's work (1914-1923) on Hindu religious and fictional motifs. Using Bloomfield's Hindu motifs as intertextual references, I discuss how the tales in this collection have mainly Hindu religious and cultural motifs. I also discuss the coexistence and assimilation of Hindu and Muslim religious elements in some of the other folklore forms of Bengal in order to elucidate how Majumder's collection omitted Islamic or secular elements from his representation of Bengali folktale through content analysis. To reach this end, I make a comparative discussion of this collection with a Bengali folk ballad collection,

Eastern Bengal Ballads Mymensing (1923) by D.C. Sen, collected from the same geographical area of Bengal from which the tales in Majumder's collection were collected from to investigate how the two collections treated Hindu-Muslim religious influences on Bengal folklore differently. As I will demonstrate, the nationalist ideology of the Swadeshi movement in the early twentieth-century shaped Majumder's editorial choices in Thakurmar Jhuli. I will also attempt to picture how the Muslim and Hindu versions of the same tale from Majumder's collection would look by analyzing two Bengali films from Bangladesh and India that were based on the tales in this collection.

Chapter 2

The History of Folklore in Bengal: 1757-1906

Folklore as a vehicle for carrying authentic Bengali tradition and culture through time immemorial became popular in Bengal during the British colonial time. The historical development of colonialism and nationalism in Bengal contributed to the popularity of folklore collections and translation. Majumder's collection of Bengal folktales underlies the nationalist philosophy of the 1906 nationalist movement named Swadeshi Andolan. This movement was not the first instance where folklore became a tool for fulfilling broader socio-political purposes in British Bengal. When British colonial power started to spread in Bengal during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the study of the literature, culture, tradition, belief, and language became popular among the colonial officers and missionaries as a means for colonizing the people better. Colonial administrators and missionaries published English books, both translations from existing literary books and English textual representation of materials collected from orally transmitted sources that contained resources about the Bengali culture, tradition, religion, belief, language and society, in order to represent Bengal society and Bengali people to the English readers residing in England. By the end of the nineteenth century, a number of Bengali scholars started to get involved in this practice of collecting oral traditions following the footsteps of the colonial collectors. Like the British collectors' works, they also aimed at presenting Bengal oral lore to the English audience in the English language. Influenced by the changing political atmosphere of the early twentieth century, the native collectors' concentration switched from the English audience to the Bengali educated readers. In this chapter, I will discuss some of the significant historical events in colonized Bengal that contributed to the Bengal folklore activities and used Bengal folklore to meet other political goals. Agreeing with

Sadhana Naithani that "the history of folkloristics in … colonized countries must begin in the colonial past" (2010, 3), I will begin this chapter with a historical account of the colonial invasion of Bengal happening after the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the subsequent political, social and cultural changes. I will discuss how the different administrative policies of the British colonizer transformed the class structure of Bengal society and what role the colonial officers and English missionaries played in this transformation process. Next, I will direct the discussion towards the political changes of late nineteenth century and the emergence of the "bhadralok" class out of the British colonizers' Anglicization process in Bengal. In the last part of my discussion in this chapter, I focus on the "Swadeshi Andolan" or the own country movement and its influence on the ideologies of the bhadralok scholars of the early twentieth century. My study of the colonial history and the history of Bengal folkloristics is aimed at discovering the different motivations behind the folklore activities influenced by the political changes at the different points of time in colonial Bengal up to the publication of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder's folktale collection *Thakurmar Jhuli* in 1907.

2.1 Battle of Plassey and the Socio-Political Changes after 1757

British colonial power entered India through Bengal after the battle of Plassey in 1757 between East India Company and the Nawab of Bengal[8], Siraj-Ud-Daula. At the outset of their scheme to dethrone Siraj, the British had no plan to control the Bengal government. The Company's initial purpose in the Battle of Plassey was to remove Siraj-Ud-Daula to attain financial benefit and eliminate trading competitions like the French and Dutch from Bengal.

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[8] The Nawab of Bengal was the hereditary ruler of the Bengal Subah comprising the regions Bengal, Bihar and Orissa under the Mughal rule at the beginning of eighteenth century. Though the Nawabs paid revenues to the Mughal emperor in Delhi, these Nawabs were independent rulers with their own administrative systems. Unlike the previous Subahdars, the Nawab settled down in Bengal and the ruling powers were handed down in the family. Murshid Quli khan became the first Nawab of Bengal.

Foreign and domestic trade flourished during the rule of the Bengal Nawabs. The Bengal

Nawabs encouraged freedom of trade giving opportunities to all foreign traders to do business in

Bengal. At the same time they did not allow these European traders to have any military power in

Bengal as they were aware of the French and British intervention in the political disputes of

Hyderabad and Arcot (Stein 2010, 202). During the reign of Alivardi Khan (1740-1756), the

British were allowed to trade in Bengal for the first time but were denied their own army and

fortification like they had in other parts of India. As his successor, Siraj continued this

prohibition and took strict measures when the British and French both started to build forts in

Calcutta. The French traders complied with his order to stop fortification, but the British

continued building Fort William in Calcutta. As a result, the British fort in Calcutta was captured

by Siraj-Ud-Daula in 1756. Siraj also insisted that the British had misused the 1717 "farman"[9]

given to them and defrauded the state of a crore[10] and a half rupees of tax money (Sinha 1967a,

9) which he wanted to recover. Moreover, Mir Jafar, the commander of the Nawab's force who

betrayed Siraj in the battle of Plassey, and became the Nawab of Bengal after him, promised the

British property rights and wealth from Nawab's treasury in exchange of their help to dethrone

Siraj. He also promised the existing French settlements and factories to the Company (ibid, 22).

So, the battle of Plassey was financially very beneficial for the Company. Their inland private

trade grew and they eliminated their European rivals in trade after 1757. With the increased

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[9] Emperor Farrukh Siyar granted the English East India company permission to trade duty free in Bengal paying only Rs. 3000/-. With this "farman" the company got passes or "dastak" for duty free movement of their merchandise. But the company employees misused these passes and used those for their personal businesses.

[10] Crore or Koti is a widely used counting system used in the south Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It denotes ten million and is written as 1, 00, 00,000 in these countries.

wealth and military power the British squashed the French dream of an "Inde française" or a

French India by winning the battle of Wandiwash in 1760 (Kulke and Rothermund 1998, 215).

Slowly the governing power of the Bengal Nawabs was taken over by the Company. The

Muslim Nawabs between the years 1757 and 1772 became Nawabs in name only and a "Double

Government" controlled Bengal's administration and economic policies from 1765 to 1772

(Sinha 1967b, 81). Under this system, the Company obtained the Dewani[11] while the Nawab

owned the administration or Nizamat. But in reality the Nawab could not operate independently

and the Company indirectly controlled the jurisdiction. With the expansion of colonial power out

of Bengal into other parts of India during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the

upper class Muslims lost their positions in civil departments and military as the "Company

acquired zemindery rights, monopolized revenue, assumed civil control and excluded all

Muhmedans [Muslims] from responsible posts by destroying their military, educational and

financial supremacy" (Siddique 1966, 9). The Company's new administrative policies made

Muslims jobless and powerless. English civil servants replaced the Muslim revenue collectors

and the Muslim soldiers lost their jobs from the military under the new Company troop.

Moreover, due to the new lease-farming system[12]imposed by the East India Company in 1772

and the Permanent Settlement Act[13] of 1793 many Muslim landlords lost their ruling powers. On

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[11] The right to collect revenue from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

[12] Warren Hastings, the Governor of Bengal, made a policy of leasing the land to the highest bidder that lasted from 1772 to 1786. In an auction anyone who promised the largest amount of revenue could lease land for 5 years. Before the Company rule, Zeminders and Talukders collected land revenues for the Nawabs and also took care of the peasants in their zemindaris. Under the new policy collecting more revenue became the most important concern for the landowners and they tried to collect as much as possible using any means they deemed necessary.

[13] Lord Cornwallis introduced this act in 1793 after Hastings' policy failed. Under this new act, Zeminders were given ownership of their lands and the power to sell, transfer and succession at the condition that that would pay a fixed revenue at a said date before the sunset. Many Muslim landlord lost their lands as they failed to pay revenue intime.

the other hand, a Hindu businessman class replaced the old Muslim landlords and became zeminders by paying the Company (ibid, 14). Zeminder or Zamindar was the hereditary landlord of the estates known as Zemindari, Zemindery or Zamindari of Bengal under the reign of the Nawabs of Bengal. During the Company rule this hereditary Zamindari system was threatened causing major changes in the administrative system as well as the social structure of Bengal. Though the zemindaris in Bengal were owned by both Hindu and Muslim Zeminders, mostly the Muslim Zeminders suffered due to the Company's new policies (Khan 2013, 63). The Company's rule created drastic change in the local industries. With the imposed import and consumption of Manchester goods the flourishing weaving industry[14] of Bengal got destroyed entirely. Consequently, the British colonization completely broke down the political and economic structure of the country.

In the next phase of their colonial expansion, the Company rulers changed the official language and education policy of Bengal. Before the 1757 war, the education system of Bengal included vernacular educational institutions like tols and madrasas. Only students from upper castes of Hindus like Brahmins and Vaidyas were allowed in the tols (Sinha 1967a, 21). Hindu lower castes were not allowed in these educational institutions. Madrasa education was made available to the Hindu students during the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar. Madrasa curriculum included both religious subjects as well as history, mathematics, geography, algebra, astronomy, chemistry, medical science etc. Three languages were taught—Arabic, Persian and Bengali as these three languages had practical uses in pre-colonial Bengal (Khan 2013, 54). The mission of "educating [the] young Bengal… English with [a] special emphasis on European literature and

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[14] Cotton and silk weaving built the Bengal economy before colonial intervention. Different districts of Bengal had different distinct kinds of cloth that the weavers learned to make as family tradition for generations.

science" (Siddiqui1966, 22) was initiated by the British colonizer in the nineteenth century. English replaced Persian, a language that had been the official language for a long time and the language in which the Muslim rulers and upper class were proficient. Moreover, English education became a mandatory qualification to enter into government services (ibid). The government jobs snatched from the Muslim civil servants and given to Englishmen from England were made open to the Bengali people who learned English in the nineteenth century.

Educating the Bengali people in English language was also important for the Christian missionaries of Britain operating in Bengal to convert more Bengali people to Christianity. Bengal was not oblivious to the religious doctrines of Christianity as it was introduced by the Portuguese merchants to the Bengali people during the sixteenth century. There were nearly 50,000 native Catholics in Bengal during the late seventeenth century (Siddique 1966, 29). It was not until 1800 that English missionaries started operating in Bengal in an organized manner. The Serampore Baptist Mission, established by William Carey, Josua Marshman, William Ward and others in 1800 (ibid, 30) was the first missionary institution in Bengal. In contrast to the East India Company's business minded exploitation of the people, the missionaries' approach was of understanding the people to have effective preaching.

The study of Indian art, language and literature started getting British attention during Warren Hastings time as the first governor general of Bengal[15]. His appointment marks an important transitional point in the history of both Bengal politics and folkloristics. Up to this point, the Company controlled the civil affairs of Bengal indirectly, keeping the Nawab in the front. Many young Englishmen came to India in search of great wealth after 1757. These young officials exploited Bengal people to earn more profits which eventually became a topic of debate

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[15] Hastings became the governor of Bengal in 1772.

in British parliament. British parliament intervened in the Company affairs by making Hastings, a Company employee serving in Bengal for fifteen years, the governor general of Bengal in 1773 in order to stop the oppression conducted by the officials. The Company's dominance started to diminish, and the British parliament became more active in the affairs of Bengal administration from this point on. Moreover, Hastings discarded the Mughal governmental system and replaced it with British policies that benefitted mostly the Company officials and their Bengali managers. Learning the language and culture of Bengal also got attention of the English administrators. Language was a barrier for them and was one of the reasons why the Company employees failed to create any meaningful communication with the people. Considering this as a reason for the exploitative behavior of the Company officers towards the people of Bengal, Hastings expressed that,

> accumulation of knowledge…obtained by social communication with the people over whom we exercise dominion founded on the right of conquest…imprints on the hearts of our countrymen the sense of obligation and benevolence… [and] a sense of feeling for their natural rights and teach us to estimate them by the measure of our own. But such instances can only be found in their writings. (cited in Cohn 1996, 45)

With this belief Hastings established a Madrasa in Calcutta in a hope that it would "preserve and further knowledge, provide training for future law officers of the Company" (Cohn 1996, 46). So, gathering knowledge from the existing Bengali literature and presenting the knowledge of the languages and culture of the people before the British people started gaining importance. *The Asiatic Society of Bengal* was formed in 1784 by a Supreme Court Judge, William Jones, with the goal of gathering knowledge about Bengali people and culture. The society published a journal named *Asiatic Research.* This society aimed at studying the literature, culture and traditions of India and making those available in English as a means for the Company employees to learn about the places and people they were to interact with when in office in Bengal. Surveys of the territories and making of geological maps of Bengal started during the late eighteenth

century with the same goal. On the other hand, the missionaries started to translate Bengali texts, compose and publish the grammar of Bengali language, compose a dictionary of Bengali language, translate the Hindu and Muslim religious books and collect and translate the folklore of Bengal to understand the structure of the Bengal society (Siddiqui 1966, 31-35, 49). The Serampore Mission established a printing press which helped the missionaries to preach Christianity as well as make the Bengali language and literature accessible to the British government officials. Missionaries like William Carey and William Yeats published books on Bengali language in which they made use of Bengali legends, oral tales and fables as specimens of the Bengali language. It is from this press the first Bengali newspapers Dig-durshan (1818) and Somachar Darpan (1818-1821) were published. These initiatives of the missionaries helped the British purpose of gathering knowledge of the Bengali people and culture to establish British rule. Many new educational institutions were established by missionaries during the 1830s, which contributed to spreading western philosophies and education among the Bengali people.

The Company's new initiative of spreading English education through new schools, colleges, and universities and making it essential for Bengali people through creating work opportunities during the nineteenth century got very different reactions from the two major religious groups of Bengal. Bengal Muslims refrained from English education and focused more on Islamic revivalism. On the other hand, Hindus embraced European education and got appointed to various positions under the Company officials. That created a marked difference in the social status of the Muslim and Hindu communities during the British colonial time.

2.2 Bengal Folklore in the Nineteenth Century

British publications containing Bengali folklore elements can be traced back to the works of the *Asiatic Society of Bengal*, but those were not conscious folklore activities as the society aimed at literary translation of Sanskrit texts into English, making Bengali language accessible to

the English readers. Ethnographic field work or documenting folklore from primary oral sources was not practiced, but these works of translation contained many items of Bengal folklore. From 1784 to 1800, the works of this society included translating the classic Sanskrit stories, music, fables and proverbs into English, composing books on Bengali grammar and vocabulary in English, and conducting geological surveys of India. The translators were aiming to create a medium through which the language barrier between the British colonizer and the colonized could be overcome. They expected that the Company officers will have better attitude towards the Bengali people once they learn about more about them. The years 1800-1857comprise the formative phase of colonial Bengali folkloristics. The characteristics of the folkloric works during this period, as discussed by Ashraf Siddiqui (1966) were, "(1) Casual ethnographic information regarding customs and manners; (2) translations of religious books; (3) travelers' accounts; and (4) casual folklore collections" (54). Continuing the practice of the previous decade, missionaries and British officers translated works of a number of Bengali writers during this time. Translation of the Sanskrit texts into English was also encouraged during this period. The central focus of both the British and Bengali translators was on the Sanskrit and Hindu religion, customs and traditions. Very few works were done on the Indian Muslims that mostly described the elite Muslims living in urban areas in different parts of India (ibid, 58). Besides these some travel narratives by some European and American writers also recorded the life, festivals, customs and religious practices of the time. Overall, the Bengal folklore activities of the Company period were focused on representing Bengal to the British audience in the way the British administrators and missionaries wished them to be seen. Many Bengali scholars and Company employees helped them in their translation work.

Bengali Mushis or Pandits helped the missionaries and government officials in collecting, and translating Hindu literary, religious and folklore materials which were published as books on

Bengali culture, language and tradition. William Carey composed textbooks for the Fort William College[16] during his service there as a professor of Bengali and Sanskrit from 1801-1831. Some of the Bengali writers who helped him to compile the textbooks are Ram Ram Basu, Mritynjoy Vidyalankar, Rajib Lochan Mukherjee, Goloknath Sharma, Tarini Charan Mitra, Chandi Charan Munshi, Ram Kishore Tarka-Chundamani, Probodh Chandrika and Hara Prosad Roy. Carey introduced Bengali oral tales to the newly recruited British civil servants using these Bengali intermediaries' works on Bengali Folklore. Following on Carey's footsteps, J.D. Pearson, a government official, Graves Champney Haughton, a Military Cadet Officer in East India Company, and William Yeats, another British missionary in Calcutta, used this folklore to compose books on Bengali language, grammar and stories.

Apart from the practical reason of knowing the languages of the colonized people to improve colonial administration, there were more important political reasons for British interest in Bengali folklore. The Sepoy Revolt[17] of 1857 played a vital role in increasing the colonia enthusiasm for folklore collection in Bengal. By the 1820s The East India Company established dominance over entire Indian politics and commerce. A large number of Indian soldiers were appointed in the British military who "won India for [the Company]" (Stein 2010, 220). Before the 1857 uprising there had been frequent armed resistances against the British colonial rule at different point of time which were always handled by the Company using these Indian sepoys. Several religious and political changes made by the British rule caused these uprisings. Disgruntled by the many changes brought by the colonizer in their attempt to "Anglicize" the Bengali people "to make them faithful replicas of their British rulers in every respect other than

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[16] Fort William College was established in Calcutta to teach native languages of the colony to the newly recruited British civil servants by the then Governor General of Bengal Lord Wellesly in 1800.

[17] The British called it "mutiny" whereas the Bengali scholars with nationalist agenda refers to the uprising as the "First Indian War of Independence".

blood," (Kulke and Rothermund 1988, 234) a large number of Bengali sepoys in the Bengal army set out to take the Company's ruling power away from them and reinstate the older ruling powers. These soldiers and some unhappy "landlords and peasants, and some disinherited princes," whose ruling territories were taken away from them and put under the direct British rule (Stein 2010, 222; Kulke and Rothermund 1988, 236), started the rebellion. The immediate cause of this rebellion was the introduction of a new cartridge greased with animal fat. These cartridges had to be cut open by teeth and word spread that the fat on them was from beef and pork, taboo animals for Hindus and Muslims. Soldiers got agitated by the rumor that the British were doing it intentionally to condemn them to convert to Christianity. Moreover, these soldiers were treated as "menial servants" by the British officers. All these factors collectively caused the resistance that surprised the British colonizers and changed the colonial policy of governance in India. After the territories occupied by the "mutineer" army were recovered, the Crown took over India from the East India Company and India came under the Victorian monarchy.

