

## Introduction

*Englancy Bangamahila* or *A Bengali Lady in England* is a travelogue by Krishnabhabini Das, a twenty year old Bengali, Hindu, middle class housewife, who visited England with her husband Devendranath Das in 1880. Though they stayed there for almost a decade, this book documents her perception of the British society and culture in the initial three years of her stay in England. It provides a detailed commentary on the British lifestyle as seen by a woman from the colonies. There is also an underlying comparison throughout the text between the British and the Indian societies, particularly Bengal, and an effort to understand what makes England the colonial overlords of India. Importantly, she is more meticulous in her work than many of her contemporary male travel writers from Bengal. This is a significant achievement for any nineteenth century woman, and even more so for a middle class Bengali housewife belonging to an orthodox Hindu family. Situated within the contexts of nationalism, women's education, and the nineteenth century social revolution that was taking place in Bengal as well as in other parts of India, her work provides an interesting angle to the nineteenth century Bengal-British relationship. The bold words and uninhibited commentary on the positive as well as negative aspects of both the society brings forth a strong personality of the author and an unbiased mind. Here, I have attempted to translate the text from Bengali to English to help it attain a wider readership. This text will be of interest to those scholars dealing with the Indo-British relationship of the nineteenth century and offer a fresh perspective from the doubly marginalised point of view of a woman from a colony. To understand the text better I have also tried to look at the historical background of the author's life and times as well as the other travel writings of that period.

### **Krishnabhabini Das: Her Life and Times**

Krishnabhabini Das' *Englndey Bangamahila* or *A Bengali Lady in England* (1885) is a pioneering work from at least three different perspectives – authorship, content and context. As the title suggests, this book records the experiences of a Bengali lady in England. The author, by using the word '*mahila*' in the title also clarifies her social status – that she belonged to a respectable middle class family. As Mrinalini Sinha, Swapna Banerjee<sup>1</sup> and others have pointed out that by the mid nineteenth century, Bengali middleclass women came to be known as *bhadramahila*, the counterpart to the Bengali *bhadralok*, an identity created on the basis of a set of characteristics which distinguished these women from the Western women on the one hand and from the lower class Bengali women on the other. Krishnabhabini Das, at the time of writing this book was just a twenty year old housewife belonging to an orthodox Hindu Bengali middleclass family – an identity which ensured a completely cloistered existence within the four walls of the house. Yet the depth of her understanding and clarity of vision that we come across while reading this text is a remarkable accomplishment for one so young in years and experience. Another important claim that *Englndey Bangamahila* has on history is that it is the first travelogue by a Bengali woman in England; we may remember that the period in which it has been written is one when women's education was in its most elementary stage in Bengal as well as throughout India<sup>2</sup>. Yet, according to author's own claim in the same text, this work is a result of some serious research done by herself; as she says in her preface:

In the course of writing this account I have consulted some English books, monthly journals and newspapers regarding certain issues. I have also consulted a few of my trustworthy British friends concerning certain customs and conducts and tried to provide a faithful account. To reduce the chances of making

mistakes, I have read a few books by some British as well as some foreign authors regarding how the British judge themselves and how the people of other nations look at them (65)<sup>3</sup>.

In an introduction to an anthology of Krishnabhabini Das' selected essays, Aruna Chattopadhyay draws our attention to Krishnabhabini's scholarship when she mentions that the latter spent hours reading in the British Museum Library along with her husband (*Nirbachito* 7). The control that she exercised over her narrative, the keen intercultural study of the Bengal-Britain interface, her sensitivity towards women's issues and bold nationalist consciousness present in this text are in contrast to her position as a doubly marginalised subject as a woman in a colonised country. At a time when women were considered to be chiefly driven by emotions, Krishnabhabini presents to her readers an extremely rational documentation of the cultural history of the nineteenth century Bengal-British interface. Bengal here is the absent text, located between the lines of the original text, and brought to readers' consciousness through her constant comparison of the two cultures. Her documentation is not just detailed but also includes almost all the aspects of the British life such as their architecture, culture, economics, education, marriage, politics, religion, social customs and taboos and so forth. Most of her contemporary travel writers did not provide such detailed documentation (as I have discussed later), though many of them were illustrious authors. Rabindranath Tagore's *Europe Prabashir Patra* (Letters from Europe) published in 1778, a few years before *Englancy Bangamahila*, needs a mention here because Tagore at the time of writing these letters was also a young boy of seventeen, a few years younger than the author of *Englancy Bangamahila*. But a comparison between the two texts shows *Englancy Bangamahila* to be more sensitive to the concerns of its age such as women's social position and education, nationalism, colonialism

and freedom etc. By contrast *Europe Prabashir Patra* seems a trivial and light-hearted engagement of the youth with the alien culture, as I have discussed later. In fact Tagore himself was almost apologetic about this work and in the epilogue says, “Those letters expressed pure audacity and not the unalloyed truth” and compared his actions with the flamboyance of young stag that has shown the first trace of an antler<sup>4</sup> (Tagore, *Europe* 215). Through my discussions in the following pages I have tried to locate *Englandey Bangamahila* within the context of Krishnabhabini Das’ life and the nineteenth century Bengali society. I have also tried to engage in an in-depth discussion of the text itself, looking at it as a travel writing and contextualising it within the genre of women’s travel writing in particular; because by its very nomenclature this genre disrupts the dominant ideology of gender identity by asserting “a female identity in the public sphere in a two-fold way: by producing a public self in print and by locating the traveller’s persona in the public world of travel” (Ghose 8). Krishnabhabini das’ marginalised subject position enrich the text and offer an alternative discourse in history – a marginalised subject’s point of view, not included in the general history. So a re-reading of the text becomes a rethinking of History or a historical intervention. A translation of this text thereby becomes an important project that engages with both the cultures and opens a new dialogic space for cross cultural interactions.

*Englandey Bangamahila* by Krishnabhabini Das is a travelogue written during the author’s first and only visit to England in 1882. She accompanied her husband and stayed there till 1890 that is towards the end of the Victorian reign. This book records her views of the English society during the early years of her stay there and was published from Bengal in 1885. Being the only documentation of Krishnabhabini’s years in England, a record of an important part of the author’s life, it is also a kind of life writing or autobiographical writing. But unlike

the traditional autobiographies, the narrator's presence as the 'I', the central focus of the narrative is missing here. It is as if the entire 'self' has metamorphosed into a body of thoughts and the personal entity has subsumed itself within the larger social consciousness. Nevertheless it involves a particular kind of self-fashioning as well where the author is analysed not by her actions but by her ideologies and through the issues that she takes up within the text. The text focuses on the analysis of the British society and engages in a comparative study of the Indian and the British societies. Throughout her narration she keeps reminding her readers of the virtues which have made the British a superior race and of the forgotten virtues of the Indians. The nationalist sentiments were so strongly voiced in this book that the British considered this book dangerous and it was banned in this country (Deb 139). Interestingly, there is no mention of the author's personal life in England. The social consciousness of the author regarding her appearance in the public domain through writing dominates her personal 'self' and the only authorial intervention that we get within the text is in form of her interpretation of the alien culture and its comparison with the indigenous one. Her principal concern in the text is the condition of Bengali women back in the country and how their condition could be improved. This awareness and solidarity with the women of her nation that marks her text is what Margo Culley as recorded by Marjanne E. Goose calls 'women's personal literature of the self'. Goose goes on to say that "the construction of the self then is an integral part of the narrative project... viewed as construction of the self through conversation, women's narratives become inseparable from their relationship to others" (415). The content as well as the context of the work makes it tremendously important in the cultural history of the Bengal-British interface and also for postcolonial study. Its contents make it a part of the cultural historiography of that period. This text belongs to nineteenth century Bengal which is characterised by social

paradoxes and political complexities. It becomes a part of the British-Bengal dialogue that dates back to the early British colonial mission in India, offering an alternative discourse to the way the natives looked at their colonial masters. Hence her comments and analysis of the British in their homeland are not only interesting but also an important part of the postcolonial study that attempts to look at the individual histories where the ‘subaltern’ not only ‘speaks’ but also has an audience.

In the traditional Hindu society, crossing the *Kaala pani* (literally, it means the dark water; it stands for the taboo in Hinduism regarding crossing the sea) was a taboo even for men and those who dared to cross it, had to face social ostracism. In such circumstances, the whole idea was unimaginable for a woman. By mid-nineteenth century, the figure of *bharatmata* in chains, waiting to be delivered by her sons, had become one of the popular images. Such iconographic representation of women made her the source of all power and deified her but at the same time took away her right to active participation in the nationalist movement. Her role became passive – restricted to producing able children, sons in particular, who will be the ultimate deliverer of the mother India, bound in chains<sup>5</sup>. So the conceptualization of Indian women as mothers of valiant sons became only natural. In the context of nationalism this becomes an extremely important issue as according to the nationalist ethos woman was the upholder of cultural values; as Partha Chatterjee says in the ‘Colonialism, Nationalism and Colonialized Women – the contest in India’, “The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility for protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external conditions for life of women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (that is feminine) virtues; they must not, in other words, become *essentially* Westernized.” (626-27). In such a context then

Krishnabhabini's trip to England and her act of leaving behind her child, is a transgression of social, religious and nationalist codes of conduct. The act in itself required a lot of courage which we might not realise today, separated almost by two centuries of time period. Her achievements as a traveller and the author of a travelogue make her a pioneer, a woman well ahead of her times.

*Englancy Bangamahila* is also an important text that highlights the socio-cultural history of that period. Her engagement with the issues of nationalism, the women's question, the role of the British in India, the ideas which the Indians needed to import from the West and those Western influences which they needed to reject – all conform to the discourses that had started formulating in the latter half of the nineteenth century. But at the same time there is a distinctive woman's voice that can be heard, sympathising with her fellow sufferers. In fact, her concern about her fellow Bengali women, trapped in the traditional Bengali society is the driving force behind this text. Krishnabhabini Das' overwhelming concern about the fate of the Bengali women visible in the issues she chose to represent in her text truly makes her narrative also a narrative of the subjugated women of Bengal. The persona of Krishnabhabini is build up through the way she perceives the existence of her fellow sisters as opposed to the relatively free women of England. The persona of the author becomes inseparable from that of the other women of India who faced the doubly bonded life at every moment of their existence. Rowbotham's concept of 'collective consciousness' that goes into the making of a woman's self, as discussed in Susan Friedman's essay, "Women's autobiographical selves: Theory and Practice" is operative here as well. It is this collective consciousness which makes up Krishnabhabini Das' psyche and identity which is actually a "sense of shared identity with other women, an aspect of identity that exists in tension with a sense of [her] own uniqueness"

(44). It is this tension between the individual identity and the shared identity which then adds to the complexities of women's life writings. The individual identity of Krishnabhabini as a woman relatively freer from her fellow sisters contradicts her identity that she gains in solidarity with them. Throughout this text she conforms to patriarchy but at the same time pushes its boundaries, trying to extend the space they offered to the women as a social group. These issues together makes Krishnabhabini's work more complex than a mere travelogue.

A look at the nineteenth century Bengali society will be important to contextualise the text and understand the making of its author. The rise of the *bhadralok*<sup>6</sup> community was a phenomenal feature of the nineteenth century Bengali society that had far reaching consequences in Indian cultural and political history. Its roots can be decisively traced back to the beginning of colonialist mission in the country. Introduction of English education and employment of Indians in government services are the two important causes that led to the growth and sustenance of this class. The passing of the Charter Act of 1813 was the most crucial moment in the Indian educational history. With this act the British assumed a new responsibility – that of the native education. Though the acknowledged reason behind the British interest in the education of the natives was the depraved state of the British and other European nabobs in India and the debilitating effect that they said were considered to have on the native population, these excuses thinly veiled the actual intention of further territorial domination and spread of the British Empire. In the parliamentary debates around that period, Henry Montgomery, a participant in the debate, as quoted by Vishwanathan in her work *Masks of Conquest* says that “if we wished to convert the natives of India, we ought first to reform our own people there, who at present only gave them an example of lying, swearing, drunkenness, and other vices”. And therefore we can agree with Gauri Vishwanathan that “Thus in the course of the argument the question of how

England can serve the people of India blends indistinguishably with the question of how power can be best consolidated” (26).

Whatever be the original intention behind the introduction of English education in India, it nevertheless helped in the emergence of a completely new class of the *bhadralok* in the nineteenth century Bengal. This class can be further divided into two sections, the early *bhadralok* community that was anglophile by nature with an unalloyed adulation for the West and the later *bhadralok* community that was more critical of the role of the British and demarcated the extent till which the colonisers could interfere in the lives of the Indians. According to Partha Chatterjee<sup>7</sup>, this latter group chose to “modernize” themselves while at the same time retaining their cultural identity. They accepted the material superiority of the West but did not let them touch their ‘spiritual’ core. Gradually the dichotomies of the West/East, material/spiritual graduated in to world/home or the *bahir/andar* and home became the sanctified space of nationalist discourse which they needed to keep pure from foreign influence. This desire to present ‘our’ culture as different from ‘theirs’ can also be interpreted in terms of ‘anxiety’ generated by nationalism, “about the image of one’s own culture in the eyes of the world. These were aggravated through the apprehension that the negative assessment by the dominant race, whose judgement one often accepted implicitly, might after all be valid” (Raychaudhury 332).

