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A Psychoanalytic Reading of *Mālañcamālā*, *Rūpbān*, *Nūr Bānu*, and *Madanamañjarī*

Popular Imaginings of the Wife-Mother by the Bengali People

This article is an examination of four Bengali folktales, which are woven around the marriage of a newborn male child to a girl who has just reached puberty, the exile of the couple and the bringing up of the child-husband by the pubescent girl, and their subsequent return home where they carry out their "normal" roles as man and wife. It seeks to answer whether the tales bear any relevance to the daily lives of the Bengali people and their impossible and forbidden wishes. It proceeds in four parts: the first briefly recounts the tale of *Mālañcamālā*, suggests its proximity to the "reverse Oedipus" (Indian) tale discussed by Ramanujan (1984, 237–42); the second summarizes three variant tales (*Rūpbān*, *Nūr Bānu*, and *Madanamañjarī*) as belonging to the same type; the third part is a Freudian unpacking of the tales as aesthetic phantasies manifesting an Oedipus complex among the Bengali males; and the fourth examines the notion of the wife-mother through the critical lenses of Girindrasekhar Bose's "wish to be female" and the "Oedipus mother," and Sudhir Kakar's "maternal-feminine." The article ends with a self-reflexive afterword that attempts to recuperate traces of feminist agency embedded in the tales, and the play of "gender performativity," by means of which patriarchal norms are continuously redeployed.

KEYWORDS: Oedipus complex—aesthetic phantasy—patriarchy—Bengali—folk

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In order to avoid a death prophecy, a newborn boy is married to a pubescent girl. This motif, categorized as Type M 341.0.3 (Thompson 1955, 54) and common to the folktales of *Mālañcamālā*, *Rūpbān*, and *Nūr Bānu* in Bangladesh and West Bengal (India), is developed further by having the couple banished to (or seeking shelter in) the forest (Motif Type S 143). During this period of misfortune, the pubescent girl faithfully brings up her child-husband as a mother (a motif hitherto unidentified, which may be numbered Type T 215.9), the child attaining masculine maturity during a passage of time when the girl does not age (a motif hitherto unidentified, which may be numbered Type U 263), and then the couple return to a sanitized human society where they carry out their "normal" social and personal roles as man and wife (Motif Type L 111.1). In a divergent narrative, in other words, that of *Madanamañjarī*, the marriage is caused not by death prophecy but the vow of the father of the pubescent girl to marry her to the first man he looks on the following morning (Motif Type M 138.1), and the couple escape from home to a distant kingdom to evade shame (Motif Type R 213). Are these narratives of the wife-who-serves-as-mother (henceforth wife-mother) irrelevant grandiloquent tales that bear no relevance to the actual daily lives of the Bengali people, or do they mean something more? Can a psychoanalytic reading of the four tales inform us of the unconscious scripting of the impossible and forbidden wishes of the bearers of the tales?

In attempting to answer the questions posed above, this article risks being perceived as pursuing a well-trodden, if not hackneyed, destination of the Oedipus complex because it proceeds from the assumptions that "the work of art is a daydream or dream dressed in aesthetic clothes" (Ronald 2003, 4), and that "the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex" (Freud 1960a, 156). Acknowledging Freud's fall from grace in psychoanalytic and literary circles—not in the least because of feminist and postcolonial questionings regarding misogynistic and conquistadorial underpinnings in his conceptual framework, and in no way undermining the questionings as such—and at the same time accepting that the utility of Oedipus complex theory in the analysis of Bengali patients has been challenged by "the first non-Western psychoanalyst, Girindrasekhar Bose…, who pioneered the discipline in India" (Nandy 1995, 83), and even categorically rejected by Indian psychoanalysts who trained in the West and

practiced in both Western countries and India (Roy 1975, 123, fn 2), this theoretical undertaking, nevertheless, returns to Freud by recognizing him as "a deep explorer of the human condition" (Lear 1995) whose notions on human sexuality are subversive probing and not an insistence of a hallowed truth.

The article proceeds in four parts: the first briefly recounts the tale of *Mālañcamālā*, suggests its proximity to the "reverse Oedipus" (Indian) tale discussed by Ramanujan (1984, 237–42); the second summarizes three variant tales (*Rūpbān*, *Nūr Bānu*, and *Madanamañjarī*) as belonging to the same type; the third part is a Freudian unpacking of the tales as aesthetic phantasies manifesting Oedipus complex among the Bengali males; and the fourth examines the notion of the wife-mother through the critical lenses of Gririndrasekhar Bose's "wish to be female" and the "Oedipus mother," and Sudhir Kakar's "maternal-feminine." The article ends with a self-reflexive afterword that attempts to recuperate traces of feminist agency embedded in the tales, and the play of "gender performativity," by means of which patriarchal norms are continuously redeployed.

Before engaging with the questions posed above, it is necessary to insert a personal disclaimer. As an academic-cum-theater practitioner triply inscribed with the roles of citizenship of Bangladesh (which has, in recent years, shown increasing predilection for Islamist norms), a biological and heterosexual male, and a (non-practising) Muslim, the writing of this article for me can hardly afford to be an exercise aimed at assuaging "the unhappy guilt conscience of the depoliticised intellectual by offering [me] the alibi of a process in which everything one does can be something that one can pretend is politically engaged" (Polan 1986, xxvi). Rather, it is urged by my politics to contest the patriarchal structures in Bangladesh today that seek to regularize and "normalize" the discourse of gender and psychosexual desire into a regimented monolith.

I: *Mālañcamālā* : The Tale of a Wife-Mother

The most detailed and complex of the four tales of the wife-mother is the *gīta-kathā* (folktale interspersed with songs) named *Mālañcamālā*. Published from 1896 to 1902 in a compilation of folktales named *Ṭhākurdādār Jhulī*, the *gīta-kathā* was collected by Daksina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar from an old woman aged over one hundred who belonged to the Yugī caste and was a resident of a village near Pinger in Tangail administrative district of Bangladesh (Sen 1920, 262). The earliest form of the tale may have developed a thousand years ago, because as Sen (1920, 265) asserts, "[t]he old Bengali life of the tenth century is vividly before us in the story of Mālañcamālā." Employing the third person narrative mode and an omniscient voice, the tale presents Mālañcamālā as the protagonist with "exquisite grace and suggestiveness" (Sen 1920, 323). It was very popular in Eastern Bengal (present-day Bangladesh) a hundred years ago, when "old widows of the humbler classes, assisted by a chorus, used to recite [*gīta-kathā*s] before ladies of high rank during the days of their confinement [after childbirth]" (Sen 1920, 261), "in the palaces of kings as well as in the huts of the poor" (Sen 1920, 265). Although it is

hardly heard today in Bangladesh, the tale is still popular in West Bengal (India), where Mālañcamālā lives as an iconic image of the perfect wife. The following is a synopsis of the tale as given in MAJUMDAR (1388, 151–220).

King Candra of Candrapur is childless. Following the advice of an ascetic, he performs rigorous penance, plucks a pair of mangoes of golden hue from his orchard, and consumes them with his queen. In due time, a son is born and he is named Candramāṇik. However, he learns through the gods of fate that Candramāṇik's lifespan is only twelve days. When all seems lost, the chief god appears in the guise of a Brahmin and after examining the child, who is by then seven days old, declares its life may be prolonged if he is married to a girl who, on that very day, has completed her twelfth year (an age when South Asian girls enter puberty). A meticulous search produces no result—except Mālañcamālā, the daughter of the *kotwāl* (police chief). The king hesitates because of her low social status but is forced to marry Prince Candramāṇik to Mālañcamālā as no recourse is available.

Immediately after the marriage, as soon as Mālañcamālā enters her apartment with her child-husband in her arms, ominous signs begin to play havoc and Candramāṇik dies as fated. In reprisal, King Candra has Mālañcamālā's father beheaded, her hands, ears, and nose chopped off, and her eyes gouged. Then she, along with the body of the baby prince, is cast into a funeral pyre outside the city gate. But, by virtue of her unflinching love, karma, and great esoteric power, she brings her child-husband back to life and regains her lost limbs. Renouncing the city from where she has been cast out, she sets off in search of cow's milk and reaches a dense forest. There, she befriends a tiger, and its mate suckles the baby. After spending five years bringing up her child-husband in the forest, protected and fed by the family of tigers, she sets off from the forest to impart Candramāṇik with education befitting a prince, and arrives at a dilapidated garden in the kingdom of King Dudhbaraṇ. Her presence makes the plants bloom with flowers, and so the owner of the garden, a flower woman, is only too pleased to give her shelter.

At this stage Candramāṇik's education begins at a school where the children of King Dudhbaraṇ are also taught. But now, fearing that Candramāṇik will mistake her as his mother, Mālañcamālā remains at a distance, and fulfils all the child's needs through the flower woman. At the school, Candramāṇik excels all others in studies and attracts the attention of Princess Kāñcī. When her brothers learn of this ill-matched infatuation of the princess, they decide to remove Candramāṇik from the school by asking him, first, to be dressed like a prince, then to arrive riding a royal palanquin and finally, a horse. When Mālañcamālā fulfils all these conditions, the princes challenge Candramāṇik at horseracing but are outdone at that as well. Princess Kāñcī is so impressed that she garlands Candramāṇik, thus publicly acknowledging him as her husband. Consequently, King Dudhbaraṇ is forced to recognize Candramāṇik as his son-in-law, but because of his low social status, imprisons him for twelve years.

When Mālañcamālā learns of this development, she sends a note to King Candra, who marches with an army to free his son. He loses the battle against King Dudhbaraṇ, but Mālañcamālā assembles an army of tigers with the help of the

befriended tiger family, and rescues Candramāṇik. Instead of expressing his gratitude, however, King Candra refuses to acknowledge the daughter of his *kotwāl* as his daughter-in-law, and marches back home with his son and Princess Kāñcī. Mālañcamālā does not abandon her husband or her father-in-law. Refused access to the palace, she enters it secretly by night and watches her husband sleeping peacefully in bed with Kāñcī. One night, Candramāṇik apprehends her, but she refuses to divulge her identity. In the morning, King Candra throws her away and Mālañcamālā is forced to leave with a broken heart.

