The *Rakshasi* in the Bengali *Rupkatha* Tradition of the Late Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Century

AMRITA CHAKRABORTY

When we look at the afterlife of the Bengali fairy tale or *rupkatha* texts published in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, we observe that one of the most popular figures from these texts that has remained in circulation within Bengali culture is that of the *rakshasi.* These *rupkatha* stories, popularly placed within the pantheon of Bengali children's literature[1] that came into existence in nineteenth-century colonial Bengal, have remained landmark texts with a rich and colourful afterlife. This paper will concentrate on the figure of the *rakshasi* as she appears within this literary tradition, particularly in the works of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar (*Thakurmar Jhuli*, 1907) and Reverend Lal Behari Day (*Folk-Tales of Bengal*, 1883).

To understand the significance of the *rakshasi* figure within the matrix of the texts, an enquiry into the historical context of the tradition is important. The socio-historical circumstance of its appearance in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was the result of an amalgamation of cultural influences and political discourses. White colonial Indologists had carried their strain of folklore scholarship from Europe to the colonies. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the consolidation of India under the British crown, knowledge about the natives was believed to be integral to the smooth running of the empire. Sadhana Naithani notes that "in this process folklore played an important role because most colonies were predominantly oral cultures. Orality became the source of all kinds of writing on the colonized."[2] A number

of folktale/fairy-tale collections thus appeared in print, collected by men who held British administrative positions in India. Along with the Christian missionaries, these men were instrumental in inspiring native *bhadroloks* into taking up the task of collecting Bengali folktales. Subsequently, with the rise of a nationalist consciousness in the late nineteenth century and the *Swadeshi* movement in the first decade of the twentieth century, folktales and other indigenous oral traditions were thrust to the forefront as a means of resistance to British hegemony and propped up as the very heart of Indian national culture. The tumultuous years that followed the first partition of Bengal in 1905 led to widespread efforts at the revival of *swadeshi*—that is, the indigenous culture of Bengal—by the bhadrolok classes who were opposed to the British move. This caused a renegotiation of the *bhadrolok* relationship with folk and popular cultural forms. Long despised as low and ill-bred and the very antithesis of educated culture throughout the nineteenth century, some of these forms were chosen for a project of revival and re-circulation among the educated upper and middle classes. This set the stage for the publication of literary texts of oral stories. Rabindranath Tagore became a leading figure in such efforts. Tagore had already been collecting folk stories for at least a decade, and the establishment of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat or the Bengali Literary Council in 1893 provided a platform that allowed him to influence others to do the same. The Bengali *rupkatha* as a literary genre thus developed from the oral storytelling tradition that existed in the region, as a result of the intersection of both these influences. This socio-historical-political context influenced the ideological standpoints of the authors as well as their writing. It also influenced the process of selection and editing of the texts. The figure of the rakshasi that appeared in these volumes was an amalgamation of folkloric beliefs with the contemporary hegemonic conceptions of womanhood that were an important part of the political and cultural discourse of the time.

Women, or rather their position within society and tradition,

had become an important issue within the political discourse of the period. This was bound to influence the representation of women in literary texts, and the *rupkatha* tradition was no exception. Orality was readily intertwined with womanhood, an association that both Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, the first writer to publish *rupkatha* in Bengali, and Reverend Lal Behari Day, the first native writer of Bengali *rupkatha* and other folk stories, made through their references to the indigenous female storyteller in the prefaces to their books. While this association was based on the social reality of women having abysmally low literacy rates at the time, it was also important to the late nineteenth-century nationalist consciousness. Women were integral to the political opposition to the colonial state by Indian nationalists. This is not to say that women were given an active space in the political opposition or allowed mass participation. Rather, women became the site on which the political opposition was staged. The condition of women had been regarded throughout the nineteenth century by the colonial state as a problem of Indian tradition. The same women were now recruited by nationalists in the defence of Indian tradition. Since cultural resistance was an important part of the political resistance, women and indigenous cultural traditions came to be conflated within contemporary political thought. Partha Chatterjee has pointed out how early Indian nationalism had separated the "domain of culture into two spheres": these spheres were linked to the differential realms of the inner and the outer, the *ghar* (home) and the *bahir* (world), the spiritual and the material, the female and the male.[3] The outer sphere of material culture involved the daily exchanges of men with the colonial state coupled with daily humiliation and compromise, whereas the inner spiritual sphere was the space where the native woman willingly submitted to the native man and remained the incorruptible bearer of traditional culture. Parallels and contrasts were drawn between the *ghar* and the *bahir* through the metaphor of household relations, as Tanika Sarkar has observed. Whereas indigenous household

