Bangalla to Bengal, Phantom to Aranyadeb: Colonial Transitions and Translations

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Abstract

When Phantom comics got translated into Bengali, the 'viewders' (a portmanteau of viewers and readers since comics reading is an activity which requires both reading and viewing at the same time) were introduced to a hitherto unseen world of exotic jungles, spandex-clad supernatural superheroes, along with their reintroduction with a form of entertainment that was laced with colonial-hegemonic themes and undercurrents. While neocolonial influences take several forms of re-penetration in the erstwhile colonies (Nkrumah, 1965) the most apparently innocent medium might be comics (Sarkar, 2020 p. 120). This paper will analyse selected newspaper strips, Anandabazar Patrika from March 2002 to May 2010 of Phantom comics translated into Bengali to question the re-iteration of pro-colonial perspectives inside them via Post-Colonial critical discourse analysis as established by Dipesh Chakraborty and Stuart Hall among others. The liberalisation push of the 90s provided rich dividends to the Indian markets after their encounters with foreign agencies which provided a context for the burgeoning of translated texts. The implications of the series of events created a market for foreign-produced comics in India. They reinforced the image of the white super-bodied European male saviour in the psyche of the Bengalis.

Keywords: Translation, Transition, Post Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism, Decolonisation.

Introduction

In India, language has been at the core of many post-colonial conflicts and considerations and as Stuart Hall rightly points out that

the choice of language often compels identity formation (Hall, 1999, p. 208). In fact, a whole new country named Bangladesh came into existence (a genocide and a war later) when one linguistic community tried to hegemonise another. Again as Ngugi Wa Thiong'O affirms, "Language,...is both a means of communication and a carrier of the culture" (Thiong'O, 1994, p. 13) and if a nation or a power (or a product) gains control over a language then the control extends to the people who speak the language as well as Bourdieu agrees, "Language is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power" (Bourdieu, p. 648). One of the most unlikely tools for such an exercise is the comic books/strips. They reach a very large and heterogeneous audience (especially in West Bengal) which has a population of children and adolescents as well as adults (Indian 2019, 40.) Kevin Patrick agrees, "Moreover, the Phantom (comics) has become an entrenched part of the everyday, vernacular culture of Australia, Sweden, and India" (2017, p. 4). This paper aims to investigate how the Bengali translations of Phantom comic strips[1] from English published in Anandabazar Patrika (2002 to 2010) can be seen as carriers of neo-colonial narratives by preserving and disseminating colonial themes through vernacular language, visual motifs and cultural references within a post-colonial framework of analysis. The paper will negotiate the texts with the following critical/analytical tools – language and cultural control (Ngugi Wa Thing'O), lack thesis (Dipesh Chakrabarty), hegemony and cultural reproduction (Stuart Hall), deconstruction via postcolonial and visual ideology formation and sequential narrative theories of representation of sounds (Neil Cohn and Charles Hatfield). The Phantom (also known as the Ghost Who Walks) was created by Lee Falk (Leon Harrison Gross, 1911 - 1999) for King Features Syndicate, USA (a division of Hearst Corporation) and first published on 17th February 1936 in *The New York Journal*, USA. It premiered in colour in the Sunday Supplement of the Newspaper (including a few other newspapers) on 28th May 1939. The comic strip is still running with Tony DePaul as the writer and Mike

[1] Given the short scope of the chapter/paper will deal only with Newspaper comic strips and not with any other format of publication.

Manley (weekdays) and Terry Betty (Sundays) as the joint illustrators. Besides being published in newspapers in sixty-odd countries as of June 2024 it is still published in thirteen newspapers (including dailies and Sunday editions) in the USA alone and five dailies in India (including Bengali and other vernacular versions) (The Phantom, 2024).