For twelve years, great misfortunes befall the kingdom, and seven children born to Candramāṇik and Kāñcī die one after another. Candramāṇik realizes it is all because of the daughter of his father's *kotwāl* but King Candra is adamant in refusing to acknowledge her. One day, when the perplexed king is lost in the forest in great confusion, he comes across Mālañcamālā, who quenches his thirst by offering water and reverence. At last, the king realizes the girl's worth, and invites her back to the palace. Mālañcamālā revives the kingdom back to its glory, brings back to life her father and her seven stepchildren, and installs Kāñcī as Candramāṇik's chief consort. Nevertheless, because of her charity and love, the people install her in their hearts as a goddess.[1]

At first glace, the tale of *Mālañcamālā* appears to bear no similarity to tales of the Oedipus type (931) prevalent in Greece or the "reverse Oedipus" type (931b) prevalent in India, which RAMANUJAN (1984, 237–42) has brought to notice. Nevertheless, it is suggested that if one were to take up the structure or matrix of relations and actors of the "reverse Oedipus" (Indian) tale type—in which like sexes repel and unlike sexes attract as in the Greek Oedipus tales but in reverse direction of aggression and desire (RAMANUJAN 1984, 252)—and replace the node of the "mother" in the structure with a collective figure which condenses the wife with the mother as the wife-mother (in this case, Mālañcamālā), then the tale of *Mālañcamālā* could clearly be envisaged as strikingly close to the "reverse Oedipus" tale. Very much like the Indian versions, *Mālañcamālā* functions more like a Freudian "screen memory" (FREUD 2002, 45), when compared to the "straightforward" Greek Oedipus-type of tales. As in the Indian tales, there is no Laius figure; nor does the son supplant or overcome the father. Instead, it is the father who directs his aggression towards the male child by having him married at the age of twelve days because of the threat of sexual transgression by the child. For the child, the threat is so severe that it dies out of fear. Furthermore, bearing closer relation to the Indian tales and far removed from the Greek counterpart, the narrative point of view of *Mālañcamālā* is that of the wife-mother. The husband-son is very much a passive actor, as in the Indian tales.

II: *RŪPBĀN*, *NŪR BĀNU*, AND *MADANAMAÑJARĪ*: VARIANT TALES OF THE WIFE-MOTHER

Three more tales that bear structural similarity with that of *Mālañcamālā* are popular among the Bengali people. These are the tales of *Rūpbān*, *Nūr Bānu*,

and *Madanamañjarī*. The first-mentioned of the three, that is, *Rūpbān*, is currently the most widely known among the tales of the wife-mother and is popular especially with the Muslims of Bangladesh. The summary discussed in this article is based on the thirteenth edition of a *Jātrā* play titled *Rahim Bādśā O Rūpbān Kanyā* (lit. King Rahim and the maiden Rūpbān), collected and edited by Saodagar (1992). The structural makeup of the text as well as its language suggest that Saodagar's *Rahim Bādśā O Rūpbān Kanyā* was written in the post-1947 period (that is, after Pakistan was created). However, the fact that Saodagar acknowledges that he collected and edited the text indicates that there may have been earlier versions. Today, the tale has proliferated on the proscenium stage in urban areas and film.[2] On the other hand, the currency of the tale of *Nūr Bānu* appears to be restricted in the southeastern administrative district of Chittagong (Bangladesh). The text of *Delbar Kumārer Pālā* (Chowdhury 1993, 3–53), on which the summary of *Nūr Bānu* is discussed below, was composed as a *gītikā* (ballad) by Sultan Ahmad from Pāirol village in Chittagong district (Chowdhury 1993, 53). Abdus Sattar Choudhury collected it in December 1961 (Chowdhury 1993, v, x), and it was subsequently published by Bangla Academy in 1993. At the time of its collection, the tale was performed in the narrative form by a male performer with musical and choral accompaniment. The tale of *Madanamañjarī*, composed by Gayaram Das as indicated by the signature lines in the text, was also performed in the narrative form by a male performer. The summary of the tale discussed below is based on Stewart's translation (2004, 195–233). This is the only tale in the group of four discussed in the article which propagates the message of efficacy in the worship of a generic holy man by the name of Satya Pīr, who, transcending the sectarian division along religious lines, "signals allegiance to both Muslim and Hindu sensibilities" (Stewart 2004, 11). The tale must have been very popular all over Bengal in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, as Stewart (2004, 13) indicates; but it is hardly heard today in Bangladesh.

Similar to the tale of *Mālañcamālā*, the tales of *Rūpbān* and *Nūr Bānu* begin with a patriarchal figure pining for a child: King Ekābbar of Nirāśpur in the tale of *Rūpbān*, and a merchant-prince named Kaṭak Saodagar of Miśar (Egypt) in the tale of *Nūr Bānu*. Ekābbar's situation is most desperate because his subjects consider the childless king an ill omen and intend to migrate from his kingdom; hence the king decides to abdicate his throne and commit suicide. Kaṭak Saodagar is more fortunate since he fulfills his desire entirely by prayer. In sharp contrast, the tale of *Madanamañjarī* begins with a virtuous, potent, and youthful royal couple—Vinod Viharī, the king of the city of Vijaya, and his queen Citrāngiṅī, living happily in conjugal satisfaction. Citrāngiṅī bears a child in the due course of time, as any "normally" fertile woman would, and gives birth to a girl endowed with exquisite beauty, who is named Madanamañjarī. On the other hand, Kaṭak Saodagar and his consort beget a male child (Delbar) through divine intervention processed by conjugal intercourse. Ekābbar and his consort also beget a male child, although his situation verges on the parodic. After abandoning his throne, as the frustrated king wanders in a forest, he stumbles unwittingly across an ascetic in

deep meditation. The outraged ascetic hurls a curse at Ekābbar that he will grieve twelve years for his son, unaware that his wrath is directed at a childless man. When Ekābbar reveals the irony of the curse, the ascetic is forced to grant him a son—as though to ensure the potency of his claim to extra-normative will-to-power.

Thus the prophecy is engineered in *Rūpbān*: that Ekābbar would be bestowed with a son whose lifespan would be only twelve days, unless he is married to a twelve-year-old girl within those twelve days, and on the very marriage day, exiled with his wife for twelve years so that the king can grieve as cursed by the ascetic. The prophecy in *Nūr Bānu* is less ironic: astrologers inform Kaṭak Saodagar that his son, named Delbar, is fated to live only for ten days; in order to save him, he must be married to a girl not older than ten years. However, the precipitating action leading to marriage, as recounted in *Madanamañjarī*, is not a prophecy, but a vow of the father Vinod Viharī. The circumstances that lead to the vow is again parodic: Vinod Viharī has been so engrossed with the affairs of the state that he never had time to visit the inner quarters of his palace for twelve years. And when he does, he is stunned to see his daughter, now twelve years old. Spurred to his duty as a father by his wife, the king promises to marry Madanamañjarī to the first eligible man he sets his eyes upon on the following morning. Lo and behold, the parodic multiplies twice over, as the first "eligible man" the king beholds the following morning is the chief minister's six-month old son Candrasena, whom a maid-servant had carried to him to be blessed immediately before dawn—the hour that was set to hold an auspicious ritual for the child. In spite of tumultuous protests from his queen and the chief minister, the righteous king Vinod Viharī fulfils his promise and has twelve-year-old Madanamañjarī marry six-month-old Candrasena.

The crisis is graver in *Rūpbān* because the only twelve-year-old girl in the entire kingdom is the *wāzir*'s beautiful daughter Rūpbān, but he refuses to accede to the royal proposal. His life is saved only when Rūpbān sacrifices her life to marry the infant. However, Nūr Bānu, the youngest daughter of another merchant-prince, is a willing bride. She studies her horoscope and decides to marry the seven-day-old baby—much to the dismay of her parents. Accepting Delbar happily as her husband with love and respect, she spends the daytime caring and playing with Delbar and at night, letting him sleep in his mother's bosom.

Both Madanamañjarī and Rūpbān abandon their homes immediately after marriage: the former to a distant kingdom, in the midst of human society, and the latter to a forest, away from civilization. Madanamañjarī roams aimlessly from place to place till she reaches the distant kingdom of King Magendra, where she wins his protection as her godfather and lives in a homestead built at a secluded space near the citadel but away from the dwelling quarters of the citizenry. There she devotedly worships Satya Pīr, who in turn extends his generous protection over her. On the other hand, Rūpbān heads for the forest where she is rescued from two robbers by an aboriginal tribal chief, and decides to live there. However, perils of life in the forest, including stalking tigers, force her back to human habitation in the kingdom of Bādśā Sāyed. There, with the help of the tribal chief, she gains

the shelter of an elderly single woman, with whom Rūpbān establishes an aunt-niece relationship, and brings Rahim up. However, Nūr Bānu is forcibly banished to the forest when Delbar is two and a half years old. This dramatic turn of events arises after Delbar's mother dies, his father remarries and the stepmother schemes to remove Delbar from the family by ridiculing Nūr Bānu that her husband is fit only to be her son. In the forest, after befriending two tigers by the grace of Allah, she meets a woodcutter who takes pity on her and takes her home. There she lives as the woodcutter and his wife's godchild, and brings up Delbar happily till he is five years old. Importantly, all the three women establish themselves in the public domain as the three male children's elder sisters. Privately, Nūr Bānu and Rūpbān also give their child-husbands to understand that they are their elder sisters, while Madanamañjarī lets Candrasena know that she is her mother's faithful maidservant. The actual relationship is revealed only to the aboriginal tribal chief and his consort in the case of Rūpbān, and the woodcutter and his wife, in the case of Nūr Bānu.

