

Chasma Kholo – Golpo Balo

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Abstract

In this article I focus on a selection of prose by Abanindranath Tagore and the genealogy of reading *roopkatha* or fabled tales. In the initial part of the essay I discuss nineteenth-century journals related to children's literature. In this part there is a deliberation on how far *roopkatha* was conceived as children's entertainment and how far they had an underlying moralizing tendency. Many authors of Bengali Literature chose *roopkatha* as a means of self-expressions. In the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth century in the hands of Rabindranath *roopkatha* became a medium of fullest creativity and self-expression. As in fairy tales of Europe of the time, an attempt to present social history through the lens of folkloric literature could be noticed here as well. In the second part of the paper I establish the argument that collecting folklores from the towns and villages of Bengal, that began under the leadership of Tagore and Dinesh Chandra Sen, as an 'anthologizing activity' may be discerned as a new problematic trajectory for the history of *roopkatha*.

Abanindranath Tagore appeared as a major icon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the discourse of *roopkatha*; he not only influenced the narrative, but affected the very tone, image and flavour that constituted the ambience of *roopkatha*. Unlike Rabindranath, he would remain entranced in a world of his own, that thrived on the incredible, baffling and carnivalesque 'willing suspension of disbelief.' He obliterated anything that had the appearance of concrete information! He detested a narrative that even remotely seemed to be didactic. In place of design he preferred story-telling, suggestive of an oral style. Abanindranath sustained the trend, created by Trailakyanath Mukhopadhyay in his novel *Kankabati* which had entirely overturned the readers' sense of rationality. Thus fiction earlier considered only for children, became oriented to the ubiquitous reader irrespective of age. Abanindranath wrote for *that* reader solely, who eternally waited for the quirky with an eye of faith in an imaginative frame of mind.

Key words: *roopkatha*, Abanindranath Tagore, children's literature, folklore, carnivalesque