

Alice in Nineteenth-Century Bengal: The Case of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's Kankabati

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Abstract

My paper will examine Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's *Kankabati* as a Bengali retelling of Lewis Carroll's 1865 classic *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. I wish to demonstrate how *Kankabati*—which caught the attention of Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore—skillfully recasts Carroll's masterpiece of Victorian fantasy, imposing new meanings on it. Published in 1892, six years before Carroll's demise, *Kankabati* preserves the essence of the original novel while working to transform it in ways that are remarkably ingenious. Beginning with a brief overview of the popular recreations that the Alice stories generated in *fin-de-siècle* Bengal—Bengalis were warmly receptive of English books, thanks to colonial education—and situating *Kankabati* in relation to these now-forgotten texts, my chapter will move on to attempt a close reading of Mukhopadhyay's novel, considering its rechanneling of Carroll's source text as a case study in transcultural adaptation. While Mukhopadhyay maintains the basic framework of a girl child's absurd dream adventures, he relocates the Carrollian tale to his native milieu and in so doing not only ensures its survival in a non-English context but also “revitalizes” (to use a word from noted adaptation theorist Robert Stam's essay on revisionist films) its fictional elder.¹ By analyzing how Mukhopadhyay appropriates Alice, I will try to showcase how *Kankabati* functions as an Eastern avatar of a Western text, reading it as a nineteenth-century specimen of what is now widely known as hypertextuality.

Key words: fantasy, politics, hypertextuality, transcreation, adaptation, dream narratives.

The idea of adaptation serves two primary purposes. First, that it disembarks on the authenticity of origins from where all processes of translation and transcreation emerge as a cognitive-textual activity (here we may consider this to be regarding the origin ideas). Second, that it relates to the seminal, basic function of literature to reflect on society and its structural constructs as any other piece of realist fiction. Though the latter purpose might appear presumptuous bordering upon the

contexts of bourgeois realism, we might as well remember that ‘the novel’ had been read and re-read in the light of bourgeois aesthetics in the west and upper class nationalism in India. If I were to establish my paper against this latter context, the novels that I discuss here fit in this rubric (‘novels of realism’) with ease. However, there still occurs a problem of ‘authenticity’ and ‘origins’ when we relocate the definition of realism against the understanding of literary adaptations/ translations as an autonomous literary genre. Here, if we are to consider the problem of authenticity, we will enter the Barthesian paradigm of ‘who exercises authority on the originality of ideas’ or ‘who creates original ideas’ and would be tempted to question the transmission of these ideas through its different forms of representation. Of course, one way to look at it (and concomitantly dismiss) is through the curious literary associations of the conscious and the subconscious. Hence, this question of the term ‘form’ is significant to understand here. Forms, in general, refer to different media of organization within an otherwise broader unity of presentation. Here too, the unity lies in the ideas that are conceived intrinsic to a social problem that in the ‘original’ text is revised and responded to through adaptations. This might serve for the purpose of satire, or for emphasis or even for modifications on social transitions and difference.ⁱⁱ For instance, Hutcheon in her *A Theory of Adaptation*, attributes the reception of adaptations to the constant process of using “repetition with variation” to generate an effect of “surprise with novelty.”ⁱⁱⁱ From here, we understand that adaptations, though in a way displaced, adds to the expansion of literary/social ideas and cater to a broader politics of trans-cultural dialoguing and affirmation.