At the age of five, Delbar begins to attend a *mādrāsāh* (Islamic seminary), where he excels in studies. When he attains the age of twelve, Nūr Bānu notices signs of his manhood and decides to consummate her marriage. Unfortunately, a serpent strikes Delbar to death in the bridal chamber, evoking a clear parallel to the corpus of medieval narratives known as the *Padmā-purāṇ* or the *Manasā-maṅgal*, in which Behulā's husband Lakṣmindar is bitten to death by a serpent sent by Manasā (the Goddess of Snakes) on their wedding night. However, unlike Behulā who sails in a raft with the body of Lakṣmindar, Nūr Bānu does not accompany the body of her dead husband which she sets adrift on a raft. In *Madanamañjarī*, Candrasena also begins to attend school at the age of five, and like Delbar, also excels in his studies. By the time Candrasena is twelve years old, his teacher begins to suspect that the purported relationship with the maid-servant who cares for him (that is, Madanamañjarī) maybe fictive. He repeatedly instigates Candrasena to uncover the truth by various tests, which leads Madanamañjarī to reveal her identity to her husband. Consequently, their marriage is consummated happily.

In *Rūpbān*, the school-going adolescent phase brings adverse complications similar to *Mālañcamālā*. Rahim is also sent to school at the age of five and like the other child-husbands, excels at studies. Like Candrasena, he also attracts the suspicion of the schoolteacher. More serious is Rahim's superior performance in studies over his classmate Princess Tājel, the daughter of the kingdom's monarch Bādśā Sāyed. In a fit of jealousy, he attempts to remove Rahim by commanding all the students to attend the school by displaying signs of aristocracy. Tājel offers to help because she secretly adores him, but Rahim declines; and Rūpbān fulfills the royal decree with the help of the tribal chief. Back home, Rahim urges Rūpbān to divulge her actual identity. She holds back in modesty and indicates her actual relationship indirectly, but he fails to fathom the exact meaning of her answer. At the school, Bādśā Sāyed challenges Rahim to horseracing, and as in *Mālañcamālā*, the child-husband ends up in the dungeon. Rūpbān obtains the tribal chief's help to free Rahim, but before they can proceed, Sāyed discovers her and, enraptured by her beauty, attempts to abduct her. However, Tājel and the tribal chief thwart

him and rescue Rahim. At this point, the lad is quite lost regarding his identity and does not know how to return home to Rūpbān. Instigated further by the school-teacher, who dresses him as a Brahmin and promises that the actual identity of his "sister" would be revealed if he feigns to seduce her, he returns home to carry out the scheme. Rūpbān assaults the "Brahmin" for his audacious advances, and she discovers that he is none other than her husband. When Rahim asks why she has evaded him so long, she confesses that she waited for him to grow up to be a proper man. Sāyed arrives at the scene to beg forgiveness, and Princess Tājel, to promise to be obedient to Rūpbān. By this time, the stipulated period of twelve years is over. So, the tribal chief leads the couple back to their overjoyed parents. Amidst fanfare, Rahim is crowned as the king, and Rūpbān, his loving queen.

However, both Nūr Bānu and Madanamañjarī are forced to face a prolonged period of tribulations before they can return home to their parents. Delbar is revived to life by Bholājān, the daughter of a *garuḍik* (one skilled in treating snake poison), but he is turned into a parrot by her magic because he rejects her love. On the other hand, negligence to devotion due unto Satya Pīr leads to Madanamañjarī's woes. One day, as Candrasena was casually wandering in a garden full of exotic flora and fauna, a flower-woman named Surasikā traps him by turning him into a parrot. In *Nūr Bānu*, Bholājān restores Delbar's human form at night and gratifies her sexual desire but in the morning, she changes him back to the bird and sets off for the day's work. One day, parrot-Delbar manages to escape, and finds refuge at the hands of a princess named Phul-malā, who unmasks his human form by accidentally unplugging a magic pellet tucked in its ear. When Bholājān discerns Delbar's whereabouts with her magic and appears to reclaim him, Delbar offers her salutations as his mother. Thus rebuffed, Bholājān leaves Delbar to live peacefully with Phul-malā. In *Madanamañjarī*, Surasikā has no physical relationship with Candrasena. She is forced to hand over the parrot to Princess Hemalatā, the sixteen-year-old unmarried daughter of King Magendra, who unmasks parrot-Candrasena's human form by accidentally stroking its top-knot. Both Phul-malā and Hemalatā retrieve the human form of their respective parrots at night and engage in the ecstasy of erotic bliss, and revert him back into the parrot form in the day so as to conceal their relationships from their respective families.

Further complications from this point set the two tales on diverging trajectories. Hemalatā's "illicit" relationship is discovered when she becomes pregnant. After a parodic siege on the palace, the police chief apprehends only a parrot, and its human form is revealed dramatically when the king accidentally strokes its top-knot. In consequence, Candrasena is forced to confess, Surasikā is apprehended and banished after humiliation, and Madanamañjarī, who till then was suffering bitterly in the agony of separation from her husband, has no option but to accept the king's offer of having Candrasena married to Hemalatā so as to save his life. After the marriage is solemnized, Madanamañjarī appears to have no problem in sharing Candrasena with Hemalatā, and the three amuse themselves in secret delight.

In *Nūr Bānu*, Phul-malā manages to remain free from pregnancy and hence her "illicit" relationship is never discovered. But when Delbar confides in her that

the memory of faithful Nūr Bānu torments him, she reasons that it is wiser to run away with her lover before he runs away or her parents force her to marry another man. Phul-malā dons the guise of a prince and riding a *paṅkhirāj* horse, flies with him to the woodcutter's hut. There they find Nūr Bānu still in the bridal chamber, offering her prayer for the wellbeing of Delbar. She is initially hurt at Delbar's attachment to Phul-malā; but when the latter offers her salutations as a younger sister, the two women are reconciled.

The homecoming in *Madanamañjarī* is quite unproblematic. Candrasena proposes to Madanamañjarī, she accepts and later, the king also concedes. After a heartrending farewell, Candrasena, Madanamañjarī, and Hemalatā return back to the city of Vijaya, where Madanamañjarī is acknowledged as a woman unmatched in the greater cosmos. However, the homecoming in *Nūr Bānu*, engineered by Kaṭak Saodagar's accidental discovery of his son at the woodcutter's house, generates a few drastic changes. The woodcutter and his wife are loaded with a fortune by the merchant prince, and the second wife is banished. Thereafter, Kaṭak Saodagar hands over all his wealth to his son Delbar, and the latter lives happily with his two wives.

As the summary of *Rūpbān*, *Nūr Bānu*, and *Madanamañjarī* discussed above shows, the structure or matrix of relations and actors are indeed similar to *Mālañcamālā*, and all the four tales are strikingly parallel to the "reverse Oedipus" tale, in that like sexes repel, and unlike sexes attract, but in reverse direction of aggression and desire, and that the node of the "mother" in the Oedipal structure is replaced with a collective figure which condenses the wife with the mother as wife-mother. All the four tales, narrated from the viewpoint of the mother-wife, are devised as Freudian screen memories. It is suggested that these tales, unidentified so far, may be classified as Type 931 C (Bengal?).

III: A Freudian Unpacking of the Four Tales

The meaning and the relevance of the Tale Type 931 C may be found if these are recognized as an aesthetic reworking of phantasies, desires, and intentions of the bearers of the tales—that is, the Bengali people—because the prolonged currency of the tales establishes them as "a source and authority for understanding those desires and intentions in the first place" (Leitch 2001, 917). As Dundes (1980, 34) observes, "a goodly portion of folklore is fantasy, collective or collectivized fantasy," which "have passed the test of time and are transmitted again and again" because they "appeal to the psyche of many, many individuals." As he goes on to contend, "much of the meaning of folkloristic fantasy is unconscious" (Dundes 1980, 34). The high level of "unreality" in which these aesthetic phantasies are couched is important and necessary because as Freud (1990b, 132) would point out, "many things which, if they were real, could give no enjoyment, can do so in the play of phantasy, and many excitements which, in themselves, are actually distressing, can become a source of pleasure for the hearers and spectators." By obstructing the distressing, these phantasies offer incentive bonus or forepleasure,

because "as far as the [distressing] alone is concerned, no pleasure would arise. The result is a generation of pleasure far greater than that offered by the supervening possibility" (FREUD 1960b, 137).

It is significant that three of the four aesthetic phantasies (that is, those of *Mālañcamālā*, *Rūpbān*, and *Nūr Bānu*) begin with a childless king (or a merchant-prince), who, following FREUD (1933, 134), represent a childless "father." Because a "father" cannot be a father without a child, the children as subjects of *Bādśā* (King) Ekābbar of Nirāśpur (in the aesthetic phantasy of *Rūpbān*) decide to leave his kingdom. More importantly, if the "king" as the father of the subjects of his kingdom remains without a male heir, his "saplessness" or loss of masculinity turns his kingdom "sapless" (as the name Nirāśpur in the aesthetic phantasy of *Rūpbān* implies). Hence, the "father" in the aesthetic phantasies devotes all his energy to resolving this contradiction and begetting a son. The phantasy of *Madanamañjarī* presents an important contrast to the three other, since the father (King Vinod Viharī) not only begets a child as expected in the cases of most adult males, but also that the child is a girl. However, instead of focusing on a father-daughter relationship or an oedipal triangle with a girl-child, the phantasy employs the expository setting to direct its attention to a male child, as though to warn the consumers of the phantasy that the role of the wife-mother may insidiously trap even the most unexpected candidates.

