

An Uncommon View of Meiji Japan Through the Eyes of Two Bengali Youths

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Introduction

Japan-Probas and *Japan* by Manmathanath Ghosh and Sureshchandra Bandyopadhyay, respectively, can be considered to be the earliest Bengali travel narratives that portray Japan of early 20th century through a Bengali gaze. Both the authors, Ghosh and Bandyopadhyay had travelled to Japan in 1906¹. Therefore, one can assume that both the visitors experienced the same Meiji Japan², that opened her doors to the world after remaining isolated for ~~more than~~ 220 years³ and it was inching towards the *Taisho Japan*⁴ within the next six years.

Both the travel narratives are very important documents as they reveal the visitors' experiences in a lucid manner and update us about the attitude of the then Bengal which was under the Colonial rule, towards Japan. Their narratives let us know that the duo were not uncommon examples to visit Japan for achieving their goals. In addition, one comes to know that the Bengali readership was eager to know about Japan and thus a number of articles used to appear in various newspapers and magazines. Bandyopadhyay laments about the authenticity of the information that was available at that point of time.

Ghosh spends nearly three and a half years (p-138) of time in Japan learning various skills, whereas Bandyopadhyay spent almost four and a half years at the University of Tokyo. Both the authors in the same tone expressed that in order to understand a country one needs to spend a considerable amount of time in that society and mix with the people of the land.

While Ghosh announces his purpose of visiting Japan, as a student, at the very outset of the book, Bandyopadhyay never mentions his own purpose of visiting Japan in the entire work. One gets this information from the annex in the form of advertisement of his book titled *Hanashi* - a collection of short stories written based on Japanese stories. The Advertisement tells that Bandyopadhyay studied at the Institute of Pharmacy of Tokyo Imperial University. At the end of the book a number of reviews both in English and vernacular on *Japan* appears which are indeed valuable to know the general tendency of

¹ Ghosh left Kolkata on April 1, 1906 and reached Yokohama on April 30 &

Bandyopadhyay left Kolkata on December 10 and reached Yokohama on January 10, 1907.

² Meiji era begins from October 23, 1868 and ends July 30, 1912 with the demise of Emperor Meiji.

³ The policy was enacted by the Tokugawa Shogunate under Tokugawa Iemitsu through a number of edicts and policies from 1633-39 and ended after 1853 with the arrival of the Black Ships commanded by Matthew Perry.

⁴ Taisho era begins from July 30, 1912 and ends with the demise of Emperor Taisho on December 25, 1926.

the/inquisitiveness of the common people on Japan. For example, Modern Review says the following:

‘We have read a good many books on Japan by European, American, Japanese, and Indian writers, but we do not remember to have come across one which is so interesting and so well-written from Indian point of view. The writer knows the art of bringing out the core of the matter in a few short sentences. His style is exceedingly charming and he writes from intimate personal knowledge....’.

Amrit Bazar Patrika says:

‘This is indeed an excellent little work in Bengalee, in the branch of literature relating to travels. The little work by Suresh Chander shows that he was studying ... Japan and its people as one who earnestly looks around and not merely sees.... The book presents in simple yet crispy colloquial yet chaste – a picture of the Japanese people as they appear move and live at home that is, in their home grab and not in the gala decorations meant for the outside world Babu Suresh Chander has brought out certain facts which cannot fail to interest us.... The book under review is extremely between the Indian and Japanese institutions. The get up of the book is nice. The pictorial representations of sceneries, temples and characters have immensely added to the value of the book. The price one rupee an eight annas is cheap considering the worth of the work. We heartily recommend it to the public’.

Further, Indian Daily News says –

‘It is an excellent narrative of the author’s travels in Japan, containing the social and religious customs and the important historical events of Japan, the scenery of her Capital and of the ways and means of living of her inhabitants. We congratulate the author for the interesting work, which will no doubt be welcome to the reading public of Bengal...’.

