

Examining the Personal Accounts of Takeda and Qureshi as Literature and History

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Abstract: The paper analyses the early twentieth century published travelogue of Takeda and unpublished memoir of Qureshi to show the trade connections between the Indians and the Japanese, the social and trade networks and the rhetoric of a travelogue and a memoir. Both the accounts present historical evidence regarding Japanese society and Diasporic movement and yet rely heavily on literary devices such as point of view, first person account and emotion. Together they add new evidence to the history of the early and mid-twentieth century dealing with Japanese society and Indian politics.

Keywords: Hariprabha Mullick Takeda, Ghulam Ahmad Qureshi, Literature and history, Indian and Japanese.

The paper examines the personal travel accounts of two Indians who portray the society and institutions of early modern Japan both as literature and history. Recently postmodern scholars have argued over the collapsing boundary between literature and history and some have even proposed the redundancy of history (White 1-5). The paper assumes that personal accounts such as travelogues, diaries and memoirs are objective representations of the past and therefore a part of historical facts using creative texts,

narrative and rhetorical devices to convince the reader.

The paper examines the travelogue of Hariprabha Mullick Takeda (1890-1972) and unpublished memoir of Ghulam Ahmad Qureshi (1915-1990) to shed light on the Indian trade Diaspora in Japan during the early twentieth century. Though Muslim, Parsi and Sindhi traders who came to Yokohama and Kobe during the 1870s and 1890s were large, it was the Indian intellectuals, royal family and travelers, who left behind written accounts of lived life during this period. While some like Nawab Hamid Ali Khan (1875-1930) visited Japan for sightseeing and published their travelogue in 1896, a majority of travel writers were seeking political independence, economic progress or Japanese modernization (Green 615). Their visits were often highlighted by local newspapers and documented in their own writings, which help us to recreate the past.

Though hardly recorded, the Indian traders were more prolific during the late nineteenth century. In this sense the accounts of Takeda and Qureshi provide us with the encounter with the Japanese culture and Indian Diasporic mobility. Takeda, a Bengali married to a Japanese trader in Dacca, and Qureshi from a Yokohama trading family joining INA in the twentieth century, constitute the Indian trade Diaspora of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Though their works are neither standard nor representative history, their writings reflect their unique perceptions about Japanese society, customs and life during this period.

Bangamahilar Japan Yatra: A Travelogue of Hariprabha Takeda

Hariprabha Takeda was from the orthodox Brahmo Samaj Mullick family of Dacca, who married a Japanese migrant, Uemon Takeda in 1906. Since 1902, Uemon Takeda worked in a soap factory around the Bay of Bengal and immediately afterwards

established his own soap factory in Girigram, Dacca. With the national policy of promoting new industries in Japan, Kobe and Osaka started flourishing as the producer of light industrial goods including soap and the rapid expansion of intra-Asia trade led some pioneer Japanese to venture abroad as Uemon Takeda did, though the marriage with a foreigner was uncommon both in India and Japan.

Takeda's travelogue cum socio-history memoir, *Bangamahilar Japan Yatra* or *A Bengali Lady's Visit to Japan*, was on her four months sojourn from Dacca to Japan from November 1912 to May 1913,¹ originally written as a half-demi size 64 page travelogue in Bengali and published in 1915 in Dacca.² As Japan lifted the travel restrictions for foreigners only a decade before their visit to Japan in 1899, Takeda was one of the earliest foreigners to travel and explore Japan beyond the foreign settlements in major ports of Japan. Her account ranges from sea voyages, family gatherings, interaction with neighbors, visit to Nikko, Ueno and Imperial Palace, social manners, kimono wearing, wooden house architecture, fear of fire, visiting temples, describing education for women, marriage rituals, women's hair styles, use of tissue paper instead of handkerchiefs, difficulty of learning Japanese script, rice cleaning, mechanical tools and bathing rituals.

In contrast to other anti-imperialist and reformist accounts from Bengal and Hydearabad,³ Takeda's account presents a wide variety of Japanese social and cultural practices. It is unique in presenting the global trade diasporic movements of the

twentieth century during the rapid modernization in Japan, the perspective of Bengali Brahman women of the period and an insider's account of lived life in Japan.