The colonial government under the Crown urged the British officials to make ethnological studies in their respective areas of administration to understand the native society accurately. Before 1857 folklore collections were very few in number and were mostly written down and translated in order to familiarize the English administrators and missionaries to the language and traditions of the people they were being trained to govern and convert. The British government used the lessons from the Sepoy Revolution, and insisted that the government officers needed to sincerely understand the people of Bengal by mixing with them and gaining their confidence. To meet this end, the new recruits in civil services were taught anthropology and history along with other subjects at English universities in place of the Haileybury training college for the civil servants. Respecting the religion and tradition of the Bengali people and getting in close contact with them was the new motto (Siddiqui 1966, 26). Starting from 1858

more ethnographic data and amateur folklore collections that lacked footnotes, annotations, references and indexes were done (ibid, 52) by them. These were more scholastic compared to the previous works of the officers and missionaries because these gave vivid descriptions of the customs, beliefs, superstitions and religious festivals. There were many administrative documents and ethnological and anthropological works on the different small indigenous groups of Bengal like Santal, Chakma, Tipparah, Lhoosai, Kooki, Khamti, Abor, Naga, Khasi, Garo, Kachari, Kotch, Bhutia, Bhuiya, Munda, Ho, Birhor, Oran and Gondo (ibid, 63-65). Many journals like *Indian Antiquary, The Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, North Indian Notes and Queries, The Imperial Gazetteers, The District Gazetteers, Journal and Proceedings of Asiatic Society of Bengal* and *Man in India* as well as some non-Indian journals like *Folk-Lore, Journal of the American Oriental Society, American Journal of Philology* and *The Journal of American Folklore* published many folkloric pieces on Bengal folklore and folklife. It was during this time that Bengali scholars also started to present their take on Bengal society, culture, religion, customs, religion and festivals. Rev. Lal Behari Day is the most prominent name among them. He was a Bengali scholar who was a student of the General Assembly Institutions run by Alexander Duff.

Duff was the first missionary of the Church of Scotland in Bengal. The church was founded in Calcutta in 1830. Lal Behari Day got admitted into one of the schools run by Alexander Duff in 1833. He was born into a Hindu family and converted to Christianity in 1842. Eventually, he became a missionary in the church of Rev. Duff. His most prominent work was the folktale collection named *Folktales of Bengal* (1883). Before this collection, Day wrote several articles on Bengali games, festivals, holidays and religion in the various issues of *Bengal Magazine.* His *Govinda Samanta or The History of a Bengal Raiyat* (1874) is considered by many scholars as a pure ethnographic documentation of Bengali rural life in Burdwan district in

west Bengal from 1850-1873 (Gupta 1965, 5-16; Siddiqui 1966, 69). Day represented the "border thinker[s]" of colonial Bengal who thought "from both traditions and, at the same time, from neither of them" (Briggs and Naithani 2012, 246).

That takes us to another outcome of the European education in Bengal: the emergence of a new middle class Hindu. This class consisted of the clerks and junior administrators, brokers, financiers, and agents in trade with the Company who settled down in Calcutta during the second half of the eighteenth century and dominated the multi-caste social faction called dals (abhijat bhadralok or the noble gentlemen) and the landlords, government employees, teachers and journalists (madhyabitto sreni or the middle income class) (Borthwick 1984, 3). This group was necessary to maintain British rule as the members of this class functioned as the intermediaries between the common Bengali people and the British colonizer. This middle class did not break away from the traditional caste system of Bengal but rather denoted a newly gained status due to the wealth earned by the service to the British rulers. At the advent of European education in Bengal in the early nineteenth century, this class invested in "self-fashioning" themselves as English, which by the end of nineteenth century turned into the nationalist movements (Chattopadhay 2022, 1) as this middle class was the first to express concern over the decline of Bengali traditional culture and religion due to European education. This new social group was known as the "bhadralok," meaning "respectable men" or "gentlemen" (Borthwick 1984, 4, Kulke and Rothermund 1988, 242, Sarkar 1972; Stein 2010, 281). The first generation of this bhadralok were the "young Bengals" (Siddiqui1966, 37)—the students of the Hindu college in Calcutta that was built in 1817 (Chattopadhay 2022, 4). After the Charter Act of 1853, which opened opportunities for Indians to join government jobs, many students of this college became Deputy Collectors and Munsifs or judges (Siddiqui 1966, 23) in the colonial government. This

bhadralok class consisted of mostly the high-caste Hindus who were following the European philosophy and attempted to become as much English as possible.

The period after the 1857 revolution had more ethnological folklore works as the British officers who started collecting folklore were trained in Anthropology. They also encouraged many Bengali natives to follow them in this endeavor. As Rev. Lal Behari Day wrote in his preface to the *Folktales of Bengal* (1881), "Captain R. C. Temple, of the Bengal Staff Corps, son of the distinguished Indian administrator Sir Richard Temple, wrote to me to say how interesting it would be to get a collection of those unwritten stories which old women in India recite to little children in the evenings, and to ask whether I could not make such a collection" (vii). Previously, Pandit C.V. Ramassami from Calcutta published a translation work of Sanskrit text called *The Supta-Sati* (1823) at the encouragement of the senior Judge of the supreme court of Fort William, Sir Francis W. MacNaghten (Siddique 1966, 56). But the two works were different from each other. Day collected folktales narrated in Bengali from the real people he met and translated those into English, whereas Ramassami translated a portion from the Sanskrit Mercundeya Purana into English. This is an example of the shift in the nature of work that the native scholars of Bengal fashioned after 1857. Contrary to the textual translation of the Sanskrit literature into English or the administrative descriptions containing chance elements of folklore produced before 1857, the folklore materials were consciously collected from the peasants of Bengal who had been carrying those traditions and customs for generations. In Day's collection of folktales his informants included his servant, two old Brahmans, a Bengali Christian woman, and an old barber.

There was a change of approach in both the British and the Bengali folklore collectors post 1857 revolution. The influence of European folkloristics was quite evident. Careful investigation and explanations of the religion and belief replaced simple description and

translation. There were collections including original Bengali texts and explanatory notes and translations from other languages into Bengali. Moreover, fieldwork and collection of ethnological information became popular among the collectors. In 1872, a new journal called *Indian Antiquary* was published which contributed immensely to the publication of folklore from different parts of India including Bengal. Gayborn Henry Damant, a civil servant, was a regular contributor to this journal. He published regional folklore like *Bengali Folklore—A Legend from Dinajpur (The Story of Duha and Suha)* (1872), *Two Brothers: a Manipur Tale* (1875) and *The story of Khamba and Thoibi: a Manipur Tale* (1877) in different issues of the journal. He was the first collector to publish Folklore from North Bengal. Another remarkable folklore work was done by George Abraham Grierson (Siddiqui and Haque 1964, 4). During his twenty-six years of residence in India he collected materials from 179 languages and 554 dialects as part of his appointment to the Linguistic Survey of India[18]. Many Indian government officials helped him in this work. During this time he also collected many folk songs, tales and rhymes. He collected ballads from the peasants of North Bengal while working in Rangpur district from 1873-1877. This collection was remarkable as it was the first Bengali folklore collection that was documented directly from the mouth of a peasant and with the help of a Bengali bhadralok, was printed in Dev-nagri script with literal translation and notes in English, and accompanied by was musical notations. So, a lot of methodological changes happened during this time.

During the 1880s, a nationalistic tendency started to influence the Bengali Hindu middleclass writers and collectors. Their approach shifted from comparative study of European and Bengal folklore to the origin and authenticity of Bengal folklore. As discussed earlier Rev.

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[18] A plan for ethnological and linguistic survey was proposed by Grierosn in 1886 which was approved in 1891. The survey report was published in nineteen volumes as the "Linguistic Survey of India" from 1898 to 1928.

Lal Benhari Day's works were inspired by colonial folkloristics, and his purpose was to represent

Bengal folktales in comparison to European folktales and finding the similarities. As he wrote in

his preface of *Folktales of Bengal* (1883):

> As I was no stranger to the *Mahrchen* [sic] of the Brothers Grimm, to the *Norse Tales* so admirably told by Dasent, to Arnason's *Icelandic Stories* translated by Powell, to the *Highland Stories* done into English by Campbell, and to the fairy stories collected by other writers, and as I believed that the collection suggested would be a contribution, however slight, to that daily increasing literature of folk-lore and comparative mythology which, like comparative philosophy, proves that the swarthy and half naked peasant on the banks of the Ganges is a cousin, albeit of the hundredth remove, to the fair-skinned and well-dressed Englishman on the banks of the Thames. (vii-viii)

Many other Bengali collectors followed Day's path and started collecting folklore around this

time. Some of the prominent figures are Sarat Chandra Mitra, Kasindranath, Shovana Devi and

Abdul Wali. These collectors' works were more patriotic than nationalist. A group of nationalist

scholars started to emphasize the importance of folklore as a way of discovering Bengali cultural

heritage. These scholars started to get out of the shadows of the colonial collectors and acclaimed

the rural folklore as national treasure in the 1890s.

The bhadralok class was burdened with both the desire and fear of becoming English. At

the beginning of the nineteenth century this bhadralok class made conscious efforts to imitate the

manners and cultures of the colonizer and reject Bengali culture and religion. This gave rise to a

tension about their true identity among some of the middle class scholars and thinkers. Among

them some of the most prominent names are Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar,

Dwarkanath Tagore, Bankimchandra Chattopadhay and Rabindranath Tagore. These Hindu

scholars sensed the danger in imitating the European philosophy and education blindly and urged

the conservation of their age-old religion, culture and heritage. They also identified the

misconceptions and pretentions in the Hindu religion and attempted to correct those. At the

beginning of the national awareness these scholars did not want to reject colonial education and

thoughts. They were rather insistent on reforming Bengali society using the modern knowledge achieved from colonial education. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a Sanskrit, Persian and English scholar focused on religious reformation by founding Brahma-sabha in 1828. This was a religious organization that concentrated on explaining the Hindu classical texts like Vedas and Upanisadas using western knowledge and thereby resisting massive conversion to Christianity. Following his footsteps, Devendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen attempted to glorify the traditional Hindu culture and religion. Moreover, the formation of the political organization named the National Congress made the Hindu middle class more culturally and politically confident. Due to the changes caused by European education and increased political awareness among the educated middle class, by the end of the nineteenth century the middle class Hindu literati became more concerned about pointing out the unique features of the Bengali nation. Their focus was on the differences between the colonizer's and the colonized culture and the uniqueness of the Bengali culture. Folklore collections served as a great means for claiming the tradition and culture of the rural Bengal as the age-old heritage of the entire Bengali nation.

Among the nationalist scholars working with Bengali folklore, Rabindranath Tagore's role was pioneering as he inspired folklore activities through his writings. A prolific writer in all the literary genres of Bengali literature, Tagore also collected folklore material from his zemindari in East Bengal and included those in his literary works (Siddiqui 1966, 150). He also published collections of Bengali folk rhymes. Being a "townsman, city-born…, [whose] ancestors were among the earliest settlers of Calcutta," Tagore urged the other bhadralok to identify the "power from within the villagers… [that was] working alongside" the urban culture (Tagore from citation in Gupta 1965, 27). Tagore's inspiration and the formation of the *Bangiya*

Sahitya Parishat[19]*,* a literary society in 1893 inspired the Hindu literati in representing Bengal

folklore in a new light (Gupta 1965, 29; Siddiqui 1976, 6). A number of learned urban Bengali

men went to the distant villages of Bengal to collect and present the authentic Bengali songs,

rhymes, riddles, proverbs and tales to the urban readers. Among them Dakshinaranjan Mitra

Majumder and Dinesh Chandra Sen are two prominent names.

These folklore collections were the production of the bhadralok class of Calcutta Hindu

society in order to oppose the colonial culture. But Bengali folktale collections by Bengali

Muslim collectors in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were scarce. Siddiqui (1966)

mentioned a Moulavi Abdul Wali who collected saint legends, and songs from a small

indigenous community during the first decade of Twentieth century (128, 146-147). Dinesh

Chandra Sen also mentioned some Muslim collectors' name in his discussion of Bengal folk

tales in *Folk-Literature of Bengal* (1920). But very little can be found about these collectors.

This could be due to the fact that urban educated Muslims neglected to learn Bengali language

and literature as "the language [and literature] of the Hindu elite of Bengal," and preferred

Persian and Urdu over Bengali until the 1930s (Khan 1985, 839). Rural Muslims in contrast

made greater contributions to the Bengali folklore. Folklore forms like mangala- kavya[20] and

patchitras[21] presented the coexistence of Hindu gods and goddesses with the Muslim pirs (holy

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[19] A list of bhadralok scholars publishing in the journal published by the *Bangiya Sahitya Parishat* can be found in Sankar Sengupta, *Folklorists of Bengal,* (Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1965), 29.

[20] Mangala-kavya or Mangalkavya are narrative poems describing the legends of Bengal folk deities like Chandi, Manasa and Dharma Thakur. Though, these were Hindu deities they differ from the Aryan deities and indigenous to Bengal rural Hindus. These deities were the result of cultural changes that happened sue to the Aryan and non-Aryan as well as the Buddhist and Hindu contact that happened before the Muslims conquered the territory. This genre of Bengal folk poems were composed between the 15th and 18th century.

[21] Patchitra or Pata Painting is a Bengali folk art from. These were a type of artwork done on long sheet of cloth depicting religious and social tales. Typically, these narratives include episodes from

men) and paigambers (prophets) (Chatterji 2016; Khan 1985; Roy 1973). Muslims of Bengal did not accept English education like the Hindus which caused them to lose many opportunities in the new colonized society. During the first few decades of the Company rule Muslim elites lost their administrative and economic prominence in Bengal. Unlike the other parts of India, elite Muslim class made up of the descendants of the Muslim immigrants[22] were the minority in Bengal and they mostly resided in the urban areas. Bengal's Muslim population was mostly rural consisting the landless laborers called raiyats and the artisans. They had no land ownerships and were engaged in contract farming and craftsmanship. This larger rural Muslim population did not have access to European education. As a result, the colonial education that was introduced in the urban areas like Calcutta and adjacent districts did not reach the rural Muslim population and the "Bengali Muslims' skepticism was not [entirely] due to cultural … [or] ideological reasons, that is, antagonism toward British rule. Rather, it was due to their lack of opportunity to receive education and the government's unwillingness to provide it." (Rahim 1992, 312). When the colonial government addressed this issue[23] and made a new policy[24] at the end of the nineteenth century, things started to change.

Hindu religion to present a moral lesson. These tales were performed alongside the Chitra or painting by the Patua or the storyteller artist.

[22] Muslim rulers of India belonged to the Turks, the Afghans and the Mughals who immigrated from Turkey, Afghanistan and Central Asia. The religious figures like Sufi, Ulama, Sayyids preached Islam among people. Arabian traders also influenced the spread of Islam to a lesser extent. The descendants of these immigrants formed the upper class of Indian Muslims.

[23] The Wood dispatch of 1854 addressed the Bengal Muslim's lack of access to English education and gave the responsibility of the education at the local level to the upper classes. This policy did not work and the situation remained the same.

[24] British government addressed several shortcomings of the existing schooling system that was discriminatory towards the Muslim students and took measures to correct those. Persian and Arabic languages were included beside Sanskrit in the curriculum of postsecondary examination, scholarships and awards were for Muslim students, accommodations for Muslim students at Presidency college was made and job opportunities were created for Muslim students of English schools and colleges.

European education contributed to Bengali national awakening of 1906 by making the different groups aware of their differences as well as the awareness of an oppressive "other". When the power changed to the state in 1857 after the Sepoy Revolt, the British colonial government introduced a well-structured scheme of educating the Muslims to "create a Bengali Muslim middle class that would participate, as an equal partner, with the Hindu middle class in the socioeconomic development introduced in India by the raj… by actively participat[ing]" in the English education system (Rahim 1992, 318), and the Muslims of Bengal started to access the western philosophies and ideologies. These two middle classes varied in their attitude towards the rural people of Bengal and the colonial rulers. The bhadralok had already established itself as an economically and politically strong entity in India by the mid-nineteenth century. The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 consisting Hindu social reformers, activists, journalists and lawyers, whereas the Muslim political party, Muslim League was formed in 1906. The Hindu middle class of late nineteenth and early twentieth century started to question the British government's political, economic and cultural policies. Muslim middle class, on the other hand was focused more on the religious reformation and increasing opportunities for Bengal Muslims in government jobs and business. So, the concept of nation was perceived differently by the two major religious groups of early twentieth century Bengal.

The new educational policy directed towards the Muslims coupled with the amended Permanent Settlement Act of 1859 giving Muslim rayats more economic benefit created the Muslim middle class. For this middle class "the [British imperial] government's patronage was essential for its growth and development" whereas for the bhadralok middle class "the colonial government was an impediment to social change" (Rahim 1992, 319) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This difference in the two educated middle classes from the two prominent religious groups is essential to understand the complexity of nationalism and folklore

representation of the time. British colonial government deliberately tried to create a Muslim middle class when the bhadralok class became very powerful and expressed views antagonistic to the colonial government. With the newly gained opportunities after being oppressed by both the British colonizer and the upper class Hindus, the Bengal Muslim middle class chose not to express strong anti-colonial emotions at the beginning of the twentieth century, the period during which the Swadeshi Andolan took place.

2.3 Folklore as the National Treasure

The new way of looking into rural folklore forms as the tradition of all Bengali people gained prominence in the context of the political environment of the early twentieth century. Rejecting British culture and ideology and embracing the culture and ideologies that were found at home became important for the educated class during this time. The native participation in Bengal politics were the affairs of the bhadralok scholars and their scholarly activities were not separate from their political agendas. So, when a national movement, Swadeshi, was being initiated in Bengal, these scholars made use of the songs, rhymes, stories, rituals and customs prevalent among the illiterate rural population as a common cultural material that connects all the people of the nation.