One may undoubtedly make the same observation about *Japan-Probas* by Ghosh. Another book titled *Supta Japan* by Ghosh contains a number of reviews both in English and vernacular about *Japan-Probas*. The Indian Mirror dated 21st September, 1910 writes:

‘The style of the book is simple, and the description is quite picturesque. Within a short compass, the author has compressed a mass of interesting information which will be of great use to those who may desire to know or visit the country. Turning to the social life of the Japanese, our author gives an interesting account of the various social customs and usages in Japan, and it is remarkable that not a few find their parallel in India. He gained a true insight into the life and character of the Japanese people, which is reflected in the pages of the book that he has compiled for delectation of the countrymen’.⁵

It would be appropriate to present a review of the work by Mr. S.K. Agasti, Magistrate & Collector, Jessore under date 8.10.10 as –

⁵ Ghosh Manmathanath, *Supta-Japan*

‘ I have read the book “*Japan-Probas*” with very great pleasure. It is most interestingly and instructively written and reads almost like a romance. The author, Mr. Ghosh I am sure, will be in a position to enrich our vernacular literature with other and more ambitious contributions in the near future. He seems to have utilized his time in Japan to utmost advantage. The “Land of Rising Sun: has given him an inspiration which he is trying to realise in an industrial enterprise for which I venture to predict a large future. His book should be in the hands of every well-wisher of the country and I am sure it will command a large scale. I wish its enterprising author every success in life’.⁶

Further, a review by Pundit Haroprasad Sastri under the date September 11, 1911 says –

‘It is rarely our lot to read such a good book in Bengali as your “*Japan-Probas*”. The subject of Japan, its inhabitants, its religion, its industries, its manners and its customs cannot but be interesting and attractive. But you have made it still more attractive by your appreciative spirit, your candour and specially by your charming Bengali. To cut the story short, I have enjoyed your book thoroughly’.⁷

Upon going through the reviews by the leading dailies as well as the eminent personalities and the travel narratives, one may classify Ghosh’s *Japan-Probas* as a guide book for future Bengali male students who might possess an interest to learn useful craft from Japan, whereas, Bandyopadhyay’s travel narrative may be considered as an introductory book that attempts to give a comprehensible account of the social customs, education policies, life style, history and the political scenario of Japan; which will help the Bengali reader appreciate Japan.

Both the authors emphasised on the need to present ‘authentic’ information about Japan to their Bengali readers and did their best. However, a careful reading of both the narratives shows that in terms of tone and purpose, the two differ at times. The probable reason may be geographical, as Ghosh spent mostly in the West of Japan, viz. in Kobe, Osaka etc., and Bandyopadhyay spent in the Eastern regions of Japan, viz. Tokyo.

Structure of the two monographs

Both *Japan-Probas* and *Japan* were published in 1910 from Kolkata (formerly known as Calcutta). They have a conventional linear structure of narrative. *Japan-Probas* begins with a dedication note addressed to Pramathbhushan Deb Roy, King of Noldanga, Jessore (presently in Bangladesh). Saradacharan Mitra writes the preface of the books, who states the significance of the book to the contemporary 20th century readers. Mitra also highlights the important and appealing portions of the main text in this preface. After the preface the text is divided into several chapters, such as ‘The Calcutta Port’, ‘Rengun’, ‘Penang’, ‘Singapore’, ‘Hongkong’, ‘Tokyo’, ‘Kobe’, ‘Osaka’, ‘Camphor Burro’, ‘The Awaji Island’, ‘Nagahama Hospital’, ‘Naval Rivew/Exhibition’, ‘Bidding Farewel’, ‘Return Journey’, ‘Art training/learning in Japan’ etc. The chapters are sometimes sub-divided into sub-chapters like ‘Urayama dynasty’, ‘The Chinese People’, etc. The epilogue of the text is where he relates a letter between himself and Rathindranath Tagore, who was one among the sixteen Indian

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

students to leave the shores of Kolkata and was studying in America, about the advantages and drawbacks of studying respectively in America and Japan.

As one goes through the work, one finds Ghosh dedicates his book to Pramathbhushan Deb Roy, King of Noldanga, Jessore, who sponsored his visit to Japan. In the dedication-note, Ghosh writes that he is extremely grateful to have been able to spend the best part of his life among the Japanese with an educational purpose in mind, and the epithets that he uses for Japan, are 'newly-emerged', 'far-away', 'hard-working', and 'developing', which right away set the general tone of the book in the readers' mind. There is also a preface by Saradacharan Mitra where he points out the important portions of the book, such as his thoughts on Japanese language, Tokyo, Japanese police, Japanese civil discipline, Japanese education (mainly crafts-education), and most importantly the religiosity of the Japanese mind in the early twentieth century. He certifies that this book will be a good reading even for women due to its lucid description. Ghosh ends the book with a list of 12 items to be carried while going to Japan to reduce the burden of expenses in Japan.