Translated versions of Phantom comic strips appeared in the *Anandabazar Patrika* (a daily newspaper in West Bengal) in the 1950s and have been running till June 2024. Besides being published in Hindi (*Navabharat*), Malayalam (*Malaya Manorama*), Marathi (Navshakti), Gujarati (*Bombay Samachar*), Tamil (Maalaimalar) at various periods ranging from the 1980s to 2024, Phantom comic strips and whole pages were/are also published in various popular magazines like *Desh* (1970s-1993). Phantom reached more readers in India through the vernacular newspaper than with the help of their English counterparts (see footnote 1). However, though the bottle had changed, the wine remained the same. Early Phantom comic strips featured in American newspapers often carried themes that were subtly reinforcing the colonial narratives (Chakrabarty, 2000). These strips were translated (sometimes word to word) into Bengali and other regional languages in India. Hence, this paper argues that these products/texts subtly led to the internalization of the colonial discourse through their long-running presence in the Bengali community. When Phantom comics got translated into Bengali, the 'viewders' were introduced to a hitherto unseen world of exotic jungles, spandex-clad supernatural superheroes along with their reintroduction with a form of entertainment that was laced with colonial - hegemonic themes and undercurrents.

Contexts of Translations

While the Left government in West Bengal was gaining ground in the national sphere (in the first decade of the present century), on a larger scale, the liberalization push initiated in the 90s by the Indian economy was providing rich dividends to the Indian markets after their encounters with foreign agencies. This provided a suitable context for the burgeoning of the translated texts. Another context was the Left Front's decision (1983) (West Bengal 1981) to

discontinue studying English as a subject at the primary level (I to IV) and start English from standard five in government schools on the recommendation of Prof. Himangshu Bimal Majumdar Commission (1974-79) (Maity & Mondal, 2024, p. 111). English was re-introduced as a compulsory language in primary schools in 2004. Of course, the paper does not claim that it was the policy of the Left Government that led directly to the translation and publication of the Phantom strips in Bengali but an indication of the same could be found in the fact that the circulation of Ananda Bazar Patrika went from 1,77,242 in 1966 (Ministry of Information, 1967, p. 251) to 4,08,010 in 1983 (Thakore, 1983, p. 9). The readers who read the comic strips wanted them in Bengali then as well as in English. This provided additional Bengali-only readers of comics and the comics creators were running short of stories. The translations helped. This had far-reaching implications for the reading population of the state. The use of English as a language of reading declined. It gave a boost to the translated comic strips that appeared in the *Anandabazar Patrika*. The reading base of the strips as well as the comic books enlarged over time. This area of a subculture where the knowledge about Aranyadeb (Phantom's Bengali name) put the Bengali medium-educated comics aficionado at par with their convent-educated, English-reading and speaking peers. Tintin, Asterix & Obelisk, Mandrake etc. did the same for the readers (young or otherwise). The Western world of wonder was now available to be read, understood and internalized by the native population. Comics created by Narayan Debnath were popular but they did not provide the juice that Phantom did. While Debnath's themes were chiefly centred upon the Bengali characters set against Kolkata or the mofussils, Phantom comic strips provided a glimpse of a different world (Rao, 2001, p. 38).

The implications of the series of events created a market for foreign-produced comics in India. They reinforced the image of the white super-bodied European male saviour in the psyche of the Bengalis. Further, these texts now available to the vernacular readers put them at par with their convent-educated counterparts as far as nerd knowledge related to the subculture of comics was concerned. Thus, the Bengali language served mainly as a linguistic Trojan

Horse to re-infiltrate the yet untouched corners of the Bengali community. It is in this context that the texts, namely *The Ghost Pirates* (March 2002 to July 2002), *The Animal Collector* (July 2002 to November 2002), and *Hunt for the Unknown Commander* (January 2010 to May 2010) etc. will be interrogated via the critical frameworks established by Dipesh Chakraborty, and Stuart Hall among others as mentioned above.

Messages in the Pages

While language is generational, colonial hegemony is also handed down to posterity and Phantom's fight against crime is also generational (Aman, 2020, p. 29). Thus, in the very spine of the Phantom story, the germs of neo/pro-colonial ideas are found plenty. The neocolonial messages in the cheap newsprints came to be embedded in various motifs or symbolically charged images. We shall analyse a number of them here.