As I have discussed in this chapter, the class structure of the Bengal society went through changes after the colonial invasion and throughout the period of colonization. Among all the different changes in society, the culture of the rural population never got so much importance to the upper and middle classes as during this nationalist movement. Bengali compilers of folklore up to this point were acting more as the followers of the colonizers and practicing the newfound western methodologies of anthropology and ethnology. Starting from this point the folklore

collectors of the twentieth century invested their times on finding the "national treasure"[25] from the distant parts of Bengal. The result was the numerous collections of folklore published inside Bengal in the Bengali language, and for the Bengali people.[26]

Many foreign ships harbored in Bengal ports for numerous purposes. Some came to trade, others to invade and rule over the "golden Bengal".[27] Some settled here and the others left. But they all left their marks on the culture of indigenous people. When the Company officials started to translate some of the existing literary texts they made choices about whose tale among the many to tell and how to tell it. Most of their translations and ethnographic compilations were on the Hindu religion, community, rituals, beliefs, myths and customs. It was not surprising as they needed assistance to get access into Bengali society and culture, and that access was granted to them by their Hindu managers. Most of the native collectors were also Hindus and their folklore works were limited to the Hindu society. Moreover, the new Hindu bhadralok of the nineteenth century showed great contempt for the lower class language and culture. It was not until the late nineteenth century that this class started to acknowledge the necessity to write down the oral folklore of the uneducated people into their own language. In each of the different stages of folklore activities in colonial Bengal, the broader political events influenced the collectors and compilers' decision regarding the folklore collection. Folklore, on the other hand, served to fulfil

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[25] Referring to the Bangiya Sahiya Parishat's role in publishing Bengal folklore Majumder wrote in his preface, "বঙ্গীয় সাহিত্য-পরিসৎ বাঙ্গালীকে এক অতি মহাব্রতে দীক্ষিত করিয়াছেন; হারানো সুরের মণিরত্ন মাতৃভাষার ভান্ডারে উপহার দেবার যে অতুল প্রেরণা" (Bangiya Sahitya - Parisat has initiated Bengalis in a great way; the incomparable motivation to gift the treasure of mother tongue, and the jewel of lost melody) (Majumder 1907, 5).

[26] For precise account of these publications see Ashraf Siddiqui, *Folkloric Bangladesh.* (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1976), 16-19.

[27] This is an expression commonly associated with the natural beauty and riches of the precolonial Bengal. Rabindranth Tagore wrote the song "Aamar Sonar Bangla/ Aami tomay Bhalobashi" "My golden Bengal/I love you" in 1906 which later became the national anthem of the independent Bangladesh in 1972.

many of the political purposes of both the colonizer and the colonized. Bengal politics and folklore thus supplemented each other following the 1757 battle of Plassey.

The Swadeshi Andolan motivated the Bhadralok scholars to collect the oral folklores of the lower class, illiterate "chotalok" at the beginning of the twentieth century. The nationalist awareness of the Bengali folk culture that transpired among the Bengali scholars during the late nineteenth century out of the identity crisis resulting from the British Anglicization process, turned into the anti-colonial call for rejecting everything foreign and embracing everything "Bengali" due to this movement. Finding the authentic Bengali indigenous culture became more important in the context of this movement. Folklore collectors like Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder contributed in making the Bengali folklore available to the Bengali audience to create awareness of their national character connected in common tradition and culture.

Chapter 3

Banglar Rupkatha and Bengali Nation: *Thakurmar Jhuli* Manifests the Relationship between Folklore and Nationalism

Nationalism as a political as well as ideological force in colonized India became prominent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which also coincides with the collection and publication of folklore in native languages from different parts of India. Bengal, being the largest state in British India, also provided a fertile ground for folklore activities during the colonial time. The common search for the "distinguishing feature of a group of people… [expressed] through their folkloric cultural practices, stories, traditions, dwellings, songs, music, costume, dialect, cuisine" (Baycroft 2012, 1) makes folklore and nationalism instrumental in each other's function. While Folklore provides authenticating material to a group that wants to identify as a nation, nationalist movements inspire folklore collections and publication. In this chapter I am discussing how the Bengali folktale collection *Thakurmar Jhuli (1907)* by the Bengali folklore collector Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder manifests this relationship between nationalism and folklore. I investigate the notion of nation as "an imagined political community" (Anderson 2006 [1983], 6) being the motivation behind folklore collection in relation to the history of the "Swadeshi Andolan," a Bengali nationalist movement. I also discuss how this nationalist demand of its time shaped the collection and inspired the publishing of folktales in Bangla bhasha (Bengali language) in Bengal. I argue that Majumder collected these tales from rural Bengal in a romantic nationalist attempt to represent the traditional tales of the Bengali "folk" that justified the claim of the Bengali nation as an intrinsically homogeneous community. I concentrate on the use of folklore in supporting the nationalist ideology of Swadeshi movement as well as the political context of the time being an influencing factor behind folklore collection and publication.

Nationalism is a complex term to define and in this chapter I engage with multiple factors that contribute to the concept of nation given by several scholars that can be aligned with Majumder's folktale collection and the historical context of its creation. I argue that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, folklore became a tool in anti-colonial rebellion and nationalist movements in Bengal under British rule, and this collection marked an important point in the history of folklore collection and nationalist movement in early twentieth century Bengal. Majumder introduced the practice of collecting folktales in Bangla bhasha or the Bengali language as well as promoted the Bengali folklore genres that were different from European genres. This collection was important for several reasons in Bengali folkloristics and the motivation behind this collection was nationalist. Like the romantic nationalist folklorists in Germany and Finland of eighteenth and nineteenth century, Majumder was trying to make the folktales from rural Bengal accessible to the Bengali educated audience as a sample of their connected culture. In this chapter, first I explore the notion of nation, nationality and nationalism in the context of Swadeshi Andolan or the own country movement of 1905 and engage with the theoretical perspectives of nation given by Benedict Anderson (2006 [1983]) and Partha Chatterjee. Next, I discuss Majumder's principles of folklore collection in relation to Herder's principle of romantic nationalism (Wilson 2006) and as a response to the specific nationalist demand of Swadeshi Andolan. To meet this end I look closely at the introduction of the collection written by Rabindranath Tagore and Majmuder's own preface using Sadhana Naithani's (2001) concept of "prefaced space." I aim to reach an understanding of the nature of Bengali nationalism, nation and nationality of the early twentieth century conveyed in this folktale collection through this analysis.

3.1 *Thakurmar Jhuli, Banglar Rupkatha*

In 1907, Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder published his Bengali folktale collection titled *Thakurmar Jhuli Banglar Rupkatha* which is now widely known as *Thakurmar Jhuli,* from a renowned publisher of Bengal, Bhattacharya and Sons. This collection was the result of his twelve years' effort of recording the authentic tales of the rural people from his paternal aunt Rajlakshmi Chaudhurani's Estate in the district of Mymensingh of the then East Bengal and present time Bangladesh (Gupta 1965, 114-116). Comprising diverse forms, themes, and cultural materials from Bengal, this collection "has been [the] highly prized [folk literature of Bengal] since its appearance" (ibid, 117) not only for its folkloric richness but also for the cultural representation of the Bengali 'folk' in it.

The Bengal folk of this collection was linked to the political representation of 'the people' of Bengal during the early twentieth century. Folk in the context of this Bengali folktale tradition represented the rural, illiterate people who lived in the distant villages of Bengal, in the zemindari or the lands owned by upper class landowners- the Zemindars. These were the people that the literate middle class of the time was negligent of and considered their culture as backward, uncultured and unfit for the literate cultured society (Gupta 1965, 115). Majumder created several discourses around this folktale collection that attempted to bridge this gap and fulfill "an ideological necessity" (Hopkin 2012, 373) of a "nation struggling for independent existence" (Wilson 2006, 110). Before going deep into this, I will discuss the historical context of this collection as the folklore collection was associated in several ways with the emergence of a nationalist movement in Bengal in 1905. My purpose here is to reach an understanding of how and why collecting folktales as authentic Bengali products became influential in the context of colonization and anti-colonial political movements. To reach this end I will concentrate my

analysis on the underlying bourgeoisie power politics of the Hindu middle class's "Swadeshi" movement.

3.2 Bangabhanga and the Swadeshi Andolan

The geographical region known as Bengal during the time of this collection included the present time Bangladesh, West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa in India and was the largest province of British India with a population of 78.5 million people (Stein 2010, 280). This large population was diverse in religion, culture and language. There were Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and other ethnic groups in this province of whom nearly a third were Muslims. Swadeshi Andolan started as a reactionary response to Viceroy Curzon's Plan of Bengal partition known as Bangabhanga[28] in 1903 that came into effect on 16 October 1905. Viceroy Curzon declared this plan of dividing Bengal into two administrative parts as East Bengal and Assam, and Bengal. Of the two provinces into which Bengal was divided, East Bengal and Assam was predominantly Muslim, with a population of 38 million made up by adding the mostly non-Muslim Assamese. The other part was the western province called Bengal with a minor Muslim population of only 16 percent. In this province Hindus were the religious majority but Bengalis were the linguistic minority as the people of Bihar were Hindi speakers, and Oriya was spoken in Orissa (Stein 2010, 280). Though the British government declared this partition to be an administrative decision for improving the management of the large province, there was a hidden agenda of resisting any Hindu-Muslim unity that could threaten the British rule over the province. The concept of separate Muslim and Hindu provinces was introduced by Lord Curzon through this partition (Kulke and Rothermund, 1998, 262). In response to this partition a nationalist movement named the Swadeshi Andolan was initiated by the Hindu middle class.

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[28] Banga is another Bengali word for Bengal and Bhanga means broken or to break.

The main motto of this movement was to boycott all things that were British, which included British clothes, British law, British courts and British education, and instead adopting Bengal goods. A meeting held at the Calcutta Town hall on August 7, 1905, marked the beginning of this movement that also set several resolutions for the movement. The resolutions can be narrowed down to: boycott of foreign goods specially the cotton goods from Manchester, creating pressure on the British government by causing financial losses and reviving Bengal industries like the hand-loomed textile called Khadi (Biswas 1995, 39).This was not the first anticolonial movement in Bengal but it was different from the previous movements in the engagement of educated upper class Hindus and the romantic nationalist image of all Bengali people that it projected.

A closer look into the history shows that this movement did not include all the Bengali people from the two new parts of Bengal and the then existing religious classes. This movement was mainly initiated by the educated middle class from Calcutta who were the products of English education and worked for the British government as civil servants, lawyers, clerks and bookkeepers, and the enthusiasts of Bengali Renaissance- that combined Hinduism with revival of Bengali literature (Kulke and Rothermund 1988, 242). When the British introduced European education in India and changed the administrative language to English from Persian, Muslims and Hindus showed complete opposite reactions. Hindus eagerly adapted to English education whereas upper class Muslims kept away from such schools and colleges, (Sarkar 1972, 166) which created a vast difference in the social position of the two in the nineteenth and twentieth century. About this disparity between the Muslims and Hindus of the twentieth century McLane (1965) says,

> In Bengal, in 1901, only 22 out of every 10,000 Muslims knew English compared to 114 out of every 10, 000 Hindus. They held only 41 of the "high appointments" under the Government while the Hindus, who were less than twice as numerous as the Muslims,

> held 1, 235… of the ministerial posts in divisional, district and sub-divisional offices in Eastern Bengal, Muslims made one-sixth of the appointments although they made up two-thirds of the population. (229)

Moreover, the larger Muslim population of Bengal resided in the rural areas without financial means to avail of colonial education. So, an imbalance of social condition and participation in administrative and economic spheres persisted between the two communities.

The British government was well aware of this imbalance and also took advantage of it as the government was concerned that communal unity would create opposition to British rule. In MacLane's (1965) words,

> the vehemence of the agitation in 1903 and 1904 suggested there might be a political advantage to partition…the political motive does not seem to have been communal [rather] to distribute Bengali politicians, overwhelmingly Hindu, between two provinces. When Curzon emphasised the benefits likely to fall to the Muslims from partition, he was looking their support for his policies. (234)

So, the British government became concerned about the rising political powers of the elite Hindus and used the poor economic condition of the Muslims as a tool to restrain the rising political activism of the Hindus. As a result, under the apparent administrative reasons of partition, the first partition of Bengal launched the divide and rule strategy of the British Empire. With the government encouragement, upper class Muslims formed their first political party, the Muslim League, in 1906 which unsurprisingly rejected the boycott called by the Swadeshi movement. The elite Muslims considered Bengal partition as an opportunity to return to their economic and administrative positions that they had during the Mughal rule (Stein 2010, 280). Bengal nationalism of the early twentieth century must be understood with reference to these complex power relations because "nationality,… nation-ness , as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being" (Anderson 2006 [1983], 4). In the next section of my discussion I analyze the Swadeshi nationalism that arose out of this movement in relation to

different theories of nationalism and how Majumder's collection of Bengali rupkatha was motivated by that Swadeshi nationalism.

3.3 Bengali Nationalism and the Swadeshi Jinish

The first definition of nation that I engage with is Benedict Anderson's notion of nation as "an imagined community" (2006[1983], 6). An individual feels affiliated to the nation, though he/she does not know more than a few members of the family, relatives and social circle from the large population of the nation that he or she belongs. This affiliation is constructed through the imagined linkages that underlie the notion of nation. Anderson's perspective on imperial education, religion, language, and print-capitalism contributing to people's perspective of themselves as part of a nation align with my topic. Nations as homogeneous groups seek for national identity and autonomy in the face of outside interference and subjugation. Anderson's theory of nationalism aligns with the central tenets of the Swadeshi Andolan, which was rejecting everything British and promoting Bengali education, literature, culture and commercial products that created a sense of connection among the mass population. The imagined community, according to Anderson is to be understood not in relation to its "falsity/genuineness," but to the way it is imagined (ibid). Taking this argument into consideration, I will discuss how the early twentieth century Bengali nation was conceptualized, who were the pioneers in the construction of this particular view of Bengali nation and nationalism and what were the problems in that construct.

The colonial province of Bengal consisted of diverse linguistic, cultural, and religious groups. Bengal, like "[p]remutiny India did not constitute a nation in the European sense of the term, nor did its people share a common culture or a common religious heritage." (Green and Deasy 1985, 16). Even before the British colonizer took over Bengal administration, Bengal society was divided into different ethnicity, religion and caste based classes, which was further

divided into "bhadralok" and "chotalok" classes depending on their exposure to the English education introduced by the colonizer during the colonial rule. The bhadralok class, constructed primarily of the Hindu educated middle class, regarded themselves as better than the commoners of Bengal. They neglected the oral language and folklore as inferior to the literary language of the educated class, and not suitable for literary and artistic creation. This new elite class was "well dressed and polished and [spoke] better English… [and were different from the Hindu lower castes], Muslim peasantry of east Bengal and the tribal and feudal society of Bihar" (Kulke and Rothermund 1988, 243). I have discussed in the previous section how the Swadeshi movement as a response to the political partition of Bengal by the British Empire inspired this Hindu educated class in the revival of Bengali traditions and rejecting everything British, and how none of the agenda included claim of an independent country. The movement rather called for a national unity among the Bengali people who were otherwise divided in many aspects in order to fulfil a specific purpose- revocation of the partition of Bengal.

The call for national unity did not become a reality of the movement. Through the Swadesdi Andolan, the Hindu literati attempted to posit a colonial/ national duality by the invocation of the Swadeshi spirit among all Bengali people. It promoted "the swadeshi propaganda [of] Hindu-Muslim unity… through speeches, pamphlets and songs."(Sarkar 1972, 175, Biswas 1995). But the prominent figures of the movement consisted of Hindu political figures, writers, poets, economists, teachers, social reformists,... The Hindu upper class and middle class literati considered Bengal partition a strike to "the territorial roots of the [Hindu] nationalist elite of Bengal" (Kulke and Rothermund 1988, 262) as with this partition the Bengal Hindus found themselves to be the religious minority in the new East Bengal and Assam, and a linguistic minority in the other province called Bengal (Stein 2010, 281). Muslims, on the other hand, welcomed the partition which was reflected in their non-participation in the boycott of

British products (ibid). For the lower castes of Hindus, the partition was an upper class affair and they decided to stay away from it (Biswas 1995, 51; Paul 2015, 155). Religion failed to create a sense of solidarity among the people of undivided Bengal, rather caused suspicion and debate among them. At the beginning of the Swadeshi Andolan, some Bengali Muslims participated, which was more of an individual interest than a community involvement (Sarkar 1972, 181-195). Most of the upper class and educated Muslims supported the separation as it created more job opportunities for the Muslims. By 1907, Muslims and Hindus separated into two opposing poles, Hindu nationalists and Muslim separatists (ibid, 199) which resulted in communal riots at different places in Bengal during 1906 and 1907. Religion in twentieth century Bengal not only failed to create national solidarity but questioned the national character of the nation that the movement was trying to promote.

It is evident that Bengal partition received mixed reactions from the different religious groups and social classes of Bengal. At the same time, the Bengali bhadralok class was ignorant of the hegemonic nature of their view of nation. In colonial territories, according to Anderson (2006 [1983]) "intelligentsias were central to the rise of nationalism" (116) as this class was formed with the people who embraced colonial education. By embracing the colonial knowledge they became the privileged members of the colonized nation which also made them eventually realize the necessity of an indigenous national identity rooted in history. In Bengal, the bhadralok intelligentsia gained access to both the western culture and "the models of nationalism, nationness, and nation-state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century" (ibid), which made them aware of the limited power they were attributed by the British imperial government. They had access to the western education and local administration but they had no voice in the economic and political sphere of the country. The bhadralok intellectuals used their knowledge in "propagating the imagined community, not merely to illiterate masses, but even to

literate masses reading different languages" (ibid, 140) through Swadeshism (Biswas 1995, 50).

Among the different classes of people from different religions, Hindu upper and middle class had

the earliest exposure to these nationalist ideologies and this class actively promoted the idea of a

Bengali nation. It is evident from my above discussion that Hindus were leading the Bengali

intelligentsia of the early twentieth century, and they had to find a solution to the problem that

was caused by the partition plan of the British colonizer. The movement thus came as an attempt

at resisting the colonial divide and rule strategy, and posing a non-religious nationalist vision to

gain support of people from all classes and religion. But this class also overlooked the vast

differences in the social conditions between their own and other communities of Bengal.