On the contrary, Bandyopadhyay himself writes the preface to his book, where he emphasises why a book in Bengali about Japan should be written, mentions his gratefulness to Arthur Lloyd's "Everyday Japan", and to his female Japanese friends. Most importantly, he hopes that his book will act as a bridge between undivided India and Japan. Before Bandyopadhyay begins his first chapter, the readers are provided with a list of the pictures about Japan, pertaining to a varied range of topics that are added in the book which is highly appreciated by the reviewers of the book (Hanashi, Appendix p:5-6).

Bandyopadhyay's book too is divided into a number of broad chapters, such as 'On the Sea', 'The Capital', 'The Society', 'Education', 'Previous History and Statecraft'. The work effectively provides a wholistic view of Japan to the curious readers.

Using the information available in these two precious travel narratives, this paper will introspect the authors' impressions and the message they wanted to convey about Japan through their works, to the Bengali readership.

The Journey to Japan

Ghosh travels to Japan in a group, with fifteen other students who aimed to study in Japan or America. But Bandyopadhyay was a solitary Bengali visitor to Japan and perhaps for that very reason he made friends with passengers from different nations, who were aboard the ship. This shows that both the travellers encountered different exposures from the very first day of the commencement of their journey.

Bandyopadhyay begins the first chapter of *Japan* by portraying the emotional farewell 'typical of that time, a common troupe in Bengali travelogues' that he received. He makes his journey to Japan in the costly accommodation rooms and areas of the ships. He feels entitled to the costly treatment instead of feeling privileged by it, which tells the readers that he comes from the upper rungs of the social ladder. While spending his time among the other well-paying guests, he makes some significant observations during his journey. He idolizes the 'innocent and simplistic' rural life of Bengal while the ship sails on the Ganges, and when they reach the sea, he is overwhelmed by the sublimating presence of the vast sea which

encompasses the horizon on all sides. But it does not take too long for him to get bored of the sea.

When the ship crosses by the Andaman Islands, he mentions a prison, which might be the cellular jail, the construction of which was completed in 1906. When the ship reaches Penang, he sets out with a Chinese co-passenger to explore the city and he notes the Chinese person's effort to speak pidgin English and dress in European attires because otherwise he will not have any 'prestige' among the local people of Penang. When the ship reaches the bustling city of Hongkong, Bandyopadhyay goes into the city and finds it to be messy and untidy.

Bandyopadhyay meets a Japanese Christian gentleman and his family and is delighted to converse with the gentleman's English-speaking Japanese wife and tells the readers that this is the first time in his life that he has an opportunity to speak to an educated woman who is also a stranger. He is on good terms with the Russian co-passenger, but he seems to find the Chinese co-passenger to be insensitive and almost lacked civility. The little episode of mistakenly telling the wrong time from his watch to two foreign ladies, and then being extremely embarrassed about it is also interesting, because that episode is one among the many instances in which he expresses a clear interest in women, and wants to get to know about them.

On the other hand, Ghosh who was older than Bandyopadhyay⁸ and was already married at the time when he visited Japan in 1906, strives to set an example of himself as an ideal Bengali learner and aspiring entrepreneur who never shows anything more than a mere academic interest in the ways of women, in his writings. In fact, he proudly records a conversation about himself that he happens to overhear, where he is being testified as a foreigner with a remarkably commendable and serious character.

Ghosh begins his first chapter with the description of 16 determined Indian students leaving for Japan and America to learn various subjects. He gives the names of the 16 students including him who started their journey on 1st April, together to achieve their goals and states that only one out of the sixteen students was non-Bengali. He further states that they bid farewell from the people who came to see them off by saying *Bandemataram* and all of them sat for *upasana* (prayers) together as the ship commenced her voyage. Like Bandyopadhyay, he too becomes overwhelmed at the sight of the vast sea. When the ship reaches Rangoon, he visits the Bengal Social Club, as well as other sight-seeing places like the Royal Lake and the Golden Pagoda. He was also impressed with the Swadeshi appreciation of the Burmese people. In spite of the many hardships that all sixteen of them faced aboard the ship due to poor living conditions, they completed the journey and the author reaches Japan on 30th April at Yokohama port.

