

## Preface

The nineteenth century was an important period in the world history. It has seen remarkable developments both in the East and the West. In India and particularly, in Bengal too this was an outstanding epoch. Krishnabhabini Das is one of the extraordinary personalities, a relatively lesser known iconoclast who was born and lived in this eventful century. Her solitary full length book in prose, *Englandey Bangamahila* (A Bengali Lady in England) (1885) deserves an important place both in the postcolonial studies and gender studies. The simple, lucid but sharp language engages the reader in a conversation with the author right from the beginning. She is bold in stating her mind, unafraid either of the colonial government or the patriarchy. I was drawn to this text first by the author's straightforward narrative which is quite extraordinary for a Bengali middle class housewife belonging to a conventional Hindu family, her nationalist sentiments and her extreme concern regarding her fellow Bengali women. Visit to England for her is like a pilgrimage in search of a better life for the women back home. As I started translating the text, I became more aware of her scientific temper, rational thinking and a complete lack of any superstitious beliefs accompanied by a characteristic clarity of thought. As we still struggle with women's issues and are yet to arrive at a society free from gender disparities, Krishnabhabini's genuine concern regarding contemporary women and her liberated thinking make her all the more topical.

Though a lot of work has been done on the nineteenth century travel writings or condition of women, much has not been done on Krishnabhabini Das and her corpus of writings. Very few scholars have focused on the biography of the author which is equally interesting. As a result, in spite of being one of the important families of the nineteenth century Calcutta, not much is known regarding the Das family. A chance meeting with one of the members of the family, Smt.

Namita Dutta, towards the concluding stage of my research work gave me a clearer understanding of the Das family. From her words I came to know that Srinath Das, Krishnabhabini's father-in-law had five sons though only three of them are generally known. She also informed me of Krishnabhabini's extreme engagement with her husband Devendranath's academic work; the latter had done the proof reading of all the books that he had authored. Most of these were notes for the aspiring candidates of the Indian Civil Service Examination. In this dissertation I have translated her travel writing which is her single most important work and have tried to make it available for readers without an access to Bengali language. To contextualize Krishnabhabini, I have also included a few of the poems written by her daughter, Tilottama Dasi as Appendix I. The publisher's note to the first edition of the *Englandey Bangamahila* constitutes Appendix II. There is a third appendix to my work in which I have explored the ways in which Krishnabhabini has used Hippolyte Taine's *Notes on England* (1872), the most important source for her in writing *Englandey Bangamahila*. These appendices, though extra-textual, help in further contextualization of the text. While the first appendix narrates the emotional turmoil that Tilottama went through due to her separation from her parents, the second one can be taken as one of the earliest responses to Krishnabhabini's text. In Appendix III I have examined the ways in which Krishnabhabini interprets an existing text by a white European male author as she creates her own. These three together then map the three different aspects of Krishnabhabini's life: the domestic, the public and the intellectual.

Through my translation of this text I have tried to understand how one's culture constitutes and interferes with that person's perception of another foreign culture. Krishnabhabini's eyes are the lens through which we look at the nineteenth century Bengal and Britain. Her social and political awareness reveals the concerns of her age and her erudition,

quite uncommon among the women of her times is reflected in her text. Since this text contains many culturally untranslatable words, I have used footnotes to explain them. My introduction to the text contains endnotes, but I have used footnotes for the translation of the text itself so that the flow of reading is not much hampered. As my work actually deals with two languages, at certain places in the critical introduction I have used the Bengali font and not transliteration. All the strategies used while translating the text has been discussed in the 'Introduction'. All the quotations from various Bengali texts included in the introduction for a better understanding of *Englandey Bangamahila* are my translations unless otherwise stated. All the quotations from *Englandey Bangamahila* are from the translated text provided in this dissertation and the page numbers pertain to that. I hope my translation of *Englandey Bangamahila* along with the introduction and the appendices will contribute constructively towards the study of this exceptional personality of the nineteenth century Bengal who in spite of all her deprivations made outstanding contribution towards the corpus of texts on the British-Bengal relationship.