

Sultan Abdul Hamid II: “The Unspeakable Turk” Fights Back (Part I)

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Just who were the Ottomans and why is Sultan Abdul Hamid relevant today?



To answer this, one must step back a little into history: The Turks, a Central Asiatic Muslim people gradually moved into Europe around the mid thirteenth century founding an Empire that crossed three continents and lasted six centuries. In 1453, they sent alarm bells ringing all over Christendom with the capture of Constantinople, the seat of the Eastern Holy Roman empire, and with it, an iconic church, the Hagia Sophia. For several centuries thereafter, the "aggressive" Ottomans were regarded as a "menace" to Europe as they continued swiftly with their expansion. In 1683, they laid siege to Vienna but were unsuccessful. Popular myth has it that when the Ottomans

As all Empires inevitably decline, so too did the Ottomans. By the mid 18 and 19th centuries, it began tounravel with Czarist Russia, the Austro-Hungarians, Great Britain and France chipping away at its territories in Europe, Asia and

This sweeping denunciation seems a tad hypocritical when one compares parallel developments in the same period: Britain had put down a rebellion of the Boers and Zulus in South Africa and the "Mahdi" in the Sudan. The

The success of this modernization program and the favorable impression generated amongst Britain's Indian subjects alarmed Sir Mark Sykes, the diplomat entrusted by the British Cabinet to plan the post-War Ottoman melt-down. On a fact finding mission to India he writes with dismay "it is a shock to find that Indian towns like Delhi have made less progress than say Konja or Kastamuni; this is a real blow to my ideas...of course India is poor, overpopulated and understaffed but at the root, the secret of Turkish influence over Hindus Moslems who have been to Stamboul is that they have seen there something externally more efficient than they see at home." (letter quoted in 'The Man who created the Middle East' by Christopher Simon Sykes).

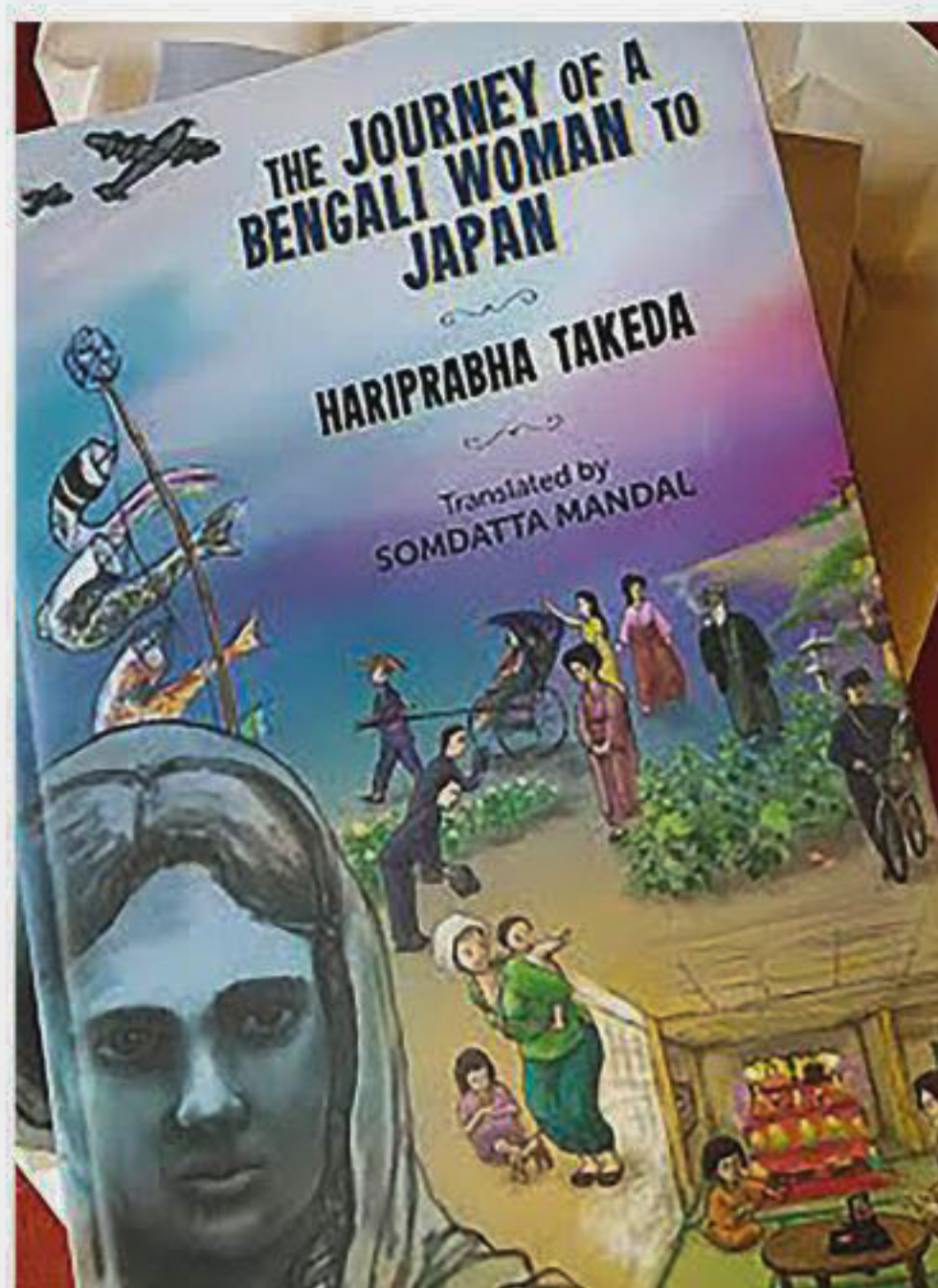
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Star REVIEWS

Truth Stranger than Fiction!

Hariprabha Takeda. *The Journey of a Bengali Woman to Japan*. Jadavpur University Press, 2019

REVIEWED BY FAKRUL ALAM



Of the works by Hariprabha, the first and longest is a fairly straightforward account of the voyage she took on shipboard with her husband to Japan and the people she met during her extended stay with her in-laws. She clearly has an eye for details and a mind that can organize them as well as the capacity to write simply. As a Brahmo, she takes occasional metaphysical leaps that stand out in her narrative. For example, when the ship she is in is leaving the river and entering the sea, she is impressed by the time it takes the vessel to reach blue water and views it as the wait

The second account attracted me a lot more than the first one also because of the glimpses it affords of Netaji and the Azad Hind in Japan

Somdatta Mandal has done admirable work not only in translating Hariprabha's works so lucidly but also in her intelligent selection of selected contextual comments of other translators and scholars. Her translation and scholarship are evidence of her admiration for the unique experience of this Bengali Brahmo woman from Dhaka in Japan. My only regret after ending the book is that although Mandal and Jadavpur University Press appeared to have done their best to bring out a very attractive edition, there are no clear photos/portraits of Hariprabha in Dhaka, Japan, or West Bengal (where she lived after partition and her return from Japan) in *The Journey of a Bengali Woman to Japan*. But that could be because of a flood in Darjeeling which ruined whatever the widowed woman had in her trunk in the last stage of her life.

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The Journey of a Bengali Woman to Japan is a noteworthy work centering on Hariprabha Mallick Takeda, a Bengali woman (1890-1972), who was married off to Oemon Takeda, a Japanese national employed in her father's soap factory in 1907 by her enlightened Brahmo father. At the time of marriage, she was looking after a home for abandoned girls and destitute women in Dhaka's Nimtali. She and Takeda visited Japan for four months in 1912-13; her account of the trip was published as *Banga Mohilar Japan Jatra* in 1915. The couple had