The swadeshi nationalism that set out to assert its freedom from European domination,

remained a prisoner of the prevalent European intellectual fashion (Chatterjee 1993, 10). The

unity that the movement promoted was in reality "imagined", and the nationalism ideologies

were Eurocentric. This movement and the role of Hindu bhadralok resonate Partha Chatterjee's

(1993) observation of Asian and African nationalism that "superficial rejection of things

Western, [was] not really a rejection at all [but] part and parcel of this extremist style of politics,

where the leaders of the revolution used any means available to reach their goal" (Chatterjee

1993, 9) of constructing the romantic image of Bengali nation as a "natural community" based

on culture and tradition like German romantic writer Johann Gottfried Herder (ibid, 18). The

Hindu intelligentsia protested the partition purely out of the self-interest of preserving their

economic and political prominence, but created the concept of "swadesh" using European

discourse of nationalism. Folklore, in the crisis of religious, class and political unity in Bengal

society, was introduced by Majumder as a useful tool for creating the concept of Bengali

homogeneous nation connected in language, culture and tradition. A closer look at the language

and content of *Thakurmar Jhuli* reveals that Majumder's motivation for this collection was rooted in the emerging ideological activism resulting from the first partition of Bengal.

3.4 The Bengali Nation and National Culture as Found in *Thakurmar Jhuli*

The introduction that Majumder wrote for this collection can shed some light on what inspired him to collect these folktales. In this analysis I draw on Sadhana Naithani's (2001) view of "prefaced space" as the collector's and other prominent intellectuals' expression of the social importance of a folklore work. I extend Naithani's (2001) argument that the long prefaces of the colonial folklore collections "sought to introduce to the intended European readers not only the tales in the collection but also India, her folk, folklore, culture, and history" (64) to the nationalist folktale collection made by Majumder to investigate his depiction of the Bengali folk, folklore, culture, and Bengali nation as well as the intended reader of his Bengali rupkatha. Using Majumder and Rabindranath Tagore's two prefaces of this folktale collection, I will analyze the image of Bengali "authentic" culture they created and the nationalist goal they set through this collection.

In a colonial society that goes through continuous changes in political, economic and intellectual conditions, folklore collections are the product of their time of creation borne out of the socio-cultural needs of the time. Both the "folk" and "nation" are imagined communities but they are imagined differently by different groups with different goals of their imagination. Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli* imagined the Bengali nation as a homogeneous cultural community connected in the "swadeshi jinish" or the product of one's own country (Bengal) from "Didima Company" or Grandma Company when the partition posed "conditions of extreme uncertainty" (Gordon 2021, 8). As I have discussed above, the partition made evident the many religious and class divisions of the Bengali society and threatened the existing privileged Hindu class's economic and political prominence. Religion, class and caste could not be used as a basis

for creating the sense of community and "[f]olklore, the stuff of traditions and folk groups and community building, was created for the purpose of accomplishing... a sense of temporal continuity that allow[ed] individuals, families, and communities to feel confident in their ability to persist through (or prevent) change" (ibid, 11) or legitimizing the claim to be a nation on their own rights. The two prefaces of Majumder's collection reveal this process of Bengali nation building using folktales.

Rabindranath Tagore's introduction to the first edition of *Thakurmar Jhuli* reads, "ঠাকুরমার ঝুলিটির মতো এত বড়ো স্বদেশী জিনিস আমাদের দেশে আর কি আছে?কিন্তু হায় এই মোহন ঝুলিটিও ইদানীং ম্যাঞ্চেষ্টারের কল হইতে তৈরী হইয়া আসিতেছিল। এখনকার কালে বিলাতের 'Fairy Tales' আমাদের ছেলেদের একমাত্র গতি হইয়া উঠিবার উপক্রম করিয়াছে। স্বদেশের দিদিমা কোম্পানি একেবারে দেউলে।""What else in our country has such a big indigenous thing as Grandma's bag? But alas, this alluring bag was also recently being made from the Manchester mill. Nowadays, the western 'Fairy Tales' is about to become the only source of entertainment for our boys. The swadeshi didima company is completely bankrupt." (Majumder 2018, 7, my translation from Rabindranath Tagore's Preface). He labelled the tales in Majumder's collection as productions of the "swadeshi didima company" or "Bengali Grandma Company" as grandmothers were the narrators of these tales linking it to the title of the collection that translates as Grandmother's Bag. This apparently romantic wordplay by Tagore in the phrases "swadeshi jinish" and "swadeshi Didima Company" has several contextual implications. By labelling these tales "swadeshi" or from our country in the first phrase, he placed these tales against the European "Fairy Tales" that had been introduced by colonial modern education to the educated Bengali upper and middle class. Moreover, Tagore's metaphoric use of the word "company" with "didima" when he placed "Didima Company" against "Manchester mill" in the

same introduction contextualized the collection in the contemporary Swadeshi movement, which emphasized rejecting British products and producing more Bengali products. "Manchester mill" in this context became the symbol of British industrialization and all the foreign products which the Swadeshi movement of 1906 wanted to discard. Bengal was both a source for industrial raw materials for the British factories in England and a profitable market to sell the industrial products from those factories (Kulke and Rothermund 1988, 243). Oppression of Bengal agriculture and textile industries was linked to the supply of indigo for the cotton industries in British cities like Manchester. Manchester mills were both the symbol of the oppression of the colonizer and the anti-colonial protest proposed by the Swadeshi movement. Tagore also referred to the colonial publications of Bengali folklore published from England in English saying that the grandmother's bag was being made from the Manchester mills. Didima Company also implied that these tales were told by every Bengali grandmother to her grandchildren, which created a general appeal to every Bengali to "conserve and strengthen the 'ghar' [home]… through the re-invocation of the cultural heritage" (Paul 2015, 158). Another aspect of this phrase relevant to consider here is: Didima and Thakurma both words are generally associated with Hindu Bengali society as these two are words for paternal grandmother in Hindu families of Bengal. Muslim children in Bengal call their paternal grandmother "Daadi," "Daadu" or "Daadiamma". Thus, it reflects that the collection made use of the kinship terms that the Bengali Hindu educated class was accustomed to with the purpose of inspiring nationalism through folklore, though Majumder did not claim these tales to be Hindu tales.

Majumder did not name anyone specific as the source of these tales, but in his preface he mentioned having heard these tales in his childhood. He revisited his childhood tales during his decade-long endeavor of collecting these tales from the old women from the villages of his maternal aunt's estate in Mymensingh. He emphasized in his preface how private and intimate

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these tales were for himself by placing them in his childhood memories with his mother. In his words, "এক দিনের কথা মনে পরে, দেবালয়ে আরতির বাজনা বাজিয়া থামিয়া গিয়াছে, মা'র আঁচলখানির উপর শুইয়া রূপকথা শুনিতেছিলাম।" "I remember one day, the aarti (the ritual of offering light during prayer before a Hindu deity) had stopped playing in the temple, I was lying on my mother's aachol and listening to rupkatha" (Majumder 2018, my translation from the Preface of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder, 8). It is noteworthy here that, he lost his mother at the age of nine (Gupta 1965, 112), and he shared a very intimate moment from his childhood memory with his dead mother. The language used in his statement also indicated the intimate nature of these tales. He mentioned lying on his mother's "aachol" or the border of her saree. In Bengali "মায়ের আঁচল" or a mother's aachol represents mother's care. Majumder positioned these tales into his own personal narrative where he as a child listened to his mother telling these stories to him. Not only Majumder, as his patron, Rabindranath Tagore in his introduction to this collection also placed these tales in the childhood memories of the Bengali boys.

Dakshiaranjan Mitra Majumder's collection, was inspired by both this romantic idea of sharing his own childhood memories and the "Bangiya Sahitya Parishat's" (the Literary Society of Bengal) initiative of bringing back the lost jewels of Bangla language and literature of the past which Majumder believed was best expressed in the (রূপকথা) *rupkatha* or the folktales from "বাংলার শ্যাম পল্লীর কোনে কোনে" (every corner of the green villages of Bengal) (Majumder 2018, my translation from the Preface of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder, 8). Though the illiterate rural people were the tradition bearers and the chief performers of these tales, Tagore and Majumder emphasized that these tales belonged to all Bengali people. Both Tagore and Majumder reminisced that they grew up listening to these tales told by their mothers and grandmothers. These were not long lost tales from primitive Bengal, but from the near past of

their childhood that the new generation was getting distant from because of the colonial education.

Language can be a tool for creating group harmony, and Majumder consciously produced these tales in Bengali language as from the introduction of the collection it can be deducted that, his motivation was nationalist or "Swadeshi". This collection was an example of how the Bengali nation was a community imagined in language. The very notion of Bengali "swadesh" was a romantic concept that Majumder tried to build through folklore. Though he had the romantic project of constructing Bengal folktales he was conscious of his readers and their preferences in terms of language use. Shedding light on the Bengali Hindu literati's perception about the appropriate literary language and its difference from the colloquial Bengali, Anindita Ghosh (2000) says, "While 'polite' Bengali was characterized by the prevalence of Sanskrit loan words, the more hybrid and colloquial forms accommodated words from both a wider linguistic spectrum of words with non-Sanskritic, non-Indian origin, as well as distorted spoken forms of what were originally Sanskrit loan-words." (153). In order to comply with this expectation of "polite" language, Majumder discarded the vernacular language of the tales that he recorded those in (Gupta 1965, 116) and created a mixed Bengali that aligns with both the Sanskritized Sadhu Bhasa, the preferred literary language of the learned Hindu middle class and the rural performative language patterns of oral storytelling creating a version of language that would be acceptable to the intended reader. In such attempts this collection mediated between the Hindu modern educated class and the folk culture of Bengal (Flora 2002, 41). Language of this collection draws attention to Anderson's (2006 [1983]) arguments about the role of colonial education and the educated class, which emerged from the colonial scheme of educating the natives, in imagining the Bengali nation and his argument that "Print-language is what invents nationalism, not a particular language per se… the very idea of 'nation' is… nestled firmly in

virtually all print languages; and nation-ness is virtually inseparable from political consciousness" (134-135). The educated Bengali people considered the vernacular language of the people as inferior and unfit for literary production and used a highly stylized written version of Bengali language called Sadhubhasha, that drew words from Sanskrit for publication. This preferred print language was "the forcible conversion of a language from an easy, colloquial to a tortuous written style" (Ghosh 2000, 159) to create a dichotomous categorization of language into polite and vulgar. Promoting a certain version of Bengali language as the standard for written publication of national folklore was reflective of the literary trends followed by the bhadralok scholars which started to change during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. With the rise of nationalistic views of late nineteenth and early twentieth century, some prominent figures from the bhadralok class started to adopt a midway of combining the written and colloquial Bengali in an attempt to mediate between colonial "modernity" and national "authenticity". Unsurprisingly, Majumder's skillful introduction of vernacular Bengali into the printed pages was praised by the contemporary scholars. Majumder's language choice in this collection brings forward two arguments about print language by Anderson (2006 [1983]). First, the use of Sadhu bhasha showed his conformity to the "language-of-power" (ibid, 45) and by his attempt of presenting the oral tales and oral style of storytelling in Sadhu bhasha this folktale language attained fixity, the ability to exist in this form for a long time. Interestingly no attempt has been made to discard the Sadhu bhasha from this collection even after the 100 years of its publication. He brought back the oral tales from his childhood and represented those for the new readership of the literate Bengali Hindu community who were the initiators and participators in the Swadeshi movement.

Majumder's collection of rupkatha made a romantic attempt of defining the Bengali nation on the basis of an "imagined" past connected by common culture and language. Romantic

nationalism in folkloristics was an intellectual project of collecting folklore as cultural expression of the "folk" and different from the "rationalist, enlightenment-based" notion of folklore as "anachronistic leftover from a premodern past" (Bauman 2006, 108). In Wilson's view romantic nationalism emerged in central and eastern Europe as "an attempt to redraw political boundaries to fit the contours of ethnic bodies… emphasiz[ing] passion and instinct instead of reason, national differences instead of common aspirations, and, above all, the building of nations on the traditions and myths of the past—that is, on folklore—instead of on the political realities of the present" (2006, 109). The nineteenth and twentieth century folklore collectors of Bengal were familiar with the nationalist folkloristics of the Grimms brothers and the western fairytale genre. This knowledge played an instrumental part in the formation of their anticolonial and nationalist folkloristics.

The first characteristics of romantic nationalism that this collection conformed to was discovering the model on which to reshape the present and build the future (Wilson 2006, 109). This collection was the product of the demand of the time and was Majumder's contribution to the Swadeshi movement's call for producing Bengal products, rejecting British goods and being "true to the national whole of which he [was] merely a part," and he presented these tales as the proof of the organic Bengal nationality different from all other nations (Wilson 2006, 109). For this collection of folktales he included the generic name "rupkatha" which was used as a subtitle of the collection—"Banglar Rupkatha". This Bengali phrase "Banglar Rupkatha" cannot be translated into the European term "fairy tales." Following this authentic Bengali tradition making initiative, Majumder published three more collections of Bengal rural folklore named *Thakurdadar Jhuli (1909)* or *Grandfather's Bag, Thandidir Thale(1909)* or *Maternal Grandmother's Bag and Dadamashayer Thale (1913)* or *Maternal-Grandfather's bag*. The

remaining three collections also had their own Bengali generic labels respectively as *Geetkatha* or musical tales, *Raskatha* or the humorous tales, and *bratakatha* or the ritual tales. In his exploration of Bengali folktales circulated orally among Bengal rural folk, documenting and presenting those before the Bengali readers in their native language and also in their familiar Bengali generic terms, Majumder helped to create a romantic nationalist "concept of independent culture types" (ibid, 111) of Bengali folklore tradition for the future folklore collectors to draw on. This collection introduced a romantic orientation to folklore as an authentic expression of the "folk" from rural Bengal of the time and also not as leftovers from a premodern past.

These were the tales from the rural people and were Majumder's collection of native tales, the "swadeshi jinish" (Majumder 2018 [1907], 7). In his language these tales were the "Banglar Rupkatha" and not the fairy tales or folktales of Bengal. Majumder got interested in collecting folktale when he met a rural singer performer, presumably a baul[29] (an ascetic singer from rural Bengal) during his visit to his aunt's Estate in Mymensingh in East Bengal. He successfully identified the "country folk" that the literati were not considering, and presented "the line of literature [that was] truly their own and which [could] make them feel their country in their heart… and proceed to independence [from English culture] in proper channel" (Gupta's 1965, 114-115). Majumder's motivation for collecting folktales resonates with Herder's romantic nationalistic urge to "turn to the peasants" for discovering the national soul in the oral folktales told in national language in its most perfect form (Wilson 2006, 116-117).

The folk were the illiterate rural people who also told the tales that were "part of [Majumder's own] childhood memory and the ...memories ...of the whole nation," (Das 2020,

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[29] The meaning of this word is multi-faceted. It is simultaneously a folk musical genre, a religion, a cult, a philosophy and a way of living. Here, in this reference it refers to a folk singer who sings Baul songs. See more in, Golam Rabbani, "Heterogeneity and Baul Spirituality: The Songs of Baul Taskir Ali in Bangladesh," *Comparative Media Arts Journal,* Issue 2019, (2019). https://www.sfu.ca/cmajournal/issues/issue-six--aesthetics-of-heterogeneity/golam-rabbani.html

234) and who were being neglected by the educated Hindus striving for a national identity faced with the political and economic crisis caused by the Bengal partition-Bangabhanga. Bengali political nationalism that arose from the Bengal partition and Swadeshi Movement was fraught with contradiction, suspicion and mistrust, and Majumder attempted to mitigate this lack of unity through folklore of Bengali people that circulated orally in the distant corners of the folk Bengal.

Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli* emphasized on the presence of a national folktale genre that was an "authentic" representation of the cultural heritage of all Bengali people, and his perspective of this representation was shaped by the dominant thoughts of his time. D.C. Sen's discussion in *The Folk-Lore of Bengal (1920)* is relevant here. Sen justified these tales' cultural rootedness in the statement that these stories were,

> [n]ot only the heritage of Hindu children but also of their Moslem cousins who have been listening to these nursery and fairy tales, recited to them by their grand-mothers, from a very remote historical period which…[is] much anterior to the Islamic conquest. The Hindu and Buddhist converts who gave up their faith in the older religion did not forgo their attachments to these folk-tales in which legends of Buddhist and Hindu gods are sometimes closely intermixed… [which proves] the continuity of this folklore and folk wisdom current amongst Mahomedans [Muslims], from a remote time when they had not yet accepted Islam but had been Buddhist and Hindus. (1920, XVI)

Sen's statement gives an idea of the approach the Hindu middle class literati had towards folklore of Bengal. I will draw attention to some of the key perspectives about folklore and nationalism of the Hindu scholars of that time expressed in this statement. Sen considered the folktales of Bengal as an expression of the common root for all the people regardless of their religion. In Sen's view the common root was in the religious faith and practices of Hinduism and Buddhism which had not gone through any changes even after the peoples' religious faith changed by converting to Islam. Bengali culture, thus stayed the same and these folktales continued to be the same in the households with Hindus and Buddhists converted to Islam. This assumption was a good basis for creating the romantic discourse of a homogeneous Bengali nation connected in their folklore and folk belief, but it also contained duality in it. Bengal

folklore in Sen's opinion, was the result of the intermixing of Hindu and Buddhist religious belief but Islamic values did not get adopted into this lore. It was no wonder that D. C. Sen in the same book made this blatant comment that between Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder's "Pushpamala" and Muhammad Korban Ali's "Sakhi-sona" Majumder's one was the "most authentic" and "most accurate form" (Sen, 1920, 195-209) of Bengali folktale. He chose to base his comparison of the two versions on determining which one conformed to the preconception of the Hindu middle class literati's acceptable authentic form and elements. In doing so, he ignored how the different versions reflected the combination of the lived experiences of people of Bengal going through social, cultural, political, religious and linguistic changes over the hundred years of Islamic influence on Bengali people and society. The Bengali nation that these folklore collectors and scholars constructed was fixed and bounded. According to them, only Hinduism and Buddhism made a combined contribution of providing a solid sense of uniformity that even the people's conversion to different religious beliefs or hundreds of years of exposure to Islamic culture could not change in any way. But the very presence of the different versions is proof that this is not true. Moreover, the term Sen used for Bengal folktales was "fairytale," a European folklore concept that evinces his exposure to European culture and education.