It was this ‘anxiety’, the need to change or ‘modernize’ which gave shape to the issues regarding women. The need to educate the women was a modern requirement that the nationalist leaders had to accommodate to keep with the changing forms of the society. Though they wanted to keep their ‘home’ free from the colonial influence, the very idea of educating the women was a concept imported from the colonisers. The ‘new woman’ or the *bhadramahila* was supposed to be educated and accomplished but not like the rich and spoilt ladies of the West. Her moral-

cultural configuration was to be according to the ideals of feminine virtues that prevailed in the English educated ‘westernized’ sections of the society. In fact the moral, cultural and aesthetic parameters of the ‘new woman’ were drawn in the minds of the nineteenth century *bhadralok* nationalists; “the model [bhadramahila] was an attempt to synthesize the virtues of new and old, based on traditional Hindu womanly qualities mixed with modern features derived from the Victorian image of the ‘perfect lady’” (Borthwick 56). A number of handbooks were published in the last two decades of nineteenth century offering women advice on housekeeping and proper behaviour. Inspiration for such books might have been derived from the English ones like *The Parent’s Friend* (1881) or *Education* by Herbert Spencer just as the needs for these were created by British presence in India. Bengali translations of both these texts were available in late nineteenth century Bengal (Walsh 335). Most of these texts were authored by men with a background of western education; such as *Grhalakshmi* (1884) by Girija Prasanna Roychoudhury or *Ramanir Kartavya* (Duties of a woman) (first published as a series of articles in 1881, then converted to book form in 1890) by Jaykrishna Mitra. These books were tailor-made keeping the changes of the modern society in mind. They stressed on women’s education stressing on the needs of women to be able to write letters, keep household accounts, look after their children’s education, to be able to administer primary medication, etc. They emphasised on the need for the Bengali women to change according to the times. Yet in advocating change they warned the women to resist too much of Westernization which would make them shirk household works. In other words, these texts reflected the principle concerns of this period which made them search for a balance between western ideas of liberty and Indian tradition<sup>8</sup>.

Women’s issues had become popular with Raja Rammohun Roy’s drive to eradicate *sati*, followed by Vidyasagar’s efforts towards widow remarriage. These efforts received

sanctions from the colonisers as well. But coloniser's move towards this direction was treated as a threat to Hinduism by most of the orthodox Hindu males who then tried to consolidate their hold over the society and religion by making their women even more invisible. In analysing the initial attitude of Indian men to keep their women enclosed and the British effort to liberate them, Indrani Sen traces the desire to control the 'body' of the women between the two groups of men. In 'Devoted Wife/Sensual Bibi: Colonial Constructions of the Indian Woman, 1860-1900' she says

Thus, while 'native' men evidently sought to control their women's sexuality and bodies by shutting them up inside the *zenana* away from the colonial gaze, the efforts of the Anglo-Indians were geared towards bringing these very women out into the open through the gradual eradication of the *purdah* system. The body of the 'native' woman thus became the terrain over which the two groups staked out a struggle for mastery. (8)

This 'psycho sensual' desire operated in the late nineteenth century discourse of the nationalist leaders as well, who sought to offer a regulated and limited freedom to their women, maintaining a difference between their women and the British women. In fact a similar struggle to control the woman's body was being carried on between the English educated nationalist leaders and the traditional, orthodox Hindus. Often the two groups belonged to two different generations, the former belonging to the younger generation. In keeping with the education of these young men, these reforms were often modelled in the fashion of the Victorian concept of the 'angel in the house', translated in the Bengali context as the *grihalaxmi*; though simply stating it as a translation of the Victorian concept would mean a gross over-simplification. Dipesh Chakraborty traces the complex politics behind the use of this term, for the new woman, relating it to

two contrary ways of bringing together the domestic and the national in public narratives of the social life of the family. One way was to subordinate domesticity and personhood to the project of the citizen-subject and the goals of the civil-political sphere which, in turn, were seen as the site of work for the acquisition of improvement and happiness. The other was to imagine a connection between the domestic and a mytho-religious social - often equated in conscious nationalist writing with 'community' or the 'nation' - whereby the civil society itself became a problem, a constraint whose coercive nature was to be tolerated but never enjoyed. (24-25)

This brought the public and private together, coalescing the nationalist movement for freedom and the need to reconsider woman's role within the family. The 'new woman' emerged from this struggle between the traditionalists and the modernists, thereby becoming a product of another form of patriarchy.

With the focus on development of women's conditions, marriage and role of women in the society was also re-designed. Women were now expected to be better partners to their husbands<sup>9</sup>. They had to be educated to become better mothers so that their children can grow up to become valuable national resource. Geraldine Forbes in her essay on 'Education for Women' suggests that

In the case of female education, early supporters saw opportunities for social mobility as demand for educated brides increased. They were also motivated by a desire for social reform, possible only if women as well as men were educated... The concern here was not with women as individuals but with their development

as companions of men, as ‘scientific’ nurturers, and as members of civil society.  
(90)

The nationalists offered the women a passive role in the nation-building project.

The concept of family and conjugal relationship came under scrutiny and underwent sea change. As Tanika Sarkar says,

It was one relationship that seemed most precisely to replicate colonial arrangements. Hence, this would best constitute the grounds for challenging and contesting colonial arrangements – i.e. by showing the real and the radical difference between the two sets of relationships despite their apparently similar basis, and by establishing where the moral superiority of the one lay above the other. (39)

While previously, husbands and wives were not even allowed to speak to each other during the day, now women started accompanying their husbands to their places of work. As another aspect of colonial rule, more and more men were leaving their traditional jobs and moving towards the city or to entirely different places, taking their wives along with them. This made the position of wives more important and indispensable, but nevertheless kept them subordinate to their men folks. This new mode of patriarchy made new demands on the women but it was done under the guise of social upliftment.

Krishnabhabini, being shaped by the ideologies of her times, echoes the concern of her age in her text, *Englandey Bangamahila*. In rejecting the lavish lifestyle of the affluent ladies of England and advocating the lifestyle of the middle class British women as a model for the Indian ones she is upholding the virtues accepted by the new patriarchy. She lavishly praises the educational opportunities available to the British women and wishes the same for her Indian

sisters but at the same time she upholds the traditional role of the women as mothers and housekeepers as she mentions in her text “it is not surprising that such strong and industrious mothers will bear healthy and strong children who will later grow up to be brave, spirited and hard-working British men” (159). And a few pages later, “It is not just the uncivilised and wild races that know the value and honour of *satitva*; it is the civilized and developed people who accept *satitva* to be the chief *dharma* of any woman” (164). She disapproves of the extreme fashion consciousness among the British women and the extravagance associated with it and says in her text, “What more is there to say; looking around I am convinced that the British woman’s pathological fascination for clothes has become a terrible vice. It has gone beyond their control” (162). In contrast she advises economy and temperance. She praises the middleclass British women for being true partners to their husbands. In one of her essays she states quite clearly that ‘everywhere a woman’s actual workplace is her home; her primary duty is her household chores’ ( Das, *Nirbachito* 74) and education is the means to make her adept in that<sup>10</sup> . Nationalist discourse followed similar lines regarding women’s education. She pushes the boundaries a bit farther by advocating that women are at par with men when it comes to mental abilities. So Krishnabhabini cautiously treads on a male territory, complying, but at the same time trying to stretch the available space a bit more.

The trajectory of Krishnabhabini’s life can be read in terms of this new development in the society. Born in 1864 in a village named Kajala<sup>11</sup> in Behrampore, she was the only child of an educated Bengali Brahmin and had received elementary education in her village. She was married to Debendranath Das<sup>12</sup> at the age of ten and this probably changed the course of her life. Unlike the traditional married couple of that century, Krishnabhabini and Devendranath’s relation was based on companionship. Devendranath provides an interesting and romantic

account of their early married life in *Pagoler Kotha* (B.S. 1317), where Krishnabhabini appears as Kajalani. Like many of his English educated contemporaries inspired by the concept of companionate marriage of the West, Debendranath took an active interest in educating his wife<sup>13</sup>. Krishnabhabini herself was a keen learner as well. She documented her life and thoughts in an anthology of poems, *Jeeboner Drishyamala* (B.S. 1316) which reflects a sensitive, perceptive and intelligent mind with a keen awareness of her surroundings. The anthology contains poems which are extremely personal, such as ‘Farewell’ (*bidaye kale*), a poem written on her husband’s voyage to England; and some secular, social poems such as the ‘Durga puja and Draught in Madras’ (*durgotsav o madraje durbhikkho*) and ‘On the Pitiable State of Women’s Education’ (*streeshikshar durobostha dorshone*). This anthology is important in itself because it is a reflection of the emotional self of Krishnabhabini which she had managed to suppress completely in her travelogue, *Englandey Bangamahila*. These two texts complement each other and reveal the complete personality of the author. Perhaps the author herself is engaged in a conscious process of separating the emotional from the political, the home from the world.

After marriage, the next milestone in her life was Devendranath’s visit to England. It was also the beginning of difficult times for her. She lost her first-born, a son, when Devendranath was away. His return too brought little emotional respite for her as she saw him being disowned by his father, Srinath Das<sup>14</sup> for crossing the *kala pani*. She left home along with her husband but left her daughter at her in-laws’ house. In 1882 she accompanied her husband during his second trip to England, leaving behind their six-year-old daughter, Tilottama, with her father-in-law. By leaving behind her daughter Krishnabhabini completely subverted the trope of *grhalaxmi*, the ideal of womanhood as propagated by the new patriarchy

of the nineteenth century Bengal. This also gives rise to one of the paradoxes in her life as she herself was educated and heavily influenced by the dominant ideologies regarding nationalism, women's education, role of women in society, etc. of her times. In her other writings too she had mentioned the duty of a woman towards her family or her role as a mother<sup>15</sup>, yet she herself has to leave behind her daughter in order to accompany her husband. Future in England was uncertain because Devendranath, inspite of being a great scholar could not get either of the two lucrative career options eyed by the Indians visiting England in those days – civil services or the law, and had to earn a livelihood by teaching. These uncertainties of life abroad, economic constraints and Srinath's insistence must have forced them to leave their only child behind. The fear of social ostracism which, like them, their child might have to face as well, for visiting the continent might have added impetus to their decision. This was the beginning of an almost life-long separation between the mother and the daughter. Interestingly, Krishnabhabini maintains a complete silence regarding this painful separation throughout the narrative of *Englancy Bangamahila*. While describing her voyage, she talks of her pain at being separated from her near and dear ones – “I had fleeting thoughts – one by one I remembered my mother, brother and sister and my heart ached” (69); but not even for once she mentions her daughter. Probably, she chose to remain silent at the point which hurt her the most. She does not provide any proper reason behind leaving her daughter with her in-laws at home, but there have been various scholarly speculations regarding her actual reason behind such an act<sup>16</sup>. Srinath Das had strong reservations against this visit to England but in spite of his best efforts could not dissuade his son and daughter-in-law. Apparently, Srinath Das got Tilottama married at the tender age of nine years in the tradition of *gauridaan*<sup>17</sup>; but the already existing disagreement between him and his youngest son also raises a question regarding his true intention behind the

act. Miles away, the progressive minded parents could not do anything to stop it. The marriage turned out to be a great failure and Tilottama spent her life in misery. Even when Krishnabhabini and her husband returned, the daughter's orthodox in-laws did not let the parents meet their daughter. It was only when Tillottama was mortally ill and in great pain that she could go to her parents<sup>18</sup>.

Though a lot has been said about the troublesome relationship between Devendranath and Srinath Das, it is noteworthy that at least three of Srinath's sons had been inspired by nationalist ideals. Upendranath, the eldest son, had fallen out with the British Empire for authoring swadeshi plays like *Sarat-Sarojini* and *Surendra-Binodini*. He had to spend a few years in England in exile to save himself from imprisonment. Jnanendranath was a lawyer and a staunch supporter of women's education. He and his wife were associated with a number of social works. He even published a magazine called *Samay* for a short time. None of the brothers had followed the orthodox ideals of Srinath. In fact, Devendranath, younger than the other two might have been following the elder ones' footsteps.

In the tussle between the father and son, tradition and modernity, Krishnabhabini perhaps suffers the most. Her maternal instinct gets caught between the two forms of patriarchy: Srinath Das being the representative of the passing era and Devendranath being a model of its newly developing form. Not surprisingly, she chooses the second model of patriarchy when offered a choice, as that allowed her some space of her own. The decision to leave her daughter must have been the most painful one. Poems from *Jeeboner Drishyamala* are a testimonial to it but the family structure of that period and the way children were nurtured also came to her aid. Though the joint family structure was receiving constant blows from the spirit of modernisation<sup>19</sup> and many newly wedded, English educated men preferred to set up

houses of their own, it had not yet left its stronghold from the society. The children too were comfortable in growing up with grandparents or other members of the family and therefore much less dependent on their mothers. These factors must have played an important role in building up Krishnabhabini's mind.