In this, Prof. Sukanta Choudhuri’s textual reference to the ‘herons in the water’ in his *The Metaphysics of Text* is a case to understand. In the text, Prof. Choudhuri almost follows Derridean deconstruction and replication to elaborate on how an idea, here represented through the heron finds its reflections through the medium of water.^{iv} While Choudhuri refers to the textual adaptations and semantic construction, adaptation techniques vary across inter-media spectra and in the designs they employ and there have been scholars who have discussed various degrees of signification in trans-media platforms.^v Hence afterlives have more cultural impact in not only addressing textual thought in one direction or offering more avenues for academic understanding but they also promise a case to study similarity and difference, with its coordination and contradiction in historicising different moments of cultural history. Such study is thus relevant both in cultural and materialist terms. Here, then, adaptation is about ideas and their modes of presentation. Julie Sanders probably elucidates on this context better when she details on the politics of representative adaptation as “that of the movement of proximation, a strategy that brings the text closer to the personal frame of reference of the public, according to contexts and local audiences. It is, therefore, a process through which adaptation is modified so that audiences from the most diverse times, places and social aspects can identify with it more easily.”^{vi}

However, in this particular paper, I attempt to study Trailokyanath Mukopadhyay’s *Konkabati* as a textual adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and explore its relationship to Carroll’s text. There is no marvel in considering Carroll as the rallying point of fantasy fiction meant for children. With the generic change in the modes for children’s fiction (that is the transition of the genre from polished didacticism to empathetic engagement), the idea of

children's fantasy became doubly venerated. First, this literary phenomenon occurs in that the double veiling allowed different strata of meaning to arise and from thence then, the implied reader(s) from different sections and ages could savour its 'grave' delight. It is 'grave' in the fact that children's literature often arises with already existing oral narratives that are passed into print after some standardisation. Or, there are cases where popular religious texts or moral doctrines are peppered with ingenuity with an intention to be introduced to children as 'subjects of the political' right in their formative stages. Whether we risk an analysis of political influencing on subject and identity or not, children's literature is most likely to filter down through the adults that communicate with them. This is exactly where the implications of readership might get complicated. This process of communication is more intrinsically a project of semi-conscious interpellation of children where the conventional strokes of morality are painted. No doubt, the golden period of children's literature appeared more alluring at a time given the discussion on pure indulgence in fantasy. It almost appeared gilded and untainted with the lack of any immediate moral pivot. This is of course to discuss appearances. But initiating with Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* and Charles Kingsley's *The Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* and continuing through Carroll's texts on Alice till Collodi's *Pinocchio*, Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Kipling's *Jungle Book*, the idea of fantasy became much more cascading and inclusive, variegated and overt; thus avoiding the naïve talk on innocence and expanding literary imagination for children to a more nuanced stature. I shall look into similar patterns of textual behaviour in Mukhopadhyay's *Kankabati* and locate the moral complications in trans-cultural adaptations.

Mukhopadhyay's *Kankabati* is a text that had been penned down around 1891 and was published in 1892, three years after the Mukhopadhyay had visited Europe.^{vii} Carroll's popular success had been well established by then though there was little to appreciate the criticality of his tropes and characters. Mukhopadhyay, however, can somewhat be assumed to have borrowed the tropes of magic realism and that of the dream narratives from Carroll; this being brought to academic spotlight after the insights of the Bengali author and laureate RN Tagore himself. Though Tagore was rather critical of Mukhopadhyay's inability to exploit the fairy tale genre to its fullest gift of impossibilities, its playful incoherences and its undulated convergence of irrationality with rationalism, his idea of *Kankabati* as a probable after-life of Alice in colonial Bengal is indubitably significant.^{viii}

While discussing *Kankabati* as a text of both adaptation and political importance, the key to understanding its intentions might be explored in its opening prologue.

"We have all heard the Knakabati tale as children. Kankabati's brother bought a mango. Keeping the fruit in the safety of his room, he wanted one and all--- "Let no one touch my mango. Remember, I will marry the one who consumes it." A mere child, Kankabati couldn't gauge the implications, and ended up eating the very fruit! So her brother declared: "I will marry Kankabati". Parents and acquaintances went blue in the face trying to convince them that this was not the proper thing to do!...The brother however refused to pay heed. ..Kankabati was abashed beyond measure! She made a boat and set herself afloat on a river...out of her brother's reach and beyond his determination to marry her. Thus goes the story of Kankabati. But is it

possible to believe such a tale? Is it probable that a brother would insist on marrying his sister for the sake of a mere fruit. This is patently impossible! I will narrate a tale that lies within the realm of probability. ^{xix}