The travelogue begins with the short description of Takeda's eagerness to meet her in-laws in Japan some day, the long aspired wish since her marriage, which was about to be fulfilled. On 30th October 1912, the trip to Japan was formally decided and she started writing the record of the journey to Japan. The Takeda family took a local ship from Naranyanganj port to Goalanda where they changed to a train to Calcutta. In Calcutta they stayed with Shimizu families who provided boarding and lodging and Hattori families helped them buy underwear and gloves and food for their journey such as biscuits. From Calcutta, they went on to a cargo ship that had converted some space for passengers. It took over forty days from Calcutta to Kobe, via ports of Rangoon (where they stayed with Hariprabha's schoolmate), Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and Moji, before visiting her in-laws in the village in Nagoya. It is possible to see a large diasporic network of friends the Takeda family had and used their help.

The motive of the journey to Japan for Hariprabha Takeda was somewhat unique as it was not for a political purpose or tourism but to visit her in-laws and to seek their blessings. However she does bring in her identity as a Bengali Brahmin and the popular discourses that she might have encountered regarding nation and identity. Her prejudices and biases are reflected in her description and observation of social manners and customs and the understanding of class structure in Japan. Being a devout Brahma Samaji her family conducted two farewell ceremonies before her departure for her protection and self-development; one in the Brahma Samaj temple in Girigram Dacca

and the other in her own house. The Raja Bahadur of Dinajpur granted 25 taka before her departure to Japan as well.

When she observed the education system at women's schools for young girls in Tokyo she admired the opportunities available there and wrote about the wide varieties of humanistic and scientific disciplines such as Chemistry, Botany, Geography, gymnastic exercises together with cooking, washing, cleaning, gardening, sewing, music, art, moral education and English available for them. She was appreciative of such opportunity, writing that there seems to be all possible opportunities given to them to become complete human beings for the nation through such an education system.

Such a viewpoint is shared in other descriptions too; for instance in her writing on a day of the Japanese women. Takeda describes that women in Japan begin a day's work by opening the doors of the house, folding beddings before making breakfast and sending children to school. During daytime, some women work outside as well as completing household chores and bringing wages for the family. To her surprise, there is no objection or hesitation among women in having an occupation. Women in this country, she continues, whether rich or poor do not spend more than twelve hours to cook, eat and sleep. The rest of the time is used for important personal and social work such as self, family, and progress of the nation.

Her travelogue after arriving in Japan hardly records conversation, however, her impression and opinion on the social norms and habits in Japan are expressly written. Based on the detailed description of her observation of scenery and behaviors of people,

the account provides rich information of Japan from the perspective of a Bengali Brahmo woman.

Hariprabha also shows us an insider's perspective of the Japanese society with quite descriptive and visual representation of scenery, attire and behavior. For example, she provides an in-depth analysis of the *ho-ji* or a Buddhist service conducted by the parents-in-law in celebrating the safe return of the son and his bride. The *ho-ji* ceremony, which started by taking a picture of sixty relatives, including 12 monks and their family wearing good quality expensive attire was conducted in the morning, afternoon and the next day with four hour long prayer with all the monks reciting the sutra followed by the male family members reciting the sutra together. Food was provided to the family and neighbors during the *ho-ji*, but as the numbers unexpectedly became large and became three hundred or four hundred, as people expected to see Hariprabha, donation was requested and 15-6 yen (equivalent to 23-24 rupees) were collected even though each gave a little. The money collected was given to the monks. Being in the curious crowd during *ho-ji* made her feel exhausted and her brother-in-law had to take her inside the house. Though she details her experience in a Japanese household, it is possible to see that she is treated as a foreign guest.

As can be seen from above, Takeda's socio-cultural travelogue eloquently describes the social customs of Japan and shows an interesting narrative of the experience of the early trade diaspora. Her writing is not strictly written in a diary format as she skips dates and often summarizes and comments on events which may not have taken place on that day. Though her travelogue is primarily social and personal and does not mention about her

husband's business, it does give a picture of the Japanese trade network in South and East Asia.