The readers can note that while Ghosh does not show any direct sarcasm like Bandyopadhyay, he has a poetic sensibility which is evident in the descriptions of clouds, moon and sky during his sea-journey.

⁸Sureshchandra was 19 years old when he went to Japan and Ghosh was 24 years.

Initial Impressions of Japan

Bandyopadhyay left Kolkata on 10th December and sets foot in Japan at the port of Yokohama on 7th January and his initial feeling about Japan consists of an increasing degree of disappointment and apprehension. He already regrets coming to Japan at the site of *Ocha* or the Japanese tea which is devoid of milk, sugar and a pinkish colour. At first, he is completely contemptuous of the Japanese, because he had hoped that his stay in Japan would make him more like a 'Saheb' (the fair Western master), but he soon realises the futility of this dream, because he witnesses that the Japanese themselves are trying to gradually become westernized, and it is bordering on mimicry. He hears that the Chinese men in Japan walk somewhat lifelessly, and are despised by the Japanese. This reminds the readers of how Ghosh too describes the Chinese and Korean students in Japan, who were dull and lacking any interest.

Ghosh starts relating his experiences and impressions on Japan from the time he reaches Tokyo from Yokohama. He begins by small observations such as sending things through parcel office, the cost for sending the things, the *kimono*, the *geta*⁹, and by noting how the Japanese do not pronounce the 'T' and 'L' sounds. Instead of being even a little disappointed, he rather admires the Japanese generosity when he feels that conversing with a Japanese person can make one feel like they have known each-other for a very long time.

Ghosh also highly praises the civility of the police and contrasts with the rudeness of the Indian police. He notes that almost all police personnel can more or less speak and understand English, and that the number of Japanese who knew English was more than just a few. He talks about Indian students residing there, had helped them in a major way. His appreciation about Japan, which is narrated from the very beginning to make the readers anticipate his expressions much later in the book, when Ghosh compares Japan to 'Heaven on earth' or 'bhuswarga'.

However, the solitary traveller Bandyopadhyay, who is a self-proclaimed prosaic sees his co-passengers through the lens of irony. One finds him stating with exasperation about the way young Japanese students almost pestered the foreign students in order to learn English from them.

Contrary views on transportation and social commentary

Bandyopadhyay introduces Tokyo in the second chapter of *Japan* which is titled 'The Capital City' (রাজধানী). He notes the absence of beggars on the streets of the city, which makes him contemplate the situation of his own country. He comments that 'our country is a country of beggars. He blames ignorance and lack of education for turning the Indians into lazy, indifferent entities who do not uphold the community and the country's interest in the project of nation-building. While on the street, he notices a number of things that seem interesting to him. He sees many women shopkeepers in the Japanese shops which was unthinkable at that time in Bengal. Revealing a witty sense of humour, he makes fun of the Japanese language as

⁹ Wooden shippers

well, when he talks about *irrasshaimase*¹⁰ being reduced to *shai* which simultaneously saves time and upholds the norms of politeness.

His minute description of Japan's roadways, the transportation system, and the transporters, offers a view of Japanese life in the public domain. He critiques both Japan and India through the accounts related in his travelogue. He does not really approve of how the trams in Japan get over-crowded but he also notices that none of the passengers voice any complaints concerning this. Then he reminisces about the trains in India which he posits as pictures of the stark lack of sympathy and co-operation, where the passengers can deny space to a co-passenger even when he has a valid ticket. Bandyopadhyay also brings up the issue of Japanese women who have to stand during the tram-journey because no men came forward to give up their own seats. He insightfully comments, 'Even if the Japanese women have a few more rights than the Indian women in some aspects, their position is still inferior to the men' (Bandyopadhyay:p-46). He exercises a tone of clear sarcasm in this regard. On the contrary, Ghosh asserts that the male Japanese youth are very willing in the tram to give up their seats for the aged or the women, which then brings up the question about the differences in representation between the two narratives.