From here two things can be observed. First that Mukhopadhyay has already offered us a classic case of upturned realities in his very opening section of the text. The glaring story of the brother insisting on marrying her sister (and hence incest) is already a stunning idea, made more stunning through the overtly forward presentation. Of course, incest is a social taboo but existent none the same in society through the discourses of prohibition and probability. Probability is the same word that the narrator uses in his text. In this, one may derive the Aristotelian dichotomy between probability and possibility. Incest is not socially acceptable and hence improbable. But life beyond liminality is possible and a reality too. So this failure of social determination in what is under purview as ‘unreal’ and the ‘reality’ behind constructing what is but not accepted to be real is redolent in the narrative, right from its outset. Could Tagore now justify Mukhopadhyay’s deliberate shortcomings in utilizing the incoherence of the dream that Carroll had? It appears to be so. Second, the author-narrator himself promises us an alternative dimension of probability that which, in text, is innocent but ridiculously unreal. Given these two observations, one might very well understand that Mukhopadhyay was not blindly aping Alice in Konkabati. Hence, there is more than striking similarity of genre in the two texts under comparison, Konkabati is an afterlife in difference and perhaps with far more nuances of the text than in Carroll’s socio-political allegory.

Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* is a girl’s journey to a fantasy land where she encounters animals and birds and stock characters who behave the same as humans and more so in creating meaning in apparently meaningless acts. This is a significant point in Carroll’s text. Be it the unusual modifications in sizes, the caucus race, the baby of the Duchess who turns into a pig, the scene at March Hare’s house, the croquet game, the mock turtle’s story and finally the mock trial scene are all comic but desperate attempts at constructing meaning in an otherwise random world. Human world is definitely an apparent statement in everyday meaning; in the tale, however, the activities that create meaning remain the same. What changes is actually the agents that should under normal understanding executed the actions to meaning formation. The same problem of action in creating meanings but by agents and means that are radically ‘abject’ is to definitely look at the very basis of existence and meaning, a problem of existential hermeneutics. One might recall the caucus race where everyone runs without a start or end but continues till the work is done or the rather interesting conversation between the Mad Hatter, March Hare and Dormouse where meaning is not what is intended (the offer of wine by March Hare to Alice when there was none, time personified as a disciplining agent and the Mad Hatter’s riddled language) and the mock trial scene where none knows the allegations or the crime but the accused and the jury decide on the legal process. All these three examples explore existential and social politics to a different level. The Mad Hatter’s assertion of having more when with having none is a brilliant case in point to show that everything that appears improbable is far more real at introspection. This gap between what is meant and said in human reality and the ‘unreal’ in the wonderland serves the greater purpose to investigate if reality can be alternatively constructed and more importantly if reality is a human construction in structures and not bestowed naturally.

The idea of an alternative reality through the trope of parody is central to the wonderland. But with parody, emerges seriousness. A race should serve no other purpose but to achieve its goal, just like the animals ran for dry breaths. The distribution of gifts is a remarkable point on social collaboration even at the face of odds, one race where most falter and fail in the human world. Time too takes on agency brutally so far as to stagnate a tea party for months. Of course, the narrator must have been more concerned about human experience of subjective term that the clock time while creating this scene.