relations and more specifically conjugality were presented as loving, apolitical, and based on the surrender and submission of the wife to the husband, the coloniser–colonised relationship was presented as a political relationship where one party was forced into submission to the other.[4] This also allowed the valorisation of Indian womanhood and became a justification for resisting the colonial state's interference in indigenous civil matters. The inner sphere was to be kept sacrosanct, as were the women and native traditions, as in this realm indigenous culture was superior to the West. These discourses were woven into the *rupkatha* texts' presentation of female rivalry, and female rivalry was the context within which the *rakshasi* figure usually appeared in the stories.

Female rivalry in the Bengali *rupkatha* texts occurs mainly between the self-sacrificing, good, obedient "*lakshmi*" *bou* (the wife who brings peace and prosperity to the family) and the evil, power-hungry, jealous "*alakshmi*" or "*rakshasi*" *bou* (the wife who destroys the family). The fact that they are "*shotin*" or co-wives—that is, women married to the same man—usually becomes the point of contention. The *lakshmi* bou, named after the Hindu goddess of prosperity, both displays and possesses the nature of the goddess within the bounds of the family structure. She nurtures and protects the family and is instrumental in holding it together. The *rakshasi*/*alakshmi bou* does the exact opposite; she tears the family apart. Central to the conceptualisation of such a dichotomy was the importance placed on the woman as the pivotal figure maintaining the family structures. The association of women with the home and the family in the gendered division of the sphere of work is typical of patriarchal social structures and values. The early Indian nationalist consciousness was no exception to this and had employed the association between home and women in its political resistance to the empire. The sociological workings of the polygynous family structures of the South Asian region, with men controlling all the family resources and women competing with each other for access to those resources, set women

up for the kind of conflict that manifested itself in popular tales as female rivalry and led to the prevalence of tropes such as that of the evil *shotin* (co-wife) in Bengali popular culture. Within the universe of *rupkatha* stories, the evil *shotin* or the *alakshmi* could either be a human being or a *rakshasi*, with both manifesting the same kind of destructive nature. Their villainy was not just limited to causing the destruction of their rivals and their children but also caused the total destruction of the family that they sought to control. One can provide many such examples from the *rupkatha* stories. In Mitra Majumdar's "Sheet-Basanta," the evil human queen uses a magic pill to turn her co-wife into a bird and then orders the killing of her stepsons. However, this leads to a chain of events that causes the fall of the kingdom and the death of the evil queen's own sons.[5] Similarly, in "Lal Komol Nil Komol," the *rakshasi* queen devours not only her rival's son but also her own son when the latter comes to the defence of his step-brother. The king too is ruined as other *rakshasas* come and take over the kingdom.[6]

The *alakshmi* / *rakshasi* queen is thus a threat to the stability of the family through her capability of undermining patriarchal authority from within. Her destructive nature marks her as monstrous. However, the *rakshasi* is literally a monster in the fairy-tale world. Her monstrous non-human form disqualifies her from a position within the family structures. As a result, she is always an outsider who has to gain access into the inner quarters of the family, the *andarmahal*, through deceit. In most of the stories, she becomes the king's consort by hiding her true looks and nature. For example, in Mitra Majumdar's "Dalim Kumar," the *rakshasi* tricks the young prince into giving away the dice that contains the life of his mother so that she can enter and animate the lifeless corpse and thereby become the queen.[7] Again, in "Sonar Kathi Rupar Kathi," the *rakshasi* disguises herself as a beautiful woman in order to lure the king into marrying her. From her position as the queen, she is able to command the prince-protagonist to complete a task that she believes will lead

to his destruction.[8] This characterisation of the *rakshasi* as the other woman, the woman of the street, who gains entry into the home through deceit is not just a feature of the stories authored by Mitra Majumdar but can also be seen in Day's depiction of the *rakshasi*. In the story "The Boy whom Seven Mothers Suckled," the king, while out on a hunting expedition, meets a woman of peerless beauty, falls in love with her, and makes her his wife. She turns out to be a *rakshasi* who instigates the king to murder his seven pregnant wives, thereby destroying the royal family.[9] Similarly, in the story of Sahasra Dal and Champa Dal, the *rakshasi* disguises herself as a beautiful and rich woman in order to deceive the Kulin Brahmin into believing that she is his long-wedded wife. The Kulin Brahmin readily believes this deceit and is trapped as he accepts her as his second wife.[10]