Krishnabhabini's decision to accompany her husband has been legitimised under the trope of the devoted Hindu wife, carrying on the legacy of Sita<sup>20</sup> who accompanied her husband when he was exiled<sup>21</sup>. Along with it was also an extreme desire to "meet dear Freedom ... [in] the country where she resides" (77) and serve her motherland in some way. Also, the right to choose between her husband and her child, for the first time endowed her with an active agency to exercise her desire. By choosing to differ from the traditional, she asserted her individuality otherwise denied to the Bengali women of that period. Krishnabhabini undertakes an extremely transgressive action which, ironically, she justifies through the traditional and religious trope of *Sita*, accompanying her husband to forest. Perhaps this was her way to legitimise her journey and silence her orthodox Hindu critics.

The deliberate silence in *Englodey Bangamahila* regarding her separation from her daughter makes the text all the more a conscious nationalist project. This mother-daughter separation remains a crucial gap around which the text is constructed. The personal agony that she had felt on account of her daughter is probably articulated in the guise of her concern over the condition of Bengali women in general. She spent the later part of her life in trying to rescue women in distress and provide education to girls.

Krishnabhabini's life can be read as a series of paradoxes. Her insatiable thirst for knowledge led her to the British Library while her desire to work for her fellow Indians

(particularly Bengali women) made her publish the book, *Englandey Bangamahila*. Both the tasks go against the accepted notion of womanhood, as set down by the patriarchy. One of the examples of her extreme erudition that characterises her work is the meticulous description of the Suez Canal (90-91), not found in the works of most of the other travellers who were perhaps much more illustrious than her. But she, like Mary Shelley in her Preface to *Frankenstein*<sup>22</sup>, ascribes all her achievements to her husband Debendranath, whose love for knowledge in general and women's education in particular, she claims, inspired her to achieve all these<sup>23</sup>. The question that thus arises, is she actually conforming to the trope of the 'conventional', or is it a strategy of maintaining a patriarchal propriety to show that her desire merged with her husband's and thereby gain a legitimate entry into the patriarchal stronghold of public statements (in her case, in form of her book). This kind of paradox appears so many times in her life that it perhaps becomes a survival strategy for her to use the tropes of convention to subvert tradition. Perhaps it is the ploy of the dominated to be heard in the public forum.

Another important paradox that we find in Krishnabhabini's life is that in spite of being used to Western form of dressing<sup>24</sup> and using footwear, she embraced the life of an austere Hindu widow, forsaking every form of luxury after the death of her daughter which happened immediately after that of her husband. This period saw the coming together of the orthodox Hindu tradition of widowhood and the Christian Missionary tradition of charity. Such contradictions abound in nineteenth century history of Bengal. Probably because it was the period of transition, many of the Bengali intellectuals of that period such as Rammohun Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Keshub Chandra Sen and even Rabindranath Tagore reflected

contrary attitudes in their personal and social lives. As they had to negotiate at multiple levels with their values which they inherited and the education they acquired, the change over in their personal lives perhaps lagged behind their change in social concern, or often they had to bow down to family pressures<sup>25</sup>. Krishnabhabini, being a woman was supposed to have been more entrapped by traditional values; hence for her such negotiations must have been further complicated. This is perhaps reflected in her complete switch over from a modern Bengali woman used to Western wear to an austere widow of nineteenth century Bengal<sup>26</sup>. Society, in its effort to shake off the old and accept the new, had to pass through these interesting paradoxes. Krishnabhabini's stern widowhood could also be a form of self imposed penance because of the guilt she felt on account of her daughter's sufferings and untimely death. Since Tilottama clung to the orthodox Hindu tradition of a dutiful wife till her very end, Krishnabhainbini might have considered this act as the most fitting tribute to her. But at the same time, this act reclaimed her in the eyes of Hindu traditionalists. In her widow's garb she kept herself above reproach but continued her work. This must have made her more acceptable within the Hindu households and gave her greater access to the women of the *andarmahal*. Devendranath's absence must have rendered her more vulnerable to the traditional Hindus. But this mode of action ensured a respect for her among both the conservatives and the modernists.

Krishnabhabini's dealings with tradition and modernity are also perhaps her strategies to survive in the extremely male dominated world. Perhaps she had understood the importance of male support if the Bengali women needed to come out of their *purdah* and have a life of their own. That is why, in spite of advocating modern education for women and supporting women's going out to work, she assures patriarchy by stressing that the actual place of a

woman is her house. She wears Western garments but only at her husband's behest and forsakes them after his demise. The nineteenth century upper or middle class Bengali women wore only a sari at home, which was not considered to be proper attire for going out. There was not much alternative dressing style available<sup>27</sup> as well so wearing western style of clothes must have been necessity for her. A woman well ahead of her times, she uses the avenues available to her not only to create a space for herself but also to make this world a better place for women. Her entire life can be read as series of negotiations – between patriarchy and women's liberation, tradition and modernity, personal and social, emotional and rational; and she emerges as a strong individual. Her travelogue, *Englancy Bangamahila* is the platform which she uses to voice her thoughts. The act of writing for her is an action that signifies the freedom that she has achieved in her capacity as a woman. There is hence a kind of dissociation from the patriarchy's image of the self which Friedman defines as 'alienation from the historically imposed image of the self' (41) that actually motivates the 'creation of an alternate self' by the act of writing. This is an act of rebellion against the "silence imposed by male speech" (Friedman 41) and as Sidonie Smith suggests in her essay on 'Autobiographical Manifestoes', "the autobiographer purposefully identifies herself as subject, situating herself against the object-status to which she has been confined" (190)<sup>28</sup>. Krishnabhabini Das, by choosing to write about her experience in England and her comparative analysis of the two cultures, has deliberately placed herself as a subject with a voice and thus given herself an agency with which she subverts the imposed and accepted position of woman as an object, denied of any active agency within the patriarchal set up. It also places her among the important Indian travelogue writers of her times.

***Englndey Bangamahila: In the Tradition of***  
**Travel Writing**

Travel writing has very recently generated serious interest among the scholars of literature. It has long been enjoying a popular readership, catering to the curiosity of mankind but it was not considered to have much literary value. Recent scholarship in travel writing began with focus on the ethnographic, geographic, sociological and cultural aspects of this genre<sup>29</sup>. Travel writing as serious literature is a much newer phenomenon. In the colonial period there was a sudden burst in the number of travel writings as the Europeans ventured out to unexplored territories in colonising or proselytising missions. Traditionally travel narratives from the west on the east have been gaining focus in the early era of postcolonial studies. In case of the western travellers visiting the east, these books chiefly focussed on the curious or the exoticism of the east and their barbaric and uncivilized mode of existence as opposed to the western enlightenment. Most of the travel writing theorists have structured their thesis on the basis of these texts. But a counter flow of narratives from the east also existed simultaneously, as the number of people travelling from the east to west increased. These travellers, right from the seventeenth century, mapped the various aspects of western lives even as they were being documented.

Yet, over the early modern period, a mounting “counterflow” of tens of thousands of Indian men and women of all classes entered England, exploring life there and producing knowledge about both India and England. Some settled, but most returned after months or years, bringing back to India direct information about Europe. For the first 150 years, however, their travel accounts were largely oral. (Fisher, 154)

Written documentation in form of travel writing began from around mid eighteenth century. Even though India was a country with majority of Hindu population, in the early days of travelling to the West, there were very few Hindu travellers. Travelling, for the Hindus was restricted to mostly pilgrimage within the country. Social and religious sanctions regarding crossing the *kalapani* was the primary cause behind this. Fisher points out that the five of the earliest travel narratives by Indians in England that has been found were written by males of the minority communities – four Muslims and one Armenian Christian<sup>30</sup>. By the nineteenth century, with the rise of Brahma Samaj and spread of English education among the middle classes, the number of travellers from India in general and Hindus in particular, saw a steep rise. This also led to a sudden boom in the travel writings as these travellers did not remain satisfied just to visit England but also wanted to share their experiences with their fellow countrymen. These counter-narratives scrutinised the colonisers' lifestyle and often critically commented on their ways of existence. As Codell says, "They wanted to see Britain and Europe firsthand, judge what their colonizers told them, discover what colonizers did not say, and transmit information to other Indians" (175). These "guest discourses"<sup>31</sup>, though apparently written about the colonisers, provide interesting insights into the psyche of the colonised as well as the coloniser-colonised relationship. The 'gaze', now on the white man, was at times adoring, at times critical. It broke down the concept of a homogeneous, superior Eurocentric model to be followed by the rest of the world and shed light on the divergences existing not only within the colonies but also within the western world. As a result the model that was being propagated by the white-skinned colonisers as the only way to civilization faced serious challenge. The comparisons of the various western countries such as England, France, Germany, etc. that found way into the travel writings from the colonies drew comparative analysis of the various western cultures, thereby

exposing the fissures in their claim for a so-called uniform western/ white man's world. P.C.Mazoomdar's inclusion of his voyages to England, America and an Asian country Japan within the same covers in his book *Sketches of a Tour Round the World* is a case in the point.

The genre of Bengali travel writing developed rapidly in the nineteenth century. The socio-cultural context compelled the travellers to England to record their visits in various forms – diaries, letters, memoirs, poetry or mere travel accounts. Their purposes were quite heterogeneous which could be higher education, a career in the government service sector, or missionary duties, etc, but all of them shared a common platform – as members of subject race, they were visiting the imperial heartland. Their travel in many ways resembled the Grand Tour that was so popular in Europe in the eighteenth century. Their journey was a 'quest' but unlike the nineteenth century Western travellers it was not a process of self-discovery, rather, it was an effort to critically analyse and understand the imperial power and negotiate with it. While the western traveller explored the unknown places branding them as 'exotic', 'quaint', 'erotic and picturesque' the Indian travellers overturned this trope by concentrating on the "over-explored, over-discovered Western metropole, reversing the hierarchy of periphery and center and recalling the aristocratic eighteenth century Grand Tour of Europe" (Codell, 175). These encounters made England as much an imperial site as its colonies producing discourses that mapped the colonisers within their own spaces. "Their narratives provide historical evidence of how imperial power was staged at home, and how it could be interrogated by 'natives' in the 'mother-city of the kingdom and the Empire' itself" (Burton, "Making" 128). The result was a discourse rich in ethnography and cultural history, accommodating the tension between the empire and its subjects, the centre and the periphery and the aspiration of the colonised to create a unique cultural and historical space for itself, different from that of the colonisers.

Most of these travel writers from Bengal were English educated middle class *bhadralok* who in their writings almost invariably ended up with an ethnographic study of the two cultures. Steeped in Western learning, they were influenced by various Western models of writings but they stretched the existing genres to create new forms to accommodate their dialectical position both as ‘imperial citizens’<sup>32</sup> and as members of the subject race. Travel writing too had to negotiate between dialectical identities in which the *bhadralok* found himself in England – as imperial citizens, as one from the subject race and also as a visitor to the foreign land. What Schwartz says about the cultural historiography of that period can also be applied in case of these travel writings that, “this dialectical creation of a subject position for the Indian people involved a complex relationship to British ideology that was rarely conceived of in binary terms, or as a radical alterity positing an ‘us’ versus a ‘them’... (and) complicates the identity of the ruler and ruled” (13). The writings of these Indian travellers in England then rose out of the contact zone of the two cultures. This ‘third space’ or the contact zone gave rise to a new form of cultural documentation that problematised the relationship between the ruler and the ruled by privileging the colonised subject with the critical ‘gaze’ of the observer/narrator. Though the ‘voice’ in which they spoke was not heard initially, it at least allowed them to register their resistance.

The corpus of travel writing from England by the Bengalis in the nineteenth century includes many illustrious names such as Romesh Chandra Dutt (1866)<sup>33</sup>, Rabindranath Tagore (1878)<sup>34</sup>, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar (1883), Shivnath Shastri (1888) or Troilokyanath Mukherjee (1886). Krishnabhabini Das too created a place for herself among all these distinguished authors becoming the first woman to write a travelogue on England. Her work *Englancy Bangamahila* (1885) is one of the most detailed cultural documentation of that period narrated in a bold and clear voice. Most of her contemporary authors could only attempt a partial

representation of the cultural encounter that they faced but Krishnabhabini undertakes the ambitious project of presenting a bird's eye view of the entire British culture for the benefit of her countrymen, particularly her fellow sisters back home. The single-mindedness of her pursuit is remarkable and it adds an almost professional touch to her travel writing; both these qualities set her apart from contemporary Bengali women. In attempting a full length travel book on England, Krishnabhabini becomes one of the pioneers in this field.