But Kankabati's idea of real/unreal is different. Unlike wonderland's out and out magic realism that takes the entirety of Carroll's plot, Kankabati is structurally weaved differently in its magic function. Kankabati begins with the promise of a probable tale and takes us to the village of Kusumghati where the narrator is very particular to put forth the blueprint of the real/unreal non-binary. The village of Kusumghati was a "back of the beyond place" where mundane realities like robbers and murderers occur in colonial rural Bengal and chowkidars own up responsibility for crime records at these places but this is not the whole truth. The broad focus on corpses being transferred from one village to the other by dacoits and tigers pave way to the idea of spirits and ghosts haunting the village. The fear in people of certain trees considered to be the abode of such spirits and the firm belief in obnoxious *dainis* are all a part of the village's cultural reality as much as the robbers and the tigers. So, in the very basis of the tale, the narrator is juxtaposing between the reality of the senses to the reality of the mind and whatever overlaps in between. The tigers that hunted down villagers could "metamorphose" into humans.^x To this extent the idea of reality and unreality that was promised in the introductory section is taken up a few notches higher in the second chapter itself and the audiences might know what to expect. However, if we look into *Alice in Wonderland* as a referential parent text, it leaves little room to speculate that Mukhopadhyay did not aim for a facsimile version of Carroll's story in Bengali. Of course we have examples like Hemant Roy's *Ajab Deshe Amala* which is little more than a retelling of the Alice-story in Bengali. Unlike *Alice in Wonderland*, realism and non-realism have no separate basis in the Kankabati tale, at least at its introductory chapter. However, like Alice's tale, Kankabati too has a sharp rupture with reality before the 'unreal' section is introduced. Kankabati departs from Carroll's work in that Mukhopadhyay allots a great many chapters to understand real social workings of Bengali life. Realism is hard and elaborate through the characters of Khetu, his mother, Tanu Ray, his family including Kankabati, other characters of Sandeshwar, Niranjana Kabiratna and the likes. The overbearing realism of child marriage, religious orthodoxy and misadventures, honesty and irony, humour and pathos are all interlinked together. The divisions of caste hierarchy, in fact most of the principal characters are all upper caste Brahmins, and the authority and power that comes with it is very neatly depicted through the exchanges between Niranjana Kabiratna and Tanu Ray. The commodification of women in the name of *punya* or virtues of the parent/husband, the deep rooted patriarchy and religious hypocrisy are all topical issues that the narrator was dealing with. Similarly pathos and irony are all presented with a touch of humour in the episodes concerning Khetu and Sandeshwar, the iminalities of social inclusion and exclusion, the tragedy of the mother and the ingratitude of human hearts are all part of the realism that the novel builds on. This moves along uni-directionally to an extent where the reader might let the unreal indications of the first two chapters slip into oblivion.

In Carroll's *Alice*, wonderland occurs in the first chapter itself, thus confirming the narrator's primary quest for the world of non-sense. But in *Kankabati*, the story is embedded deeply into reality so much that even one might not figure out why the title of the novel reads after *Kankabati* despite her finding serious room of her own only in the seventh chapter.^{xi} The break with the stark social realism occurs only after the eleventh chapter in the second part of the chapter. And this marks the engagement of the text with unreality and the fantastical till the end of the novel. Now, one may understand that the narrator attempted to devote separate parts to the real, unreal binary before synthesizing them together at the end. This happens after *Kankabati* wakes up after her long feverish slumber.^{xii} There the two separate parts of the real/unreal binary in the text's structure synthesizes into non-duality. Here, one may understand that while Carroll was more allegorical in the politics of the wonderland, he attempted to look at the reality through its inversion, through a looking glass. This might very well justify the nomenclature of his sequel to the wonderland. However, for Mukhopadhyay, the question of real/unreal boundary was more simply put. His neat demarcation between the two worlds of reality, even with their own undercurrents that ran counter to each section, is primarily divided to contextualize a narrative that was meant to satirize overtly the processes of colonial Bengal. In that, his intention is more of an affect. While Carroll puts forth ramifications and scope for different narratives for children and for adults, for the political class and the ruled, his pragmatism is more broad and wide. To Mukhopadhyay, the intention of affect was more pointed to the extent that allegorical underpinnings under non-realism was somehow undercut and made subservient to force a more real end. We are left to guess if it were for the lack of credibility of the Bengali readers of the age to attempt an allegorical interpretation or his own endeavour to generate a singular social effect that made him devise the novel's structure the way he did it. This becomes evident if we look at the endings of these two novels. *Alice* returns back to the world from sleep and her sister envisions a more domestic life for her while *Kankabati* awakes to find a kinder change in the hearts of her family and village.