No sooner than the desire of the father (as the patriarch) is fulfilled with the birth of the male child, as in the aesthetic phantasies of *Mālañcamālā*, *Rūpbān*, and *Nūr Bānu*, he is "fated" to live a short life. The latent content of this turn of events may be taken to imply that the patriarch immediately perceives the threat of sexual transgression by the male child. The threat is so severe and the moral anxiety is so well perceived that instead of waiting for him to enter the third phase of early childhood psychosexual development, that is, the phallic stage, the aesthetic phantasies manifest the desire of shielding the son from the threat and accompanied fear of castration in the first (oral) stage. The solution to save the male child's life is banishment to, or seeking refuge in, a forest. In circumstances that are devoid of verisimilitude (and thus impersonalizing the aesthetic phantasies and diminishing the degree of distress), the father is shown as "forced" to act for the "benefit" of the son (as in *Rūpbān*), or as falling prey to family squabbles arising out of the stepmother's intolerance (as in *Nūr Bānu*). The undercurrent of the threat of rivalry between the father and the son is most clearly articulated in the phantasy of *Mālañcamālā*, where the child dies. On the other hand, in *Madanamañjarī*, there is only a veiled allusion to the threat of sexual transgression by the male child. In this case, the strategy employed is drawing a parallel of Madanamañjarī's case to that of Rati, the virtuous, chaste, and faithful wife of Madana (the god of love), by the literary technique of "evocation… of precedent at a crucially parallel moment" (RAMANUJAN 1984, 245). The precedent evoked, by Madanamañjarī's companions to the bride after her marriage, is Rati's bringing up of her husband Madana, who was reborn as a child inside a monstrous sheatfish following his attempt to interrupt Śiva's yogic austerities, and consequent annihilation by his (Śiva's) fire

of wrath. Madana's annihilation, read as the result of a conflict between a young male adept in erotic craft (Madana) and an older male engaged in abstinence from sexual endeavours (Śiva), works as an implicit reference to the threat of sexual transgression by Candrasena. The degree of distress is diminished in the aesthetic phantasy by showing Candrasena's father as "forced" by the king.

The male child is nevertheless allowed a means to repress his sexuality and adapt to a cultured (or civilized) life by having him married to a collective figure (Mālañcamālā, Nūr Bānu, Madanamañjarī, or Rūpbān), which condenses the wife with the mother. If "[t]he motive force of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality" (Freud 1990b, 134), then the initial action of the four aesthetic phantasies—the marriage of a newly-born male child to a girl who has just reached her puberty—must be read as a "hark[ing] back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which represents the fulfillment of the wish" (Freud 1990b, 135). The fulfillment of this wish, that is, the male child's possession of the mother takes place in a "playground" perceived as "a potential space between the mother, and the baby or joining mother and baby" (Winnicott 1991, 107), where the baby can confidently experience omnipotence and maximally intense experience regarding his sexual strivings toward his wife-as-mother. The "playground" can be a forest (a representation of nature away from civilization and culture), as in the aesthetic phantasy of *Mālañcamālā*, a space in-between forest and human civilization, as in *Nūr Bānu*—or extended to both, as in *Rūpbān*—or simply a secluded space away from human habitation, as in *Madanamañjarī*. As Kakar and Ross (1986, 188) observe, this tendency demonstrates "the attempt to elevate the object of incest, and the impulse itself, to a domain where natural laws, the rules of the body and social order are inoperative." Hence, the "playground" is located away from the familiar and known social space, in which the wife-as-mother and the male child are bound by a complex set of social relations with preestablished rules, schemes of domination, and legitimate opinions—to a space where such relations may be newly established, where there is no threat of castration from the awe-striking figure of the father, but at the same time, is protected by a benevolent representation of an ideal father. It is here that the male child begins a protracted liminal phase of psychosexual development by passing through the oral, anal, and phallic stages.

The aesthetic phantasy of Nūr Bānu offers an interesting insight in the oral stage of development. As recounted in the narrative, when Delbar is two-and-a-half years old and sleeping at night on the bosom of Nūr Bānu (the wife-as-mother), he wakes up and begins to cry for milk. After groping in the dark, he bares one of Nūr Bānu's breasts and begins to kiss it. When nothing issues from the "pot of honey" (that is, the breast), he begins to cry again and wakes Nūr Bānu. She is reduced to tears at the baby's plight and laments the absence of his mother because she would have been able to suckle him (Chowdhury 1993, 19). Thus, by artfully displacing the breast as the first love object onto the wife-as-mother Nūr Bānu, the mother's breast is established as laden with libidinal investment. At the same time, the phan-

tasy articulates the threat of the patriarch by Kaṭak Saodāgar's banishment of the couple to the "playground" of the forest, where antagonistic patriarchal authority continues to pursue the couple in the guise of the tigers. Their aggression is nevertheless redirected into protection by God (Allah), who may be read as an idealized image of a nurturing and primal Father. This projection of ambivalence towards the father figure extends to the woodcutter, as he is initially attracted by Nūr Bānu's beauty and desires to marry her. His sexual motive, however, is sublimated when she invokes Dharma and seeks the woodcutter's protection as a godfather. Brought to his better judgment, the woodcutter accepts Nūr Bānu as his godchild and thanks Allah for the miracle of bestowing on him a daughter because he and his wife are childless (CHOWDHURY 1993, 25–26). After the woodcutter's wife also accepts her as a godchild, Delbar is allowed to pursue his sexual gratification without further hindrance at the woodcutter's home, a "playground" located in an in-between space between forest and human civilization.

In the aesthetic phantasy of *Rūpbān*, when the wife-as-mother enters the "playground" of the forest, she is shown falling prey to the robbers (a projection of the threatening patriarchal authority from whom the male child had to flee). The tribal chief, however, appears to protect her and Rahim (as a projection of the benevolent image of the father). This allows the male child to pursue his sexual strivings in the forest. In Saodagar's version of the text, however, the pursuance is cut short by the threat of the tiger—another projection of the father/patriarch. Consequently, Rūpbān and Rahim are forced back to human society to live with a mature single woman introduced simply as the aunt, with whom Rūpbān strikes a mother-daughter bonding. In the scene immediately following, the spectators are treated with sexual innuendoes of a young male servant who exploits the family conflicts of a miserly pawnbroker (*poddār*) and his quarrelsome wife. When the aunt arrives to sell a valuable object given by Rūpbān and in exchange procure food and other necessities, the male servant makes veiled sexual advances. This scene is clear nonsense if read out of context. However, its close reading suggests that the young male servant and the aunt are shadow representations of Rahim and Rūpbān. Hence the text appears to suggest that in the sanctuary provided to Rūpbān and Rahim by the aunt is a "playground" of permissive domain where incestuous sexual gratification, unhindered by patriarchal threat, is possible. In this reading, the function of the scene is to imply that the male child, unhindered by tigers (that is, patriarchal authority), may now continue to gratify his sexual strivings with his wife-as-mother (SAODAGAR 1992, 33–38).

In *Mālañcamālā*, the threat of patriarchal authority also follows the wife-as-mother and the child in the "playground" of the forest, in the guise of a tiger. However, unlike the two above-mentioned phantasies, the threat is redirected as a projection of the benevolent image of the father by Mālañcamālā, who offers her own life in order to save the child. Indeed, the redirected benevolent image recurs throughout the phantasy as a projection of the idealized image of the patriarch (literally, a man who rules a family). More importantly, the phantasy of *Mālañcamālā* presents the oral phase with greater aesthetic skill and delicacy.

It shows Candramāṇik dying, and the responsibility of the death being squarely placed on Mālañcamālā. In consequence, not only is her father beheaded, but also her hands, ears, and nose are chopped off, her eyes are gouged, and she is cast in a funeral pyre with the body of the male child. The manifest content of this imagery appears to be a disguised rewriting of the latent content by inversion: the male child's antagonism towards the father projected as the father's counter-wish of the male child's death. At the same time, although the counter-wish appears to contradict the father's wish of desiring a male child, it also fulfils the desire of removing the threat. In the funeral pyre, an inverted image of immolation of the *sati*, Mālañcamālā does not die with her child-husband but revives him back to life and regains her lost limbs. Thereafter, she nurses the male child exactly as a mother would, except that she does not literally breast-feed him. Possibly because such an act is considered taboo among Bengalis, the wife-as-mother feeds the child milk that appears miraculously in a "cooking pot," which, as a receptacle, is a representation of the female genitalia (Freud 1933, 131), in this case, the breasts. The text describes this crucial moment thus:

> She does not eat nor bathe but devotes all her time for her (child) husband. There is milk, there is everything, Mālañca feeds her husband.... She smiles when her husband smiles, cries when he does; speaks to him when he speaks.... She sits holding him firmly to her breasts. Thus passes days, months, and years till the day when the gods suck away the milk from Mālañca's limitless store. Mālañca discovers that the pot contains no milk. So she sets out to get some cow's milk from some human habitation. (Majumdar 1388, 180).

It is thus that the aesthetic phantasy of *Mālañcamālā* averts breaking a taboo and yet pleasurably harks back the adult male Bengalis to their primal memory traces and archaic heritage of object cathexis: the mother's breast that nourished it.

In *Madanamañjarī*, the "playground" is located in a distant kingdom, in the middle of an open field and thus away from the habitation of the citizenry, but near the citadel of the reigning king Magendra. Malevolent or aggressive father figures are completely absent in this phantasy; instead, the two benevolent father figures, King Magendra as the god-father and Satya Pīr as the idealized image of a nurturing (and primal) father, protect Madanamañjarī and her child-husband. However, the phantasy is curiously silent regarding the incestuous sexual gratification of Candrasena. It simply passes over the subject by observing that he reached the age of five "[i]n what seemed like no time at all" (Stewart 2004, 209).

In spite of the pronounced silence regarding the desire of the mother's breast in the aesthetic phantasy of *Madanamañjarī*, their prevalence in the other three indicate that the desire of the breast must be insatiable for the objective psyche of the Bengalis, adding further substance to Freud's observation that "however long [a child] is fed at its mother's breast, it will always be left with a conviction after it has been weaned that its feeding was too short and too little" (Freud 1959, 56–57). The desire for the breasts that "later completed into the whole person of the child's mother," who by her care of the child's body became "its first seducer"

(Freud 1959, 56), is fulfilled in the four phantasies by the collective figure that condenses the wife with the mother. This collective figure of the wife-as-mother is able to operate in the objective psyche of the Bengalis, because in the two relations of caring and seducing lie "the root of a mother's importance, unique, without parallel, established unalterably for a whole lifetime as the first and strongest love-object and as the prototype of all later love-relations" (Freud 1959, 56).