The extent of Krishnabhabini's work can be better gauged if pitted against her contemporary traveller, Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore's first travel to England was a few years before Krishnabhabini, at the age of seventeen and he had left an account of his experience there in epistolary form which were first published in fourteen issues of *Bharati* from April 1879 (Baisakh 1286) to July 1880 (Srabon 1287) and later in the book form as *Europe Prabashir Patra*. Krishnabhabini too was just twenty during her voyage to England and had published her book within the initial three years of her stay. Belonging to the Tagores of Jorasanko, Rabindranath was already way ahead in terms of culture, modernity and education when compared to Krishnabhabini, the house wife from a Bengali Hindu family. Yet, she far surpasses Tagore in terms of her depth of cultural historiography. While Tagore in *Europe Prabashir Patra* engages only superficially with the foreign culture commenting on the English ladies, ball-room dances, London's weather, Indian men in England, etc, Krishnabhabini tries to include almost all the aspects of English culture and lifestyle in her work. In fact, Tagore himself tried to dissociate himself from this work and considered it to be an example of the impertinence of young age. When the *Europe Prabashir Patra* was published as a book it came along with such a disclaimer from the author himself (215-18). Tagore's epistolary mode gives him some freedom to adopt an

informal tone from which Krishnabhabini strictly restricts herself. Her voice is that of a cultural historian engaged in a comparative ethnographic study of the two distinct locations.

*Englandey Bangamahila* follows the trope of the nineteenth century Bengali travel writing and shares certain features with the writings of her contemporary travellers. All these travellers to England left an account of their experiences in the heartland of imperialism and a comparative analysis of Indian and British culture became a conscious or a subconscious product of their authorship. Most of these authors' sensibilities had been shaped by the predominant ideologies of the nineteenth century, nationalism being the prime among them. They featured certain shared characteristics and were often repetitive in their representation of certain aspects of British culture and their experiences; for example almost all the Bengali travel writers began their narratives with a customary account of their voyage. Bidding farewell to the friends and family was also an elaborate ritual. As Keshub Chandra Sen says in his *Dairy in England*, "waving handkerchiefs and tearful eyes alone indicate in a most affecting manner the exchange of mutual sympathies and tender farewell as we get further and further down the river and are at last lost sight of by numerous concourses of friends standing on the wharf (1)." Krishnabhabini does not talk about any elaborate farewells but her heart is heavy at the thought of parting from her country and as the train leaves Howrah to reach Bombay, she thinks that her "heartache cannot be compared to anyone else's" (67) as probably, all her co-passengers in the train from Calcutta to Bombay were either going for a short trip or returning home.

Ship became symbolic of change and of the rising modernity – as a means for crossing the *kala pani*, and as an equaliser of caste and race. As Simonti Sen rightly analyses, "the ship, in a way, symbolised the quintessence of the civilization that had travelled the path from Galileo to Newton, and thus, within its small confines, it held the whole package of modernity for

exhibition” (61). The ship was also the site where “perhaps for the first time they and their European co-travellers would be subjected to an enforced regime of sameness” (61). And hence the ship necessitated a detailed description, especially for the native readers back home, who have not been fortunate enough to experience this travel. Troilokyanath Mookerjee in his *A Visit to Europe* says, “Most of my countrymen have no idea what a passenger ship is. It may be compared to a large house with all the comforts and conveniences of a high life... (3)”. Krishnabhabini therefore provides a thorough details of the ship in which they were travelling – not just the physical description of the vessel but also complete information regarding its officers and other crew members, as well as the task assigned to them (80-82). This meticulous quality of her narrative indicates her keen observation power which is rare in any individual, more so in a woman of her period.

For most of the Indian travellers the ship was the first opportunity to brush shoulders with the white skins. Hence, often it was on ship that most of the travellers recognised the ‘real’ British gentleman. A number of travel writers have focussed on the benevolent British co-passengers that they came across on board. Perhaps distance from the colonies brought out the gentler self of the colonisers. Bipin Chandra Pal in his autobiography, *Memoirs of My Life and Times* notices a similar situation during his voyage to England. Branding the Mediterranean as the ‘waters of Lethe’ he says, “Englishmen and Europeans coming out of India forgot the native suavity of their character as soon as they entered the Suez Canal and found themselves in Asiatic waters. Similarly Anglo-Indians, as soon as they crossed the Suez Canal and entered the Mediterranean all their caste pride dropped from them as yellow leaves in autumn (550).” More than a decade earlier, Krishnabhabini had echoed similar sentiments, “I have heard that when the British go to India from England, they are polite towards the Indians and treat them as equals but

when they are on their way back, they strike a different attitude. Their politeness disappears. Therefore I too did not talk to anyone” (84-85). In the Preface to *Englandey Bangamahila* she points out this difference in attitude among the British in their country and the British in their colonies, “I have tried to present an unbiased account of the British lifestyle here, not taking into account the changes that occur in them when they are abroad, particularly in India” (65). It is remarkable that in spite of being a twenty year old housewife from a conservative family Krishnabhabini could draw conclusions similar to what Tagore would arrive at in his more matured years in his essays in *Raja o Praja*<sup>35</sup>.

There were certain other features which routinely appeared in most of the travel writings by the Bengali visitors to England in this period. Almost all the Indians travelling to England have recorded their experience in London. This city, being the capital of British Empire was a significant landmark for these colonial visitors. What stuck them most is the hurry that they found among most of the Londoners which as P.C. Mazoomdar aptly describes as the “whirling, jumping, bellowing, whistling population of the London streets – the crashing, roaring, rumbling traffic.” (18). Keshub Chandra Sen also mentions about his stay in London in his *Diary in England* (1886). Krishnabhabini devotes two separate chapters on London and its population. A different picture of London at night is provided in Shivnath Shastri’s *Englander Diary* (Diary from England) (B.S 1364) where he mentions prostitutes and drunken women and talks about his experience in the train where not a single passenger was sober enough to stand on his feet (141)! Parliament and its workings were another area of interest for the Indians visiting England. Troilokyanath provides a detailed description of it (310-12) in *A Visit to Europe*(1889). Being subjects of a country under foreign rule, they were very curious about the workings of a free parliament. Keshub Chandra Sen, Rabindranath Tagore and most of the other authors of this

period and genre talked about it in details. By devoting a section of her book to this particular topic Krishnabhabini also follows the trend but her description is more detailed and enumerative. Other shared features of these travel writings included discussion on comparison between British women and Indian women, education system in England, alcoholism among the British people, particularly working class, descriptions of various places to visit in England, etc. Krishnabhabini's text also covered these aspects but what differentiated her from other travel writers was her meticulous detailing. Almost none of the other travel accounts could render as fulsome a study of the British culture and its comparison with the indigenous one as we find in Krishnabhabini Das' *Englandey Bangamahila*. Unlike other fellow travellers who recorded their experiences directly, Krishnabhabini's response is supported by some scholarly research in the British Library. While most of such travel narratives picked up certain aspects of British life and culture for study, Krishnabhabini's research was all-round. This is a rare feat to be achieved by a woman of her times. Her subjugated life as a woman and her education under her husband Devendranath gave her the 'dual access' to the two worlds that Karlekar talks about and turned her into a "more sensitive and perceptive observer" (Karlekar, 21). At the same time this also causes her woman's 'gaze' to be mediated by that of a male point of view. As she first learns to see the world through the eyes of a male, her husband, we cannot expect to have an unmediated woman's 'gaze'. Yet her sensibilities are that of a woman and hence she can feel and sympathise with her fellow women in India still leading their lives like 'caged bird'. That is why she always negotiates between two referential planes – one is the country of her visit, England and the other, her homeland, India.

Women's travel writing has always been a controversial issue from the traditional perspective - travel and writing being taboos to women universally, irrespective of their cultures.

Confined within the four walls of the house, women were denied any active agency. As both travel and writing involved an interaction and an active participation with the outer world, both the activities were denied to them. Ironically, England, which was considered to be the ideal site of women's liberation by the Indian reformers, also preferred women within the close confines of homes. Therefore travel writing by women did not receive any proper critical assessment either in the Western or the Indian context. Yet nineteenth century was an age when women crossed the thresholds of their houses to step out in the world. There were a good number of British women who travelled to India and left various accounts of their travels. These accounts, though a part of the empire building process, was not considered to be so. British women in India occupied an interesting position as being 'colonized by gender, but colonizers by race' (Ghose 5). According to the western critical tradition of assessing women's travel writing, their writings were considered either trivial or exaggerated. When women confined themselves to the domestic affairs of the 'other', not focussing on the other important aspects of the empire building agenda, they were brushed off as inconsequential, trivial accounts; but when the narrative strategy was that of an adventurous hero in keeping with the male tradition of travel account, it was considered an exaggeration as women were traditionally considered to lack the heroic qualities that mark a male traveller (Mills 118). These writings, though widely read, did not acquire more respectability than 'coffee-table' companion, to borrow Sara Mill's phrase<sup>36</sup>. Travelling women were either considered eccentric or tomboyish in nature, both not the traditionally accepted trope of feminine behaviour. The women travel writers too followed various strategies to avoid criticism, often assuming the tone of a 'reluctant traveller' (Ghose 73) as in the case of Emily Eden, or followed the confessional mode in their narratives. Another difficulty that Mills points out in case of women's writings is the hesitation among women authors to occupy the centre-

stage which writing and publishing in any mainstream genre ensured. As a result they often took recourse to document their travel experience in forms which were of lesser literary value such as diaries, letters, etc. Since these genres were posited between the domestic and the public world, it allowed women the freedom and space to negotiate and also offered her more freedom as an author (Mills 41).

There were a few dissenters from this tradition as well. Indira Ghose talks about Maria Grahams' *Journal of a Residence in India* (1812) and Marianne Postans' *Western India in 1838*, 2 vols.(1839), as two of the early travel narratives from India where the authors deliberately try to speak in the voice of the Orientalist. Though Graham's work is in the form of a journal, she deliberately uses a scientific mode of language that 'bristles with erudition and scholarly references' (Ghose 28). What they are trying to achieve is 'not a graceful or elegant style but the production of knowledge or valuable information' (30). By directly engaging in 'knowledge production' they subvert the conventional roles assigned to women and directly contribute to the empire building process. Whether they were accepted in the same way by their contemporary readers or not remain to be explored but what becomes important here is the active agency with which they endowed themselves to contribute to the existing knowledge bank. Intention of the authors becomes more significant than the actual reception of the text. In this way they also subvert the gender roles as delineated by the patriarchy.

Krishnabhabini too undertakes a similar task of knowledge production. Belonging to the subject race, her position is further marginalised than that of the western women visiting India. She is colonised by both race and gender; yet she undertakes the task of visiting England, the country of her colonisers, and attempts a critical assessment of their life and culture. Such a work is then bound to become one of the important documents of the nation-building agenda taken up

by the leaders back home. Nation-building being one of the chief preoccupations of the intellectuals of that period, Krishnabhabini by contributing to that discourse, stepped into an area that was exclusively a male territory. She also chooses the genre of a proper travel book, not camouflaging it with the more feminine genres of diaries or letters. But she very confidently and boldly holds her own among them and can be considered to be one of the finest authors of that genre. Contemporary critics such as Ghulam Murshid notes the fact that the kind of work she produced in *Englandey Bangamahila* can be considered a proud achievement not just for a woman but even for any man of that period. He goes on to say that the kind of social awareness and consciousness regarding women's position that is noted in her work was not to be found in any of her contemporary travel writer, except perhaps young Rabindranath Tagore (33). But as I discussed earlier, even Tagore in *Europe Prabashir Patra* lacked the kind of commitment and extensive study that we find in Krishnabhabini's work.

In terms of women's travel writing, Krishnabhabini does not have much of indigenous legacy to fall back upon, she herself being the first Bengali woman to write a travel account of England. She might have come across the women travel writers from England writing on India during her scholarly pursuits in England; but there is no direct evidence to prove that she actually did so. She might also have been familiar with the Indian male travellers' records of their stay in England<sup>37</sup>. Yet, Krishnabhabini was not the first Bengali women to travel to England. None of these other women travelling to England recorded their stay there. The Dutt sisters, Toru and Aru, and their mother travelled to Europe (France and England) in 1869, Shashipada Banerjee's<sup>38</sup> wife Rajkumari went to England in 1871. Jnanadanandini Devi (1877)<sup>39</sup> is perhaps the first woman to travel to England on her own accompanied by her three children. Krishnabhabini Das (1882) accompanied her husband. Swarnalata Ghosh<sup>40</sup> and Hemangini

Devi<sup>41</sup> also went to England around this period. Jagatmohini Chaudhury<sup>42</sup> travelled to England in 1894 to learn more about Christianity. These visits had a marked influence upon the psyche of these women travellers. Among all these women, Krishnabhabini was the only one belonging to the orthodox Hindu family. Among the rest of them, the Dutt sisters and Jagatmohini were Christian converts while most of the others were influenced by Brahma Samaj. So for Krishnabhabini, crossing the *kaala pani* was a more difficult task. Ironically, the traveller for whom it was almost impossible to visit England is also the creator of the most successful travel writing in this genre. In fact, her work begins a legacy in travel writing later followed by other women travellers such as Jagatmohini Chaudhury and Durgabati Ghosh, but neither of them could surpass their precursor's sensitivity or perception.