Here, the problem is both of similarity and differences. Both narratives are similar in the prediction of a more domesticated desire in women towards role playing, both characters are positively mirthful after the dream and both the dreams can be deciphered as romantic escapism of the two characters. However, while *Alice* is 'expected' to conform into practices of traditional lives in future whereas *Kankabati* is seen to be entering it already with the village as a witness.

This draws us to the study of agency that the individual author-narrators have permitted them to function on. At the very first glimpses of *Alice*'s adventure, the author narrator is positing no other human character but *Alice* and her sudden jump into the burrow opens up the wonderland. In sharp contrast, *Kankabati* is introduced in the third chapter with a one-liner that mentions her as "Ray's (Tanu Ray) youngest daughter. She was just an infant."^{xiii} The next mention of her occurs in the titular chapter seven where though the title indicated some detail on *Kankabati* as a character, the volume was given up to the Tanu Ray's wife and Khetu's mother. Only in the latter half of the chapter does *Kankabati* get introduced with her "giggles" and follows up with better descriptions of playfulness in the succeeding chapters of the first part (chapter eight and chapter eleven). *Kankabati* has no real agency so far and her possibility to exert her will almost

collapses with the last chapter of the first part where the character of Janardhan Chowdhury makes up his mind to marry her despite Khetu's objections. Now, whether we attribute it to the realism/dirty realism that Mukhopadhyay framed to embed his "probable" story on, Kankabati's subservience is well established to a point of doom. Her mother character Alice never faced the "moment of subservience" per say and all the forebodings are through the anticipation of future. For Kankabati, it is the present moment of reckoning and the pathos is deep.

To look at the wonder-landscapes would now be significant to understand the politics that these characters were subjected to as spaces without much social control. Alice's character struggles with meaning as much as Kankabati, if not more. She meets animals who behave like humans, deals with the maze of floating signifiers that associate with random signified edibles that create no meaning, ("EAT ME", "DRINK ME"), meets a vanishing Cheshire cat, messes up with meaning again in a tea party against frozen time till a mock court session which she breaks down overgrowing herself. Feminist observations are likely to ascribe much latitude to the protagonist in her responses to seemingly meaningless situations. Alice's responses are steady so much so that she remains firm at the face of the unruly Duchess and questions the overbearing Queen. Alice also talks to herself in situations which are incomprehensible, thus locating her as both the victim and the interlocutor. The doubling of the self or the split in self is essential to understand the body of Alice as a site of resistance, one where the semiotic processes of splitting and conversations with oneself can be contrasted against the speech that Alice utters to respond to unfamiliarity. Alice's discussions with the self occupies more space in the text than her enunciated responses to characters of the wonderland. This might be a totemic representation to insinuate the resistance of the symbolic order of society (society that is as random and meaningless as the creatures of the wonderland and their roles) through her mental conversations that are more semiotic and akin the senses of the body than the operations of society. However, her own discussions, even when considered a semiotic gesture that attempts to bestow sense is already colonized by the paternal signifier of the language. Thus, Alice's apparent resistance and resilience is regulated by the Lacanian Law of the Father that she does not understand. Her act of disruption too is by the enlargement of her size through an invisible agent that she doesn't know not. Thus, the contextual assertion might be that the negotiating points of the New Woman in Victorian society is but a ground regulated and sustained by a more patronising patriarchal-centre.

These motives are put with more clarity in Carroll's *Through The Looking Glass*. In fact, though contemporary studies have followed Tagore's similarity between Alice and Kankabati through the novels under discussion, it appears to me that the question of agency is overt in *Looking Glass* so much so that this novel resembles *Kankabati* in more than just a few aspects. Alice is deliberately addressed as a pawn throughout the novel (the novel itself identifies itself with a chess match) in the game between the ruling classes. Alice's Sisyphean act to reach the garden, her being a pawn in the game, her loss of memory and the fatal statement of her being merely a figment of the Red King's dream all detail upon the question of free-will and existential anguish.