This kind of imagining of the *rakshasi* within the *rupkatha* stories drew from larger cultural ideas of the *rakshasi* figure. The Rig Veda describes the *rakshasa* as a flesh-seeking, flesh-eating enemy of man. In hymn 87 dedicated to Agni of Mandala 10, Agni is called upon to destroy these creatures and is thus addressed as "*rakshas*-slayer." These creatures are presented as insatiable monsters who attack pious men and smear themselves with the flesh of cattle, horses, and human bodies. Their strength and vigour are emphasised, and Agni is invoked to destroy them.[11] The *Puranas* and the two great Indian epics provide various origin stories for the *rakshasas*. Each of these stories traces the lineage of *rakshasas* to Brahma himself and classifies them as beings belonging to the class of *upadevatas* or lesser deities. In one such story, the *rakshasa* and the *yaksha* are born when Brahma is sleeping in a hungry state, which accounts for their propensity to eat too much. In the Adi Parva of the *Mahabharata*, on the other hand, these beings are declared to have come into existence through Brahma's son Pulatsya. According to this account, the *yakshas* and *rakshasas* are sired by Vishrava, Pulatsya's son, through his two wives, Ilavida and Kaikesi. The *rakshasas* fight the *yakshas* (the Ravana and the Kubera story) as well as human beings. They

can change their appearance at will as they possess the power of *maya* (illusion). They also possess unusual strength and use that against their enemies. The same qualities are attributed to the *rakshasi,* the female form of the *rakshasa*. These figures have remained in the popular imagination as they have occupied central roles in the epics as villains (Ravana, Surpanakha and Viradha in the *Ramayana*, Jatasura in the *Mahabharata*), opponents (Kumbhakarna, Kabandha in the *Ramayana*, Kirmira and Hidimba in the *Mahabharata*), and allies (Vibhisana in the *Ramayana*, Hidimbi and Ghatotkacha in the *Mahabharata*). According to Sheldon Pollock's essay "Raksasas and Others," these figures have often been identified either with "cannibals, primitive cave dwellers, theriomorphic shamans, masked dancers in totemic rites of a sort . . . " or as "actual historical ethnic groups whose descendants yet bear cognate names, as do various sub-tribes and sub-castes . . ." Such historicising is tempting, as the location of the *rakshasas* and the *rakshasis* in the epics (as well as in *rupkatha*) in places such as forests and kingdoms situated in remote lands seems to hint at their geographical and social marginalisation. There is also reason to agree with Pollock's statement that "such historicization is not in itself unreasonable… after all people do make their fictions out of facts."[12] However, such historicising does not take into account the status of *rakshasas* as *upadevatas* or demi-gods within the Indian tradition, which meant that they had a place within the Vedic and Puranic pantheon. Such attempts at historicisation can also only be speculative at best and is based on the work of white colonial Indologists who often wrote their histories with improper understanding of (and without visiting) the subcontinent. It is important, when commenting on a particular figure derived from a cultural tradition, to study the significance of the figure within that tradition without resorting to generalisations. As Pollock himself points out, what these figures represent within particular texts is ideational.[13] The texts ascribe significance to the characters they present within their universe. For example, in the

Ramayana, the *rakshasas* Kabandha and Viradha, who live isolated in forests (unlike the *rakshasas* of Lanka who live in a prosperous and organised society) are trapped in their terrifying forms because of Karma and its workings in the cycle of birth and rebirth. The struggle between Ravana (presented as a devotee of Shiva) and Rama (who upholds his Kshatriya dharma) is also presented as the result of past deeds and the workings of Karma. However, the viewpoint perpetuated by white colonial Indologists was well established by the time Lal Behari Day was writing, and he annotates the *rakshasis* as "the chiefs of the aborigines whom the Aryans overthrew on their first settlement in the country."[14]