At the end of the early childhood psychosexual development, when the danger of the phallic stage is over and the threat of castration ceases, the aesthetic phantasies offer different possibilities in the latency stage of the male child. In all the four aesthetic phantasies, he is allowed limited access to human society by having him attend a school but still under the care of the nutrient figure of the wife-as-mother, who either remains in the shadow (as in the case of *Mālañcamālā*), or appears in his presence as the *elder* sister (as in the cases of *Rūpbān* and *Nūr Bānu*) and the male child's mother's maidservant (as in the case of *Madanamañjarī*). This stage is important because it allows the male child to shed its incestuous desire for the condensed figure of the wife-as-mother and allows her to emerge as the wife-mother (that is, the wife who is also a mother). Importantly, the process of identification with the father, by which the male child introjects the father's authority, develops a super-ego, and overcomes the Oedipus complex, is not eradicated but toned down, and the father is rendered with ambivalence, projecting "the simultaneous existence of love and hate towards the same object" (Freud 1960a, 157).

In *Rūpbān*, the process of identification is toned down the least because, instead of the biological father, five surrogate father figures appear as manifestations of the ambivalence, after the male child is banished by the patriarch Ekābbar. Two of these, the tribal chief and the school teacher, operate as his nurturing "helpers." The aforementioned provides protection and appears as the savior whenever Rahim is threatened; the school teacher leads to Rahim's conjugal union in Rūpbān. On the other hand, the robbers and Bādśā Sāyed appear as the contesting father figures who attempt to (re-)possess the wife-mother, a strong reminder of how Bādśā Ekābbar would bar Rahim from possessing his biological mother. The tiger, another contesting father figure, threatens the male child for his incestuous desire. The school, where Rahim is compelled to undergo Bādśā Sāyed's injunctions, helps him to adjust to the reality principle. In this regard, the horse as a symbol of manly vigor stands out quite prominently.

In the aesthetic phantasy of *Nūr Bānu*, the process of identification is toned down more and consequently, the ambivalence towards the father is less obvious as the same figures (the tigers and the woodcutter) shift from hatred and threats to love and nurturing care. The process of identification is toned down even more in *Mālañcamālā*, where the tiger, initially aggressive but later a benevolent projection of the father figure, protects and exerts pervasive influence as the surrogate father figure. The process of identification is toned down the most—rendering it almost transparent—in *Madanamañjarī*, where the surrogate father figures of King Magendra and Satya Pīr continue to exert beneficial influence throughout the oral, anal, phallic and latency stages, and the school teacher operates as Can-

drasena's nurturing "helper" in the latency stage, despite hints of unease exhibited by both Candrasena and Madanamañjarī. But more than all these shadowy and not-so-shadowy surrogate father figures, it is the wife-mother through whom the male child introjects (or is interpellated by) patriarchal authority. This is where the schooling of the male child plays a decisive role. The introjection of the patriarchal authority through the wife-mother is most apparent in Rūpbān's confession after Rahim's attempted "rape" in the guise of a Brahmin that she evaded him so long because she wanted him to grow up to be a proper man—the patriarch.

It is thus that the Tale Type 931 C offers a qualified validation to Girindrasekhar Bose's claim that "under normal conditions of development Oedipus wishes are not adjusted by yielding to the castration threat of the superego as has been supposed by Freud but by overcoming the obstruction imposed by the hostile father and mother images and the subject's final identification with them" (Bose cited in Hartnack 2001, 147–48). As will be seen in the interpretation of the four tales presented in the following section, it is the wife-mother through whom the male child introjects (or is interpellated by) patriarchal authority, during which process the father figure is rendered with ambivalence.

The four aesthetic phantasies also manifest important differences in the process of maturation of the male child during the latency period. *Rūpbān* allows phantasizing on sibling incest, as when advised by none other that the schoolteacher, Rahim feigns to seduce his "elder sister" in the guise of a Brahmin. Similarly, *Nūr Bānu* also permits similar phantasizing. As a prelude to inviting Delbar to the bridal chamber as her husband, he acts upon the advice of the *mālinī* (a female florist), to indicate his willingness by tugging at the loose end of the sari of his "elder sister" (that is, Nūr Bānu) (Chowdhury 1993, 35). On the other hand, both Mālañcamālā and Madanamañjarī maintain a vigilant moral code as the cultural superego figures. Mālañcamālā never appears in the presence of Candramāṇik but continues in her role as the self-effacing and entirely nutrient mother. Although Madanamañjarī physically supervises Candrasena's wellbeing, she is careful not to exhibit any sign of an actual relationship with the growing young man.

The most critical stage in the maturation during the latency period is illustrated in *Nūr Bānu* where Delbar is snake-bitten immediately prior to Nūr Bānu's consummation of marriage with him. If the famous symbol of the serpent is the male genital organ (Basu 1950, 93) and if "[b]eing bitten by a snake in a nightmare is a phobic response" (Belanger and Dalley 2005, 285), then the latent content of the image in the aesthetic phantasy of *Nūr Bānu* may be taken to indicate the moral anxiety arising from the fear of the phallus as the patriarchal authority. It is as though Nūr Bānu has not as yet shed her identity as an elder sister/mother and hence the moral anxiety over incest is so great that death appears to be the only option. Perhaps Nūr Bānu commits the mistake of not making enough room in the latency stage for the male child to make contact with women who are not forbidden by the incest taboo (as in the aesthetic phantasies of *Rūpbān* and *Mālañcamālā*); the contact in turn allows him to shed his incestuous desire for the

mother. Delbar can be revived and can live with Nūr Bānu only after the experiences he passes through with Bholājān and Phul-malā.

When the period of latency ends and the male child steps into the final genital phase, what FREUD (1959, 11) calls the "second efflorescence," the four aesthetic phantasies appear to offer three alternatives regarding the male child's initiation into adult erotic life and the consequent sexual relationship in conjugal life. In *Nūr Bānu*, in which Delbar's actual mother dies shortly after giving birth to him, the wife brings up Delbar as a mother but fails to initiate him to the erotic life. This is imparted by Bholājān, a woman skilled in the art of lovemaking, but with whom matrimonial relationship cannot be established. Hence it is necessary to escape from her influence after learning what is necessary. The role of the wife as a conjugal partner is allotted to Phul-malā, a girl younger to Delbar in age. As a man Delbar can live with the wife-mother, Nūr Bānu, and Phul-malā, the sexual partner.[3] In *Rūpbān*, an equivalent of Bholājān is absent. Even an equivalent of Phul-malā and Hemalatā, Princess Tājel in this phantasy, is removed as a possible sexual partner, although she challenges Rūpbān initially. The message regarding the normative marital life in the second alternative is clear: the adult male needs to be content with one woman as a sexual partner, who must be the wife-mother and also the initiator of erotic life.

In *Madanamañjarī*, the wife-mother is also the initiator of erotic life. Nevertheless, like the phantasy of *Mālañcamālā*, that of *Madanamañjarī* offers the possibility for the male to choose a second sexual partner, and at the same time, makes it necessary for the wife-mother to sacrifice everything a human can possess with unflinching devotion to her husband. Nevertheless, where the phantasy of *Madanamañjarī* differs from that of *Mālañcamālā* is the deemed rationale for the strategy, which is the inevitable infidelity of the male partner. In the first encounter of Candrasena and Hemalatā after the latter transforms him into a man in her bedchamber, he is described thinking—not without a touch of playful delight—"[t]o look at her makes me curse the time lost in blinking" (STEWART 2004, 224). In sharp contrast, Candramāṇik is represented as "guiltless" of infidelity since he was completely unaware of his relationship with Mālañcamālā when Kāñcī garlands him as her husband. The purported message urges the consumers of *Madanamañjarī* phantasy to acknowledge that because the male partner may easily fall "prey to not one but all five arrows of the god of love, who destroys the sense of one lost in love," as was the case with Candrasena, and be smitten by the breathtaking beauty of a maiden "like a puppet transfixed on the strings of her charm" (STEWART 2004, 224), it is wiser for the wife to impose a limit to the infidelity of her husband by allowing, as Madanamañjarī did, a safety valve in the form of a second wife. The *Mālañcamālā* phantasy does not make a huge fuss about the possible infidelity of the male partner, and at the same time, does not insist that the wife-mother needs also to initiate her partner into erotic life; nevertheless, it makes room for a safety valve in the form of a second wife. It is no wonder that D. C. SEN (1920, 323) is eloquent in praise for *Mālañcamālā* for "bring[ing] forward vividly the Indian [that is, South Asian] conception of the ideal woman in a most striking manner."

IV: The wife-mother through the lenses of Girindrasekhar Bose and Sudhir Kakar

The reading of the four aesthetic phantasies as deliberated above is well validated by Roy's (1975, 124) study of Bengali childhood, which "indicates strong Oedipal tendencies that have definite and discernible outcomes in later life," and that the length of time a mother and a son can "remain as highly cathected libidinal objects" is a lifetime (Roy 1975, 125). Nevertheless, it is necessary to test the validity of the reading further by subjecting it to a critical examination through the theoretical lenses of Gririndrasekhar Bose's "wish to be female" and the "Oedipus mother," and Sudhir Kakar's "maternal-feminine," because these notions radically challenge the oedipal matrix of relations, and impinge heavily upon the notion of "wife-mother" discussed in the previous section.