Meiji modernity and perceiving the Emperor

The eagerness among the common people during the Meiji era to learn English and adapt European ways is something that Bandyopadhyay finds to be interesting, but he is also exasperate when he sees the Japanese men uncomfortably clad in European attire, sign-boards above shops full of spelling mistakes ('Europe of Confectionary', 'Kaks and Bisketts'), and when he is requested by random people to teach them English.

Among other general observations, it can be mentioned that both Ghosh and Bandyopadhyay approved of the Japanese police who are very different from the Indian police that they are used to seeing. However, both of them are skeptical about the system of bathing in the public bath-houses (Ghosh:p-66 & Bandyopadhyay:p-54).

The emperor's palace is at the top of Bandyopadhyay's list of places for sight seeing in Tokyo. Drawing an interesting analogy from Bengali fairy tales, he compares the emperor with the highly protected, enigmatic black bumblebee of the Bengali Children's tales, and says that, may be it is the inaccessibility of the Emperor, which has also made the Emperor achieve a supreme God-like status in the minds of the common Japanese people, and the reader can suspect that the tone of the author is quite critical because he sees the emperor as an influential force who is also an object of blind worship (Bandyopadhyay:p-56).

However, Ghosh who actually had the opportunity to see the Emperor during a procession, writes in *Japan-Probas* that the Emperor seems like a simple, benevolent person (without the haughty grandeur that accompany the royalty), who is known to pay visits to ordinary schools, and partake the ordinary meal of the school with the students.

Further, Ghosh remarks in *Japan-Probas* that as the Meiji era progresses, more and more Japanese are learning English, and most of them can converse in English. Once again,

¹⁰Greetings used to welcome guests at home and customers at shops, restaurants etc.

the disparity between Ghosh's and Bandyopadhyay's observations might stem from difference of perspectives, difference of expectations – as mentioned Bandyopadhyay wished to become a westernized Saheb, whereas Ghosh was deeply immersed into Swadeshi sensibility, or difference between the physical places where they resided, which in turn would imply the difference between East Japan and West Japan.

Analyzing the Japanese society and social trivia

The third chapter of the book *Japan* is titled 'The Society'. Bandyopadhyay begins the chapter by pointing out the universal truth that there is no society where all the people have equal rights for everything. He chooses the people of Japan as the first topic of his discussion about Japanese society.

Ghosh notes with incredulity, the lack of play of emotions in the facial expressions of the Japanese, during an incident of conflagration, when many houses were burned, but none of the unfortunate residents ever revealed any show of impatience. And he feels that it is something highly extraordinary. Bandyopadhyay too observes this fact, but he chooses to delve deeper to learn the reason for it, and points out the extremely strict norms that used to determine even the facial expressions of the Japanese people from ancient times as the root cause (Bandyopadhyay:p-84).

Bandyopadhyay's descriptions are full of personal interest with approach of offering something exotic to his readers. He lists the practices, festivals and aspects of Japanese society which he finds interesting, such as the rituals that take place after birth, and during the marriages; the practice of Sumo wrestling, and making bonsai. Ghosh too describes some of the Japanese social rituals such as the custom of giving return gifts after certain ceremonies, the way the Japanese conduct their worships and funeral etc. But he uses the descriptions to compare them to Bengali rituals and offers social critique of the Bengali customs which he feels to be obsolete and in a dire need of reform, such as the Bengali custom of a needlessly elaborate feast after any ceremony.

In *Japan-Probas*, the author tells the readers about how he learnt Japanese language by visiting the button-making factory of Kobe. In this narrative, one can find long conversations in Japanese written down in Bengali script. It may be mentioned here that in many a case one finds misrepresentations of pronunciations, though the effort and good intension of the author cannot be ignored. The purpose of incorporating these long conversations might be to help the target readers have some kind of familiarity with how Japanese words are pronounced and also to teach the interested people the basic conversational sentences.