One of the 'good' things that the British taught us was the value of time as if before them we did not understand time or its value in our daily chores! Dipesh Chakraborty in his book *Provincializing Europe* (2000) quotes, "It is because of this quality (to do things at the right time) that the English get the time to do so much." (2008, p. 225). It reflects Phantom's insistence on timeliness in *The Hunt for the Unknown Commander* (English text, page 18, first panel and Bengali text, page 20, first panel).

Phantom rides a horse named Hero. Interestingly, the name of the horse remained unchanged in the Bengali Newspaper strips while the name of the horse (Toofan in Hindi) and the dog (Shera in Hindi) underwent changes when the strips were translated into other Indian languages. Horses were introduced in Africa/India by foreigners (Danino, 2006, p. 1). Horses are common animals for Europeans. Perpetuating an icon, though in the form of an animal can reinforce the image of the colonizer as familiar. We usually accept whatever becomes familiar. Neocolonial strategies work best when they are invisible and more insidiously - familiar (Nye, 2004, p. 7). Along with the horse, we might become familiar with the horse rider too. The idea of familiarity enters into another paradigm of mytho-social

space when we take into consideration the idea of the gods having a stead. For example, one of the most popular deities among Bengalis is Durga, she has a lion for a stead. The Bengali readers might associate the image of Phantom with a local deity of the jungles. After all, in Bengali Phantom is called Aranya Deb (which translates to the deity of the jungle). The horse which was not popular in the ancient Indian (Bengali) myths can now be associated with a deity from the West. Further, when Phantom was first found on the shores of Bangalla the pygmies treated him, ". . . almost like a god." (Falk, 1936, p. 133). Inspired by the stories he heard from the Bandar tribals Christopher (the first Phantom) made a costume that resembled the Demon God of the Wasaka (Barry, 1975, p. 10). The Wasaka were so shocked to see their God come alive that they set free all the Bandars in their custody (*The First Phantom* 18th May 1975 to 10th August 1975). The parallelism of a foreign superhero with a local deity goes a long way to create a space of neocolonial cultural entrenchment (Aman, 2020, p. 33). Thus, as Christopher used the local deity as a tool to challenge and weaken the physically numerous and powerful tribe, the translations use the Bengali language to function as a changeling trying to infiltrate the popular psyche. Today the horse is replaced by other ubiquitous products like mobile phones (I Phones), laptops (Apple), bikes (KTM) and other foreign-produced items where the product often becomes inseparable from the (western) user.

Again, in the story, *The Ghost Pirates* (March 2002 to July 2002) local people, even the authorities are superstitious. Though Mawitaan, a port in Bangalla is a place of commerce and culture there is still a fog of mystery around it. This is an unmistakable post-colonial view. They come to believe that the pirates attacking them are indeed ghosts. It takes a logical-minded European saviour to unravel the mystery. Aman points out, "The Phantom" among other Jungle heroes like Tarzan, "championed the idea of one man imposing order on a chaotic land" (Aman, 2020, p. 26). Thus, the Phantom is both a saviour and a custodian. Though the wise man (the reason as to how he knows, remains shrouded in mystery) of the jungle, Mozz, did point Phantom in the right direction. This might seem innocent especially when it is portrayed in a comic strip

because though the presence of pro-colonial or neo-colonial discourse in mainstream literature has been thoroughly studied over time yet, as Aman informs us, "comics have received similar attention less often" (Aman, 2020, p. 26). The repeated reinforcement of this idea gets hardwired into the impressionable minds of the young readers (who, though not sole consumers of comic strips, do form a major chunk of the same) ("Tariff Board Inquiry", 1946). In the same text (*The Ghost Pirates*), Devil sees 'something' in English (page 06) and in Bengali Devil sees something ominous (p. 30). One of the ways in which language is acquired is through repetition (Lester). When repetitions are padded with visual aids then the effect is more profound. On one hand while Phantom, a Western superhero, emerges as logical-minded, scientific and rational, on the other hand, the fact that we are not sure as to how Mozz could direct Phantom in the right direction is indicative of the Western ". . . tendency to read Indian (oriental) history in terms of a lack, an absence or an incompleteness that translates into "inadequacy". . ." (Chakraborty, 2000, p. 32). Contrastingly, Phantom and his ancestors are obsessed with record keeping in tune with the western practice of documentation. This epistemological inheritance is learnt subtly by the Indian (Bengali) reader who realizes that her/his traditional techniques of mnemonic genealogies are inadequate. Inadequacies often take the form of an infection. The native reader interrogates other practices associated with reading or remembering at first and then they gradually question the whole order of things thinking that difference in cultural practices warrants critical judgements against the native way of life. For example, the absence of the /ə/ sound (schwa) in Bengali makes a Bengali pronounce 'son' as /sɔn/ and not /sən/. To many this is wrong and anybody who cannot pronounce the 'right' sounds is ridiculed. Ridiculing leads to a loss of confidence among the speakers (Thiong'O) and they might try to replace the Bengali /ɔ/ sound with the English /ə/ sound, resulting in perhaps the loss of an entire vowel sound in a language.