Girindrasekhar Bose's notion of the "wish to be female" needs to be perceived in the social context to which he and his psychoanalytic practice belonged. Born in an upper caste (Kayastha) family from Nadia in West Bengal, and the youngest child of a father who served as the Diwan of the Maharaja of Darbhanga, Bose pursued his higher education in Calcutta (the capital of British India and the second largest city in the empire) where his family relocated in the early twentieth century, and where he built up his successful practice, hardly ever leaving the city even for a visit elsewhere. Emulating the ideal of a Bhadrolak exemplified by his father and deeply rooted in his native Bengali-Hindu culture and customs, well-versed in Sanskrit and canonical Hindu scriptures, always dressed publicly in traditional Bengali clothes that were spotlessly white and immaculately starched, Bose was highly privileged in terms of his status and financial situation, and was known for his obsessive-compulsive ways. Those whom Bose treated were mostly the Bhadralok of Calcutta, upper caste westernized Bengali Hindu men, drawn from the privileged band of a rising upper-middle class. It was among these men that Bose had discovered the "wish to be female" (Nandy 1995, 89, 109, 113; Hartnack 2001, 123–24; 2003, 10; 2011). These were his "Indian patients," as he wrote to Freud on 11 April 1929, who "do not exhibit castration symptoms to such a marked degree as [his] European cases" (Sinha cited in Hartnack 2001, 141).

Before proceeding further with Bose, it is necessary to call attention to a procedural flaw in his assessment: although his case studies deal mostly with the Bengali (Hindu) Bhadralok, he extends his claim to be true for all Indians. Only thus relocating Bose's assessment "in the cultural context of his time and milieu" as Hartnack (2001, 145) would say, it would be worthwhile to recollect that in the four phantasies grouped under the Tale Type 931 C, the names of the characters, religious notions and observances, family structures, and child-rearing practices are indicative of pre-colonial milieus: the Bengali-Hindu sociocultural setting in *Mālañcamālā* and *Madanamañjarī*, and the Bengali Muslim in those of *Rūpbān* and *Nūr Bānu*. Further, the consumers of the phantasies have mostly been the non-urban populace living away from colonial Calcutta. The only exception in

this regard is *Rūpbān*, which, since 1965, has also enjoyed popularity among urban spectators in erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Having thus set the parameters, it would be in order to take up Hartnack's postcolonial explanation of Bose's "wish to be female," that is, "the occurrence of castration wishes and the absence of castration fears among his patients" (Hartnack 2001, 141). Because Bose as well as his patients "lived under conditions of cultural hybridity," she argues, they all "functioned in a British colonial world during the workday, and were Bengali the rest of the time" (Hartnack 2003, 10). Hindered in their development by the realities of colonialism, these men "envied Bengali women who were only indirectly affected by British domination" (Hartnack 2003, 10). Following this line of argument, Hartnack interprets the "wish to be female" "as a desire not to be tainted by colonialism, to belong to a world imagined to be all Bengali, thus untouched by the stresses and conflicts induced by foreign rulers, or as an imaginary withdrawal into a presumably ahistorical precolonial time, where the contemporary demands for change were not an issue" (Hartnack 2003, 147).

If Bose's argument and Hartnack's explanation were convincing, then the threat of sexual transgression by the male child in the oral stage and the accompanied fear of castration, as evinced in the interpretation of Tale Type 931 C discussed in this article, would prove to be invalid. However, Hartnack's explanation by means of colonial cultural conditioning of the Bengali Bhadralok loses much of its conviction when one is reminded of the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava political-religious movement initiated by Caitanya (1486–1533) in 1509, which drew unprecedented popular support by arguing that the *līlā*s of Kṛṣṇa are collectively an expedient to achieving devotion (*bhakti*), and that it is possible to access the Divine in devotional ecstasy generated out of recollection and reflection of the *līlā*s. Appropriating a passionate and sensuous love lore of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, which was very popular in Bengal as evinced by the existence of texts such as the *Gītagovinda*, circa 1200, and *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan*, circa 1400, Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavism (re)presented the love lore as a paradigm of the relationship between the human (as Rādhā) and the Divine (as Kṛṣṇa). The movement devised quite a few popular performances as vehicles for generating ecstasy as equivalent to the ritualized worship of Kṛṣṇa. Bose's "wish to be female" and concomitant castration wishes can actually be equated with the pre-colonial Bengali devotional practice, still prevalent among the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava men (as well as women) of West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh, in which the (biological) male devotees ardently wish to be a (biological) female (Rādhā) in order to access the Divine Kṛṣṇa (a biological male).

Hence, instead of equating the "wish to be female" with "a desire not to be tainted by colonialism" (Hartnack 2003, 147), it would be more pertinent to follow Kakar and Ross (1986, 99), who argue that "the wish to be a woman," as exemplified in the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavist and other *bhakti* cults, "is not a later distortion of phallic strivings but rather another legacy from our 'prehistoric' experience with our mothers. Indeed this ambisexuality, the play of masculine and feminine, probably represents the acme, the climax of pre-oedipal development before cas-

tration anxiety and guilt enter to limit and dull the sexual quest." However, as Kakar (2008, 77) adds, Bose's observation "is only a special proposition of a more general theorem. The wish to be a woman is *one particular solution* to the discord that threatens the breaking up of the son's fantasized connection to the mother, a solution whose access to awareness is facilitated by the culture's view on sexual differentiation and the permeability of gender boundaries" (emphasis added).

The general theorem that Kakar (2008, 74) draws attention to is "the 'hegemonic narrative' of Hindu culture as far as the male development is concerned," which is "neither that of Freud's Oedipus nor that of Christianity's Adam," but "that of Devi, the great goddess, especially in her manifold expressions as mother, in the inner world of the Hindu son." This form of the maternal-feminine, "more central to Indian myths and psyche than in the western counterparts" (Kakar 2008, 74), also draws deep resonance from Bose, who observed in a letter written to Freud on 11 April 1929, that "[t]he Oedipus mother is very often a combined parental image and this is a fact of great importance. I have reasons to believe that much of the motivation of maternal deity is traceable to this source" (Sinha cited in Hartnack 2001, 141).

Bose's argument regarding the Oedipus mother, drawn from psychoanalytic insight of colonial Calcutta's cultural context of the Bengali (Hindu) Bhadralok, complemented by that of Kakar's maternal-feminine form of the Devi, and based on a wider range of psychoanalytic insight accrued from the current geopolitical territory of India, together constitute a significant challenge to the interpretation of Tale Type 931 C discussed in this article. In proceeding on with the challenge, it would be well in order to call attention to two implicit methodological errors in Kakar-Bose's thesis. Firstly, both Kakar and Bose (as well as Hartnack in her postcolonial reading of Bose), conflate "the distinction between sex, as biological facticity [Bose's 'wish to be female'], and gender, as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity [Kakar and Ross's 'wish to be a woman']" (Butler 1988, 522). They disregard even the argument that "the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy" (Butler 2006, 188). Consequently, they conceptualize the mother-figure (the Devi in Kakar and the Oedipus mother in Bose) as the union of the biological male and the biological female categories, exemplified by Kakar (2008, 81) as the *ardhanārīśvar* (half man-half woman) image of Śiva. It is necessary to relocate the mother-figure in the Kakar-Bose thesis in the gendered notion of the oedipal mother interpellated by the Lacanian Name-of-the-Father, the legislative and prohibitive function of the symbolic father as the patriarchal norm. As argued in the third section, the Tale Type 931 C demonstrates that the interpellation of patriarchal authority is effected through the benevolent projection of the father figures, and, more importantly, through the wife-mother.

The second error is glaringly obvious in Kakar but implicit in Bose: it subsumes the polyvocal articulations of the religious-cultural practices that go by the shorthand of "Hinduism" (a term that gained currency in the nineteenth century as a result of an orientalist intent in subsuming all South Asian beliefs and practices that did not fit into the category of Islam, Jainism, or Christianity) as a monolithic and

ahistorical conception. Hence, KAKAR repeatedly invokes "Hindu" to qualify culture (2008, 74 and 78) and family relations (74). Guarding against the ideological traps laid along the intolerant sectarian boundaries insisted upon by the Islamists and the Hindutva ideologues, it would be well in order to acknowledge a pluralist view that envisages "Hinduism" as an umbrella or a sponge or even a forest replete with diverse and heterogeneous flora, which incorporates decentralised and independent bodies of beliefs and practices, where the Vedic tradition figures as just one of many others (DAVIS 1995, 5). The aesthetic phantasies grouped under tale type 931 C enjoy a wider appeal among the Bengali population precisely because these are unhinged from overt centripetal religious signifiers.

Having thus re-moored the Kakar-Bose thesis in a centrifugal terrain that refuses to acknowledge the transparency of gender and religious signifiers, one could engage with McDaniel's observations regarding the mother figure of the Devi, widely prevalent in the syncretistic Śākta tradition of Bengal, which blends elements from "tantric Buddhism, Vaiṣṇava devotion, yogic practice, shamanism, and worship of village deities" (MCDANIEL 1989, 86). Citing devotees of the cult who believe that Śiva was born from the goddess Kālī, McDaniel argues that "[t]his mixture of Śiva as offspring and husband of the goddess is a common theme in Bengal. If the great Mother is the creatress, everyone is her child—including her husband" (MCDANIEL 1989, 86). The most striking image of the mother-consort may be seen in the myth and secret tantric ritual at Tārāpīṭh, a small temple town near Rampurhat in Birbhum administrative district in West Bengal (India), where two rituals of worship are held in honour of Tārā (the fearsome Tantric aspect of the Divine Mother)—one for day and another at night. In the daytime, the devotees worship the goddess in her fiery form with four arms and a protruding tongue, wearing a Benarasi sari and a garland of skulls by food offerings. An inner statue unveiled only at midnight by removing the sari in secrecy shows Tārā as a mother suckling Śiva Mahādeva (MCDANIEL 1989, 88–89).

McDaniel makes no error in her judgment when she identifies many tantric elements in the aesthetic phantasy of *Mālañcamālā*: "the identification of the human with the goddess (here as the *satī*, the chaste wife); the ritual of *śava-sādhana* (sitting at night with a corpse until it comes to life); the powers (*siddhi*s) gained from self-sacrifice; the magical transformation of substance (she turns ashes and sand to milk and food); the power of mother/consort in relation to the son/husband. It is the attitude of a heroine (*vīrācāra*)—the stance that brings spiritual success" (MCDANIEL 1989, 88). To these, one may even add the tiger as a reconceived image of the lion (Devi/Durgā's carrier), and the ultimate image of Mālañcamālā as the goddess installed in the hearts of the people. To McDaniel's identification, one may further add D. C. SEN's, who finds Buddhistic notions of karma and renunciation embedded in the phantasy (1920, 330). Importantly, implicit and latent traces of Hindu tantrism and Buddhism as explicable in *Mālañcamālā* are largely absent in *Rūpbān*, *Nūr Bānu*, and *Madanamañjarī*.