Any discussion about Indian women travellers in Krishnabhabini's time will be incomplete without the mention of Ramabai. Though my focus is only on Bengali women travellers, Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), the Marathi woman traveller to England in 1883 cannot be overlooked, more so because hers is the only name among the contemporary travellers that we find mentioned in the text of *Englancy Bangamahila*. Ramabai has authored her autobiography and have written a travel account of her visit to the United States apart from her other works, but her experience in England has to be reconstructed from the correspondences she had with various people in that period. Krishnabhabini and Ramabai stayed in England in the same decade, yet they were ideologically as far away from each other as possible. Though both were champions of women's liberation and education, they belonged to different creeds<sup>43</sup>. Krishnabhabini's criticism of Ramabai's conversion to Christianity (226) not only shows her respect for her own faith but also her partiality towards the nationalist philosophy operating in that age. Such conflicting attitudes - on the one hand being an iconic personality in terms of women's

liberation yet adhering to the tenets of the 'new patriarchy' as represented by the Nationalist discourses on women's issues make her a more interesting figure of the nineteenth century. Such comments about her contemporaries situate Krishnabhabini's work within a particular timeframe and indicate her own ideological disposition.

By the nineteenth century Bengali women had started recording and documenting their experiences and thoughts. But travel writing was still very much an uncharted territory. Most of the women's writings focussed on contemporary social conditions of women, women's education, and other aspects of domesticity. Generally the point of view was extremely subjective and the documentation was in form of diary or letters or smaller tracts. They also engaged in creative endeavours such as writing poetry, novels and stories, mostly revolving around women's issues. Kailashbhasini Devi's *'Hindumahiladiger Hinabostha'* (Degraded condition of the Hindu women) (1863) was probably the first printed book in prose form by a Bengali woman (Murshid, *Rassundari* 58). As the title suggests, she talks in details about the degenerated condition of the Hindu women in the nineteenth century Bengal and offers certain solution. She considers women's education to be the only way out of this dismal situation and appeals to the Hindu males to show more compassion towards the women of the society. Her writings can be treated as the precursor to Krishnabhabini's *Englandey Bangamahila* where the author focuses on the downtrodden condition of not just women but of the entire country and compares the situation with that of England. The social awareness among the handful of educated women that started with Kailashbhasini attains complete maturity in Krishnabhabini when she steps out of the country and locates herself and her society within a larger territory. Some other women authors of this period were Swarnakumari Devi, Nistarini Devi,

Brahmamoyee, Monorama Majumdar, etal. Except Swarnakumari Devi, almost all the other women had been educated after marriage, by their respective husbands<sup>44</sup>.

A handful of tracts on travel undertaken by Bengali women can be found around late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most of these on journeys within India, to places like Varanasi, North India, etc<sup>45</sup>. But most of these travel writings are dated after *Engländeey Bangamahila*, which has rightly been called a ‘path-breaker of this genre’ (131) by Somdatta Mandal in ‘Mapping the Female Gaze: Women’s Travel Writing from Colonial Bengal’. The full length travelogue that Krishnabhabini undertakes was first published anonymously – “Ek bangamahila kartrik praneeto” or ‘written by a Bengali lady’. This itself is a signifier of the challenges that a woman author faced in nineteenth century Bengal. Krishnabhabini faced another challenge post publication, and that was from the English government who banned this book in India considering it to contain bold remarks regarding independence (Deb, *Antahpurer* 139), thereby indicating the potential that this book contained to subvert the authorities. All these together make this text an extremely significant one.

Generally, travel writers stress on the places visited by them, juxtaposing them with some narrative on the lifestyle or culture of the places visited. They often introduce anecdotes to make their narratives interesting. But Krishnabhabini has a very different form of narrative. She provides us with a chronological commentary of her journey from Calcutta to London, via Bombay and Venice. But once in England, she does away with all chronological narratives. She focuses completely on the various aspects of British lifestyle and compares them with the contemporary situation in India. Anecdotes are almost absent from her narrative. In fact, if we leave out her description of her journey to England, autobiographical element is conspicuously absent from her text. Her text, though structurally a travelogue, also becomes a documentation of

cultural history of her times. She, the cultural historian, provides her readers with very minute details in the comparative analysis of the two cultures – the one to which she belongs and the other which she visits. Her almost ten years of experience as house wife in the orthodox Hindu joint family heightens her sensibility to appreciate the comparative freedom enjoyed by her counterparts there. Even before embarking on the journey she thinks of England as a ‘country of freedom’, a place where women are valued and she looks at England with that eye. The ‘gaze’ of this *bangamahila* is not just of a tourist, but that of a doubly marginalised individual who is keenly aware of the degraded subject position of women in her own society. Actually, she defines her existence through her awareness and solidarity with the women of her community. Her persona is build up through the way she perceives the existence of her fellow sisters as opposed to the relatively free women of England. The persona of the author becomes inseparable from that of the other women of India who faced the doubly bonded life at every moment of their existence. Rowbotham’s concept of ‘collective consciousness’ that goes into the making of a woman’s self, as discussed in Susan Friedman’s essay, “Women’s autobiographical selves: Theory and Practice” is operative here as well. It is this collective consciousness which makes up Krishnabhabini Das’ psyche and identity which is actually a “sense of shared identity with other women, an aspect of identity that exists in tension with a sense of [her] own uniqueness” (44). It is this tension between the individual identity and the shared identity which then adds to the complexities of women’s life writings. The individual identity of Krishnabhabini as a woman who has comparatively more freedom than her fellow sisters contradicts her identity that she gains in solidarity with them. Her writing of the text is by itself an action that signifies the freedom that she has achieved in her capacity as a woman. There is hence a kind of dissociation from the patriarchy’s image of the self which Friedman defines as “alienation from the

historically imposed image of the self' (41) that actually motivates the "creation of an alternate self" by the act of writing.

Krishnabhabini's 'gaze' in this text is not just the appreciative one, it is critical as well. In her analysis of various aspects of British lifestyle she is at times eloquent in her praises or harshly critical. For example, while in her chapter on British women she appreciates the freedom that the women here enjoy, she very much disapproves their excessive fashion consciousness. Also, she very strongly criticises the British love for alcohol and the wretched condition of their working class people. Krishnabhabini has a fixed purpose in mind for authoring this book and this she states very clearly at the beginning of the text, addressing her target readers she says, "here you will only find the differences that exist between an independent life and an enslaved one... and if you read it attentively you might even be somewhat benefited by it" (64). This clarity of thought is one of the most important aspects of her narrative technique.

Even as a travelogue, *Englancy Bangamahila* has a unique structure, interposing prose narrative with three poems, one at the beginning, one at the middle and another at the end of the narrative. The prose and the poetry parts complement each other in that while the prose narrative documents her rational self, completely free of any emotional outburst, the poems are a reflection of her heart – the turmoil that it is going through at the thought of India's bonded existence. In the following section I have tried to point out and discuss the various aspects included in this text.

### **Text and its issues:**

In the title of her book, Krishnabhabini positions herself very clearly as a Bengali lady in England (*Englancy Bangamahila*). The sub-title further highlights the gender identity of the

author – *ek Bangamahila kartrick praneet* (presented by a Bengali lady), situating the author in terms of race, class and gender. Though the author publishes the book anonymously, she leaves no room for doubt regarding the subject position of its creator. The politics of identity is made obvious to the readers at the very beginning and the doubly marginalised position of the author becomes clear. The gaze then is clearly that of a woman belonging to the subject race, who sees and represents as a woman and often for the women back home. Her middleclass origin is also made obvious as *mahila* or *bhadramahila* originated as the female counterpart of the *bhadralok*. As Swapna Banerjee, in her effort to trace the origin of *bhadramahila* or the “respectable Bengali woman” says,

By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the new role and image of women proliferated among the educated middleclass, there emerged an articulate group of women known as *bhadramahila*, the female counterpart of the *bhadralok* - envisioned to embody the virtues of both the ideal Hindu woman and the Victorian image of the ‘perfect lady’ who could contribute to the furtherance of their husband’s career and educate their children in ‘enlightened’ ways (10).

Therefore by using the term *Bangamahila* or a Bengali lady, the author is placing herself as a member of this newly rising class of women who were “forged by the minority elite patriarchy, to suit their own purposes under colonial rule” (Banerjee 10).

Krishnabhabini is never too much taken up by the natural beauty of her surroundings to miss out on any factual details. Even while admiring the brightly lit city of Bombay gradually receding from sight as the ship moved away, she draws her readers’ attention to the glow of phosphorous in the sea, “I looked towards the sea again – friction between the ship and water at times made phosphorous glow like stars. It seemed that we were sailing through the infinite

sky.”(79). Similarly, while describing the industrial England, she cannot help but express her awe at the huge leaping flames of the furnaces, “Flames emitted by those hundreds of chimneys shoot upwards through the dark sky and look like red feathers of a dancing peacock” (206). Here too she does not forget to mention in detail about the British achievement in terms of industries.

### **Voyage:**

Though description of voyage was one of the routine sections for almost all the nineteenth century Bengali travel writers in England, the way Krishnabhabini does it is truly remarkable. Devoid of any other aid apart from the notes (if any) kept during the voyage, she very outstandingly reconstructs the journey in her travel book complete with all technical details as well as her personal feelings. This is also the only section of the book where we get a very rare glimpse of her personal life. She acknowledges the company of her husband, feeling grateful that his presence had reduced the stress of this journey as “as apart from him I did not have anyone to talk to” (84). She indicates the companionship that she shared with her husband, a new kind of conjugal relationship that was gradually spreading through the educated class of the colonial Bengal<sup>46</sup>. Here she also makes an oblique reference to the ties that she had to sever in order to undertake this voyage, the dear and near ones left at home which also includes her daughter, Tilottama; “I felt glad to see the known stellar bodies here. We used to sit together on the terrace of our house in Calcutta and watch them. The stars are here, still visible to me but where are the other people? Would I meet them ever again?” (84). Apart from these very rare observations Krishnabhabini’s personal life remains closely guarded throughout the narration, thereby proving the popular conception regarding women being creatures driven primarily by emotion as completely unjustified. By doing this she proves her own claim that she makes in the text<sup>47</sup> that given opportunity women can equal and even surpass men in their own fields. In her

recounting of her voyage, the twin time frames – one in which she travels and the other in which she is writing, collapses and comes together. While on the one hand the poem at the end of the first chapter speaks of her extreme eagerness and excitement to visit England, she also keeps on talking about her heavy heart and the desire to return home throughout the description of the voyage. On seeing a home-bound ship at Ismalia, her “mind wavered”. Though the journey is yet to be completed she has mentally reached England as she says, “The pain of yearning for one’s own country can only be felt by those who are living abroad” (90). Since this voyage is a reconstruction after the author has reached England, like every other autobiographical writings, here too the gap between the actual feelings of the author and the way it is represented can be explored. Memory spans its own image after a period of time and often in autobiographical representations these images come across as authentic ones, thus coalescing the actual and its reflections together. The minutely recorded narrative of her voyage that she presents in the text is remarkable considering the fact that she had nothing more than probably pen and paper to keep record of her experiences.

### **Scientific and Rational Temperament:**

For a nineteenth century woman Krishnabhabini has a very scientific outlook and is free from superstitions that was characteristics of Bengali Hindu women of that period. During her journey to England when she once sees a comet, her rational temperament analyses it as a natural phenomenon, saying, “People say that comets are ominous but I with my limited understanding cannot comprehend that how can the appearance of such a pure and serene celestial object harm this world in any way?” (69). Her broadmindedness can be further realised from the comments she makes about her own outward transformations as she embarked on this journey, “I had become so English in my eating habits and attire that no one would recognise me as a daughter

of a Hindu. Yet I had the same love towards my mother, father, brother, sister and other kith and kin” (83). By commenting on her attire, Krishnabhabini also contributes significantly to the ongoing debate in Bengal regarding the outfits of Bengali women. The single *sari* that was used to drape the *bhadramahila*'s body was not a fit attire to come out in the society. By the late nineteenth century, Bengali women's dresses became a matter of social concern for the new patriarchy which now wanted its women to step out of their houses. Thus ensued a debate revolving around *lajja*, morality and convenience. Here Krishnabhabini adds new dimension to it by dissociating the change in her outward appearance from her inner feelings which remains the same. In spite of belonging to an orthodox Hindu family, she shows considerable religious tolerance and is well aware of the diversity of religious practices in different religions. When she talks about the religious practices of the British, she does it with an understanding and tolerance not common among the nineteenth century Hindus. Her sharp mind can also comprehend the difference between Christ, the representative of God, and the actual God of Christianity, “they actually worship God although they can be seen praying to Christ” (120). For a Hindu woman used to idol worshipping, it requires an extremely rational and intelligent mind to differentiate between religious icons and their idea of God.