The following image taken from the comic strip named *The Animal Collector* (*the Ark*) (July 16th 2002 to November 27th 2002) shows Phantom's pet tiger from Eden Island roaring in Bengali.

While the roar of the tiger takes away much of the ferocity of the kingly beast (the national animal of India), the sound is closer (roar is distant approximation of the tiger's call) to the actual call of the feline except that the call - 'haaluum' (an approximation of the sound ('aauumm', a deep yet resonant guttural sound) is used when the tiger/tigress declares its boundary to other tigers and other animals. The tiger does not attack by declaring its position. The sound 'haaluum' is considered to be a watered-down version of the tiger's call (Ray, 2008). The English version makes the stalking tiger ambush Phantom and Diana in a 'growl'.

Figure 1: George Oleson (Penciler) and Keith Williams (inker), The Animal Collector (the Ark), Anandabazar Patrika, July 16th 2002 to November 27th 2002. Page 21.

Figure 1 alt text: A tiger is attacking Phantom, while a dialogue in Bengali is displayed in the image. The text exclaims "হালুম!!!" (interpreted as a tiger's roar or sound), and the speech bubble says, "ডায়না! পিছিয়ে এসো!" which means "Daina! Step back!" in English.

The scene is intense and action-packed, with the tiger in a dominant position and the Phantom seemingly in danger.

The fierce animals in Eden (a lion named Fluffy!) are submissive to both Phantom and Diana. After all, Diana too is an adventurous explorer. A type from colonial visitors to the Orient. Tiger, lion and chimpanzee represent Asia and Africa. Phantom thus lords over both these continents just like the 19th-century Europeans did. Strangely, chimpanzees and the other two predators live in peace on the island named Eden. In Bengali, there is a proverb (তার প্রতাপে বাঘে গরু তে একই ঘাট এ জল খায়।) which means that a person has such prowess and influence that predators and prey drink from the same water hole without any trouble. The British masters in India too attracted similar obedience from the natives. Robert Aman informs, "In addition to ruling the humans in the jungle—the locals are careful not to break the Phantom's declared peace, a Pax Romana in the tropics—the Phantom holds authority over the animal world: In his own island playground at Eden, he has taught carnivorous animals not to eat each other" (Aman, 2020, p. 25). The pristineness of the island reflects upon the utopian-Biblical Garden of Eden where Diana and Phantom are playing the roles of Eve and Adam respectively. This place reeks of colonial nostalgia for a safe haven of all colonial mega dreams shared by the Jungian 'connected consciousnesses' of the Western people who were much in love with the sunny tropical regions of the east as a contrast to their cold climes.

Yet like the mythical Eden, this Eden too is infiltrated by outsiders and this disturbance reflects how the entry of the colonialists disturbed the natives. The following image Mirrors the exploitation carried out by the European colonialists by forceful extraction of valuable products and items from native places. In this story, the antagonists are stealing exotic animals from the island as displayed in the following image.

Figure 2: George Oleson (Penciler) and Keith Williams (inker), The Animal Collector (the Ark). King Features, 2001. Page 07.