In the book called *In Search of Authenticty,* Regina Bendix (1997) speaks of authenticity, folklore and nationalism. Bendix writes,

> Declaring something authentic legitimate[s] the subject that [is] declared authentic, and the declaration in turn can legitimate the authenticator, though here such concerns as social standing, education, and the ability to promote one's views also play a role… [.] Folklore has long served as a vehicle in the search for authenticity [and]… [t]he most powerful modern political movement, nationalism, builds on the essentialist notions inherent in authenticity, and folklore in the guise of native cultural discovery and rediscovery has continually served nationalist movements since the Romantic era… [It is noteworthy], [t]he notion of authenticity implies the existence of its opposite, the fake, and this dichotomous construct is at the heart of what makes authenticity problematic…identifying some cultural expressions or artifacts as authentic, genuine,

trustworthy, or legitimate simultaneously implies that other manifestations are fake, spurious, and even illegitimate. (1997, 7-8)

The Hindu scholars were engaged in the problem of authenticity. By insisting on certain versions of Bengali folktales as "authentic," they indirectly declared the other versions inauthentic or fake. Their view of authenticity was fraught with contradictions that ignored the religious assimilation in the religion and culture of rural Bengal.

3.5 Religious Assimilation in Bengal Folklore

Bengali national identity is a layered one that intermixes the different religious beliefs of the peoples expressed through their cultural expressions. Bengali folktales, songs, customs and festivals are the spaces within which the interaction among the different religions is manifested. Bengal folklore of the nineteenth and twentieth century, which both the European colonial collectors and upper class educated Bengali collectors published, belonged to the rural lower casts of Hindus and Muslims. Folklore in Bengal was the space where the different religious beliefs and practices were assimilated, forming a unique Bengali cultural-religious form. The majority of the Muslim population of the twentieth century was rural, and this rural status was the opposite of the other Muslim majority parts of India. These rural Muslims, along with the lower castes of Hindus like Mahishyas[30], Pods[31], and Namashudras[32], constituted the rural Bengal population (Roy 1973, 24). Besides their pastoral presence, another similarity between these Bengali Hindus and Muslims was that both were partially religionized. Unlike the other

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[30] Partha Mukherjee, "Seeking New Identity: The Mahishya Caste Movement in Midnapore, 1896-1921," *Journal of People's History and Culture* 7, no. 1 (2021). 128-29.

[31] Soumen Biswas, "Aspects of the Socio-Political History of a Scheduled Caste of Bengal: A Case Study of the Pods (1872–1947)," (PhD diss., Rabindra Bharati University Kolkata, 1947), 3-4.

[32] A lower caste in Hindu caste system who were considered untouchable by the upper castes. They were also known as Chadala or Chandal.

parts of India, in Bengal, an acculturated form of Aryan[33] and non-Aryan culture was prevalent among the lower-class Hindus. Islam, combined with this form of Hinduism, helped develop a distinctive Bengali folk culture different from the other parts of India (Sinha 2014, 765). Bengal folklore carried the mark of the combined beliefs of these lower-class Hindus and Muslims.

So far, I have concentrated on the Hindu literati's power position in Bengal society. At this point of discussion, I will concentrate on the rural population of Bengal and their religious and class identity during the said time. The class biases in Bengal existed not only between the Hindus and Muslims but also within their own religious community. Islam entered Bengal with the Muslim conquerors and the Muslim missionaries called Sufi as early as seventh century A.D. (Khan 1985, 835). Most of the converts to Islam from the indigenous population belonged to the lower castes of Hindus in rural areas engaged in agricultural production or craftsmanship. Among these lower-class convert Muslims a locally acculturated form of Islam or a folk Islam existed which had little connection to the dogmas of the religion (Sinha 2014, 765). Both the upper-class Hindus like the Brahmans and the "ashraf" (Roy 1973, 27)[34] Muslims considered these lower class Hindus and Muslims inferior and their culture unimportant. The Muslim upper class spoke Urdu as a marker of their noble status and rejected Bengali as a language of the common Muslims of Bengal. So, it will not be wrong to say that the culture of Bengali common Muslims existed only in the different oral folklore forms (Khan 1985, 839). The Arabic language in which the Islamic teachings were preached was foreign to the new Muslims of Bengal and the ashraf class considered translating the sacred text into the Bengali language a sin. On the other hand, the Hindu elite class used Sanskrit or Sanskritized Bengali language and Brahmanical

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[33] The ancient people who migrated to the Indus Valley in around 1500 B.C.

[34] The upper class Muslim nobility was determined by their ancestral connection to Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan or North India.

revivalism as a tool for maintaining social hierarchy. Under the colonial influence Sadhubhasa, the highly Sanskritized version of Bengali described earlier, became a hegemonic tool for the new middle class educated "bhadralok" to differentiate from the "chotalok" culture of the lower class people (Flora 2002, 14-15) during the eighteenth century. Consequently, religious assimilation into the folk cultural forms happened among the lower classes from both religions.

The religious assimilation worked in two ways in the Islamization process in Bengal. The first one was done to familiarize the converted Muslims to the doctrines of the religion. It was not until the sixteenth century that several Muslim thinkers felt it necessary to translate Islamic religious texts into Bengali. Their purpose was to remove the misinformation about Islam among the common Muslims and educate them to make better Muslims out of them. To fulfil this purpose, they included indigenous cultural elements in these translated Islamic texts to make these translations more accessible to the common Muslim population. The result was a kind of Islamic literature that differed from the conservative line of the religious teachings and included many of the existing Bengali traditional cultural-religious elements. Bengali Islamization process of the lower class Muslims made use of the "indigenous religious and cultural notions, idioms and symbols," (Roy 1973, 30) which were familiar to the folk and these same materials also entered into translated Islamic literature.

On the other hand, Islamic doctrines also entered into existing Buddhist and Hindu folklore. Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1917), in his discussion of *Shunya Purana*[35] of the twentieth century, shows Dharma[36], a folk deity[37] of Buddhist origin and prevalent in the Hindu religion,

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[35] A Bengali text containing the scriptures of Dharma Puja which is believed to be written by Ramai Pandit, a poet and preacher of Dharma Puja.

[36] Dharma Thakur or Dharmaraj is a Bengali folk deity of agriculture and fertility of ancient time who can be found in both Buddhist and Hindu tradition.

[37] Dharma Thakur is identified as a "folk deity" by scholars as the worship is limited to West

appearing as a Muslim with a black cap on his head and a trident in his hand. Other examples of

Muslim inputs are the triple deities of Hinduism—Brahma, Visnu and Shiva—reimagined as

Mohammed, a prophet and Adam respectively. The Hindu god Ganesha became Gazi or a

Muslim saint, and fakirs replaced the Hindu ascetics (225). Under the Islamic influence, Hindu

deities became Islamized in these versions. Two Bengali folk song genres named Marefati and

Murshidi contained Islamic Sufi, Hindu yogic, and aboriginal Sahajiya[38] elements in them. Pir

Pachali, a Bengali Muslim folk song-art genre, combined the Islamic ascetic character Pir with

the famous Hindu god Satyanarayan and folk deity Dakkhina Rai (Kabi 2010, 16). Thus, it is

apparent that the Bengal folklore of the early twentieth century presented an ensemble of the

religious elements from Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

D.C Sen (1920), Tagore, and Majumder's conceptualization of the Hindu (and Buddhist)

elements in Bengal Folklore as the Bengali indigenous elements and condemning the Islamic

contributions as the deviation or adulteration were not a separate event. It was the dominant

perspective of the Hindu scholars of the twentieth century. Another Hindu sociologist, Benoy

Kumar Sarkar, considered the Islamic elements in medieval Bengal folklore as tricks adopted by

the Hindus and Buddhists to continue their worship openly under the oppressive environment of

Muslim rule (1917, 219). On the other hand, D.C. Sen in his 1917 lectures on Bengal folklore

labelled the Muslim names in Bengal folktales published by Muslim collectors as "superficial"

Bengal villages in India and is not included in the mainstream pantheon of Hindu deities. See more in
Frank J. Korom, "Editing Dharmaraj: Academic Genealogies of a Bengali Folk Deity," *Western Folklore*
56, no. 1 (1997): 51-77.

[38] Sahajiya is a philosophy that emphasizes realizing the self. Realizing the self is important,
because self or the internal form of both living and non-living object is eternal, and the way to realize that
form is "Sahajiya". It originated as a Buddhist religious cult in the eighth century in Bengal. They
believed that knowledge could not be gained by reading books and "Sahajpath" is the way to attain this
knowledge. During the fourteenth century another Sahajiya philosophy developed among the Vainavas, a
Hindu sect. It is known as the Vaishnava Sahajiya.

and the Islamic ideas expressed in those as "peculiar" to the "Hindu tale[s] in every sense" (1921, 162-163). This view needs to be understood in the context of the social position of Bengali Muslims and Hindus during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The admixture of Islamic and Hindu doctrines in the Bengali folklore forms did not become a focal point in *Thakumar Jhuli*. The insistence was more on promoting the tales as authentic documents of the native tale genre of Bengal. It also served the Hindu scholars like D.C. Sen's theory that the Bengali folktales originated before the Hindu renaissance and belonged to the Buddhist period in Bengal (1917, 54), which spans sometime between the third century B.C. to the twelfth century A.D. as the folktales from before the fourteenth century had no Pouranic[39] elements in them and authentic tales should be the ones with Buddhist and Hindu philosophies. Though the Buddhist theory of the late nineteenth century was rejected by the scholars of later times it dominated the perception of Bengali folktales among the folklore scholars of the early twentieth century (Flora 2002, 11-12). Sen strongly believed that some of the stories in this collection could be from the Pala age.[40] Originating from Buddhist source or not, the stories in Majumder's collection was considered both by the collector and the contemporary scholars as the tales of real Bengali people.

I have discussed how the colonial education formed a Bengali Hindu bhadralok class who assumed an in-between space in the colonial Bengal society. They were different from both the British colonizer and the Bengal peasant. Bangabhanga came as a threat to this class which they tried to resist through the propagation of the Swadeshi movement. Religious unity was approached at the beginning but it soon crumbled and turned into communalism. Language and

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[39] Pouranic is the Bengali word for mythology.

[40] The Pala was the name of the dynasty that ruled over ancient Bengal and was the last major Buddhist imperial power of Bengal. The Pala age spanned from the mid-eighth century to the early eleventh century.

folklore then was constructed into the basis of national unity. But these assumptions were not free from the religious biases as reflected in D.C. Sen's views about Bengal folktales. Majumder aimed at creating a sense of cultural rootedness among the otherwise divided people of Bengal. Among all these tensions and trepidations, Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli* tried to project a favorable romantic image of a culturally united Bengali nation. The Bengali nation that the Swadeshi movement constructed was flawed, and that flaw is also reflected in Majumder's romantic assumption of "authentic" Bengali rupkatha.

All these factors informed Majumder's folkloric endeavor. He also belonged to the educated Hindu class with schooling in government schools and colleges of British Bengal. He was exposed to the dominating literary and linguistic trends of nineteenth and twentieth century Bengal. He also wrote poetry[41] and published in different journals and periodicals. As Sankar Sen Gupta (1965) wrote, "he had a taste for lyrical poetry and sophisticated compositions" (115) and this knowledge shaped his choice of language as well as the tales selection in the collection. An example of which was his amendment of the language of the collection in the second edition of the book as the vernacular language of the first edition was criticized as "archaic unintelligible [and not suitable] for the general reader" (ibid, 117). While attempting to produce this nationalist folk narrative of Bengal, Majumder did not keep the oral language intact and chose to make some modifications in the language of the written text that used a standardized literary version of Bangla bhasha which was very much Sanskritized or "Hinduized" (Abbas 2010, 5). Moreover, Majumder did not include any Persian or Arabic words or the vernacular variants of these languages in his tales. This is proof that he was following the dominant "Hindu bhadralok affair [of]… reshaping…a simpler 'coloquial Bengali'… [in which] no discernible attempt to include

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[41] See more in Sankar Sen Gupta. *Folklorists of Bengal*. (Calcutta: Indian Publication, 1965), 113-114.

Muslim-Bengali words [were made]. (Ghosh 2000, 158). Muslims were the majority population of Bengal during the nineteenth and twentieth century and the largest part of this Muslim Bengali population contained the peasant converts of the Mughal time (Abbas 2010, 2), and Hindus were the second largest besides the other religious communities like the Buddhists and newly converted Christians. So, the Bengal "folk" included people from all these religions who also spoke in the different vernacular forms of Bangla bhasha (Bengali language) which bore the mark of their religion. Elaborating on these aspects of Majumder's collection, it is evident that this collection was not representative of all the people of Bengal rather the Bengali nation that it constructed was a romantic imagined community.

Like the Swadeshi movement of 1905, Majumder's folktale collection promoted a version of a romantic Bengali nation that claimed to include all people irrespective of their differences in religion and class but advocated for the ideologies of the dominant Hindu upper class and the educated middle class. Majumder's collection was well accepted by the scholars as well as the general readers of the time. Bengali scholars like the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore praised Majumder for his mastery in presenting the folk language, culture and the simplicity of rural Bengal in the printed words. In his words, "নিখিল বঙ্গ দেশের সেই চিরপুরাতন গভীরতম স্নেহ হইতেই এই রূপকথা উৎসারিত।… দক্ষিণাবাবুকে ধন্য! তিনি ঠাকুরমার মুখের কথাকে ছাপার অক্ষরে তুলিয়া পুঁতিয়াছেন ... [তথাপি] রূপকথারসেই বিশেষ ভাষা, বিশেষ রীতি, তাহার সেই প্রাচীন সরলতাটুকু তিনি যে এতটা দূর রক্ষা করিতে পারিয়াছেন," "These rupkatha originates from the deepest, eternal love of entire Bengal... Dakshinababu is commendable! He took the words of the grandmother's mouth to print... [yet] He has been able to preserve the special language, the special style, the ancient simplicity of the fables so far," (Majumder 2018 [1907], my translation from the preface of Rabindranath Tagor, 7). From Tagore's introduction to the collection, it is

apparent that he considered this collection as a compilation of the original tales of the real folks of Bengal that was necessary to counter the colonial cultural aggression in the form of colonial fairy tales, and provide a sample of authentic Bengali folktales for the future generation to learn from and identify as their own culture. Naithani argues that, the folklore collector uses regional materials and employs his/her own observations and conclusions to a much wider area like the country or a nation in the preface, and defines how the texts are to be read and understood (2000, 64). As discussed previously, Majumder created a romantic notion of these tales that were from his childhood in his preface, which was further substantiated by Tagore's introduction of the collection. Tagore clearly states in his preface that these tales are to be treated as the swadeshi jinish that every educated Bengali child needs to learn about their own tradition and culture. Together they create a discourse about Bengali nationhood and authentic folktales. Besides Tagore, a distinguished scholar and folklore collector of Bengal, Dinesh Chandra Sen, applauded Majumder's work for presenting the tales told in Bengal household "from an immemorial age, before any door was opened in them for receiving rays of European or even Moslem [Muslim] culture" (1920, 41). From both Tagore and Sen's point of view these tales were of importance for the Bengali people due to their authenticity and originality. So, it is evident that this collection helped to promote this need of the time of presenting Bengali traditions in which Buddhist and Hindu religious, mythical and cultural elements were considered indigenous.

In this chapter, I concentrated on understanding the nationalism that this collection promotes. From the above discussion, it is evident that it insists on viewing the Muslims as outsiders besides the European colonizers to the Bengali culture and nationhood. Muslims could be the tellers and hearers of these tales as long as they narrated them in their "original" form without any change or addition reflecting Islamic thoughts. In that sense, the Bengali national identity Majumder tried to project was equivalent to Hindu socio-religious identity. An

assumption that folktales of Bengal were Hindu tales, a tendency to completely represent these

tales as Hindu heritage and Bengali culture as Hindu lineage, and the presence of any Islamic

religious elements in them as adulteration or degradation dictated Majumder's choice of Bengal

folktales in this collection.

Chapter 4

The Hindu Motifs in *Thakurmar Jhuli* and the Absence of Islamic Elements in the "Banglar Rupkatha"

Majumder's rupkatha included only the Hindu cultural aspects of Bengali folklore, omitting an important aspect of Bengal folktale tradition, namely, religious and linguistic assimilation. This omission was very much on par with the concept of nation and national culture of the dominant bhadralok class of Bengal of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Extending Sadhana Naithani's statement about colonialism and Indian folklore collection that "[c]olonialism generated an intercultural mental space within its overall power structures, but this space had to be, and was, negotiated by the players in the field who deployed both their power positions and their individual strategies" (2006, 57) to the national folklore of Bengal, in this chapter I consider the power relation that existed between Majumder and the folk, how the intended audience influenced the collector's choice of representation of the tales and how the swadeshi consciousness of a particular social and religious class shaped such representations. Majumder was aiming at representing the native frame of the Bengali traditional oral folktale genre to the early twentieth century Hindu educated upper class residing in the urban centers. His purpose was to popularize the neglected Bengali folktales among the educated people and raise a sense of unity and national connection to inspire them to counter the cultural oppression of the colonial British government. However, his tale content and language appropriation was reflective of the bhadralok class's "expropriation of the peasantry and the urban lower order… to draw a boundary between Bengali hegemonic culture and Bengali subaltern culture" (Flora 2002, 14-15) as well as their bias against the Bengali Muslim elements in these tales. His version of Bengali rupkatha treated Hindu religious elements as synonymous with Bengali cultural elements. This

perspective of Bengal folktale traditions was limiting as Bengali folktale genres encompassed various religious and linguistic elements that constructed the Bengali culture at the time of its production, and various later productions of these rupkatha, revealed that Bengali culture and tradition. Other than this ideological influence of a particular class, what other reasons could have mediated Majumder's choice? Was the absence of Islamic elements in this collection ascribable to its regionality? Did Majumder omit the Islamic elements to avoid the supposed "deterioration" of the rupkatha frame of narrative? In this chapter, I will address these questions by analyzing several tales in the *Thakurmar Jhuli* intertextually to trace Hindu religious and fictional motifs using Maurice Bloomfield's articles on Hindu motifs. I also elaborate on the presence of both Hindu and Islamic elements in Bengal folklore with reference to the Bengali folk ballads called "Gitika" that were collected from the same geographic area that Majumder collected his tales from. I will start by analyzing the stories of this collection using Maurice Bloomfield's works on "Hindu Motifs" (1914, 1917, 1920a, 1920b, 1923) to substantiate my argument that Majumder's collections contained stories with Hindu traditional motifs.

4.1 The Structure of *Thakurmar Jhuli* and the Hindu Motifs in it

Maurice Bloomfield wrote on several Hindu religious and fictional motifs to create an encyclopedia of Hindu fiction. His works encapsulate Indian folktales, kathas[42], charitas[43], Vedic scriptures and Jataka[44]. Following the trend of Indology of the colonial time, Bloomfield's exploration of the "Hindu motif" derived from Sanskrit literature, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism,

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[42] A socio-religious storytelling performance where tales are told with the purpose of teaching about religious practices and moral lessons.