### **Women:**

One of the primary concerns for Krishnabhabini is the condition of women in India. She is so deeply pained by the wretched living conditions of Bengali women that even while in England she cannot forget their sorrows. On the contrary, she feels “sad to realise” that scenes like “men and women together taking walks, rowing boats or riding” (148) cannot be found in her country. Whenever she came across any example of women's freedom, her mind went back to her sisters back home who “had the chains tied to [our] feet” (168). Krishnabhabini is quite an

observant woman with a keen awareness about her surroundings. When she sees the Parsis in Bombay she immediately connects them to those she had seen in Calcutta and draws her conclusions,

The Parsi women are not confined like us. I have seen them on roads, stations, shops, almost everywhere. They go out wearing very nice and decent clothes. Looking at their enthusiasm and perseverance, they don't seem to belong to India. Wherever I go, I can see their shops or business centres. I have seen many Parsis in Calcutta but Bombay seems to be their own state. I have also heard that they own big shops in Aden, and many of them stay in London for their business. If the other communities of India emulate their qualities, then there shall be a better scope for the country's development. (74)

The ethnographic study begins much before she reaches England. In fact as soon as she steps out of her house, she is alert to the cultural nuances among people of various races. Bengal and her women become the constant planes of reference in the course of her culture study. She never forgets her fellow women, which is why she can contrast a lone light house standing on a shore to that of a coward and weak Bengali woman (79). Her preoccupation with women's issues is so much that in spite of devoting one full chapter on women ('British Women'), there is still hardly any chapter where she does not dwell upon the conditions of women from various social angles. In the chapter, 'Education and Education System'(211-223) a considerable section is devoted to women's education in England and how it has helped the British women.

She is also quite progressive for her times and has the boldness to publicly declare that women like Mary Carpenter or Florence Nightingale "did not get married to be led by others and

served this world with their own strength” (167). For a Hindu married woman of the nineteenth century, for whom the husband was supposed to be a god-like persona, such a statement required not just courage but also a sharp mind that was far ahead of its times in terms of modernity<sup>48</sup>. She openly criticises the Bengali men and holds them responsible for the condition of Bengali women, “Indian men are afraid to give freedom to women. They fear that after staying subjugated for such a long time, women have become mentally so weak they will not be able to conduct themselves properly even if they become free... if they are not gradually initiated along the road to freedom, they shall never learn self-control or become independent” (165). She is also very critical of the conjugal life that most of the Bengali women were forced to lead during that period where they had to spend their lives confined to the *zenana*, without any clue to the way their husbands spent their days (185). She upholds the companionate marriage that the English couple enjoyed to be the ideal form where the husband and wife became partners in the truest sense.

Women had been one of the important aspects of discussion in most of the nineteenth century Bengali travel writings from England. But here it becomes the central point of discussion. Being a woman herself, Krishnabhabini’s sense of shared identity with her fellow woman makes her go back again and again to this issue from various perspectives. While she is influenced by the nationalist ideologies of the nineteenth century Bengal, she has the mental agility to reach at the centre of women’s problems and tries to address her issues from there. She realises that without social freedom and respect as well as education, women cannot improve their condition and for that she again and again stressed upon the balance in the conjugal relationship visible in the West and the kind of education the women received there.

### **Patriotic and Nationalist Sentiments:**

“If this book is able to generate new perceptions or help reconsider the issues of *swadesh* and *videsh*<sup>49</sup>, then I shall consider all my efforts fruitful” (264): these concluding lines of the text of *Englandey Bangamahila* convey her intent and purpose of authoring this book as well as her nationalist consciousness in a nutshell. The text is built around nation building ideologies predominant in the nineteenth century Bengal. But added to it is a woman’s point of view where the bonded condition of the motherland and the subjugation of its woman are conflated.

In spite of being a travelogue, *Englandey Bangamahila* is rich in patriotic and nationalist sentiments. She feels quite strongly about leaving her *swadesh* and going to a foreign land, “I was leaving *swadesh* today – that *swadesh* for which people travelled hundreds of miles to return to her... I did not know when I shall get to see her again” (79). She shows her familiarity with ideas of *swadesh* (one’s own country) and motherland – two very popular concepts among the educated middle class in late nineteenth century India. A deliberate agenda of building the national character runs throughout the text. She picks out those virtues of the British race which are required for building a strong national character. In the chapter on ‘British Race and their Character’ she talks about the unity among the British people and their fellow-feeling, “They might cheat people belonging to other races but they will never do so to their own. The kind of malice and envy that is seen among the Indians is not generally found in them. The British never ridicule their own race nor do they bow down before anyone” (134). The qualities that she focuses upon here are the ones essential if India has to develop as a nation. Eulogising of such virtues is spaced out throughout the narrative. In the chapter on ‘Queen Victoria and her Household’, she similarly endows the Empress of the British empire with all the qualities that she desires in her fellow sisters. The Queen becomes the symbol of womanhood, an ideal to look

up to. The Queen as she describes, is religious but open minded, she is a devoted wife, a loving but stern mother and a dutiful woman. The Bengal intelligentsia, even in the post *sepoy* mutiny era considered the Queen to be an ideal maternal figure. Krishnabhabini, whose ideological position was heavily influenced by the nineteenth century Bengali *bhadralok's* philosophy, follows the same tradition in the representation of the Queen and hopes “she would become an example for every Indian woman” (138). Nineteenth century Bengali middle class society had realised the importance of education and the need to propagate it. As a part of her nation building agenda, therefore, Krishnabhabini Das provides a model education system by elaborately discussing the British system, particularly the higher education, in details for her readers (219-23). She also gives an elaborate account of women’s education and achievement in England in the chapters, ‘British Women’ and ‘Education and Education System’.

### **Class Consciousness:**

When Krishnabhabini left for England, middle class or the *bhadralok* community was developing in Bengal. But in England it was already a considerable force as the industrial revolution had given considerable impetus to the development of this class. Also, the British middle class is quite different from the newly rising Bengali middle class which was an offshoot of the British education system in India. While the middle class or the *bhadralok* community was primarily the intelligentsia whose prime occupation was as teacher, barrister/lawyer, or government employees, British middle class was a more heterogeneous group. Industrial revolution had given rise to many associated services such as banks, hospitals, civil services, schools, etc which required a great number of people. All these people were grouped under the banner of middle class though even among them there were various income groups; for example the highly skilled experts in industrial techniques and the university educated professionals such

as engineers, doctors, lawyers etc., earned much more than the school teacher or clerks. But they were held together by a set of ideals that became particular to this class, such as separation of home and the world for men and women, role of the women as the angels in the house, etc. But in Krishnabhabini's text, this nuanced separation in terms of income among the British middle class is absent. Her awareness about the three social classes – upper, middle and lower, are based on the situation back home and she conflates the two completely different societies in her attempt to analyse the British class system. This is particularly noticeable in those places where she engages in direct comparison of the two societies. In the eighteenth chapter of the text, 'Daily Life', she gives individual details of each class, clubbing the poor and the middle class together in a number of cases. For instance, she depicts the beginning of a typical day for a rich man in England as: "Most of the gentlemen get up by half past eight in the morning and take their 'breakfast' around nine o'clock. This is not an elaborate fare. They have butter toast, boiled egg, fish, sometimes a little meat, and tea or coffee" (239). And then she clubs the poor and middle class men's mornings together in her description, "the middle class and the poor Englishmen wake up at six or seven in the morning and take a sparse meal of some bread, butter, egg, etc" (241). Though Krishnabhabini is quite detailed in her analysis of the other aspects of British society, she does not show similar discernment here. Probably, it is difficult for her as a foreigner to understand or get into such minute details of the other society.

Through her comments on various aspects of the British society, Krishnabhabini makes us aware of her middle class consciousness. Her critical gaze is one that is formed by the middle class values of the nineteenth century Bengali society. That is why she calls the lower class or the working class British as the *chhotolok* (1996, 51)<sup>50</sup> - a term loaded with several layers of meanings. As Mrinalini Sinha points out that the *chhotolok* or *itarlok* were the "uncultured poor"

(1988, 17), thus the term was a signifier of not just the economic status but also their culture that was considered to be much inferior to their socially superior *bhadralok* community. Her disapproval of British women's extravagant nature or their extreme love for clothes is also steeped in middle class morality where ideally the wife should be the judicious spender of money. In fact most of the handbooks for women published around this period focussed on this issue. Dhirendranath Pals's *Streer Sahit Kathopokothon* (A conversation with one's wife) stresses that while earning is the husband's responsibility, spending that money judiciously is the foremost duty of the wife (17-18).

### **Social Evils:**

Krishnabhabini also draws attention to the darker sides of the British society. She is quite critical of the British working class and their drinking habit. At the same time she also draws attention to the gap that existed between the rich and the poor in that society. She juxtaposes the picture of an affluent lady in a "beautiful carriage" along with her "well dressed coachman and her servants" with that of "the tired workers in tattered clothes entering the liquor shops after their day's work" (145). She is also critical of the British practice of consumption of too much meat and liquor. While drawing a comparative analysis of the farmers in the two countries she says, "Though the Indian farm workers do not work or earn as much as the British ones, they are much happier. They do not consider consumption of alcohol and meat to be the most indispensable part of life and hence do not lead a beastly life as their British counterpart" (203). In fact she has devoted one full chapter named 'Wine or Poison' to discuss the ill-effects of drinking and how it is harmed the British society. Throughout the text she remained critical of the extravagant nature of the British. Even though she praised the British women for their independent nature, she does not support their extravagance regarding clothes and feels

convinced that the “British women’s pathological fascination for clothes has become a terrible vice. It has gone beyond their control”. (162)

She concludes her work in almost a rebuking tone where she rues the Indian attitude of sloth, cowardice, disunity, and all other vices that draw her away from freedom. In the true manner of a pedagogue, she expects her readers to learn from the British virtues that she had discussed elaborately in the text. She strongly criticizes the indifference of Bengali men towards their women, “The educated Bengali youth are busy earning degrees and in pursuit of their own pleasure; silent tears of the caged Bengali women fail to draw their attention.” (262) and through her words tries to rise Bengali women to some kind of action similar to their British sisters, “if we could similarly fight for women’s liberation here and drive it straight into the hearts of every Indian or if we discarded our helpless attitude and did not repress our emotions to shout our hearts out in front of our men” (262). This is an extremely bold position taken up by a Hindu, Bengali middleclass housewife.

All these make *Englancy Bangamahila* a travelogue with a difference. In the times when the British Empire had spread its tentacles throughout the world, she anticipates the postcolonial concern regarding the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, constantly negotiating between the indigenous and the alien cultures. This book is actually two texts in one. On the one hand, it is a text on British culture, lifestyle and the country itself which she writes for her fellow Bengali readers. She assigns this text a utilitarian role of becoming a handbook for the aspiring visitors to England. On the other hand, there is also a text which is absent or hidden, and that is the parallel text on Bengal. Her constant comparisons and analysis of the two cultures make Bengal a constant presence. This absent text is also the nationalist text, the text through which she upholds the values and beliefs of her society against the foreign one. Bengali lifestyle also becomes yardstick

to measure England's cultural quotient because her analysis of the British lifestyle is mediated by the values that she stood for, or her country valued.

### **Translation: Means and Strategies**

Whenever any text is translated into another language, one of the intentions behind the project is to make it available to the target language readers. In that case, maintaining an easy readability in the target language becomes one of the important factors. But along with that, the translator also needs to keep in mind the author's style, intention and meaning. So a translator has to strike a balance between the existing text in the source language and the resources available in the target language. The uniqueness of each text in terms of its location in the socio-cultural matrix then calls for a different approach for each text. It is therefore difficult – or almost impossible to arrive at a single perfect translation theory. What one can possibly arrive at are various approaches to translation. Andre Lefevre and Susan Bassnett, also highlight this aspect of translation theory by saying that, “Translations made at different times therefore tend to be made under different conditions and to turn out differently, not because they are good or bad, but because they have been produced to satisfy different demands” (Bassnett and Lefevre, 5). In fact, approach to translation varies with the translator as well. The translator's understanding and subjective position might also cause a change in the translated text. So any translated text at best is an approximation, a continuum which is kept alive by its very susceptibility to change. Another translator in another time and/or society might have another approach to the same text as R.S Gupta says, “no two translators have ever come up with the ‘same’ translations of a given text or script” (190, Ramakrishnan).

While translating Krishnabhabini Das' *Englandey Bangamahila* I have tried to keep my text as close to the original as possible. But given the fact that English and Bengali belong to two different language systems and follow very different syntax, it has not been possible to maintain a verbatim translation at all the places. My focus as a translator has been two-fold: firstly to keep the text lucid in the target language and secondly, to be faithful as much as possible to the original author's mood, tone and cultural subjectivity as is allowed in the target language. In order to do that, I have followed certain strategies which I have discussed later in this section. But before discussing those strategies, I have tried to sketch briefly how translation theory and the role of translator has changed over the ages which strengthens my initial argument that translation is always in a flux, and we can at best try and develop various approaches to translation and not a single universal theory.