Figure 2 alt text: A helicopter is depicted lifting antelopes using a harness, while Phantom looks on in shock. The dialogue in the speech bubble reads, "!!! THEY ARE STEALING THOSE ANTELOPES! -- EXTINCT ON THE MAINLAND!" This suggests the hero is witnessing a crime involving the theft of rare or endangered animals.

Phantom saves the indigenous animals and becomes once again the messiah of Bangalla. It is not only Phantom who fights for the 'poor' and 'helpless' animals but his friends too (Aron) have laid down their lives for the cause. The following image confirms the white European/American as a warrior 'for' the 'native' animals against persons of pronounced African descent. Without a proper

context, this image could very well be considered extracted from an illustrated rendition of European physical torture on the native African population where the white master is punching an African native (unmistakably 'evil') for a mistake while carrying out his duties against the backdrop of the unmistakable 'camps' owned by the appropriately dressed white man.

Figure 3: George Oleson (Penciler) Keith Williams (inker). The Animal Collector. (the Ark). King Features, 2001. Page 03.

Figure 3 alt text: This image shows a character with a rugged, aged appearance, possibly a seasoned fighter or warrior, clenching his fist with determination. He wears a hat, possibly suggesting an explorer or adventurer persona. The speech bubble reads: "EVEN IN

OLD AGE, HE WAS FEARLESS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST EVIL!" This statement highlights the character's resilience and courage, even in the later stages of life, indicating his continued commitment to battling injustice or malevolence.

Eden hosts a primitive man (Hij). Hij reinforces the image of an island as stuck in the past, timeless and hence exotic. In the Western discourse India is primitive (interestingly the pygmy community of Bangalla are called Bandars, which translates into monkeys in both Bengali and Hindi). According to the West, we Indians live in perpetual decay and regression. Today the US (and NATO) has adopted the role of the demigod of democracy. They topple governments at will in the name of establishment of democracy (as in the case of Iran, Iraq and Venezuela). After toppling a government, they come with aids and the philosophy of democracy which is a thin veneer of their neocolonial exploitative ploys. In the strip under discussion, the animals were first taken to an airplane which doubled up as a ship. The ship was the vehicle for the slave trade as well. It was the ships that helped the Europeans navigate their way to India and other places they 'discovered'. Through this struggle where Phantom ultimately saves the day, the image of the benevolent colonizer is provided with a firm ground. Aman attests, concerning various other strips including this, "the plot nonetheless still offers a prime example of what is conceptualized as a "white savior complex" (Aman, 2020, p. 32).

Myths are most often transmitted through languages (Cook, 1980). Just as horses were not native to India, unicorns were never really a part of Indian myths. Here in *The Animal Collector,* the image of a Western mythological animal is incorporated into the popular consciousness of the East. Another biblical myth of Noah has been introduced. We can find subtle indoctrination through comics. This indoctrination is done with the help of incorporations of myths. Through the myths, culture (foreign) also seeps into the collective consciousness of the natives. The colonial missionaries too have been trying to do this for a long time but this is a more subtle way to do it. While direct exposure to English language comic strips might have found some resistance, when the white Western myths are channelised via a local language, the room of doubt

decreases with increasing room for acceptance. Also, tigers are not native to Africa. The fact that these animals are representatives of their nationalities and geographical regions are kept together and protected by Phantom gives the message that the Whites will protect the regions in times to come. For example, America often interferes in all the affairs (internal) of Africa and the Middle East (Chimbi, 2024). An example of a White man's burden to forcefully meddle with the natural order of things. Something that the US is still at. This discourse is reinforced through these images which find greater penetration since they are in vernacular. Makarand Paranjape argues that the Phantom represented a fusion of the British imperial adventure story and the "American comic-book fantasies of the superhero," which produced a "composite myth that combines the older declining imperialism of the British with the newer, incipient imperialism of the US" (p. 12).