MCDANIEL's observation that "the mingling of parental and erotic love," despite its prevalence among the Śāktas, is forbidden for the Vaiṣṇavas (1989, 89), argues

against Kakar's insistence that the "hegemonic narrative" of Hindu culture is that of Devi. Indeed, the narrative of the Devi is also what Kakar (2008, 77) observes regarding the "wish to be female," that is, another proposition of a supposed and hypothetical general theorem—if there is any—of dealing with "the discord that threatens the breaking up of the son's fantasized connection to the mother." Arguing by means of the "reverse Oedipus" matrix of relations that Ramanujan has proposed and this article has explicated, and the matrix of psychosexual development of the male child as encoded in the Tale Type 931 C, Kakar's Gaṇeṣa and Skanda complexes, that is, a "strong pull towards surrender and re-immersion in the enveloping maternal fusion" and "a powerful push for independent and autonomous functioning" (2008, 79), respectively, can be explained as two manifestations of the of psychosexual development of the male child: Gaṇeṣa complex in the oral, anal, and phallic stages, and the Skanda in the genital phase.

Even though Vaiṣṇavism strictly enforces boundaries between parental and erotic love, there is enough space for the play of eroticism by means of veiled allusions. In the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and his (foster-)mother Yaśodā, he is projected as "the ideal son—mischievous, irresponsible and intrusive in a delightful, almost thrilling way," (Kakar 1981, 153) and these characteristics, in turn, generate in them a deep bonding of sensual comfort and security. The bonding is so comfortable and secure that the erotic dalliances between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, instead of altering the intensity of emotional investment of the (foster-)mother in her son, "rather serve simply, elegantly, to incorporate the fantasized fulfillment of her sexual desire for him" (Kakar 1981, 153). This, then, is yet another proposition for dealing with the discord that threatens to break up the mother-son fantasized erotic relationship.

In the heterogeneous domain of "popular Islam," a term that refers to, for the purpose of this article, "the derivative and synthetic patterns of the little tradition characteristic of communities on the periphery rather than at the center of a putative Islamic civilization" (Gaffney 1992, 39), one generally encounters either 1. the "wish to be female" projected through Rādhā's yearning for Kṛṣṇa as an equivalent for a devotee's desire for union with Allah, as seen in the songs of the Vaiṣṇavism-influenced male Sufi mystics of Bengal (such as Shahjahan Miah's *Kāla Āmāy Pāgolo Karise Re*), or 2. the deepest devotion and respect for Fatimah Zahra (the daughter of Prophet Muhammad born to Khadija, his first wife), the preeminent and sublimated mother-figure who is virtually erased of all signs of overt sexuality. Nevertheless, oedipal allusions do surface, even if furtively, in appellations such as *Ummu Abeeha* (lit. "the Mother of her Father"), that Fatimah is honoured with for her deep bonding with the Prophet.

However, more relevant to this article is the father-son rivalry between Allah (as a symbolic representation of the Name-of-the-Father) and Fatimah's foster son, Syed Badi'uddin Qutubul Mādār, who is one of the most popular Sufi saints of South Asia and is popularly known as Śāh Mādār or Mādār Pīr. As presented in a narrative form of indigenous performance of Bangladesh known as *Mādār Pīrer Gān*, Mādār Pīr challenges Allah's authority by holding back the soul of a cholera-

stricken child from Azrael, the angel of death. Consequently, Allah throws him in the fires of hell. When the fate of her foster son comes to the knowledge of Fatimah, she requests Moses to intercede on her behalf to Allah. When he fails, she herself pleads for Mādār's clemency but again, Allah refuses to forgive her wayward son. Left with no alternative, Fatimah reminds Allah that at the beginning of time, the universe, including Allah and the Prophet, came to being from an egg that she incubated as the primordial Mother. At this point, Allah has no option but to grant the petition of the Mother of the Creator, but on the condition that Mādār must beg forgiveness from him. Mādār does, but he also manages to get Allah to promise that cholera will not visit villages where his followers reside (AHMED 2006, 76–80.) This is how a section of popular Islam proposes to deal with the castration threat and father-son rivalry: the son does not kill the father figure but wins halfway by means of the mother's firm support.

Against all these propositions (and numerous others prevalent all over South Asia),[4] the four phantasies of *Mālañcamālā*, *Rūpbān*, *Nūr Bānu*, and *Madanamañjarī*—articulating concerns of a people far removed from the societal parameters of Bose and Kakar—represents another proposition with four variations, that by displacing the node of the "mother" in the oedipal matrix with that of the "wife-mother," encapsulates the psychosexual development of a male child from oral, anal, and phallic stages, through the latency stage to the "second efflorescence" of the final genital stage. Their prolonged currency (since the tenth century when the earliest version of *Mālañcamālā* appeared if D. C. Sen is credited, right up to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries when, as pointed out in note 2, *Rūpbān* has been repeatedly revived in the cinema and theater) establish them as a reliable source for gaining insight into the unconscious scripting of the impossible and forbidden wishes of the Bengali people.

The popularity of the four aesthetic phantasies and their repeated revivals in the indigenous/folk performances, urban theater and cinema, appear almost as a manifestation of repetition compulsion, by which the objective psyche of the Bengalis apparently repeats the traumatic events that initiate the Oedipus complex and the threat of castration in childhood. The complex is so potent that it incessantly threatens to reappear and disrupt the conscious functioning of the people. "[T]he return of the repressed" (FREUD 1990a, 113) in the phantasies appear to be an attempt to normalize and sanitize the "deviant" and repressed Oedipal desire—and thus help adult Bengali males to transit from nature to culture—by the following three operations. First, they rework the desire "into a more effectively disguised and relational form," where "'proscribed sources' have not been eradicated but toned down;" second, they provide "forepleasure, the pleasure, that is, attached to the 'representation' of phantasy;" and third, they erase "'what is too personal' about daydreams, [to become] *impersonal*, available not just for the self but for others," and thus cease to "repel" the others (EASTHOPE 1989, 21). Through the psychological progression of the central characters, the spectators of theater and film learn to believe that the rebus posed by the images is transparent, banish the proscribed sexual instincts back to the labyrinths of the unconscious,

displace them onto a substitute object, or sublimate them according to acceptable norms and goals that are "diverted towards other ends, no longer sexual and socially more valuable" (Freud 1933, 17)—and thus they attempt to reinstate "the universal break between nature and culture" (Leitch 2001, 915).

However, as Freud (1933, 17) cautions, "the structure thus built up is insecure, for the sexual impulses are with difficulty controlled." Affirming this tendency Kakar and Ross (1986, 187) observe, "[t]he sexual arousal by the mother, however well integrated it may become during the course of development in most men, nevertheless continues to lurk under the surface as a seductive restlessness." Bengali society appears to be more sympathetic in helping an adult male to negotiate and overcome his unresolved or residual oedipal investment, and the recurrence of repressed sexual instincts in the form of libidinal desires for his mother, that, as Freud cautions, are seldom "solved in a manner psychologically as well as socially satisfactory" (Freud 1933, 283). Consequently, the aesthetic phantasies are rewoven over and over again in the manner that has been done in Bangladesh and West Bengal, where the repressed desire for the mother has continuously been reworked, as Easthope (1989, 21) would say, "into a more effectively disguised and rationalised form" for quite a few centuries. It is thus that the phantasies, borrowing from Dundes (1980, 36), "provide… a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of what cannot be articulated in the more usual, direct way."

Afterword: unmasking gender in the playground of patriarchy

Having thus examined the Tale Type 931 C, as I look back in a self-reflexive stocktaking, I begin to hear Freud pondering over "[t]he great question that has never been answered, and which [he was not] able to answer, despite [his] thirty years of research into the feminine soul"—'What does a woman want?'" (quoted by Marie Bonaparte in Jones 1955, 421).[5] In a worse state of patriarchal blindness than Freud's, and subsumed by "humanist discourses which conflate the universal with the masculine and appropriate all of culture as masculine property" (Butler 1988, 530), I now realize that the question remained transparent to me as I labored over this article. Perhaps, it is not so much that the question has never been answered but that patriarchal discourses have systematically erased the "answers" from—or has been too insensitive and preoccupied with itself to be able even to hear—the tales in which the central characters are women, such as *Mālañcamālā*, *Rūpbān*, *Madanamañjarī*, and *Nūr Bānu*.

As already observed, the narrative point of view of all four tales is that of the wife-mother. Very much like Lālmon in *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pīrs*, they are independent and politically savvy woman in a "take-charge" mode, "who step outside the confines of the home to tame a world" in a manner one expects of men in the "traditional" tales, "and at the same time manage to discharge all of her duties as a 'traditional' woman as well" (Stewart 2004, 6). The husband-son is very much a passive actor, as in the Indian reverse Oedipus tales. As Stewart

(2004, 7) observes in a different context, "one common thread in the complicated plots of these tales… is the response of resourceful women who find themselves plunged into situations that compromise them at very turn; they must find their way out of what is socially awkward if not truly unacceptable" (STEWART 2004, 7). It is thus that each of the four "[n]arrative allows for exploration with a kind of protection and impunity not granted in the impetuous real-life actors.… They say what cannot be said, poke fun at those in authority, play off of sexual tensions, and in many small ways challenge what passes as standard" (STEWART 2004, 4).