In contrast to the *rakshasas* in the epics, the *rakshasi* in Bengali *rupkatha* is presented as a different kind of being, and her being born in the bloodthirsty form has nothing to do with the laws of Karma. There are simply no *rakshasis* who are not evil in the universe of *rupkatha*. The depiction of *rakshasas* and *rakshasis* in the epics is far more complicated. There is a difference between the *rakshasas* who live in Lanka in a civilised society and are worried about moral complexities, and the solitary *rakshasas* like Kabandha and Viradha who live in forests and attack humans. There are *rakshasa* characters who possess and display the capacity for compassion (like the *rakshasis* Sarama and Trijata, who befriend and protect Sita in Lanka) as well as characters like Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna who have moral qualms about the right course of action and the workings of justice. The *rakshasi* in Bengali *rupkatha* is, however, depicted as driven exclusively by lust and blind hatred. Whenever she appears in a story, the narrative requires her death in order to reach closure. She is presented as inhabiting forests as well as the *rakshasa* kingdom. When she is introduced as a solitary figure, the story also goes on to tell the reader about the kingdoms that belong exclusively to her kind. The heroes in tales like "Lal Komol Nil Komol" and "Sonar Kathi Rupar Kathi" travel to these kingdoms. One of the most interesting features that sets the *rupkatha* tales apart from the epics is that the

former do not have any male *rakshasas* in central roles. Even when the plot lines shift to the kingdoms of the *rakshasas* and the *rakshasis*, the central figure is a matriarch, usually the mother of the original villainous *rakshasi*. This is consistent with the presentation of women in villainous roles in these stories.

The way the epics and the Puranas influenced folkloric belief is commented upon by A. K. Ramanujan in his prose essay "Telling Tales." He writes: "even Sanskrit mythologies have to be studied not only from texts, as they have been, but on the ground—as they are selectively remembered and told in context. For they are not only in written texts; they also have a parallel life in the oral traditions . . . We need to work at Indian mythologies as if they were folklore in order to get a nuanced and true sense of what they are about. By doing so, we could also hear the dialogue between the Puranic mythologies and the non-literate creations like those carried and polished and renewed by nameless and subtly powerful grandmothers."[15] In the folkloric world where oral *rupkatha* stories circulated, the *rakshasi* was remembered as purely evil and was a supernatural being with the power to change physical form at will. She could use her eyes to suck blood out of her victims and was driven by hate and desire for flesh. Like the mythological *rakshasi*, she was terrifying to look at in her original physical form. She became a part of the rich world of supernatural beings, ghosts, demons, and spirits that inhabited the cultural space of rural Bengal. *Thakurmar Jhuli* thus opens the section called "*Rup Tarasi*" (literally meaning 'of terrifying visage'), which contains all the *rakshasi* stories, with the rhyme: "those whose looks frighten, but who remain disguised as human beings." (translated from the original Bengali)[16]

Although the *rakshasi* figure is often associated with lustfulness and sexual excess in the epics, she is not always punished for it. Surpanakha and Hidimbi both proposition the male heroes, Ram and Bhim respectively. While Surpanakha is punished for refusing to acknowledge the ties of marriage, Bhim and Hidimbi marry

and have a son Ghatotkacha, who is dedicated to his father. In the literary *rupkatha* text, this traditional feature of the *rakshasi* interplays with the suggestion of sexual immorality that was ingrained within the idea of the woman who existed outside family structures, the woman of the street. However, the *rakshasi* figure in the stories of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar and Lal Behari Day may also be distinguished on the basis of the authors' treatment of the theme of sexuality. Sexuality remains subterranean in Mitra Majumdar but comes to the surface in Lal Behari Day's presentation. A close reading of the stories mentioned above (both Day's and Mitra Majumdar's, where a *rakshasi* enters a human household from outside) always reveals an implied desire on the part of the *rakshasi* for initiation into a sexual/conjugal relation with a man. This desire is not merely economic, in that it is not just a desire for the position of queen consort and all the wealth and security it brings; it is also sexual. The *rakshasi* desires flesh, both literal in that she wants to consume people and animals, and metaphorical in that she wants sexual relationships with the male characters. In Day's "Story of the Rakshasas," the *rakshasi* could not have had any economic motivation for marrying a poor Brahmin. She desires to be his wife, and then she desires his flesh. She devours him and his human wife when they discover her true self. In the same story, Day also presents a *rakshasi* making false accusations of sexual assault against the protagonist—the son of the first *rakshasi* and the Brahmin, Champa Dal. He encounters this *rakshasi*—who is disguised as a maidservant—in the palace of Sahasra Dal, Champa's human half-brother. This woman is clever, resourceful, tremendously useful, and indispensable to the mother-in-law of Sahasra Dal. She is placed outside the dichotomy of female rivalry but is nevertheless a villainous figure who deceitfully attempts to get rid of Champa Dal by maligning him in retaliation for his act of obstructing her nightly hunts for live meat. Day, writing two decades before Mitra Majumdar, did not edit out all references to sexuality like