Of course, Alice's spat with the Red Queen and her alliance with the White Queen are all but a battle of kings returning back to the Red King's dream. Alice's position as a subjugated class

against the royalty (class question) and a female character (gender question) are all a part of the greater play of the Red (evil) King's ploy (note the gender and the class). However, Alice is aware of her role (in society?) as a performance (she tells her kitten to "pretend") and her role of rowing away is a desperate act of survival.

The motif of rowing is overwhelmingly present in Kankabati's tale too. Kankabati rows away from society on the call by the magical fishes in the pond. Significantly, for Kankabati, the departure to the world of magic realism was rather a more conscious working of the subconscious. Kankabati almost converses with his brother against the societal structures of honour and attachment in a lyrical tone as she contracts in her own world of experience.^{xiv} We might notice that the realistic prose of narration slips into lyrical charm of one's own imagination, a more real experience and a more intelligible recognition than what society delivers her. She discards the commodifying functions of the society in favour of liberty and choice.

To be sure, this is an attempt to explore the prospects of the feminist question. However, the succeeding episodes of the novel place her in the typicality of the modern bourgeois representative function. Almost alluding to the Richardsonian premise of virtue being rewarded, Kankabati relinquishes queenship "to weep her heart out."^{xv} What is pertinent through the second chapter of the latter section is the kind of importance Kankabati fantasizes for herself in her dream. The desire for recognition, the longing for being transported across places for her anointment (here, to get her the royal garment) are all explorations in the interior psyche of the woman protagonist even if it endorses some amount of the gap in agency. If we look at the chapters that depict Kankabati's return to the world of Kusumgati, though in her dream, we might notice the same lack of agency playing through the text. It would be interesting to notice that though Kankabati had in herself the desire to be celebrated, all her worldly adventures (even in her dream) were always already shared in and around Khetu. This ties up to the point where Kankabati herself had to submit herself to Khetu's advise to return under the grasp of her father's tyranny. This continues through the tiger episode, of romantic belonging between Kankabati and Khetu till Kankabati herself takes on agency to save Khetu's life.

However, if we reconsider Kankabati's apparent agency, it would be significant to observe that the agency that Kankabati creates for herself is largely to save the life of the man she loved and the one who had his will over hers.^{xvi} Also the expedition to bring Khetu back to life is a foolish design of Kankabati, a conventional societal motif.^{xvii} In a similar vein, Kankabati's efforts are always already inscribed within the norms of patriarchal worldview and can be related to the constructed game that enmeshes Alice in Carroll's text. While Alice manoeuvres through sudden humorously Kafakesque locations, it is on the promise to become a queen on the other side of the looking glass. Kankabati, however, is the queen who takes on these expeditions even after coronation. Be it the meta-commentary on the life of women through these texts, there is a sort of social pre-destination that haunts the woman question. Be it the New Woman or the more subjugated sort in rural India, the fate is only a little different within the feudal/capitalist-patriarchal nexus. The plot reaches its climax with Kankabati's abortive attempt to resuscitate Khetu and her voluntary insistence on being the Sati.^{xviii} A trenchant social commentary on colonial Bengal and its degradation, Kankabati stands much more like an agent of patriarchy in stricter senses. Alice's attempts to make sense of the unintelligible, represented through her

constant self-conversations find rare insistence in Kankabati. Neither does Kankabati respond in the manner Alice attempts to respond in the wonderland or her attempts to discover her identity. The case of the forest within the world of the looking glass makes identity perish with the exclusion of the mnemonic function. The same loss of identity is far more overtly presented in Kankabati throughout the story's narration. Unlike Alice, there is slight consciousness of the question of identity exploration in Kankabati.