[43] A poetic representation of a person's life, noble or common, where more importance was given to the poetic quality than the historical accuracy. The central character of the narrative is usually from Hindu mythology, a prophet, religious preachers or a renowned Indian king.

[44] Tales composed in Pali and Sanskrit about the previous lives of Buddha.

Sikhism and Tamil literature. The term "Hindu motif" refers to the motifs that Bloomfield and several of his students listed from their analysis of the Vedic literature, Buddhist jatakas, Hindu mythology, Sanskrit animal fables, and Indian folklore. Many of the Hindu motifs from Bloomfield's discussion are present in Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli,* which proves that the tales he included in this collection were derived from the Hindu religious, literary and folkloric tradition.

There are fourteen tales in the *Thakurmar Jhuli* that Majumder divided into three sections with the titles "Dudher Shagor" (sea of milk), "Ruptarashi" (rup: form, tarashi: fear inducing; together: form that induces fear), and "Chang-Bang" (Fish and Frog). Other than these tales this collection also had a bedtime rhyme to put children to sleep named "Shona Ghumalo" under the section title "Aam sandesh" (Aam: mango, sandesh: a sweet made from fresh cottage cheese, Aam sandesh is a sweet made combining cottage cheese with mango pulp) and the concluding section "Furalo" which includes a nonsense rhyme marking the end of a story in Bengali oral storytelling performance. Majumder also added a rhyme at the beginning of each of the three tales sections, where he gave a simplistic idea of the kind of characters, main incidents and major themes of the tales in each respective section.

Dudher Shagor contains six stories in which all of the main characters are royals: kings, queens, princes and princesses. In these tales mundane life is mixed with supernatural phenomena, and adventures and expeditions are an essential component of the plot development. The story titles are "Kolaboti Rajkonna" (Princess Kolaboti), "Ghumonto Puri" (The Sleeping City), "Kakonmala Kanchonmala", "Saat Bhai Champa" (Seven Brothers as Champa Flowers), "Sit Boshonto", "Kironmala" (Wreath of Light).

The second section has tales about demonic women called "rakkhoshi". The stories are

"Nikomol aar Lalkomol" (Bluelotus and Redlotus), "Dalim Kumar" (the Pomegranate Prince), "Patal Konna Monimala" (The Woman from the underground-Monimala), "Shonar Kati Rupar Kati" (The Golden Stick and the Silver Stick).

The tales in the third section Chang- Bang are "Shiyal Pondit" (The Fox Teacher/ Scholar), "Sukhu aar Dukhu" (Sukhu and Dukhu), "Brahman-Brahmani" (The Brahmin and his Wife, Brahmani) and "Der Angule" (One and a Half Finger Tall Boy). These are humorous tales containing morals like "Good triumphs over evil", "Honesty is the best virtue", "Present mindedness and wit can save one from grave dangers." Bloomfield's Kakataliya motif, talking birds motif, overhearing motif, dohada motif and saccakiriya motif are present in different stories of these sections.

4.1.1 Kakataliya Motif in *Thakurmar Jhuli*

Kakataliya motif denotes two events happening at the same time having no relation to each other, but due to their co-occurrence, one is misunderstood as causing the other. The word "kakatalia" is an allusive derivative adjective from the crow and the palm tree fable (Bloomfield 1919, 1). Kakataliya is a compound word combing Kaka, meaning crow, and tal, meaning palm in Bengali. In the fable that this word is from, a crow was flying over a palm tree at the exact moment of the tree's falling. The crow being considered as the reason for the palm tree falling down is alluded to by the word kakataliya. Bloomfield (1919) defines the motif as the cooccurrence of two unrelated events or an event when the co-occurrence helps to save a character from danger.

The third tale from the third section, "Chang Bang" (Fish and Frog), titled "Brahman Brahmani" (the Brahmin and his wife), (Majumder 2018 [1907], 112-117) has three episodes with the kakataliya motif. After spending some time with a recluse, the Brahman comes back to his village, claiming to have earned a lot of knowledge. The first person he convinces of his

mastery is his wife, Brahmani. He reaches his home in the evening in the Bengali month of Bhadra. Before entering his house, he hears the "chak chak" sound of something frying in the kitchen. He makes an assumption that Brahmani is frying tal bora, a fried palm patty because Bhadra is the month for this food as palm fruit ripens during this month. So, when he tells his wife the exact number of the tal bora she is convinced of his knowledge of astrology. This is kakataliya as his wife is convinced that he can predict things that happen in his absence using his new knowledge. Still, in reality, it is his mere luck that he reaches home at the exact moment when she starts frying the bora and his shrewdness of counting the number of "chaak" sounds caused by the bora touching the hot oil. So, convinced of his abilities, Brahmani spreads the news, and people start to come for different predictions from the Brahman.

In the same tale, kakataliya happens in the way that it helps to avert an undesirable event and fulfills the desire of the Brahman through a coincidence (Bloomfield 1919, 13). After Brahman's fame spreads, a washerman named Moti dhopa comes to him for help after losing his donkey. The Brahman makes an excuse that it is his time to worship goddess Chandi and goes out to find the donkey. After spending the entire day under the hot sun, he returns home tired and scared that his fraud will be revealed. He sends Moti home telling him that he will get his donkey tomorrow. At night, the Brahman and Brahmani wake up to some noise outside. Thinking that it is a thief the Brahman gets petrified and wants to hide, but his wife drags him to catch the thief. When he gets out of his house, he faints seeing a figure lying in the yard. Coincidentally, it was the donkey that was lying in his yard. People of the neighborhood come after hearing all the commotion and to them, the Brahmani narrates a different story. She tells everyone that her husband has driven the donkey to his house by chanting mantras and thus has fainted due to fatigue. People are amazed by his miraculous power, and his fame spread throughout the country. Brahmin is saved by the accidental appearance of the donkey at his home.

Kakataliya motif works throughout this tale as in the next event; the Brahmin is saved again by chance encounter. When his fame reaches the king of the land he is called to the court to find the princess's necklace. He has to find it, or he will be imprisoned. He asks for two days. At night he starts to pray loudly, "হায় মা জগদম্বা, বিপাকে ফেলিলি,/ ছাএ পোয়েসর্বনাশ, প্রাণে-ধনে নিলি,/ কি করি উপায় মাগো, কী করি উপায়-/জগদম্বা এই তোর মনে ছিল হায়!" "Oh mother Jagadamba, what a danger you have put me in, I will lose my life and riches, what should I do, what is the way, Oh Jagadamba! This is what you intended for me!" (my translation from

Majumder 2018 [1907], *116)*. The gardener lady named Jaga malini, named after goddess Jagadamba, hears him saying her name and gets scared. She falls to his feet asking him not to reveal her name. Brahmin realizes that he has found the thief coincidentally but does not reveal his true mind. He acts as a great scholar and asks her to put the necklace in a pot and put it in the mud of the outdoor pond. Jaga malini follows his instruction and the next day the Brahmin acts like a great pandit and finds the necklace.

4.1.2 Talking Birds in *TakurMar Jhuli*

Bloomfield (1914) identifies several real and fictional birds as recurring motifs in Hindu fiction. These birds are significant for their ability to speak and "are regarded as wise, shrewd, cunning, faithful, self-sacrificing, fit for delicate missions, and capable of extricating men from difficult situations." (354). In *Thakurmar Jhuli,* several talking birds fulfill different purposes in the stories.

A talking bird in "Kironmala" from the section "Dudher Shagor" (Majumder 2018 [1907], 55-66) instructs Kironmala about what to do when she reaches the Maya Pahar (enchanted mountain). Following its instruction, she sprinkles fountain water on the hill, turning all the stones back into humans. This golden bird also knows the past, and using that knowledge

it instructs Kironmala to invite the king of the land to a feast. The food the bird asks to arrange

reveals its wisdom as it asks them to prepare different types of desserts made of gold coins,

pearls, gems, and jewels. When the king's wife was pregnant, her evil elder sisters threw away

the newborn babies in the river and showed a puppy, a kitten, and a wooden doll to the king.

Presenting the strange food inedible to humans, the bird asks three questions to the king, "Do

humans give birth to a puppy? Do humans give birth to a kitten? If humans cannot eat this food,

then how can a human give birth to a wooden doll?" (my translation from Majumder 2018

[1907], 65). The birds help the king realize his mistake and reunite with his three children, Arun,

Barun and Kironmala.

Among the fictional birds of Hindu fiction, there is the bird couple Shuka-Shari. Shuka is

a male bird and Shari is a female. Bloomfield (1914) notes that,

> From Veda and Asoka inscriptions, through Sanskrit literature and Buddhist Jatakas, to
> modern collections of folk-lore, and foreign versions of Hindu fiction, [Shuka] and
> [Shari] appear together. To a considerable extent they figure as man and wife… [this
> couple is formed by] the unnatural alliance between the two heterogeneous birds [usually
> a parrot and a maina]. (352-353)

Parrot and maina birds are real birds but they are paired together as man and wife in the Hindu

tales as Shuka-Shari where usually the parrot is the husband and maina is the wife. This bird pair

is found in "Sheet Boshonto" from the section—Sea of Milk. In the tale, this pair is addressed as

"meso-masi" by Boshonto, which also refers to their status as a couple. In Bengali Hindu

families, mother's sister is called "masi" and her husband is called "meso".

In Majumder's collection, Shuka or parrot appears alone in some tales. In the first tale

from the first section, "Kolaboti Rajkonna" (Princess Kolaboti) (Majumder 2018 [1907], 17-30)

Shuka appears alone and is also made of gold. This golden Shuka is the only companion of

princess Kolaboti. It speaks with the princess and also assists her in finding the correct life

partner. Shuka appears alone in another tale from the second section "Ruptarashi" of the

collection named "Shonar Kati Rupar Kati" (ibid, 91-100). Here the shuka bird contains the life of the rakshasi that has disguised as a beautiful woman and become the queen.

Another fictional talking bird pair that is exclusively Bengali and whose mentions are found in Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli* is Bangoma-Bangomi, the human-faced bird with no eyesight at birth. In the tale "Nilkomol aar Lalkomol" (Bluelotus and Redlotus) (Majumder 2018 [1907], 67-77) there is an episode with these birds where the two brothers Nilkomol and Lalkomol help a Bangoma-Bangomi couple by giving their blood for their children. After getting their sights, the two Bangom children carry Nilkomol and Lalkomol on their backs across many lands, forests and mountains to the country of the rakshas (rakshasa).

Like the Hindu religious and fictional tales, in the rupkathas of Majumder's collection, these talking birds play active roles and influence the course of the story because they possess human attributes like talking. A talking bird is a character in these tales. Other than being there to assist the humans, the talking birds also assume other forms in this collection. The queen transforms into a talking parrot in "Sheet Boshonto", who also influences the course of the story by suggesting princess Rupabati choose the prince who brings the elephant jewel as her husband. In the story named "Kolaboti Rajkonna", an owl is born from a human who eventually transforms into a human prince after his wife burns his wings.

Other than these talking birds there are mentions of Bengal birds like the cuckoo, robin and peacock. These birds cannot talk and thus do not bear any significant roles in the tales. They are there to create a natural ambiance of the Bengal countryside.

4.1.3 Overhearing Motif in *Thakurmar Jhuli*

Another motif from Bloomfield's discussion that involves the talking birds is the overhearing motif. In this motif, the main character overhears the conversations between two talking birds, other humans, or any other talking animal. These conversations either reveal some

events of the tale hidden from the character overhearing theme or are full of directions of the future decisions to be taken. Bloomfield divides the motif into two kinds: empirical and fabulous (1920a, 310). The empirical overhearing has no divine or magical intervention. Here a human character overhears the conversation between other humans and presents solutions to problems or gets direction about the future course of action. On the other hand, the fabulous kind of overhearing,

> [is] designed, or rather intuitively produced, to save from death, disease, or catastrophe; to procure fairy-tale wealth and success; or to furnish helpful information or instruction in perplexing situations. Whenever and wherever the hero is in danger or trouble, he happens to overhear a pair of being divine, demonic, or animal who tell him how to extricate himself. (1920a, 309)

The overhearing happens as an event that is not the center of the narrative. It helps the plot move forward when it comes to a momentary stop or as transitional segment of the tale. Birds are commonly the prominent source of information in the fabulous type of overhearing, and they present information that is otherwise inaccessible to the characters.

Both kinds of overhearing motifs are present in *Thakurmar Jhuli*. The empirical overhearing is present in "Kironmala". At the beginning of the tale, the king asked his advisor how he could learn about the real condition of his subjects. The advisor advised him to go on a hunting expedition during the daytime and at night, disguise himself to check on his people. As advised, the king started going in disguise and learning about the happiness and sorrow of his people. On such a night, he was passing beside a peasant's hut. He overheard the three daughters of the peasant talking among themselves. The eldest sister expressed her desire to get married to the grass-cutter of the king's palace. The second sister's wish was to marry the royal cook. The youngest sister was quiet for a long time but after the insistence of her two sisters, she said "আমার যদি রাজার সঙ্গে বিয়ে হতো, তো আমি রানি হইতাম।" "If I were married to the king, I would be the queen" (my translation from Majumder 2018 [1907], 56). The king left that place

after hearing this. The next day, he fulfilled all three of their wishes and the youngest sister became his queen.

The fabulous overhearing is present in the story "Sheet-Boshonto". The brothers Sheet and Boshonto got separated in the forest after they were ordered to be slain by their father, the King, as a result of their stepmother Shuoraaani's scheme. After many years of separation, they forgot about each other. The conversation between the bird couple shuka-shari at the sage's house where Boshonto grew up after getting separated from Sheet plays a vital role in their reunion. This overhearing also helped him to achieve magical wealth. Boshonto overheard their conversation about the magical elephant-jewel, golden lotus, and princess Rupabati's condition of marrying the man who achieved those. Living in the sage's hut in a jungle detached from the rest of the world, Boshonto could only learn about these from the shuka-shari birds. He then set out on an adventure to obtain the treasures which resulted in him finding his lost brother Sheet. He also found his mother who was transformed into a golden parrot by his stepmother, the three stepbrothers and his father.

Fabulous overhearing also helps the main character to overcome challenges. Lalkomol and Nilkomol's journey to the rakshas country became smooth after they overheard the Bangoma-Bangomi bird couple's conversation. They were very tired of walking for many days before overhearing them talking on the same tree under which they were resting. The Bangoma was telling the Bangomi, "আহা, এমন দয়ালু কারা, দুফোঁটা রক্ত দিয়া আমার বাছাদের চোখ ফুটায়!" "Aha, who will be so kind as to donate two drops of blood to open my children's eyes!" Hearing their conversation Nilkomol and Lalkomol offered their blood saying, "গাছের উপরে কে কথা কয়?রক্ত আমরা দিতে পারি।""Who is talking on the tree? We will give our blood." Bangoma-Bangomi went to their nest with their blood. After some time two Bangoma boys flew

to them and said, "কে তোমরা রাজপুত্র আমাদের চোখ ফুটাইছো? আমরা তোমাদের কি কাজ করিব বল?" "Who are you prince who gave us our eyesight? What work can we do for you?" Nilkomol and Lalkomol replied, "আহা , তা তোমরা বেঁচে থাকো, এখন আমাদের কোনোই কাজ নাই।" "May you live long, we have no task for you." "আচ্ছা, তা তোমরা যাইবে কোথায় চল, আমরা পিঠে করিয়া রাখিয়া আসি।" "Then let us carry you on our back to wherever you are going." (my translation from Majumder 2018 [1907], 73) said the two Bangoma children and they carried Lalkomol and Nilkomol to the rakshas country within seven days and seven nights. This encounter saved them from an arduous journey, and time to the rakshas country.

4.1.4 Dohada or Pregnancy Whim in *TakurMar Jhuli*

Dohada or the pregnancy whim is another motif that is found in abundance in Hindu Vedic literature. The craving of the pregnant woman is called dohada and "the prosperous development of the embryo depends upon the satisfaction of these cravings" (Blomfield 1920, 2). Fulfilling the cravings or whim of the pregnant woman is important and it is "a Hindu motto, because the fetus comes to grief if desire due to dohada is not granted" (4). Husbands are conscious, and it is their duty to attend to their wives' cravings for the fear that her health will be affected unless the dohada is fulfilled. Bloomfield discusses six manifestations of this motif in Hindu religious and fictional literature. From these six, the tale "Kironmala" of *Thakurmar Jhuli* contains the "Dohada… impels some act on [the husband's] part which involves danger" (ibid, 6) motif. Unlike the talking bird and overhearing motif, as Bloomfield says,

> dohada is employed constantly as a start motif which initiates a chain of unusual happenings, or as a progressive motif in the course of stories. Clearly, if the story requires something unusual to be done if the smooth course of someone's life is to be disturbed; or, if the evenly righteous or proper character of some person needs to be turned into something wicked or convulsive; dohada, in its unbridled unexpectedness, can be readily called upon. (5)

In "Kironmala", when the queen was expecting a child she expressed her desire to meet her two elder sisters and have them in her Aturghar[45] during the child birth. The king prepared a Aturghar with white marble, diamond and gold, and brings the queen's sisters in the palace and entrusts her childbirth to them.

Two aspects of this dohada motif are employed in this tale. The first aspect is the husband's inability to deny the wife her whims during childbirth as it might harm the unborn child. When the queen expresses her desire to have her sisters with her in the natal home the king obliges instantly. "How does the king say no? He says, 'All right.' ("রাজা আর কী করিয়া 'না' করেন? বলিলেন 'আচ্ছা'") (my translation from Majumder 2018 [1907], 56) and that sets the second aspect of the motif in motion.

The second aspect is the drastic change in the character of the two sisters happening as a consequence of fulfilling the pregnancy whim. After the sisters arrived at the palace they got jealous seeing the youngest sister's wealth and a significant change in character happened after this. In the first encounter with the sisters in the tale, they appeared quite simple-minded and content with little things. Their ambitions were not too high as one of them wanted to marry the grass cutter of the palace and the other wanted to marry the cook. Both of them seemed content to have enough food to feed themselves. Even after their youngest sister got married to the king they did not seem to express any dissatisfaction as the eldest sister had fried black gram at the grass cutter's house and the second sister ate the royal food every day. Their characters turn wicked after they arrived at the palace to help their sister's childbirth.

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[45] Traditionally, this is the labour room where Hindu women gives birth and remains in seclusion for eleven to thirty days. This is a makeshift hut which is burnt down after the seclusion period is over.