When the antagonist, Noah Von Belon (conveniently a German) kidnaps Diana Phantom asks the President of Bangalla to lend him a fighter jet to force Von's aeroplane to land. Thus, a westerner uses national resources to rescue his wife. Would they do the same for indigenous people? Further, when a foreigner provides an airplane to the Indigenous people for medical emergency purposes, the missionary activities which were and still are a part of pro-colonial and neo-colonial activity are normalized for the Bengali readers. While many elderly Bengalis still believe that Bengal prospered under British rule, (Latif, 2021) the Western discourse does display the ubiquitous Indian railway as a 'gift' from the departing colonialists.

Colonial Translation and Tradition

The Bengali into which English has been translated is rather too bookish and overly formal. The Bengali translation uses too formal words and repeatedly whereas the English version uses colloquial language. For example - "Time for "Ghosts" to go "bump" in the night" (Olsen, 2001, p. 9) becomes in Bengali - "রাত্রের শিকার অভিযানে "ভূতেদের" যাত্রার শুরু।" (Olsen, 2002, p. 35) which translates to the 'ghosts' are setting out for their nocturnal hunt. This according to

Chakraborty is, ". . . an unmistakable expression of the nationalist and civic desire to appropriate the instruments of Modern rule…" (Chakraborty, 2008, p. 222). The overly formal translation with a learned register of the dialogues in Bengali adds a sense of weight to the Phantom's character which rises above its popular cultural space to the linguistic hierarchy of the Bengali 'bhodrolok' (gentleman). Also, it might indicate a desire to overcompensate for the use of English words in our daily parlance. The desire to switch to the master's tongue to get a sense of power still drives our linguistic choices but when it comes to something as intimate as comic strips which are supposed to help us unwind, the tendencies might reverse resulting in diligently erasing any trace of English domination. Thus, what is considered (Hatfield, 2017, xi) not worth paying attention to in terms of academic energy since the strips are popular culture is awarded a linguistically higher rank within the same paradigm of popular cultural entertainment. Chakraborty adds, "The mode of self-representation that the "Indian" can adopt here is what Homi Bhabha has justly called "mimetic" (Chakraborty, 2000, p. 40).

Another aspect of these translations is that the translators are anonymous. Often the awkwardness or mistranslations could be ascribed to this fact. Further, the translations could be a work with a shifting workforce making it difficult to pin one particular translator. Whatever the reasons behind this it appears that it has worked in the favour of the subtle theme of neo-colonization since the names of the original writer and inker appear on the panels and some readers might think that it is they who have translated the same into Bengali. This is a common feeling among Bengalis (for that matter of all people alike) that any person who speaks the Bengali (or one's native) language automatically becomes a part of the linguistic community (Schlendel, 2022). The American writers thus became familiar to the Bengali readers. However, a lay reader of the strips does not always remember their names but the more interested among them do. While the names of the creator (Lee Falk) and the pencilers and inkers are mentioned in some pages in the English versions, in the Bengali version of the strips the names are present in every other strip (at least in one panel). Interestingly, the names of the creators remained untranslated in the source language. The same is true with the language of the copyright declaration in favour of

King Features. This could have something to do with copyright issues. This repetition as already mentioned is a mnemonic device of linguistic acquisition. With linguistic acquisition, cultural acquisition becomes easy. While a Western product produced in the US entered into the Bengali literate families of not only Kolkata but also of the mofussils and rural Bengal[2] (with the district pages starting from 2001), a large section of the Bengali diasporic community found the image and stories of Phantom in the USA (as well as in Australia) to be familiar. This familiarity with a subculture often helped the displaced reader form a bond with the present community which indulges in the same subcultural activity. Kevin Patrick informs in his book *The Phantom Unmasked: America's First Superhero* (2017) that a community of robust numbers remains active in Australia with their annual meetings. Interestingly the community is named, Lee Falk Memorial Bengali Explorers' Club.

The superheroes like Batman, Superman and Spiderman were not translated into regional languages in these numbers[3] and hence the Bengali audience had become more familiar with the Bengalified

[2] Malathy Sriram informs in her article, "Anandabazar Patrika: Informing the masses since 1876" (https://bloncampus.thehindubusinessline.com/columns/brand-basics/anandabazar-patrika-informing-the-masses-since-1876/article24293354.ece) that, "By 2005, the *Patrika* had breached the 1 million circulation mark. Its present circulation - about 1.3 million - makes it the largest single edition regional language newspaper in India; the readership is said to be 5.8 million."