During his stay in Osaka, Ghosh had picked up the Osaka dialects and he also records some FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) that an Indian generally had to face, so that the future students might be able to prepare themselves with answers to those kinds of inquiries. Some of the examples of those questions would be –

- How many seasons does India has?
- What is the longest river in India?
- In Japan paddy is grown once a year, how many times in a year do Indians grow paddy?
- Besides cotton, what are the other crops that grow in India?

- What is the National Anthem of India?
- How does the Indian National flag look like? etc.

Discussions about dresses appear in some parts of Bandyopadhyay's travel narrative. He scathingly critiques the persistence of Japanese men about wearing Western attires, because in his eyes, Japanese men and Western attire is an unsuitable match. With his words, he draws a poignant picture of the traditional Japanese woman at the threshold of the traditional Japanese house, seeing off a Westernized Japanese husband, who is implicated into the Western work-culture. This single moment vividly shows the tussle between Western influences, and traditional Japanese life. He is full of admiration about Japanese women, and provides a very detailed account of their clothing, ornaments, beauty, figure, and even how the women spend their time on an ordinary day. The domestic hospitality of Japan is symbolized to Bandyopadhyay in the Japanese women whom he met during his stay in Japan. The way he experienced hospitality led him to have a revelation about Japan. He self-criticizingly admits that before coming to Japan he, as a representative of a colonized country, was under the notion that a nation's development is bound to be reflected on the outside (Bandyopadhyay:p-106). In his hopes of finding Tokyo to be better than Calcutta (presently Kolkata), and of all Japanese citizens speaking fluent English, he had initially overlooked the 'stream of upliftment' which flows on within the Japanese household in their daily lives. He is finally able to appreciate Japan not through its imported modernity, but through the simple and traditional customs of hospitality which comes very close to his heart.

Ghosh too is deeply moved by the traditional Japanese hospitality that he received soon after arriving in Japan. He says with a sense of wonderment, 'I do not know whether any other race can mix with others with an open mind, similar to that of a Japanese'. However, he comments immediately after that it can be easily assumed that the Japanese are pretty selfish as a race. The admiration of Ghosh towards educated Japanese women are evident in his book because he was able to learn many things from them as well. Among them, the daughter of the main judge of Kobe and the 65 year old Obāsan (an old lady) of the Urayama family are of special mention. While discussing Japanese customs of marriage, the readers can see Bandyopadhyay's opinions on divorce when he says that in Japan a wife cannot appeal for divorce whereas, the husband easily can, and refers to it as an 'significant example of extreme social selfishness by the men towards women'. His thoughts on the shackles of arranged marriage in Meiji Japan is also featured in the narrative (Bandyopadhyay:p-115-6).

Opinions on Japanese Religion

It might seem to the readers that Ghosh is a bit biased towards Shintoism, a way of life which lends the Japanese the strength of their national character, which he finds to be superior than the 'lifeless' religious grandeur of Europe and America. But he carefully dissects and analyses why the younger generation is leaning towards Christianity, which is often due to the desire to become 'civilized' or to learn English. Ghosh who had taken part in the Swadeshi movement (1905) before coming to Japan, and was singularly concerned about the good of his motherland uses his opinion on the religions of Japan as well to neglect upon the Hindu religion and its rigidity. He states that if Hinduism had the chance, then even the Japanese would agree to be converted into Hindus, because of the lack of a religious sense in Japan that he notices during the last years of Meiji era (Ghosh:p.59). In Bandyopadhyay's

large spectrum of discussing Japanese society, the popular Japanese myths/superstitions also get a place, such as the tales of *inari*¹¹, *kannushi*¹², alive hair, Japanese ghosts etc. He demonstrates an excellent sense of humour and social critique when he says that Japanese ghosts are not bound by any caste system, but Indian living humans, as well as ghosts are categorized strictly by castes. Then he scathingly asks, ‘are we (Indians) then inferior even to the Japanese ghosts?’ (Bandyopadhyay:p-142), and suggests the readers to ponder upon it.

The last section of this chapter is entitled ‘A few Words’ which is filled with social trivia that the author finds quite interesting. He finds the Japanese to be unpunctual people who do not understand the value of time. However, the Japanese decorum of extreme politeness is both amusing and sometimes exasperating to him and he gives a very humorous rendition of Japanese manners, with an Indian anecdote tagged with it (Bandyopadhyay:p-151).