4.1. 5 Saccakiriya or Truth-act Motif in *TakurMar Jhuli*

Saccakiriya or the truth act motif works as a declaration made by the characters of their own good deed or to mark their noble character in a monologue while helplessly faced with a dreadful situation (Bloomfield1917, 16). This is "a formal declaration of fact, accompanied by a command or resolution or prayer that the purpose of the agent shall be accomplished (Burlingame 1917, 429). The character who declares the truth is usually blind or has lost his own body and entered another body of a bird, an animal, or another human of lower status (Bloomfield 1917, 16; 1923, 149). He has lost the power and strength of his own body but either possesses certain good qualities or is free from certain evil qualities, and a single, most commonplace sort of truth is sufficient (Burlingame, 1917, 431) to cure himself. Telling the truth about his nobility and a good deed gets him out of the dangerous situation he is in and also restores the lost bodily attribute.

In *Thakurmar Jhuli* the tale "Dalimkumar" (Majumder 2018 [1907], 78-84) from the second section "Rup Tarashi" contains an episode of saccakiriya. Dalimkumar, who was blinded by the spell cast by the rakshasi disguised as his mother, reached a city that was going through an ordeal of its own. The princess of that kingdom got married to a new man every day that was chosen by a royal elephant, and the next morning the only thing left of the new groom were the bones. The people of the kingdom celebrated every noon till night on the wedding, and lamented the death of the new king in the morning. When Dalimkumar reached the kingdom, the royal elephant chose him as the new king. On the wedding night, a snake as thin as a hair got out through the princess's nose and transformed into a thirty-two hooded snake. Dalimkumar who was blind could not see anything but sensed the presence of something unusual and declared, "জানি না, যে হও তুমি, রক্ষ যক্ষ দানব। যদি রাজপুত্র হই, যদি নিষ্পাপ শরীর হয়, দৃষ্টির আড়ালে তরোয়াল ঘুরাইলাম, এই তরোয়াল তোমাকে ছুঁইবে।" "I don't know who you are, a Raksha, a

Yaksha[46] or a Monster. If I am a prince, if I have an innocent body, I am maneuvering the sword

blindly, it will strike you." (my translation from Majumder 2018 [1907], 81), and it did, and he

successfully killed the snake and regained his sight.

The act of declaring truth in "Dalimkumar" contains several characteristics of a true act

or saccakiriya. Dalimkumar performs this truth act in a state of blindness caused by the

rakshasi's spell. When he declares his "power of goodness and the power of merit" (Burlingame

1917, 432) possessed in his "innocent body" his sword cuts the snake. He cuts it with his power

of righteousness. The declaration of his true identity and his righteous character take the form of

a prayer addressed to the evil spirits present in their wedding chamber. Dalimkumar's true

identity is hidden to the princess and her subjects until that moment of "truth act". His act of

speaking the truth is used as a means of avoiding injury or death in ordeals (Burlingame 1917,

432). Acts of truth takes the form of a healing charm healing his blindness.

Other than these specific motifs, several markers of Hindu society, culture and tradition

often transpire from these tales. In "Kolaboti Rajkonna", Princess Kolaboti observes Brata or

Hindu ritualistic fasting. In the same tale, the human forms of the monkey and owl princes

Buddhu and Bhutum are compared to the sons of the debota or Hindu gods. The prince in the

second tale "Ghumonto Puri" (Majumder 2018 [1907], 31-34) from "Sea of Milk" is also

compared to Hindu gods. Moreover, the description of the wedding ceremony in this tale is of a

Hindu marriage. The description includes "mongol ghora,"[47] "alpona,"[48] "gua-paan,"[49] "path-piri

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[46] A class of nature spirits found in Buddhist and Hindu mythologies.

[47] Mongol ghora or mongol ghot is a brass pitcher filled with water, covered with mango leaves
attached to one twig and green coconut placed on it used during the Bengali Hindu marriage.

[48] The white patterns or designs made in the Bengali Hindu houses during weddings.

[49] Betel-nut and betel leaf.

ashon,"[50]a conch shell, and the marriage is conducted by a "purut"[51] before "aagun"[52] or fire.

The other stories have many such direct or indirect references of Hindu rituals, customs and

mythological characters.

In the above discussion, I have tried to emphasize that the tales presented in Majumder's

collection were derived from the long tradition of Bengali Hindu religion and folklore. Yet the

presence of the Hindu motifs and religious markers in Majumder's Rukatha collection cannot be

ascribed to his ideological biases without analyzing it in relation to other folklore from the same

geographic area. In the next section, I will discuss the Hindu and Muslim elements found in a

Bengali folk ballad collection from Mymensingh titled *Eastern Bengal Ballads Mymensing*

(1923).

4.2 The Ballads of Mymensingh

I discuss the ballad collection from Mymesingh for two reasons. First, these collections

include the ballads collected from the same district Mymesingh, in the then East Bengal, from

where the tales in *Thakurmar Jhuli* were collected. Despite the place of origin being same, these

ballads have ample samples of Muslim contributions to Bengal folklore tradition which prove

that the absence of Islamic elements in Majumder's tales were not due to their regional origin.

Secondly, the folklore that it represented was free from religious bias and the "problems and

conflicts… [in the] ballads [were] either social or individual, but very seldom [had] any religious

bearing" (Zbavitel 1963, ix-x) and presented the life of the Bengal folk that included people from

both religious communities. Many of the ballads that were collected from Muslim singers had

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[50] The wooden stool on which the bride and groom sits during the "saat paak" or the seven circumambulation in Hindu marriage

[51] The Bengali colloquial word for purohit, a Hindu priest.

[52] Agni, Aagun or fire is an integral part of Hindu marriage.

Hindu religious elements in them whereas there were many ballads that included Islamic elements. Hence, these ballad collections may prove that the presence of Muslim elements in Bengal folklore did not hamper but contributed to the Bengali folk culture.

The folk ballads of Bengal were an untrodden arena of Bengal folkloristics until 1913. It came into the notice of Bengal scholars when Chandrakumar De's collected ballads from the Muslim farmers of a village named Masuka in Mymensingh district was published in the magazine Saurabh[53] (Gupta 1965, 167; Zbavitel 1963, x; Sen 1958, preface page 1). With the ten folksongs from the twenty one folk ballads collected by Charakumar De and edited by D.C. Sen the first edition of *Mymensingh Gitika* was published in 1923. An English prose translation of the *Mymensingh Gitika* was published in the same year titled *Eastern Bengal Ballads Mymensing* (1923). Sen later published a range of books on Bengali folk ballads from other parts of East Bengal as *Purbabanga Gitika* (several volumes were published starting from1926) (Zbavitel 1963, v). English translations of these volumes were also published as *Eastern Bengal Ballads* in four large volumes from 1926 to 1932.

These song performances were done in community settings or as professional performances. These were performed by a group of singers consisting of "a main singer accompanied by musicians and chorus" (Zbavitel 1963, 8). The main singer or the "Gayan" sang the song whereas eight to ten more singers known as "Paile" repeated after him in a chorus (Sen 1923, xei). These were performed in one of the houses of the village at night by the "amateur parties" consisting of a group of people from the village, or by professional singers from other

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[53] Chadrakumar De was born in the village of Aithor in Mymensingh in 1881. He was a selftaught man with little academic education who had no knowledge of literary composition. He collected many folk songs that he called "ময়মনসিংহের মেয়েলী সঙ্গীত" or the feminine songs of Mymensingh. These songs attracted D.C. Sen's attention after his essay on one of the songs was published in Saurabh, a local newspaper of Mymensingh in 1913. Sen, on behalf of the University of Calcutta appointed him for collecting the Bengali folksongs for a collection of folk ballads. He had to travel distant villages, meet several singers to acquire a complete song, and live among them to collect these tales.

villages in exchange of remunerations (ibid). These small groups owned these songs, and the ownership of these songs were heavily guarded and were passed on only to the apprentices and "learned by heart and sung naturally with all the changes, mistakes, omissions" (Zbavitel 1965, 14) made by the previous singer. Most of the ballads in these collections included names of the supposed composers or singers. In the Bengali versions, Sen insisted on retaining the original dialect that these were performed in, and Chandrakumar De followed his instructions in his documentation.

These songs were part of the Bengali rural commoners' cultural tradition and neglected as a culture of the lower class among the upper educated class. In his introduction to the Bengali collection Sen mentioned that very few among the educated people of Mymensingh knew about these songs and those who knew about them considered those inappropriate for the sophisticated educated class as "ছোটলোকেরা, বিশেষতঃ মুসলমানেরা" (Chotalok and the Muslim peasants) sang these songs (Sen 1958, preface page 1, Sen 1923, xv). From this it can be understood that Bengali folklore was practiced among both the Muslim and Hindu people of the rural areas. In the same preface, Sen also revealed that Islamic influence in these songs were clearly evident as this district had been under Muslim rule since the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

The songs from Mymensingh are great examples of Bengali folklore's Hindu-Muslim religious assimilation of the twentieth century. In Sen's (1923) own words,

> These ballads are sung in the district of Mymensing generally by Muhammadans and low-caste Hindus—-those belonging to the Namasudra, the- Hādi, the Dom, the Jele (fishermen), the Patni (boatmen) and other depressed castes. As a rule, they are illiterate, their chief occupation is agriculture with other humble avocations in which they are engaged in the day-time. (xei)

The ten songs in *Eastern Bengal Ballads Mymensing* (1923) have several Hindu and Muslim characteristics, but their religious identity does not overshadow the themes of these folksongs.

These ballads, though fictional, have names of real places and people, and historical inferences in them. These songs deal with themes like love, social injustice, and heroism. Co-existence of Hindu and Muslims comes as a natural part of Bengal social life in these Gitika. In the ballad "Kamala", Manik Chaklader, an affluent man from the village Hulia serves both the Hindu Brahmins and Muslim Fakirs with food, clothes and money. Moreover, the existing caste system in Hindu society and the changing social structure due to the Muslim preachers' arrival can be found in some ballads. Muslim religious preachers and how they influenced the rural Hindu population with their occult powers, and convinced them to follow the new belief is present in the ballad "Kanka and Lila" (Sen 1923, 220-223). A Muslim Pir[54] amazes the people of Bipropur with his ability to cure any disease using only mud or dust. The ailing persons do not need to speak of their illness as the Pir knows all about it. He also turns a mud-cake into sweet, and any wishes expressed to him are realized. This ballad also reveals the several chauvinisms associated with the Hindu caste system. Kanka, the main protagonist, is rejected by the Brahmin society because after his parents' (who were Brahmins) death he is raised by a chandal (lowest caste of Hindus) couple, and becomes a disciple of the Muslim pir. Besides, both Muslim and Hindu composers are identified as the authors of these songs. Though religion is present in all of the ballads, but none show any bias towards a particular religion. Rather, these folk songs concentrate more on the people interacting with each other while living their lives among the many social changes happening around them. As these ballads existed in Bengal before the Muslim conquest, they were essentially Hindu in origin. However, the collection that was published during the second decade of the twentieth century does not only concentrate on finding

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[54] In the Bengali folk concept a Pir is an Islamic spiritual person with divine powers. They were immigrants settling in rural places who established dargah or a spiritual establishment surrounding a holy tomb of a revered religious figure.

the original text but also includes the way the Muslim conversion of Bengali people contributed to this genre.

Several aspects of Muslim influence are present in this collection. First of all, the composers' and singers' names that are mentioned are from the both religious communities. Sen enlisted many names of renowned ballad singers of his time and earlier times in *Eastern Bengal Ballads Mymensing* (1923, Introduction xeiii). Moreover, many of the singers who added their own interpretations while performing these songs belonged to the Muslim community. For example in the song "Mahua" the bandana (preliminary hymn) part was added by a Muslim Gyen (Sen 1923, in the Preface to "Mahua", i) though "Mahua" was composed by Dvija Kanai, a priest of Nama Sudra caste, the lowest cast of Bengal Hindu society. Examples of Muslim additions to the Hindu ballads are found in other ballads in this collection and *Purbabanga Gitika.* Bandana, or the introductory invocation, is addressed to Hindu gods and shrines in some of the ballads, while to Muslim religious characters in other ballads. Additionally, some ballads also contain combinations of both Hindu and Muslim elements, and also secular invocations (Zbavitel 1963, 141). Three Muslim singers Pashani Bewa, Sekh kancha and Nidan Fakir's contributions were compiled into the ballad "Malua." Secondly, there are characters from both religions in these ballads. The prominent Muslim and Hindu characters in several ballads are as follows:

Ballad Name	Hindu Characters	Muslim Characters
Mahua	Mahua, Naderchand, Naderchand's Mother, The Sannyasi	No Muslim character
Malua	Malua, Chand Binod, Mother of Chand Binod, Hiradhar, Netai	The Kazi, Dewan Saheb (Dewan Jahangir)
Chandravati	Chandra, Jaychandra, Bangshi Das	The Mahomedan Girl

Kamala[55]	Manik Chakladar, Sadhan, Kamala, Chikan (a milk-maid), Karkoon, Prince Pradip Kumar	No Muslim character
Dewan Bhabna	Sunai, Madhab, Bhatuk Thakur (a Brahmin), Shalla,	Dewan Bhabna, Baghra (His religious identity is not clearly stated. He worked as a spy for the Dewan)
Kenaram the Robber	Kenaram (a Brahmin turned robber), The Kaivarta[55] Brothers, Bangshi Das	No Muslim character
Rupavati	Zaminder[56] Rajchandra, The Queen, Rupavati, Madan,	Nawab of Bengal
Kanka and Lila	Kanka, Murari, Kaushalya, Garga-the sage, Gayatri Devi, Lila,	A Mahomedan Pir
Kajalrekha[57]	Dhaneswar, Kajalrekha, Ratneshwar, Needle prince	No Muslim Charater
Dewana Madina or Alal-Dulal	Hiradhar	Alal, Dulal, Dewan Sonafar, The Vizir, The Begum, Dewan Sekender, Mamina, Amina, Madina, Suraj Jamal

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[55] Kaivartas or Kaibartas was a Bengali Hindu agriculturist caste.

[56] Zeminder.

[57] This one in the collection is a folktale narrated in prose and poetry. Sen considered the ballads as historical, having roots in the actual events in history happening at actual places. A large part of his discussion concentrated on the actual people and place names that these ballads were based on. He labelled "Kajalrekha" a folktale and a pure fiction that imitated the traits of Mymensingh ballads. A version of this tale was published in Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli* as "Kakonmala Kanchonmala".

4.3 The Difference in the Representations of Bengal Folklore from Mymensingh

More than a decade apart, Majumder's collection of folktales, *Thakurmar Jhuli* (1907) and Sen's ballad collection, *Eastern Bengal Ballad Mymensing* (1923) from the same geographic area show a shift in the folklorists' treatment of Muslim components and language in the folklore. Unlike Majumder's folktales, in the Bengali version of the folk Ballads in *Mymensingh Gitika* Sen kept the vernacular dialect that Chandrakumar De documented them in. Though Sen did a lot of editing of De's manuscripts to develop their literary quality, he did not try to mix in the Sadhu Bhasa that Majumder did. Taking these folksongs as evidence, Sen criticized the Sanskritization of Bengali language, and argued that these songs were the proof that "Prakrit"[58] was the origin of Bengali language (Sen 1932, xi). He also acknowledged the internalization of Urdu, Arabica and Persian words into the Bengali language of the common people of Bengal. Moreover, Sen criticized Hindu orthodox society for the decay of these folksongs in Hindu households and lower caste Hindus, and identified Muslims as the tradition bearers for the same reason. About the folksong "Mahua" he says,

> At one time very popular in Eastern Mymensingh[59]… the freedom and romance of love in the melodrama could not…[get] approval of the orthodox community [that grew rigid] as the Brahminic influence spread…owing to the opposition of the orthodox Brahmins who condemned the poem as corrupting the morals of young women, the song is scarcely sung now in Hindu houses [and] the peasants and lower-class people, especially the Mahomedans who do not share the scruples of the Hindu, occasionally sing some of its song. (1923, in the Preface to "Mahua", i-ii)

It is interesting to see Sen addressing Muslims as the true practitioners of Bengali folk culture as in his earlier discussion of the Bengali folktales he condemned the Muslim versions of folktales.

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[58] In a simpler definition this was the language of the common people of Bengal that was different from the Sanskrit language. There are opposing views about the origin of Prakrit and Bengali language. Using these ballads as proof Sen argued that Bengali language came from Prakrit not Sanskrit.

[59] Sen used both spellings,"Mymensing" and "Mymensingh," in the same book. I have kept the spellings as found in the book.

In 1906, when Majumder's collection was published, scholars were trying to find the original

version, the "ur-text" of Bengal folktales, and ignored the social phenomena that shaped and

contributed to the changes in folklore materials. According to the prominent Hindu scholars of

the time, this original version was "Hindu and Buddhistic in spirit," and different from the type

developed by the "Pouranic Renaissance" and the Muslims (Sen 1920, 155). In their opinion, the

Muslim versions retained the form of the "earliest type", but Muslim collectors "introduced some

of the peculiar ideas current in [Muslim] society" (ibid, 13, 163). With this in mind, no tales with

any Muslim characters or words from the Arabic, Persian or Urdu languages was included in

Thakurmar Jhuli to retain the supposed "originality" of the rupkathas.

The bhadralok scholars' vision of the original Bengal folklore had contradictions. The

genealogy of Bengal folktale needs to be addressed in relation to the hegemonic nature of the

dominant Bengali folklore collectors' ideals of originality. Bengal folklore collection of the early

twentieth century was impacted by the existing socio-political factors. In order to resist the

colonial cultural and political dominance, folklore was used as a tool of framing a national

tradition and culture using the regional traditions. Bengal folklore forms like folk songs,

folktales, folk rituals etc. were diverse, and there was no uniform cultural unit called "Bengal

culture". As Zbavitel (1965) says:

> According to authorities such as Niharranjan Ray or Asutosh Bhattach**a**ryya, **as** well as
> my own experience, the whole of … Bengal…does not represent a uniform cultural unit.
> There are considerable differences in the historical development, economic and living
> conditions, language and features of folk-culture, between, for instance, Chittagong on
> one hand, and Mymensingh on the other. (vii-viii)

Everything that was published as Bengal folk culture came from the multitude of regional folk

lore collected from several parts of the largest province of the colonial India. Similarly,

Majumder's rupkatha was formed using regional folktales and conditioning those in the language

of the bhadralok and in the version acceptable to them. On the other hand, Sen's ballad collections acknowledged the regional character of the folklore materials being collected.