the latter, who was writing in the heyday of the *swadeshi* cultural revivalist movement with a juvenile readership in mind. (The *rupkatha* was conceptualised as a tradition belonging to the national child and carried forward by the national woman.[17]) Such censoring was also important to the *swadeshi* cultural project because of its romantic infantilisation of women and children. It was for this reason that Mitra Majumdar's *rupkatha* collections received effusive praise from nationalist scholars such as Dinesh Chandra Sen. Sen believed that the absence of references to sexuality, particularly representations of female sexual desire, in Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's volumes proved the authenticity of his version of the stories. Since these stories were composed and told by women, Sen argued, they must be "pure" and devoid of "vulgar(ities)"[18] such as women propositioning men, attempting incest, and engaging in extramarital sexual relations. Sen compared Mitra Majumdar's stories with the earlier versions told through court romances by Muslim writers as well as by Lal Behari Day and proclaimed that Mitra Majumdar had recorded the exact versions of the stories as told by Hindu women in their homes. However, Sen might very well have been praising Mitra Majumdar's censoring of the stories as the mark of their authenticity. There is a section in *Thakurmar Jhuli* that may be identified as an instance of Mitra Majumdar's censorship of references to sexual desire. In the story "Sonar Kathi Rupar Kathi," the grudge of the *rakshasi* against the young prince remains somewhat unexplained. She seems to want the prince's destruction because she is unable to devour him like she devours his three friends when she chances upon them in the forest. The *rakshasi* follows him till the end of the forest and then entices the ruler of the kingdom where the prince had taken shelter to marry her, so that she can have the prince in her power. One has to read between the lines here because what the prince had actually done to anger the *rakshasi* is never explained in the story.

Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's treatment of female rivalry and

the *rakshasi* figure can be linked to a specific conception of Indian womanhood within the nationalist discourses. The central conflicts had the self-sacrificing good woman on the moral side and the desiring self-serving evil woman on the other side. This conception of the Indian woman required her willing surrender to the harsh demands of indigenous patriarchy. Such an idea was central to the nationalist distinction between the nature of Indian tradition and that of British colonialism. The Indian woman, 'the other' within the self (the nation), became the central site for developing and emphasising this distinction. During the public debates surrounding the raising of the age of consent, nationalists were forced to admit that the Indian woman was subject to social laws and cultural dictums that were detrimental to her. However, as Tanika Sarkar has observed, the revivalist-nationalists who were opposed to indigenous social reformers as well as British interference argued that the Indian woman followed socio-religious laws voluntarily, no matter how ruthless these laws were. The Indian woman was held up as the embodiment of Indian tradition as well as the marker of its superiority because of her ability to sacrifice her interests, her body, and even her life for the well-being of her people. This discourse also emphasised the essential difference between the East and the West with regard to the social space occupied by women. The wife in the West was the companion of man, whereas in the East she was a goddess (specifically in Indian tradition). The spiritual superiority of the East was established by the Eastern woman's moral triumph as represented in her self-sacrificing ability. Such linkages ultimately led to the birth of the figure of Mother India as a Hindu ascetic, painted by Abanindranath Tagore in 1922. She was depicted as a four-armed goddess in saffron robes, embodying the quality of self-renunciation or *tyag*. Woman, tradition, and religion were therefore linked to form a co-ordinated concept of nationhood. This general perception of Indian womanhood led to the valorisation of the goddess as a self-sacrificing heroic woman in the literature produced