[3] There are several reasons for this: first, Batman, Superman and other such superheroes were primarily created in the format of comics and not strips. It was not easy to reformat the same for newspapers. Further, the time and energy required to do so would have probably overrun the profits. Secondly, as Kevin Patrick says, the Phantom provided the audience with "visual excitement" (74) of the romantic kind which was absent for a long time in the Adventure or Detective Comics. Thus they appealed to the "entire family (not just children or adult males)" (76) which the DC superheroes couldn't match. Thirdly, most of the superheroes were set against the backdrop of metropolises which had not mushroomed in West Bengal yet and perhaps many readers identified with either the exotic jungles or the similarly developing African nation as presented in the strips. Fourthly, while newspapers and even periodicals were easily available in public libraries the same was not true about comics in India. Finally, the publishers of the Phantom readily adapted to the Indian setting by changing the names of the places and names of characters as and when required hence Bangalla became Denkali, Rama (who murdered the father of the first Phantom) became Ramalu.

Phantom. So much so that while the Bengali translation retains the name "Bengala," refusing to change it to "Renkali" (later Denkali) as was done in the Hindi version in 1964 in the issue named *Vetal ki Mekhla* (The Phantom's Belt) published by Indrajal Comics. This decision reflects Bengal's desire to maintain its cultural identity and resist erasure. Anu Kumar informs:

Bengali was where the tribe called the Bandars stayed – you can see how Falk carried political incorrectness all the way and had a lot to make up for in the later comics. Indeed, in later versions from the 1970s onward, Bangalla moved to the African east coast, close to Kenya and Zanzibar. The only other time Bangalla appeared in known historical writing was in a book written a hundred years or more before Falk wrote the Phantom comic. A British businessman, John Ranking, based in India and Russia, and convinced of the genuine historicity of his efforts, wrote *Historical Researches on the Wars and Sports of the Mongols and Romans* in 1825, which mentions Bangalla as being located at the mouth of the Ganges, at the eastern end of Bengal itself (Kumar, 2015).

Resistance

It is in the use of the onomatopoeias that the resistance to the colonial discourse via translation is represented whereas one of the less discussed aspects of translations of comics is the translation of the onomatopoeias (Zanettin, 2014, p. 6). According to the uninitiated in the history and significance of sequential narratives, Superhero comics are synonymous with the cliched, "Pow, Wham, thud." In the three comic strips discussed, there are a number of onomatopoeias which have been translated from English to Bengali. Let us look at a few and their significance:

Sl. No.	Name of the strip	English with page number	Bengali with page number
1.	*The Ghost Pirates*	WAK	(02) ঠকাস
2.	do	BOOM	(03) গুড়ুম
3.	do	FTOOM	(20) বুম
4.	do	(8) ZZZ	(31) ভোঁওস
5.	do	(09) BRUMMM	(35) ভূওওওস
6.	do	(10) SMAK!	(36) চটাত
7.	do	(11) WHAK!!	টিসুম
8.	do	(19) CLANK	(67) ঠন্যাং
9.	*The Animal Collector*	(24) SPLOOSH	(94) ঝঅপাআআং
10.	do	GROWL	হালুম

While the significance of the last onomatopoeia has been already discussed, we can find that while indigenizing the English sounds the translators have fallen back on their native ear and have followed the popular cultural sounds as they really are or as they have been handed down through Bengali pop literature. This act of translation is significant because it offers the superimposition of the Bengali layer over the English. However, one word in the *Animal Collector* was kept as it is. “Flap flap flap” (the sound of the helicopter) isn’t a Bengali onomatopoeia. Perhaps the Bengali translators were not familiar with the sounds of the helicopter as much as their Hindi counterparts were. Perhaps it was due to the influence of another

popular cultural medium that this difference became conspicuous. While the Hindi movies often required the use of helicopters in their high-octane action sequences, the Bengali movies were satisfied with the 'dhishoom, dhishoom' between the antagonist and the protagonist. Pulp fiction predecessors including detective fiction and comics (created by the Late Narayan Debnath) did not bestow sounds that were too mechanical like the whirring of the helicopter blades or the machine gun fire, frequent both in Bollywood and Hollywood. Nevertheless, in all these examples which are but samples from a vast collection of texts, we find that the Bengali translations always have a few extra syllables in comparison to their English counterparts. This feature is indicative of the multi-syllabism of the Bengali language that offers it a lilt that is not to be found in monosyllabic languages like English.