Despite these remarkable signs of feminine agency, there is an important qualification to be made. Although the husband-son is very much a passive actor, both Nūr Bānu and Madanamañjarī recede to the background after their husband-sons mature as adults. The reconciliation with the wife-mother in the first case is the outcome of the husband's volition but in the second, it is accidental. The point also not to be missed is that the tale of *Nūr Bānu* is known as the tale of *Delbar Kumār*—a strategic move that attempts to privilege the male. Further, because of Satya Pīr's divine intervention, Madanamañjarī's agency appears quite diminished when compared to Mālañcamālā. Even Rūpbān and Nūr Bānu appear diminutive when compared to her. Perhaps it is not irrelevant that all three tales of *Madanamañjarī*, *Rūpbān*, and *Nūr Bānu* were performed by males, unlike the tale of *Mālañcamālā*, which, as an oral narrative, was invariably told by old widows to women convalescing in the postnatal period. Betwixt and between these contradictory trends of agency and objectification, Judith Butler surfaces with her proposition on performativity of gender.

Moving beyond Erving GOFFMAN's argument (1959, 252–53) that "[t]he self…, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location [but] a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented [in everyday life]," Judith BUTLER (1988, 528) suggests "that this self is not only irretrievably 'outside,' constituted in social discourse, but that the ascription of interiority is itself a publically regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication." The gender identity of the self is continuously reinscribed as a societal norm by the performance of gender in everyday life by embodied agents "wearing" certain cultural signification. The performance is neither an innovation nor expressive of the self but is a part of a well-rehearsed script—"restored behaviors," as SCHECHNER (2002, 28) shows—which "survives the particular actors who make use of it" (BUTLER 1988, 526). Butler further argues "the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame [and] renders social laws explicit" (BUTLER 1988, 526).

As a political tool aimed at subverting the social laws, Butler privileges gender performances in non-theatrical contexts (where conventions that facilitate the demarcation of the "imaginary" from the "real" are absent) over those in theatrical contexts (protected as these are by conventions that announce "this is only a play"), because an act in the aforementioned category "is not contrasted with the real, but constitutes a reality that is in some sense new, a modality of gender that cannot readily be assimilated into the preexisting categories that regulate gender

reality"—a modality so disquieting and threatening that it cannot be dismissed as "just an act," as in the theater (Butler 1988, 527). However, the point she misses is that the performance of gender in a theatrical context is also a political tool—insidious and invisible—that can reinstate the normative by "empathy or osmosis" (Boal 1979, 113–15): by juxtaposing the "imaginary" and the "real," a theatrical performance can induce the spectators to enjoy the "imaginary" as the "real," and at the same time, interpellate them ideologically.

The ideological interpellation mobilized by the four tales operates as a twofold rap. Firstly, the responsibility of reinstating "the universal break between nature and culture" is delegated to the wife, who must nurture her husband as a child and, in the process, must remain utterly and unquestionably loyal to him alone. Sexual anxiety over the female body as a male property, suspicion against women, and the necessity of patriarchal control for the woman surface strongly in the insistence on a ten or twelve-year-old girl, who by implication is a virgin "unpolluted" by another male. Secondly, the mother is represented stereotypically as the one whose love is unconditional and who does not cognize exploitation and repression. Rūpbān, Mālañcamālā, or Madanamañjarī are not directly coerced; Nūr Bānu goes a step beyond by choosing to marry against the consent of her parents. As the stereotypical mother, they activate all the "correct" psychic buttons in the male spectators. Consequently, a critic of one of the filmed versions of *Rūpbān* comments, "[t]o tell you honestly, I wouldn't mind being Rahim at all" (Feroze 2005). Obviously he would not, because Rūpbān is a self-effacing, ever-bountiful, ever-giving, and entirely nurturing mother. This representation of the mother emphasizes the biological function that relegates women entirely to the "private sphere."

Unquestionably, watching a performance of Rūpbān may well constitute for some adult Bengali male "a dip into fantasy land" (Feroze 2005). What needs to be pointed out, though, is that in the collision of reality with fantasy, it is the fantasy that tends to prevail, "as the language and the conventions of the story shape not only what is thought but also what can be said, not only what is heard but what can be understood" (Pope, Quinn, and Wyer 1990, 445). Consequently, the ideology of the wife-mother can be so powerful that the failure to emulate her may result in a rejection of a woman by the society. It is thus that "ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (Althusser 1971, 173) by the play of gender as a performative tool in the theatrical context. It is because of such interpellations that biologically males as well as females operate with their gender identities in the ongoing performances of everyday life. Such interpellations are all the more durable when the performers in the theatrical context are biological males imposing masculine prerogatives in seeking to banish their unresolved or residual oedipal investment in socially sanctioned outlets.

However, because the four tales of *Mālañcamālā*, *Rūpbān*, *Madanamañjarī*, and *Nūr Bānu* also provide a conceptual space for "exploration with a kind of protection and impunity not granted in the impetuous real-life actors," because they say what cannot be said in everyday life, poke fun at authority, "play off of sexual

tensions, and in many small ways challenge what passes as standard" (STEWART 2004, 4), the performance of gender in the theatrical context is turned into a site of ongoing struggle, where the notion of gender is continuously being rendered permeable and porous as Mālañcamālā, Rūpbān, Madanamañjarī, and Nūr Bānu continue to conform, and at the same time flout the norm by dissidence, and thus attempt to extend the boundary of their conformity and seek newer "lines of flight" by testing the very notion of the norm. It is in this liminal condition "outside or on the periphery of everyday life" (TURNER 1974, 47) facilitated by the theatrical context that meta-commentaries of gender are continuously being rewritten as a consequence of the ongoing struggle between "indetermination" (that is, the wish, the possibility, that which "could be" or "should be") and "modes of determination" (that is, the normative structure which attempts to bind the society or parts thereof into a harmonious whole).

These meta-commentaries—"explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting"—"feed back into the *latent* processual structure of the social drama" (TURNER 1990, 16). Consequently, as Turner goes on to argue:

> Life itself… becomes a mirror held up to art, and the living now *perform* their lives, for the protagonists of a social drama, a "drama of living," have been equipped by aesthetic drama with some of their most salient opinions, imageries, tropes, and ideological perspectives. Neither mutual mirroring, life by art, art by life, is exact, for each is not a planar mirror but a matricial mirror; at each exchange something new is added and something old is lost or discarded.
>
> (TURNER 1990, 17)

In this feedback loop between performance in daily life and theater (see figure 1.3 in TURNER 1990, 17), as the notion of gender is being continuously reformulated in a social world that is already always "in becoming" (TURNER 1974, 24), it is not inconsequential that both Freud with his conquistadorial agenda tucked up in his oedipal mechanics, and Bose with his postcolonial resistance lurking beneath his "wish to be female," aim decisively at restoring and strengthening a masculine identity. It is not inconsequential because despite Freud, Bose, and others, Mālañcamālā, Rūpbān, Madanamañjarī, and Nūr Bānu continue to provoke the Bengalis in many small ways to test the limit of what passes as the standard notion of gender in living everyday. In the interstices generated as a result of the struggle they embody, BUTLER (1988, 522) does not fail to insert the claim that "gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all."

NOTES

1. Interested readers may access the tale of *Mālañcamālā* in SEN (1920, 267–322) who narrates it in English, or in MAJUMDAR (1388, 51–220) for the Bengali version.

2. In 1994, the tale of *Rūpbān* was produced in the form of *Jātrā* and travelled to the London Festival of Bangladesh to cater to the expatriate Bangladeshi community living in Britain. In 1996, *Rūpbān* appeared on the proscenium stage in a play rewritten by Hiren Dey

as *Rūpbhān* (রূপভান), directed by Quamruzzaman Runu, and produced by a theater group in Dhaka called Theater (Bailey Road). Both the spectators and performers were urban and mostly from the middle class, although the production retained the tale summarized above as well as substantial characteristics of *Jātrā*. The film versions of the tale are *Rūpbān* (রূপবান) directed by Salahuddin in 1965, *Rahim Bādśā O Rūpbān Kanyā* (রহিম বাদশা ও রূপবান কন্যা) directed by Safdar Ali Bhuiyan in 1966, Salahuddin's remaking of *Rūpbān* in Urdu (1966), and Ibne Mizan's *Ābār Banabāse Rūpbān* (আবার বনবাসে রূপবান, lit. Rūpbān Exiled Again) as a sequel to the tale of Rūpbān where she is banished to the forest by Rahim Bādśā (1966); *Rūpbāner Rūpkathā* (রূপবানের রূপকথা, lit. the Fairytale of Rūpbān) directed by E. R. Khan (1968), *Raṅgin Rūpbān* (রঙ্গিন রূপবান, lit. Rūpbān in Color) directed by Azizur Rahman (1985), *Rūpbāner Saṅsar* (রূপবানের সংসার, Rūpbān's Domestic Life) by Sirajul Islam (c. 1988), and *Ajker Rūpbān* (আজকের রূপবান, lit. Today's Rūpbān) directed by Chotku Ahmed and Sanwar Morshed (2005). Some of these films were also shown on state-run and private television channels.

3. This option appears to contradict Delbar's experience. When his biological mother dies and his father Kaṭak Saodāgar remarries, Delbar falls victim to the stepmother's scorn and is forced to leave home. After Kaṭak Saodāgar returns home with Delbar, he banishes her. Despite this history of problems with two matrimonial partners that his father had, Delbar opts for polygamy.

4. One of these would definitely be the *Padmā-purāṇ* or the *Manasā-maṅgal* in which a female deity of the serpents (Manasā) wages war against Čād Saodāgar, who represents not only the ideal of masculinity unparalleled in the entire medieval Bengali literature but also the entire Hindu society of the medieval age (Bhattacharyya 1989, 419–22). Importantly, Behulā is not older than her husband when she is married, but sails with his dead body to the heavenly abode of Śiva, gives a dance performance to appease him, and has the serpent deity revive her husband.

5. In all fairness to Freud, it must be added that the quotation is not beyond dispute, as Elms (2001, 84–89) argues. But then, it is immaterial whether Freud actually asked the question. The fact that the question has gained wide currency implies that it reflects a bemused reaction to patriarchal assumptions regarding women. In this case, Freud operates only as a hinge that redeems the question with respectability.

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