Over the years translators have debated over the actual methodology of translation, over the issues like fidelity to the original text, indulging often in a gendered explanation of the role of the translation/ translator. This "sexualisation of translation" as Chamberlain shows appears as early as the seventeenth century when the tag "*les belles infidels*" became popularly associated with translation which implied that "translation should either be faithful or beautiful" (456). The cultural complicity inherent in the issues of fidelity in marriage and in translation gave it a further thrust. This equalling of the translation to a wife and associating it with fidelity acts in two ways – thereby proving the secondary position of the translation/ wife and also going on to say that the original / husband cannot be unfaithful. This need to regulate the fidelity in translation is reflected in the Earl of Roscommon's treatise on translation in the seventeenth century. Here, the translator is expected to usurp the role of the original author, to become the author himself in order to render the correct translation. But the text is the female whose chastity

must be protected by the translator in the role of the author. Similar debates continue and with colonialism the role of the translator changes from that of the protector of the text to that of the one who enriches it by translating it into a more powerful or superior language. Once again referring to Chamberlain's essay, 'translation has also been figured as the literary equivalent of colonization, a means of enriching both the language and the literature appropriate to the political needs of expanding nations...translation can expand both literary and political border' (Chamberlaine 459). Thus when colonialism was at its height, translation became a tool to domesticate the alien tongues of the colonies and also to assign them a place of pride by accommodating them in the so-called superior language of the colonisers. "In the colonial days, translation became a part of discourses of colonisation which constituted/ interpellated Indians as subjects...what the British translators undertook in colonial India is very important" (211, Chellappan, Ramakrishnan). Contrarily, in the postcolonial situation "translation is fulfilling a significant function in the evolution of national/ regional identities through literatures" (211, Chellappan, Ramakrishnan). In a multilingual country like India, translation is the only means of making texts in one *bhasha* language available in another. All these go on to prove the changing role of the translator and elusive nature of the translated text.

Present day translation theorists are more concerned with the transference of the cultural code embedded within each text to be translated. More than linguistic translation, thrust is on finding the cultural equivalence which might then convey the meaning more appropriately. Feminist translation practice, as practised by the feminist translators of Quebec might be pertinent here. They practice the strategies of 'supplementing', 'prefacing and footnoting' (Flowtow 75) as an integral part of translation. 'Supplementing', that is replacing a part of the culturally untranslatable part with a suitable intervention that can bring out the meaning clearly,

and even add to it in the translation. By ‘prefacing and footnoting’ the translator actively intervenes with the text, subverting the traditionally understood role of the translator as a ‘see-through and silent’ ( Flowtow 76). These feminist translators, translating from Quebec to English, begins with the premise that all language is patriarchal and makes an effort to make the woman visible and heard. By attempting to translate a text by a woman author, the translator gets actively involved to get the voice heard. In the essay ‘Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and theories’ Flowtow while analysing the origin of feminist translation says that “Feminist translation seems to have developed as a method of translating the focus on and critique of "patriarchal language" by feminist writers in Quebec...(it is) a phenomenon intimately connected to a specific writing practice in a specific ideological and cultural environment, the result of a specific social conjuncture. It is an approach to translation that has appropriated and adapted many of the techniques and theories that underlie the writing it translates” (Flowtow 74). The politics of translation shows how its aim and scope changes over time and location and leads to change in the thrust area of translation theory. So the act of translation becomes an open ended action leaving room for further scope for reinterpretations with changing time and society and even translator.

Translation of a *bhasa* text to English operates on multi-dimensional level. On the one hand, there is the allegation against the translator becoming a prey to colonial hangover while<sup>51</sup> on the other hand is the consciousness of English being the conveyance to reach the world literary market. Post-colonial situation addresses the problem by ‘de-territorialisation’ of the foreign language<sup>52</sup>. Keeping in mind all these considerations I have attempted a translation of *Englandey Bangamahila* to make it available to the readers without an access to Bengali language.

While translating Krishnabhabini Das' *Englandey Bangamahila* (A Bengali Lady in England) I had to face both linguistic and cultural challenges which I have tried to discuss briefly in the following section. Since English and Bengali are two languages belonging to different families, they have very different syntax. Therefore a verbatim translation might often result in a cumbersome sentence in English. At places therefore I have taken some liberties with the order of the sentences as for example in the sentence, "England is nearer to Bombay than Calcutta. The Europeans have stayed here for a longer period and possibly this makes Bombay look somewhat like a European city" (74). In some cases I had to break down a single sentence into a few smaller ones, owing to the difference in the nature of the two languages. Also, it was a trend among the nineteenth century writers from Bengal to use long and convoluted sentences which is not suitable in present day English language structure. The following is an excerpt from the text which comes as a single sentence in the original but has been broken into smaller sentences in the translation:

"India is my birthplace and I have lived here for all these years. I loved her with my entire soul. Looking at her downtrodden condition, I blamed myself for being unable to do anything for her and today, I do not know for how long I was going away from this dear land." (77-78)

English language does not have much scope for accommodating this entire passage in a single sentence. This is one of the strategies which I have adopted quite consistently to keep the translated text from becoming too awkward in terms of its readability.

Long hands of translation like footnoting and italicising words retained from the source culture in the target language text have been some of my strategies to deal with such cases. For example I have retained the word *memsahib* (67) used by the author as it lacks an English

counterpart. The word is loaded with a cultural derision that a section of the middle class Bengalis harboured for the anglicised Bengali women. It conveys Krishnabhabini's inner conviction which freed her from any kind of prejudice and reflects her boldness required in stepping out in an English dress in a culture which judged women a lot by what they wore. By substituting this word with any other equivalent word/phrase like 'the anglicised woman' would have robbed it of its richness. Instead by italicising the word and explaining it in the footnotes I have not only retained the cultural nuances but also made a statement regarding the author's personality. A similar example is found in her use of the word, *babu* (103) in the text which the author uses a bit differently in the original. Some other examples of culturally loaded words used in the original text and retained in translation are *satitva* and *dharma* (164) which do not have Bengali counterparts. Extensive footnotes have been provided within the translated text to help the readers belonging to a different culture understand authorial intention.

I have also added footnotes to expound various names of the people (96, 166, 177, etc) that she uses in the text for the benefit of the readers and to identify and contextualise the references from various texts she uses in her writing. Footnotes have also been used to inform the reader of the true source of quotations or epithet, for example, in one of the footnotes the readers have been informed that the probable source for the epithet 'the city of advertisement' (110) used by her in the text is Romesh Chander Dutt's *Three Years in Europe*. This is not just informative to the readers but also manages to focus upon her erudition. Such footnoting, though not present in the original text, enriches the text by offering additional but pertinent information regarding the content of the original.

In some other cases footnoting has also been used to show limitations of language; *firingi* (1996, 11), a word used in the original text is a single term used for all Europeans as well as

Eurasians. So while translating I have kept both the words, ‘Eurasians and Europeans’(73) as the meaning in which author uses it is not clear. Footnotes have helped to explain this confusion that arises due to translation here. The original text uses the old system of units of measurement in keeping with the time of this text being written. Sticking to that old system even in translation would have been redundant. So I have used the modern international standard units in my translation and provided the readers with the original units used in the footnotes (81,85,90,100 etc.).

The language of a work is determined by the kind of reader an author wants to write for. Tagore’s *Europe Prabashir Patra* has a liberal amount of English sprinkled throughout the text. English being the language of the upper echelons of the society, we understand that Tagore was not writing just for the general reading public. Similarly Troilokyanath Mukherjee and P.C. Mazoomdar had recorded their visits in English further delimiting the Bengali readers from accessing it. But Krishnabhabini had in her mind the women readers as well, and most of them did not have an access to English. So her text has been very consciously written in lucid Bengali. Whenever she uses any English term or concept, it is followed by an explanation in Bengali. At quite a number of places in the text she gives her readers the original English phrase along with its translation in Bengali. For example in the second chapter, ‘From Bombay to Venice’, while describing the small boy divers near the port of Aden she offers a verbatim quote of their calling out to the voyagers, “ohho have a dive” (81) in transliteration and then explains its meaning in Bengali. She translates ‘lighthouse’ as ‘*aaloghar*’ (1996, 17), ‘fog’ as ‘*garho kuasha*’ (1996, 43), ‘courtship’ as ‘*premkaran*’ (1996, 91), etc. All these words are mostly concepts foreign to her native readers. In my translation, I have omitted the literal explanations provided by the

author because in English, these words are self-explanatory. Including them in the translation would have compromised the readability of the text.

In the chapter titled ‘A Tour of London’, Krishnabhabini gives a verbatim translation of the calls of the various kinds of peddlers doing rounds in the London streets (1996, 63). Since I could not find the actual calls used by these peddlers I have done a sense translation of those lines in the text (143).

Krishnabhabini Das plunges into a Sanskritised form of Bengali when she was deeply moved or awed by some scene or thing. But while translating I have not been able to maintain this difference as English language does not have much scope for it. One option could have been the use of a more stylised version of English using an archaic diction, but then again that would have made the text redundant. Therefore in translation these passages have lost their distinctive narrative tone and have become a part of the greater narrative of the entire text. One such example is as follows:

Original: “শতশত ধুমসাজি-বিনিরগত আগ্নিদ্ব্যতি তমসি নিশা ভেদিয়া লোহিত ময়ূরপুচ্ছের শোভা  
বিস্তার করিতেছে; স্তূপাকার জ্বলন্ত লৌহ পাথরের নিম্প্রভ দ্ব্যতি নিরখিয়া ভ্রম হয়ে যেন পৃথিবীতে প্রলয়  
উপস্থিত হইয়াছে এবং সমস্ত জগত মাহাগ্নি দ্বারা ভস্মিভূত হইয়া যাইতেছে। (১১১, দাস)

Translation: “flames emitted by those hundreds of chimneys shoot upwards through the dark sky and look like red feathers of a dancing peacock. Looking at the heaps of burning hot iron it seems that the world is about to end in a great fire...” (206)

Bengali language has more provision for the use of onomatopoeia as compared to English. So one can find phrases like ‘গাড়ি ঘটঘট শব্দে ছুটিল’ (1996, 7) or ‘প্রস্রবণ হইতে ঝরঝর

শব্দে নির্ঝর সলীল নিঃসৃত হইয়া...’ (1996, 30). It is difficult finding onomatopoeic counterparts for these words in English so in most cases there has been a sense translation of such phrases.

The author has also included excerpts from English authors translated in Bengali. Since the details of her source have not been mentioned it has not been possible to locate the original pieces. In the chapter titled, ‘The English: An independent Race – Their government and Election of the members of the Parliament’ she uses an extensive passage from one of the British authors. I have translated the entire piece back to English resulting in a translation of a translation (237-39).

*Englandey Bangamahila* also contains three poems by the author which are more personal and emotional in nature than the rest of the text. Through these poems Krishnabhabini talks about her dreams of a free country, exploitation of India by England, miserable condition of Bengali women and many such issues close to her heart. These poems are more important for their content than for their poetic value. While translating them, I have therefore primarily aimed at keeping the content intact. The resulting translations are a sense translation of the poems. While translating Krishnabhabini’s daughters’ poems in the Appendix I, I have maintained the same strategy.

These are some of the challenges faced during translation of *Englandey Bangamahila* into English. All these challenges within which a translator has to work, invariably lead us towards the question of loss/gain in translation. This debate has been continuing for long and a proper solution is yet to be reached. In my opinion, the ‘loss’ in translation can be addressed in some way by the use of notes along with the primary text. The notes themselves then form a parallel culture text providing the readers with a much-required insight into the source culture. The process of dialogue between the translator and the original author that opens up with the

beginning of the text is in itself a ‘gain’ because it brings forward newer issues, previously not considered by the original author. So at the end of every translation remains the question how much have been sacrificed and how much gained in the process.

My effort has been to negotiate between the source and the target language and arrive at a form of translation somewhere between sense translation and semantic translation. Since neither of these two can be used exclusively it is important to strike at the right balance between the two. I have tried to retain the cultural nuances which I consider is of extreme importance in a text like *Englancy Bangamahila* where the author is deliberately indulging in a comparative study of English and Bengali cultures. But at the same time I have tried to maintain the contemporary English diction so that the text remains easily readable to the target readers. As the job of the translator is to make the text available to the readers who are alien to the source language and culture I have tried my best to act as the facilitator between the two language systems and interpret and explain the culturally opaque terms to the target readers.

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<sup>1</sup> This has been discussed in details later in the travel writing section.

<sup>2</sup> Though education among women was not widespread, this was also the period when Chandramukhi Bose and Kadambini Ganguli became the first women graduates (1879) in the whole of British Empire. So the spread of women’s education was extremely uneven, especially throughout Bengal.

<sup>3</sup> All the quotations from *Englancy Bangamahila* used here have been taken from the translation of the text that follows this introduction. The given page numbers correspond to those of the said translated text.

<sup>4</sup> All the translations included here are mine unless otherwise stated. The original text is as follows: হরিণ-বালকের প্রথম শিঙ উঠলে তার যে চাল হয় সেই উগ্রচাল প্রথম কৈশোরের।

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the image of woman as the mother goddess in the nationalist context refer to Tanika Sarkar, “Nationalist Iconography: The Image of Women in Nineteenth Century Bengali Literature”, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*.

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<sup>6</sup> Detailed discussion regarding the rise of the *bhadralok* community in Bengal and its various sub-categories can be found in McGuire, John. *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadrakalok in Calcutta, 1857-1885*.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* for a more detailed discussion on Indian nationalism.