There are instances where the Bengali translation exceeds their source language in terms of their currency among the Bengali readers. For example, the 'old Jungle sayings' when translated into Bengali had a primal force which was absent from the English constructions. An example will shed light on the the claim, "ক্রুদ্ধ অরণ্যদেবের কণ্ঠস্বর রক্ত হীম করে দায়।" "Voice of the angry Phantom chills the blood. . . ." This creates a sense of awe and shock not only among the criminals but among the readers too. Ironically, the readers cannot hear the blood-chilling voice but can imagine which increases the impact of the voice.

Conclusion

The Phantom comic strips serve as a lens through which to examine the colonial transitions and translations in cultural and linguistic contexts. By analysing the interplay between language, mythology, and power dynamics, this research sheds light on the complexities of post-colonial iterations. Whenever a translation occurs, inevitably an erasure ensues leaving a trail of 'trace' (the term is used in the sense of deconstructive reading). While the Bengali language superimposes itself on the source language, the indelible significations of the missing signs make themselves bare through the lacuna of the translative acts. The deeper the translative

pen makes its mark on the psychological canvas of the readers, the English significations become all the more present. The Bengali translation is thus the face of Phantom and the mask is the English. The readers are happy with the mask under the guise of the face.

Sequential narrative, according to many comics scholars including Scott McCloud and Will Eisner, has emphasized that images and words work in tandem with each other to offer significance for the 'viewders'. Again, according to Neil Cohn comics itself is a language. While translation from a culturally high source language downwards to a less powerful target language has always been there, in this case, from English to Bengali. The translations were hitherto concentrated upon more 'serious' intellectual or popular cultural enterprises. Comics have been for a long time relegated to the margins of the margins. Hence the usual guardians of academic or cultural trade have not been peering into and censoring this medium. The Phantom comics (along with several other imports) taking advantage of this laxity in social scrutiny entered and found a permanent place in the Bengali psyche. While the language had changed, the themes and the essences of the images and the narrative had not. Thus, the post-colonial translations and their entailing transitions found an ironic space where the regional language provided the opportunity for neo-colonial germs to re-infect the liminal space of sequential subculture. The Indian comics and comic strips (especially Bengali) had not been translated into English or other European languages. At least not in any serious quantity or whatever translations have been done cater largely to the Indian audience. The translations are not targeted at the West or towards the further east.

In spite of all the evidence that the Phantom comics could re-insert certain pro-colonial narrative significations through its stories, it is not true that there are no resistances to the onslaught. First, Phantom became more popular in India (and elsewhere) than in the US (Patrick, 2017, p. 98). The Bengali and other vernacular languages appropriated a popular cultural icon of the west and turned it into something that felt almost homemade. This cultural appropriation is tantamount to the linguistic digestion of borrowed words which is a device of linguistic enlargement. Along with so

many English words which have now become Indianised, the image of Phantom too is more Indian than American. Thus, an erstwhile colony uses a popular cultural icon of the West to talk back and even talk down (in a nerd contest on Phantom comics) to the originators of the lore. This concept of resistance is found in the use of the Bengali onomatopoeias instead of following the English (American) ones. The indigenous sounds added a local flavour to the comic strips and went a long way in absorbing the cultural differences both apparent and subtle. However, one could argue that 'sounds' themselves are absent in the panels and hence this resistance is futile but one should consider the fact that the sounds are pronounced by the readers in a participatory dance of signification. Finally, the fact that there is resistance to a neo-colonial onslaught confirms the fact that there is a (or at least an attempt of) neo colonial re-penetration and the medium in this case is the Phantom comics.

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