Japanese education and history

The last two chapters of *Japan* are respectively ‘Education’ and ‘Previous History and Statecraft’. In ‘Education’, the author traces the development of American-modeled education in Japan after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, and describes the education system and universities of Japan in detail. He mentions some famous educationists like Yukichi Fukuzawa, Miss Tsuda¹³ and Count Shinge Nobuokuma, who have contributions in the development of education. Among other things, Bandyopadhyay points out the absence of corporal punishment for students, and the way a child’s curiosity is patiently entertained, which implies a stark contrast with the general Indian Educational scenario of early 20th century. The author tells the readers how the education begins for the Japanese children from a very young age, through songs, drawing, calligraphy and a patient nurturing of their curiosity by the mothers. Then he talks about the years spent respectively, in the elementary school, the middle school and the high school, and introduces the subjects that are learnt by the students at each stage. Foreign language learning is emphasized in the universities. Keiyo University and its founder Yukichi Fukuzawa is greatly praised by the author. He says that the students of Keiyo University are among those who learn English the best. He witnessed the students act, recite and deliver lectures in English at an annual programme, and he also notes that even the stage, the drawing of the scenes, and conducting the orchestra were all done by the students themselves, which makes him call it a form of ‘wholesome education’ (Bandyopadhyay:p.167).

This instance might remind an Indian reader about Rabindranath Tagore’s endeavors at Santiniketan in the initial form of the *Brahmacharyashram*, established in 1901, where the students would learn to study as well as do their own work, be self-dependent, develop the ability to think independently and be sensitive towards nature. Bandyopadhyay spares some words for Umeko Tsuda’s school for Japanese women’s English learning and states that the students of that school are taught English in an innovative manner. He describes the uniforms of both the male and female students in detail. He especially mentions the 26 schools for the verbally and visually challenged students in Japan at that time. The readers

¹¹ Inari is the Shinto god of rice, the protector of food and responsible for prosperity.

¹² Male Shinto priest.

¹³ Umeko Tsuda, one of the 5 girls who were sent to Europe & America to learn from the West and she was the youngest of the group.

get to know that the visually challenged students are especially taught the processes of massage and acupuncture, so that they could actually make a livelihood out of their learning.

The relationship between the teachers and the students is not a hostile relationship, rather, it is mutually respectful. All the importance within the education system is primarily laid upon the building of character, and the usefulness of education in practical application. In various aspects the approach is similar to the approach taken by Rabindranath Tagore in Santiniketan where he experimented with an education system that would be an alternative to the colonial educational model. Bandyopadhyay tells his readers that mostly the aspiring businessmen go to the language school and the main foreign languages that are taught are – English, German, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Chinese and Korean. He also notes that Tamil and the Hindustani languages (possibly Hindi) are taught as well. The reason for this according to him is that he feels that the Japanese have finally taken notice of the money in India (Bandyopadhyay:p.170).

Ghosh's *Japan-Probas* is equally interesting narrative and an educational guidebook. He makes painstaking effort in minute detailing of how he went through the various subjects and stages of learning. From learning button-making at a factory in Kobe, to learning to make celluloid combs, umbrella, camphor, mat making, etc. - he is the model dedicated student who only has good things to say about the system that he experiences in Japan. Ghosh's learning to make paper flower at the request of his wife is a marker of his work ethic which is based upon equal participation of both men and women.

The Chapter of Bandyopadhyay's travelogue titled 'Previous History and Statecraft' provides the readers with a concise yet comprehensive understanding of the history of Japan from around 660 BCE till 1901 CE. He mentions all the important battles in the history of Japan, as well as important military and royal personnel. Though Bandyopadhyay relied on Arthur Lloyd's "Everyday Japan" for the historical facts, it is assumed that he added his own subjective reading into it, which enables him to look into the grand-narrative of Japan emerging as an intimidating power in the world politics and feel the insurmountable sacrifices and discipline of the Japanese people have turned their aspirations into an immemorial tale. Ghosh hardly touched upon the subject of the history of Japan or the political role of Japan in *Japan-Probas*. Rather, he elaborated on these topics in his other book titled *Supto-Japan* and *Nabya-Japan*.