during this time. *Tyag* was at the very foundation of femininity and female love. In *rupkatha* texts, the antithesis of the qualities that constituted this rigid ideal of the Indian woman was embodied in the figure of the evil woman. All the *rakshasis* who appear in the section *"Rup Tarasi"* of *Thakurmar Jhuli* are desiring rather than sacrificing. They have voracious appetites, which mark them as unnatural and monstrous. This is further reinforced through the folkloric/mythic ideas of her frightening form, excessive physical capabilities, and supernatural powers. The *rakshasi* therefore becomes a source of primal terror, made more dangerous by the fact that she can hide her true nature. These capabilities allow her to usurp power at certain points in the *rupkatha* stories. I say usurp because power is overtly a male forte in the *rupkatha* universe, and the stories can end only with the re-establishment of the patriarch. This model of female behaviour is contrasted in the texts of Mitra Majumdar and Day with that of the good woman who never attempts to displace or subvert male authority, no matter how unjust it is. The *rakshasi* and other villainous women inevitably pay the ultimate price for their actions and find no redemption. Significantly, their sons can be redeemed, even though they bear the *rakshasis*' blood.

That the *rakshasi*'s existence largely revolved around taking what she desired both through trickery and through force, with little regard for the laws of organised society, was a feature that could be seen in older traditions of Indian literature as well. In addition, the villainisation of the ambitious, assertive woman who originated from the street but gained access to the *andarmahal* and became the enemy within could also be traced to the nineteenth century *bhadroloks*' fear of any kind of female behaviour that deviated from the prescribed model of submissive domesticity. Sumanta Banerjee has discussed this in his essay "Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal," where he states that it was the fear of rebellion alongside the newer cultural values derived from the colonial encounter that had prompted the *bhadrolok* classes to

launch a campaign against women's popular cultural forms that presented assertive women as heroines and gave space to voices expressing dissent. Banerjee writes, "The coarse, 'untutored' expletives and expressions that they shared with the women of the streets, had to be expurgated from their vocabulary. Any sign of assertiveness or of departure from their domestic roles that might be inspired by stories about the adulterous Radha, or the assertive Vidya, had to be suppressed."[19] There were essays published in periodicals like the *Bamabodhini Patrika* that warned of the dangers of women in *bhadrolok andarmahals* reading *Vidya-Sundar* in secret. Thus, it is not surprising that the assertive woman as the villain was a regular pattern that emerged from the collections authored by male *bhadrolok* writers. Fear of the flesh-eating monster and fear of the untamed, undomesticated woman came together in the depiction of the *rakshasi* in *rupkatha*, a being in equal parts mythical, folkloric, and historic, who in the stories became a threat to the stability and continued existence of the patriarchal and patrilinear society.

NOTES

1 The term *"shishu sahitya"* was first coined by Ramendra Sundar Tibedi in his introduction to Jogindranath Sarkar's *Khukhumonir Chora* in 1899.
2 Sadhana Naithani, *The Story-Time of the British Empire: Colonial and Postcolonial Folkloristics* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 5.
3 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 120.
4 Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 39.
5 Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, *Thakurmar Jhuli* (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 1907), 85-110.
6 Mitra Majumdar, *Thakurmar Jhuli*, 141-163.
7 Mitra Majumdar, 164-177.
8 Mitra Majumdar, 191-210.
9 Reverend Lal Behari Day, *Folk-Tales of Bengal* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 113-118.

10 Day, *Folk-Tales of Bengal*, 61-88.
11 *The Hymns of Rig Veda*, trans. Ralph T. Griffith (Nilgiri: n.p., 1986), 466. http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/index.htm.
12 Sheldon Pollock, "Raksasas and Others," *Indologica Taurinensia* 13, no. 1 (1985): 265.
13 Pollock, "Raksasas and Others," 266.
14 Day, *Folk-Tales of Bengal*, 64.
15 A. K. Ramanujan, "Telling Tales," in *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, ed. Vinay Dharwadker (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 456.
16 Mitra Majumdar, *Thakurmar Jhuli*, 140.
17 Tagore, who wrote a prose Preface to *Thakurmar Jhuli,* presented this concept. He called the stories "*snehomoyee der mukher kotha*" or the oral stories of the loving women, and "*deshlakshmi der buker kotha*" or the narratives of the heart of the blessed women of the land. The stories could also provide nourishment to the national child, like mother's milk.
18 Dinesh Chandra Sen, *The Folk Literature of Bengal* (Kolkata: Aparna Book Distributers, 2007), 132.
19 Sumanta Banerjee, "Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal," in *Recasting Women*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), 163.