G. A. Qureshi's Unpublished Memoir

The unpublished work of Qureshi has many personal reactions about his life in Japan, the INA, travel to Harbin, his identity as a Muslim, and capture in the Red Fort at Delhi. The memoir is not uniformly written and skips dates and years but highlights the reactions of Indians living abroad and their negative perceptions of leaders involved in India's freedom struggle. It is an important account of India's trading Diaspora involved in the political and social struggles of their mother country. Written half a century after Takeda's travelogue, a memoir by Qureshi sheds light on the experience in Japan as an Indian growing up in Japan.

The manuscript runs into 41 pages and covers his early childhood in the 1910s to his family memories in the 1940s, followed by the 1950s when he devoted himself to the freedom struggle movement and left Japan. The original manuscript was in the possession of his relatives in Japan but unfortunately the latter half was lost and the script covers the time only till the 1940s. It is uncertain when exactly this manuscript was written but as the usage of the term "Bangladesh" suggests, it was written after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Qureshi was 56 in 1971 so it can be assumed that this manuscript was written during the later part of his life as his own biographic memoir.

Qureshi was born in Kanagawa, Japan, as the grandson of an Indian merchant, Abdool

Kaza, who married a Japanese lady from a large trade family. Kaza was originally from Madras and started trade business in Yokohama and Kobe from the mid-1890s dealing with Japanese curios and indigo trade and succeeded reasonably and later expanded the business between Japan, India, China and Russia. Though Kaza became a Japanese citizen he still wanted to maintain his Indian roots and sought an Indian trader, Said Qureshi (father of G. A. Qureshi) for his daughter's hand in marriage.

Sharing both Indian and Japanese connections, Qureshi involved himself in the trade across borders and learnt Japanese, English, French and Russian. As his grandfather was one of the earliest Indian Muslims to settle in Japan and hosted the gatherings of Indians, Qureshi as a boy was surrounded by a "good many Indian revolutionaries" who had a "high revolutionary spirit" such as Rash Bihari Bose, Raja Mahindra Pratap and Bal-u-Guatta who frequently gathered at his (grandfather's) house for secret meetings. He himself was motivated to get involved in the freedom struggle and in 1942, at the age of 27, joined the Indian freedom struggle movement.

He joined in the South Asia Movement from Japan, became the director of the Swar Youngmens' Training Institute (S. Y. T. I.) in 1942 and then worked as a personal staff for S. C. Bose as he could speak multiple languages. This memoir is interesting, though short and incomplete, in shedding light on pre-war commerce by Indians from Japan to India and to Harbin; the experience of an Indian individual who was drawn into the freedom struggle, and the activities of INA members in Japan in pre and during the Wars.

The memoir of Qureshi has four major concerns that are, complicated family issues, the freedom struggle involvement, brief commentaries about Indian Political leaders and women in his life. Qureshi's writing does not follow a clear format of a diary and apart from rough categorization of months and / or years, no chronology is maintained and therefore it is hard to place a cause and effect narrative on Qureshi's writing. Undoubtedly it falls into the category of a memoir with a political bias. Qureshi's memoir is often interspersed with personal and emotional appeals to the readers imbued with his feelings and reactions. Takeda is better written perhaps as it was later edited for publication. Qureshi's memoir was never intended to be published and till date has not been published.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the beginning, the diary and the memoir create a figural realism which falls between history and literature and uses the methods of both. They are neither purely imaginative nor completely factual. However they do provide an individual point of view to understand the social and political reality with an overarching cause and effect narrative. While Takeda's travelogue covers the year 1905 while Qureshi's memoir covers forty years. Both Takeda and Qureshi's accounts weave a literary and historical narrative which holds our interest as part of lived experience.

Notes

- ¹. This travelogue is about her first journey, though she travelled later to Japan in 1924 and 1941 during which she met Rashbehari Bose and Subhas Chandra Bose who were present in Japan, and later works as a war correspondent on

behalf of the Azad Hind Fauj.

2. The Japanese translation consists of 26 pages and is kept in the Kobe City Archives (*Kobe-shi Monjokan*).
3. See Green (2013) for the varied writings on the visit to Japan with an anti-imperialist gaze and Aqeel (2010) for the educational reform of Hyderabad.

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