Alice's wonderland is full of characters that work to formulate a tragi-comedy to relate to social significance. Be it the King and Queen of hearts, the Red-White royals and their sepoy, the snobbish Duchess who is brought to submission, the madness of the croquet game with flamingos, the predator-prey relationship through the cat-mouse stories, the solipsism of the Mad Hatter and the March Hare or the linguistic commentary of Tweedledum-Tweedledee and the Gnat, all are different tropes to relate to the Victorian ethos with its clash of meaning and the competition for power. In Kankabati too, the characters of magic have an overwhelming role to play in exploring Kankabati's character in an apparently free world of her own creation. As opposed to the almost dirty realism in the characters of the village and its material points of rupture, the characters of the magical realm weave far more liberally in the sensory world through Khetu, the man-tiger. Khetu's characterisation is significant in that it explores the possibilities to the socio-psychological divide, the point of contradictions and complimentary coordinates of the conscious and the subconscious.

However, the unmistakable similarity between the characters of the magic world and that of Carroll's wonderland are strikingly similar. The fishes that crown Kankabati with *katlani* at the head, *kankramoshai*, the *khalifa* are all symbolic of a more coordinated community that believe in altruism. They have their distinct character traits that might be metonymic representations of the human condition in colonial Bengal. Characters like *byangmoshai* and the *kharbur* doctor that finds a parallel in Alice's caterpillar while employing humour also comment on the peculiarities of the human temperament. Characterization of a *khokhosh* adds onto the autochthonous identity of the text and its purpose.^{xix} Mukhopadhyay characteristically utilises children's stories and narratives to appeal to its target readers while keeping intact the politics of the social. The characters of the moon-sepoy and the moon are directly borrowed from fantasy tales of Bengal that come alive in Kankabati's subliminal battle between innocence and experience.

What concerns us also is the portrayal of the she-monster Nakeshwari. The monstrous portrayal of the devil along with her mother against Kankabati's attempt to save her husband's life might again be read in terms of inter-societal relationships of the husband, the faithful wife and the other. This serves as another comment on patriarchy and recreating the Medusa figure. In that sense, the liminalities of social designs appear more prominently than usual. With that the narratorial presentation through seemingly innocuous humour performs as an effective veneer on all that the text criticizes. This runs to the point where a practice like Sati has been overwhelmingly glorified albeit with a humour that betrays the glorifying enterprise.

In this, the colonial conditions for the productions of the text are as much vital as the author's tour to Europe and the basic modes of British functioning. The strain of satire is though inward

looking on one's own community, Mukhopadhyay also criticises the hypocrisy of the Christian civilizing mission as much as the ludicrous mimicry of the social processes of colonial-indigenous interfaces (the character of Sandeshwar, Tarkaratna and Tanu Roy). The issues with purity/profanity, religion/modernity, honesty/hypocrisy mark all modes of survival in colonial Bengal as much as the British Victorian society where Carroll wrote. Kankabati's ordeal is as much of a pawn's trial as much as Alice's, Kankabati's labour is into a trial that re-endorses the life of a patriarchal structure both at its win with Khetu's life or its loss through his death through self-immolation. In that, the narrator's politics of nomenclature of the beastly characters are also to emphasize on the traits of humans and their eccentric abilities of utterances and meaning formation.

Kankabati and Alice's stories are weaved under different conditions of economic materiality. And if we tend to consider Kankabati as a possible Alice in her future (as Alice's sister herself dreams of), the divergences of the New Woman and a doubly oppressed female subject in society finds little to talk about. Kankabati, as a possible adaptation though indigenous in her materialization, strings together a future for women that is radically similar. Alice's bold attempts to respond to situations might possibly be the little leeway that childhood grants women. So whether to enquire about Kristeva's binary between the semiotic and the symbolic through the characters' internal fantasises and escapism, the patriarchal subjectivity against the modernizing discourse on liberty or Irigaray's attempts to subvert the linguistic unintelligibility (which is enquired in both these texts), the problematic of adaptation is far lesser than the "fragmented truth" of female experience. In that Mukhopadhyay's *Kankabati* is a success at its unique niche.