Contrast in the approaches of the two travelers

From the very onset of his monograph *Japan-Probas*, Ghosh maintained an extremely serious tone with the aim of representing the ideal Bengali male youth who will be able to responsibly take part in Nation-building. This purpose is evident in the episodes of Ghosh postponing his departure from Japan to visit an ailing Bengali student who had been taken away to a remote hospital in quarantine, and the episode of him personally taking care of a Muslim cholera patient aboard the ship, when no one else approached the ailing man. These episodes show the kind of firm, determined yet compassionate character that Ghosh made himself embody. While he recognizes Japan and its people to be superior than the Indians in numerous aspects, he retains the sense of a moral superiority and religiosity, which according to him, is lacking in Japan. There is no change in either tone or in his selfhood throughout the narrative.

On the other hand, Bandyopadhyay's *Japan* is a light-hearted, often ironical text. Due to the tourist-guide book-like nature of this work, Bandyopadhyay is able to talk about a vast range of subjects; about topics which are almost non-existent in Ghosh's writings. Bandyopadhyay's long discussion about the *Geisha* can be used as an example of this. Ghosh too touches upon the topic of *Geisha* but maintains reservation in discussing while expressing cultural shock.

Bandyopadhyay's selfhood goes through a transformation in Japan. From the somewhat immature, disappointed visitor who is dismayed at the muddy roads, he turns into a mature person who can truly appreciate Japan, and this change becomes gradually evident in his work. In spite of many differences, *Japan-Probos* and *Japan* are similar in their efforts to bring colonial Bengal and Meiji Japan culturally closer long before the mid-twentieth century Indo-Japan treaties became a reality.

Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda was perhaps the first Bengali to set foot on Japan when he reached Japan in 1893, on his way to Chicago, USA to attend 'The World Parliament of Religions'. During this short visit in Japan he wrote a letter to Mr. Alasinga Perumal from Yokohama in which he expressed his desire in the following manner – '... Only I want that numbers of our young men should pay a visit to Japan and China every year. ...'¹⁴. It can be hypothesized that both Sureshchandra Bandyopadhyay and Manmathanath Ghosh knew about those words of Swami Vivekananda. Firstly, Swamiji was already an icon at that time, and Bandyopadhyay precisely places a quotation of Swamiji about crossing the boundaries of home and comfort to fully dedicate oneself to his duties for the cause of Motherland, even when the strings of *Maya* might try to pull him backwards, at the beginning of his text. Ghosh was as well aware of the whereabouts of the Vivekananda Mission in America in spreading Vedanta philosophy, (Ghosh:p-59). Both the narratives also imply that many other male Bengali as well as Indian youths were present in Japan as students, in the early twentieth century. Moreover, the formation of Oriental Association in 1905 for annual get-together of all Asian students in Japan, where all the Indian students were members is also an important piece of information (Ghosh:p-31). Mention of renting out places by Indian students and staying together in the heart of Tokyo (Ghosh:p-33) and display of signboard on lamppost near Shimbashi station stating "Indian Students" shows that there were good number of Indian students living in Japan at that time. This situation may also be attested with a four-line verse by Rabindranath Tagore quoted here-below:

Wearing saffron robes, the masters of religion (dharma)
Went to your country to teach,
Today we come to your door as disciples,
To learn the teachings of action (Karma).¹⁵

All these leaves a reader pondering about whether Swamiji's earnest wish was already being realized as early as the early twentieth century, almost soon after he had expressed it, in an

¹⁴ Source:www.vivekananda.net (To Alasinga Perumal, Balaji, G.G. Banking Corporation and Madras friends; Oriental Hotel, Yokohama.10 July 1893).

¹⁵ One of the three poems that Tagore composed in 1905 on the occasion of Japan's victory.

Tagore Rabindranath, *Japan-Jatri*, p-145, & translation appears in *The Lotus and the Chrysanthemum – India and Japan*, Embassy of Japan, p-30

age without the luxuries of global communication, swift transportation, international conferences and meets, with the dreams of scholarships floating in the light of the LED projection. The two narratives show that in spite of the fact that the stories/narratives of most of the Indian students in Meiji Japan are lost or untold, it does not erase the possibility that the contribution of those many students were any less significant in building the Indo-Japan bond.

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