The ballads from Mymensingh were proof that Bengal folklore encompassed the religious, linguistic and cultural diversity of the different communities living for generations in the geographic area, and with the changing time and changing social and political conditions the folklore collectors' perception towards Bengal folklore transformed. Though Majumder's rupkatha and the ballad collections from Mymensingh derived folklore of the same locality of twentieth century Bengal, the folklore materials varied in many aspects from each other. At the same time, it was no wonder that, the rupkatha "Kakonmala Kanchonmala" (2018 [1907]) in Majumder's collection was rendered as the ballad "Kajalrekha" in Sen's collection. Another rupkatha "Sheet Boshonto" (ibid,) had similarities with the section about the sufferings of the brothers Alal and Dulal at their step-mother's hand in the ballad "Dewana Madina" (Sen 1923, 285-304). It is noteworthy that all the major characters in "Dewana Madina" are Muslims, and the composer, Mansur Baiyeoti was a Muslim. It is quite possible that the ballads, which were prepared for public performances were told as tales within the home walls with modifications made by the individual story teller telling the stories. The question remains of whether any of the versions of these tales can be labelled as "original", and preferred over the other variants. That is exactly what happened in case of Majumder's collection. The tales in his representations did not include the elements that the Muslim people of Bengal added to the Bengali rupkatha tradition. Those were omitted because the Hindu bhadralok Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder and the Calcutta-based scholar community thought that the "Arabian and Persian influence [of the Muslims] changed the original spirit of the tales" (Sen 1920, 13). With this purist view of Bengal folktales that treated Bengali culture as equivalent to Hindu culture and Muslims as the outsider, Majumder's collection of a Bengal rupkatha was incomplete and biased. To fulfil the need of the

time the Hindu scholars of the time chose to call these versions as Swadeshi tradition, and rejected the other versions as corrupted by foreign cultures. Thus, Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli* is a good example of how choices of representation of a particular folklore form can be governed by nationalizing goals of a particular time and a group in power.

4.4 An Exploration of Religious Variants of Majumder's Rupkatha in Bengali Films

Majumder's collection presents a rich space for analyzing the interplay of folklore and nationalism as well as the representational choice a folktale collector makes in producing a printed collection. A question that I will address here at this point of the discussion is- do the different versions of a tale deteriorate the folktale's genre structure? In this section I am going to discuss two Bengali films made after the Indian partition of 1947 that were based on several rupkatha from Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli.* The main plots of the films follow the tale "Saat Bhai Champa" (Majumder 2018 [1907], 40-42) or "The Seven Brothers as Champa Flowers" from the first section. At different plot points, other folktale events were incorporated into the plot. Greenhill and Matrix (2010) argued that, films on folktales are not "a break with tradition but a continuation of it [and] filmed [folk] tales are as much the genuine article as their telling in a bedtime story or an anthology" (3). These films used the rupkatha tales available in Majumder's tale collection and rendered two versions of the well-known folktales. Hence, I will treat the two films as two versions of the Rupkatah from Majumder's collection and discuss how the two versions incorporated different religious components within the same rupkatha frame and created new meaning for their respective intended audience.

Several films were made on tales of this collection in both pre and post-independence Bangladesh, and in West Bengal in India. Bengal, which was the biggest province in India during the British colonial time was divided on the basis of religious majority in 1947. The Muslim

majority part, East Bengal became a part of Pakistan and was known as East Pakistan after the partition of 1947. West Bengal, with its Hindu majority population became a state of India. The culture in these two parts of Bengal had many similarities, and common tradition and heritage which they carry even to this day. The Bengal folktales that Majumder published are identified by the both as their tradition and culture. The first film in discussion was made in 1968 in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh with the same title as the one from *Thakurmar Jhuli, Saat Bhai Champa*. The following production in 1987 made in independent Bangladesh retained the screenplay of the 1968 version written by Khan Ataur Rahman. In West Bengal, *Rajar Meye Parul* was released in 1993. This film's screenplay was written by Milon Chowdhury, who followed Khan Ataur Rahman's screenplay with some small changes. One of the major differences between the films from two Bengals[60] that is relevant to my discussion is the markers of religion that is carefully embedded into the screenplay without changing the main plot.

The films in discussion were based on not just one but several tales from *Thakurmar Jhuli*. The plot made use of the "Saat Bhai Champa" as the core narrative and included several episodes from other stories from this collection. In the film the King woke up from a dream in which he encountered a mystic who presented him with the solution to his problem. Audience was made aware of in the following scenes that the King was despised by his own subjects because he was "atkure" or childless. It was after this dream that he married his seventh and youngest wife in the film. This varied from the tale, "Saat Bhai Champa" but in another tale in the collection, "Kolaboti Rajkonna" (Majumder 2018 [1907], 17-30) a saint gave a magical root

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[60] I am using the term two Bengals here to refer to Bangladesh and West Bengal in India. In both of these places the language Bengali or "Bangla" has been the integral part of their nationalist identity. Through a war of independence, the Pakistani state East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971, deriving the name from the language of the majority people. On the other hand, the West Bengal state government proposed to change the state's name to "Bangla" in 2022.

that helped the seven queens to get pregnant. Finding solution to a problem in one's dream motif was taken from the tale "Der Angule" (Majumder 2018 [1907], 118-126) of the same collection. In this tale Ma Shoshthi, the goddess of reproduction, appeared in a dream of the childless woodcutter's wife and told her to eat a cucumber she will find the next day. In the films, the same saint who had appeared in the King's dream gave the youngest queen a stick instructing her to throw it at a plum tree. She got the same number of children as the number of plums that fell off the tree at one stroke. Moreover, the folk term "atkure" was used by Majumder in "Der Angule", and his "Saat Bhai Champa" did not contain it. This term was derived from "Der Angule" and used in the film's plot. Another tale that the film plot drew largely from was "Kironmala" (Majumder 2018 [1907], 55-66). Princess Kironmala transformed her brothers back into humans from stones. Similarly, the female protagonist, Parul helped her seven brothers to become humans in their grown-up forms in the film. In the story, Chotorani's seven sons and one daughter were buried together right after birth. In the film the daughter was rescued by the gardener lady who raised her up as her own daughter. So, it will be right to say that the films created a medley of the many tales from the collection to create a rupkatha that is both similar to and different from the tale version from the collection.

The films are great examples of the representational choices that the film's producers and performers make depending on the audience. In the two films, *Saat Bhai Champa* and *Rajar Meye Parul* many differences can be found. The reason for which were the religious identity of the majority audience of the films. The 1968 and 1987 production of *Saat Bhai Champa* were intended for Muslim majority audience in Bangladesh (pre and post-independence). On the other hand, *Rajar Meye Parul* was for the Hindu majority audience of West Bengal in India. As I have

mentioned earlier, the screenplay did not change the plot much and most of the changes were

made in the representations of the religious markers.[61]

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the presence of Arabic, Urdu and Persian words

were the Muslim inclusion to Bengali folk language. Difference in language use was one of the

ways that these two films appropriated the rupkatha for the audience. The following characters

were addressed using words from different languages.

Character Names in English	Addressed as in *Saat Bhai Champa*	Addressed as in *Rajar Meye Parul*
The King	Badshah Bahadur (Persian)	Moharaj (Sanskrit origin)
The Royal Jester	Nofor (Arabic)	Bhad (Sanskrit origin)
The Saint	Dorbesh (Persian)	Sadhu Baba (Pali origin)

Besides, there were several words that made direct reference to Islam and Hiduism. In *Saat Bhai

Champa* the saint reminded the King to keep his Imaan (faith) in Allah (God) intact to get out of

his misery. The youngest queen was seen seeking Allah's kindness and blessings while

performing Salah. On the other hand, in the same scenes of the film *Rajar Meye Parul* a Hindu

mystic bearing symbols of Hinduism like rudraksh appeared in the King's dream. Naturally the

lyric including the words "Allah" and "Imaan" was omitted though the rest of the song sung by

the Muslim saint remains same in this film. In the scene with the queen, every other detail was

the same except the queen prayed before the idols of Hindu gods and goddesses for a child. Such

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[61] There are differences in other creative fields like music, dance, costumes etc. which are not relevant to my discussion here.

changes did not interrupt the plot development in any way and the Bengali rupkatha remained same with both the Muslim and Hindu constituents in it.

Though Majumder's folktale collection was hailed as the Swadeshi tales of Bengali people by the scholars of the time, its contents did not represent the co-existence of the different communities, and its collector chose to represent only a fraction of it as the authentic tradition bearer. From the discussion in this chapter, it can be concluded that the inclusion of Islamic or Hindu elements in the tales do not interrupt the main frame of the tale. Rather it creates different variations of the same tale that reflects the perceptions, lived experiences, philosophy and belief system of the different people in different groups of people within a community. Examples of Islamic contribution in Bengal folklore are not scarce, and contrary to D.C. Sen's claimed, are not deteriorating or degrading to the folklore genre. A folktale tradition of Bengal representing all people cannot be realized without addressing these different experiences and exchange of language, culture, philosophy and tradition. Majumder's collection undoubtedly pioneered in establishing the Bengali folklore genre rupkatha as a native folklore genre of Bengal that the Bengali people of the following generations could identify as their own heritage. Ironically, his version of rupkatha excluded a major part of the Bengali people's input in the tradition and complied with the hegemonic culture of the Hindu literati.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

A folktale is a performative form that includes the various cultural identities of the people who tell them in the different oral variations. Moreover, the same tale can be narrated differently by different people depending on the audience. The publication of folktale collections fixes one version of the many performances of these tales into written words. Transforming the oral folktale into a written story involves choices on the collector's part that depend on many external factors other than the story and storyteller. *Thakurmar Jhuli* (1907) is an example of how local folklore was used for constructing and promoting nationhood that supported a particular view of national collectiveness. The tales that Majumder claimed to be the tales of the people of Bengal were regional tales collected from Mymensingh in the then East Bengal from people whose identity is unknown to us. The only information revealed about them was that they were from the illiterate rural population of undivided Bengal. In the area of academic endeavors in Bengal, this collection helped to concretize the native folktale genre called rupkatha as opposed to the colonial fairytale genre. In the broader social and political spectrum of colonialism and nationalism, this collection contributed to the process of promoting "Bengalicism"- an indigenous culture of Bengal before Hinduism and Islam became prominent identifying markers for different communities in Bengal (Chatterji 2016, 378). For Majumder and the swadeshi enthusiasts of the time, rupkatha became a vehicle for spreading both anti-colonial and national ambition of the twentieth-century Bengali Bhadralok.

Majumder's collection comprises regional tales and very little is known about the storytellers he collected from. I have found from the different sources that these tales were collected from his aunt, Rajalakshmi Chaudhurani, a number of old women from the Bengal

village Dighapatia in Mymensingh district and an old Buddhist nun (Gupta 1965, 114- 117; Flora 2002, 7-8). He attempted to note down the wordings of rupkatha told by the storytellers and recorded those with a phonograph (Siddiqui and Haque 1964, 7). He was a man of knowledge in "lyrical poetry and sophisticated compositions" who identified the "native style and diction of tales" (Gupta 1965, 115-116) and attempted to represent it before the Calcutta based educated readers. Even though he was not trained in ethnographic fieldwork, and his collection was modelled more as a children's storybook than as a scholarly work, it gained critical acclaim of the well-known Bengali scholars like D.C. Sen and Rabinadranath Tagore, who were both prominent contributors and promoters of Bengal folklore collection, publication and circulation among the educated Bengali bhadralok.

Hindu components of Majumder's collection were considered original specimens of Bengal folktales by the Hindu scholars of the time. The Hindu scholars like Rabindranath Tagore and Dinesh Chandra Sen wanted to find the indigenous Bengali culture through folkloric research to present it before their future generations who will grow up with a western education like themselves. So, finding the original version gained prominence over the collection of the tales as were found among the folk. D.C. Sen criticized both the versions of the Muslim and Christian collectors. Muslim versions were criticized as morally degrading and uncharacteristic of Bengal/Hindu culture (Flora 2002, 18). On the other hand, Christian collectors' collections were questioned for their authenticity due to the collectors' own religion. They were criticized as unable to represent the original Hindu tales as they lacked access to the Hindu households [62](Sen

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[62] In his comparative analysis of the different versions of "Sheet Boshonto" Sen expressed his doubt that Rev. Lal Behari Day's version was not accurate, as being a Christian, his materials were not always collected from "first hand" sources (1920, 193)

1920, 193). The collectors of the time were influenced by these viewpoints and it dictated the representational and editorial choices they made.

In my thesis, I have closed the gap in existing scholarship on *Thakurmar Jhuli* which I introduced in Chapter 1 by identifying the silenced voices of Bengali Muslims through the analysis of the content and context of the tales in the said collection. I have attempted to present both the historic development of colonization, nationalism and folklore, and their respective ideological influence on the Bengali people and society. By doing this, I have delved into the specific historical context of this collection- the Swadeshi movement and nationalism to situate the interplay between Bengali rupkatha genre and swadeshi nationhood. In so doing, I have combined Anderson's theory of nationalism with Herder's romantic nationalism, and Sadhana Naithani's concept of "prefaced space" as a way of establishing the argument that Majumder was influenced by the romantic nationalist agenda of the Swadeshi Andolan.

My research has tried to serve two purposes: the first has been to situate the collection in the broader political context of the early twentieth century Bengal, and the second, to discover the politics of representation that Majumder adopted. Finally, I would like to suggest that, while this thesis has attempted to provide as many answers as possible about the swadeshi nationalist thoughts reflected in Majumder's folktale collection, the collection's contribution in developing the Bengali folktale genre "rupkatha", the flaw in the swadeshi nationalism and its reflection in *Thakurmar Jhuli,* influence of the socio-political ideologies, and the collector's own power position on editorial and representational choices of the folktale collection, there are still questions to answer in the future. For example, this collection was lauded for presenting a Bengali traditional folktale genre, but did it start a new genealogy of Bengal folktales that the contemporary folklorists are pursuing? Are there other less known collections by Muslim

collectors from the same period of time or from a later period of time? As the national identity of the geographical area that is represented in the collection has changed, what new meanings are associated to the collection? I have touched on the media dissemination of the tales briefly in my discussion, but the collection has made its way into multi-media now. There are animated cartoons for children, daily soaps, films and web-series based on this collection or with the same title as the collection. How do the different media productions vary in their meanings depending on who is making them and for whom it is being made? These are the questions I intend to continue to ask and hopefully other folklorists will address in future.

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Appendix

Summarized Translation of Majumder's "Saat Bhai Champa"

Section 1

A king had seven queens. The elder queens were very arrogant. Chotorani, the youngest queen, was very gentle in nature and the king loved her the most for this. But for a long time the King remained childless. He felt very sad thinking who will inherit the large kingdom.

Some time passed like this. The King was overwhelmed with joy when Chtorani got pregnant. He asked his men to declare in the kingdom that the King has opened his treasury. All his subjects were welcome to take whatever they desired from it. The other queens were burning with jealousy.

The king tied one end of a chain to his waist and the other to Chotorani's waist and said, "Shake it when you have my son, I will come to see my son." Then he left for the court. Chotorani was about to give birth and she entered the antenatal house. The elder queens followed her to help her deliver the baby. Immediately after entering the room, they shook the chain. Thinking that the queen has given birth, King left the court and reached there accompanied by a celebratory band, many gifts and jewels and the priests. But he was disappointed to find that the babies were not born. So he left and started the proceeding. But again, he had to leave as the queens again shook the chain. This time he got really angry and said, "I cut all the queens if the chain is pulled again before the baby is born." Then he left.

Chtorani gave birth to seven sons and a daughter. She asked the other queens, "Sister, let me see my son." The elder made disgustful gestures and said, "What son! You have given birth to some mice and crabs." Hearing this Chtorani fainted. This time they did not shake the chain

immediately. Stealthily they put the children in some clay pots, covered them with lid, and buried them. Then they pulled the chain again and the king again reached with all the pomp. The queens showed him some frogs and mice. The King got furious and banished Chotorani from the kingdom.

The elder queens' laughter did not stop, neither did their happy dance. They lived in all the luxuries of the palace. Chotorani roamed on streets and lived in dire poverty as a *ghutekurani dasi.*

Section 2

Days were passing like this. The King was not happy, his kingdom was morose too- his entire realm was suffering a calamity, flowers stopped blooming in his garden- so, the king could not do his pooja (worship of Hindu gods).

One day the gardener said- "Your Majesty, there is no flower in the garden for today's Pooja. But I have found seven champa and one parul flower blossoming on seven champa and one parul tree on the heap of ashes beside the kitchen." The King ordered to bring those flower for his worship and the gardener left to pluck the flowers.

On seeing the gardener the parul flower on the parul tree called out to the champa flowers, "O my seven champa brothers, wake up!" the seven champa flowers instantly moved and replied in unison, "Why do you call sister parul!". Parul said, "King's gardener is here to get flowers for worship, will you give it or not?"

The seven champas quickly climbed up out of reach and said, "No, no, we will climb up higher unless the King comes himself to get the flowers!" The gardener amazed at the strange event rushed to the king and informed him. The surprised king, accompanied by his counsels reached there.

Section 3

The moment the King tried to pick flowers, parul flower again called out to the champa flowers- "O my seven champa brothers, wake up!" "Why do you call sister parul!" replied the champa flowers. "The King is here, will you give the flower?" and the reply came- "No, no, we will climb up higher unless the King's eldest queen comes herself to get the flowers!" Saying this again they climbed higher in the tree.

The king summoned her but when she was about to pick flowers same thing happened. One after another, all the six queens-Mejhorani, Sejhorani, Nawrani, Konerani and Duorani were summoned to get the flowers but none succeeded. Eventually, the flowers reached the sky and shone like the stars. The King was distraught seeing this. Finally, after Duorani came the flowers said, "If King's Ghute-kuruni comes we will give the flowers."

The king sent a palanquin with his men who searched the entire kingdom and brought her back from the field where she was making the cow dung-cakes (Ghute). Chotorani's hands and feet were covered in dung, her clothes were in tatters. With such an appearance she went to pick the flowers and the flowers swiftly came down from the sky. The parul flower joined them and from the midst of the flowers, seven princes and a princess, like the beautiful moon, called out, "Mother, mother." Everyone was astonished! Tears gushed out from the King's eyes. The six queens started to tremble in fear. The king ordered them to be punished by burying them alive with thorns on the bottom and on top. He, then left with his sons, daughter and wife towards the palace. The palace resounded with the sound of drums.