<sup>8</sup> One of the principal agenda behind women's education in that period was to make women better and more efficient wives, keeping in mind the tradition of *grhalaxmi*. One of the texts of that period, *Streer Sahit Kathopokothon* (Conversation with wife) by Dhirendranath Pal focuses on that aspect. The husband, in conversation with his wife enumerates the duties of a proper wife 'firstly, to spend judiciously; secondly, to behave well with people, thirdly, to maintain a neat and tide home... and fourthly, to keep her husband happy' (17). He adds that women should be given that kind of education which will teach her such things.

<sup>9</sup> In fact quite a number of self help books proclaimed the parity between intellectual capacity of men and women as the chief reason behind women's education. The following excerpt from *Streer sahit kathapokathan* (Conversation with wife) is one such example: "can there be any kind of friendship between a learned husband and a foolish wife? This, if not anything else should be a reason enough for woman's education. After that comes children's education – if the mother is uneducated it is not easy to get the children educated". (Pal, 146).

<sup>10</sup> In this essay titled '*Streeloker kaaj o kaajer mahatto*' (Duties of a woman and their importance) (Das *Nirbachito* 71-78) Krishnabhabini explores the causes behind degeneration of the Bengali Hindu woman. Though she conforms to patriarchy by maintaining house to be the real place for a woman, she is quite radical in her view that most of the self-help advice books that are being written for Bengali women are actually by those young men who are themselves in need of advice (72). In fact she also advocates professions like midwifery, medicine, etc as decent ways to earn a livelihood for the financially weaker women (75). This too is a radical thought for her times.

<sup>11</sup> There is a confusion regarding Krishnabhabini's place of birth. Though most scholars agree with Kajala being her birth place, some also consider it to be Chuadanga of Nadia district.

<sup>12</sup> Devendranath Das was the youngest son of Srinath Das and a true scholar. In 1876 he became a graduate and went to England to take part in Civil Services examination. In spite of qualifying the test he was not selected as he had crossed the upper age limit. He knew a number of languages, both Indian and European like Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Persian, etc. During his stay in England, he tutored the Indians appearing for the Civil Services Examination and was associated with three different colleges. He also published a number of articles on astrology, grammar, literature, philosophy, medicine, mathematics and Vedic poetry. After returning to India, he became a teacher at Barishal. His greatest achievement is the establishment of the Century College.

<sup>13</sup> Some other such examples are Jnanendranath Tagore who had employed an English governess for his wife Balasundari Devi and 'from England, Satyendranath Tagore requested Hemendranath (brother of Satyendranath) to teach english to Jnanadanandini Devi. Girish Chandra Sen used to teach his wife *Barnaparichay* (the first book of letters) after everybody went to sleep at night.' (Chakraborty S. 310)

<sup>14</sup> Srinath Das was a pleader in the High Court and one of the leaders of the Bowbazar School. He was also a well known wealthy person living in the Bowbazar area. He had close ties with Vidyasagar but extremely orthodox in his religious values. In fact he had disowned his eldest son Upendranath when he married a widow. A reunion between the father and the son was brought about by Vidyasagar at Shibnath Shastri's behest but that was only when Upendranath was in his death-bed. (Shastri, *Atmacarit* 116-17)

<sup>15</sup> In an essay called ‘*ashikhshita and daridra nari*’ (uneducated and poor women) Krishnabhabini Das says that ‘nurturing her children and housekeeping are the two chief tasks of a woman’ (85). In another essay, ‘*shikhshita nari*’ or ‘an educated woman’ she maintains that only education can make a mother better suited to fulfill her ‘auspicious’ role (82). Both the essays have been anthologized in Krishnabhabini Das’ *Nirbachito Probondho*.

<sup>16</sup> Ghulam Murshid considers Srinath Das’ disowning his son actually a social ploy undertaken to pacify his orthodox society and that is why Krishnabhabini and Devendranath could confidently leave behind their daughter with him (*Rassundari* 107-08). But Simonti Sen in her introduction to Das’ *Englandey Bangamahila* (27) and Aruna Chattopadhyay in her introduction to Das’ *Nirbachito Probondho* (7) believe that it is the extremely conservative attitude of Srinath Das and his personal opinion which forced the parents to leave their daughter at home.

<sup>17</sup> *Gauridaan*- it is a ritual much practiced in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. Girls were married off at an early age and the male guardian of the bride supposedly earned piety. *Gauri* is an incarnation of the Goddess Durga. Pre-puberty girls were given off in marriage and this *daan* or ‘gift’ was considered to be the most valuable one. Nineteenth century Bengali families were ruled by the patriarch, or the senior-most male member and he had the right to give away the daughter of the family to anyone he considered suitable.

<sup>18</sup> Tilottama blamed her mother for leaving her as a child and going away with her husband for the tragic turn that her life had taken. She voiced her agony in the poems that she had left behind, such as *Anujog* (Complain) and *Ma’r Proti* (To Mother). After her death, these poems were published by Krishnabhabini under the title *Akkhep* (Regret). See Appendix I.

<sup>19</sup> Here too the Tagore family of Jorasanko led the way. Jnanadanandini accompanied Satyendranath to Bombay, his place of work and lived with him there. Even after they returned to Calcutta, they set up a separate establishment.

<sup>20</sup> She has been compared to Sita by her contemporaries. In an article after her death, Kshemankari Devi reports that when Debendranath himself tried to dissuade her from following him and thereby incurring social ostracism, she replied, ‘if Sita could leave everything and accompany Rama to the forest then why cannot I?’ In another article, Srimati Sarojkumari Devi says, ‘accepting the society and her family’s harsh punishment of leaving everything behind, Krishnabhabini followed her husband, just as Sita had done’. (Das, *Nirbachito* 148, 153) (My translations)

<sup>21</sup> Exile is not used in the sense of modern day diaspora but in its more traditional sense of being sent out of one’s country as a form of punishment. Debendranath’s second trip to England can be seen in that sense because partly it was his ostracism by his family which made him return to England.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Shelley writes in the Preface to *Frankenstein*, “My husband, however, was from the first, very anxious that I should prove myself worthy of my parentage, and enrol myself on the page of fame. He was forever inciting me to obtain literary reputation...”(vi, Shelley)

<sup>23</sup> In a poem, *Parajay* (Defeat) in *Jeeboner Drishyamala* (Das, 144-145), she says that she has put her heart and soul in pursuit of education in order to become a proper companion to him.

<sup>24</sup> She was one of the very few women who came out wearing gowns (Deb, *Antahpurer* 52). Also, as Kshemankari Devi says ‘around this time Krishnabhabini Das, in spite of her extreme reluctance wore Western clothes in accordance to her husband’s wishes’ (149 Das *Nirbachito* 149)

<sup>25</sup> Keshub Chandra Sen, in spite of being one of the proponents of women’s reform in Bengal, got his daughter married at an extremely early age. Even Rabindranath’s attitude towards his wife was quite contrary to his public take on women’s role in society and family.

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<sup>26</sup> Widowhood was so much ingrained in the Bengali women's consciousness that even today we find examples of women acquiring a complete change in their food habits in keeping with the tradition, on losing their husbands. A detailed account of widowhood as practiced even in the last century is provided in the Introduction to 'The Magic Web and Other Stories' in which Jharna Sanyal not only represents the condition of the widows but also contextualizes it within the nineteenth century reform movements and women's regeneration. This then also throws some light on Krishnabhabini's apparently sudden change of lifestyle after the death of her husband.

<sup>27</sup> See Himani Banerji's essay, 'Textile Prison: Discourse on Shame (lajja) on the attire of Gentlewoman (bhadramahila) in Colonial Bengal' for detailed discussion on the sartorial debate that preoccupied the educated middle class men and even women in the nineteenth century.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed discussion, read Sidonie Smith's 'Autobiography and Questions of Gender'.

<sup>29</sup> As Carl Thomson says in his work *Travel Writing*, about the rising popularity of this genre in the modern times, "For much of the twentieth century at least, the genre was usually dismissed by literary critics and cultural commentators as a minor, somewhat middlebrow form. However, travel writing's reputation rose sharply in the latter part of the century, with the appearance of a new generation of critically acclaimed travel writers such as Paul Theroux, Bruce Chatwin, Ryszard Kapuscinski and Robyn Davidson. Also leading the way in this regard was the prestigious British literary journal *Granta*, which ran several travel-themed special issues in the 1980s and 1990s... Implicit in *Granta*'s championing of the form was the assumption that travel writing is a genre especially reflective of, and responsive to, the modern condition." (2)

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed account of the earliest travel writings from India refer to Fisher's article, "From India to England and back"

<sup>31</sup> This term has been used by Julie F. Codell in an article, 'Reversing the Grand tour: Guest Discourse in Indian Travel Narratives' implying that most of these Indian visitors in London were "both welcomed by Britain's hospitality and imperial British citizens." (174)

<sup>32</sup> Refer to Sukanya Banerjee's article, "Political Economy, Gothic, and the Question of Imperial Citizenship".

<sup>33</sup> The dates refer to the year of their travel. In case the author has visited England more than once, the mentioned year is of that voyage for which he has written the travel document.

<sup>34</sup> Tagore had been to England a number of times and recorded his experiences there. The given year is the year of his maiden travel to England which he recorded in *Europe Prabashir Patra* (1881).

<sup>35</sup> In an essay called 'Ingrej o bharatbasi' (The English and the Indian) in *Raja Praja* (The King and the Subjects) Tagore talks about this change in the attitude of the British people when they reach India. He says that even if any newly arrived Englishman tries to reach out to the Indians, his fellow countrymen who are already settled here stops him from doing so. (730-31)

<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed discussion on white women's travel writing and their reception in the West, refer, Mills, Sara. *Discourse of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*.

<sup>37</sup> While describing London, she says that "an Indian once described London... as the city of advertisements" (51) which is a reference to Romesh Chandra Dutt's Travelogue *Three Years in Europe*. Such references indicate her awareness regarding contemporary Bengali male travel writers and their works.

<sup>38</sup> A leader of the Brahmo Samaj.

<sup>39</sup> In spite of belonging to the progressive Tagore family, Jnanadanandini did not write about her stay in Europe. Much later, her daughter Indira Debi Chowdhurani, in *Puratani*, gives us some information about her mother's stay in England. She records the incidents as she heard from her mother but this work is mostly comprised of personal anecdotes and domestic life with almost no ethnographic details.

<sup>40</sup> Wife of Manomohun Ghosh, the reformer, lawyer and leader of the Indian National Congress. Associated with Brahmo samaj.

<sup>41</sup> Wife of Womesh Chandra Bandopadhyay, the first president of Indian National Congress.

<sup>42</sup> She recorded her visit in *Englancy Saat Maash*, published in 1905.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed account of Pandita Ramabai's stay in England, refer to Antoinette Burton's *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late Victorian Britain*. Unlike other feminist biographies on Ramabai, this work attempts to explore the imperial ideologies operating in Ramabai, Cornelia Sorabji and Behram Malabari's stay in England.

<sup>44</sup> Swarnakumari Devi, being a daughter of the Tagore family had grown up in a progressive atmosphere from the very beginning. This is reflected in the versatility of her works. While most of her contemporary women authors had focussed only on the condition of women in society, Swarnakumari engaged herself in scientific discourses and creative writings such as novels, poetry etc. along with articles on social awareness. She even recorded her travels to Prayag and Nilgiri where she talked of the excitement of travel, the journey itself, and her experiences there.

<sup>45</sup> Look up *Pather Katha: Shatabdir Sandhikkhane Bangamahilar Bhraman* for some of these travel writings.

<sup>46</sup> See introduction pp 10-11.

<sup>47</sup> While talking about British women's achievement in the field of education, she says, "...women are not inferior to men in terms of intelligence; on the other hand, the fact that they have achieved as much as men in spite of all the hurdles they face prove their superiority." (158)

<sup>48</sup> Krishnabhabini had problems to accept the god-like stature associated with men, particularly husbands. In a very interesting letter as dedicated to her late husband in *Jeeboner Drishyamala*, she says that "that Hindu husband, who has once received the *puja* of his Hindu wife will never want to step down from his position of a God to that of a friend" (Dedication, Das).

<sup>49</sup> Literally, it means one's own country and the foreign land. But *swadesh* cannot be fully explained as one's own country. It has a nuance which Tagore pitches against nationalism on his essay on this subject. Consequently then, *videsh* becomes that which is opposite to *swadesh*.

<sup>50</sup> This term has been taken from the original Bengali text of *Englancy Bangamahila*.

<sup>51</sup> As Sukriti Paul says, "Literal translation into British English can totally mow the "native" text into being a so called 'civilized' identifiable experience but in that the original text suffers a crucial loss, that of having to shed its own vital content" (228).

<sup>52</sup> As Indranath Chaudhuri says, "in the postcolonial period the resistance of the dominated language-culture neo-colonial linguistic-culture hegemony is, at times quite vivid. Now one can find the interest of Indian translators has been to explore the ways in which English language can be stretched to carry some 'authentic Indian expressions' (31).