END NOTES.

ⁱ Stam, Robert. "Revisionist Adaptation: Transtextuality, Cross-Cultural Dialogism, and Performative Infidelities," in Thomas Leitch, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (New York: Oxford, 2017).

ⁱⁱ Here, a point of consideration is to understand the processes at work between adaptation and appropriation. Julie Sanders' book *Adaptation and Appropriation* proposes a differentiation between more and less "respectful" transpositions. The author suggests "that the adaptive process has an inherently conservative character; its goal is not to challenge the canon, but to preserve it. Although cultural and temporal changes are necessary, adaptations contribute to the revitalization of the canon, reformulating and expanding it to adapt itself to new contexts. In contrast with adaptation, the term appropriation as a process of a more subversive character, whose relation to the source text is less explicit and less respectful. Thus, an appropriation often evokes the original only to challenge it and question its values."

See: Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Approximation*, (New York: Routledge), 22-24.

ⁱⁱⁱ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge), 2006, 34.

^{iv} Sukanta Chaudhuri, *The Metaphysics of Text*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2010, 220.

^v See: Lars Ellestrom, *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics Among Media*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 2014, 27 and Claus Cluver, *Inter-texts/Inter-ares/Inter media in Aletria*, v 14, jul - dec, 2006.

^{vi} Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Approximation*, (New York: Routledge), 2006, 26.

^{vii} See: Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's *A Trip To Europe*, 1889.

^{viii} The author himself insinuates that his visit to Europe played a critical role in understanding of the quest of colonial Bengal towards rationality. Again, RN Tagore was the first cultural writer to comment on the similarities of Carroll's Alice and Mukhopadhyay's Kankabati. He says, "We don't like children to be childish, then why should we appreciate books which are childlike, let alone a way of writing for children? We can assume a gruff voice and a

monstrous countenance for the sake of imparting morals in our books written for child readers. But the work of the European races is as vast as their play is boundless...That is why children's books in their literatures are so varied and so wonderful. They can effortlessly turn themselves into children for the sake of captivating children's hearts and they never consider such works to be superfluous or worthless." See: Rabindranath Thakur, "Mukhabandha", *Kankabati* by Trilokyanath Mukhopadhyay (2nd Edition, Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh), 2002.

^{viii} Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Approximation*, (New York: Routledge), 2006, 31.

^{ix} Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, *Kankabati*, 2nd Edition (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh), 2002, 1.

^x Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, *Kankabati*, 2nd Edition (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh), 2002, 6-7.

^{xi} The realism is so detailed that there is a separate chapter that is dedicated to the house cat Meni. See Chapter 9.

^{xii} One may notice the same pattern introduced as a microcosmic representation of the novel's structure in Chapter 2. The chapter while summing up the village talks about robbers and spirits before referring to the tiger that could metamorphose into a man and vice versa. There is thus a real-unreal binary drawn before a non-dual synthesis between the two.

^{xiii} Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, *Kankabati*, 2nd Edition (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh), 2002, Chapter 6.

^{xiv} Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, *Kankabati*, 2nd Edition (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh), 2002, 76.

^{xv} Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, *Kankabati*, 2nd Edition (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh), 2002, 75.

^{xvi} The character of Khetu has more than often helped *Kankabati* directly or indirectly, however the overarching heroic portrayal of Khetu provides little agency to *Kankabati*'s character. His attempts at defining *Kankabati*'s actions and limitations work as a superego that broadly infantilizes women's identity.

^{xvii} Society—woman blamed for man's failures.

^{xviii} Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, *Kankabati*, 2nd Edition (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh), 2002, Second Part, Chapter 19.

^{xix} One might note that such characters already existed in Bengali children fantasy narratives like *Lalkamal*, *Nilkamal* and *Chandmama* compounded in Dakshinaranjan Mitra's "Thakurmar Jhuli".

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