

# Book review

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## House of Memories

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Name of the Book: Rabindranath and His Many Abodes

Research and Text: Shouvik Mukhopadhyay, Partha Sankha Majumdar and Ramanuj Mukherjee

Publisher: West Bengal Heritage Commission, the Government of West Bengal

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Price: Rs. 600.00

West Bengal Heritage Commission, the Government of West Bengal is presenting us a praiseworthy book. Shuvaprasanna, the bearer of the ‘concept’ of the book, declares that ‘our three eminent research scholars have traced the footprints of Tagore to write this book, “Rabindranath and his many abodes”’. From the title page of the book it is evident that the ‘three eminent research scholars’ are Shouvik Mukhopadhyay, Partha Sankha Mazumdar and Ramanuj Mukherjee. The researchers inform us in the ‘introduction’ of the book that ‘despite best of our intentions shortcomings remain, for which we owe full responsibility’. Therefore, we, the readers can presume that they are the authors or makers of the ‘text’. They further state that ‘to begin on a personal note, two of us - Shouvik Mukhopadhyay and Partha Sankha Majumdar - were students of Department of History, Visva-Bharati, and this was a wonderful opportunity for us to pay our tribute to the founder of our *alma mater* which substantially shaped our academic and personal lives’. By the way, this sentence does not provide any added information regarding the book except that the two researchers are historians. In the research work we can only expect to find how Visva-Bharati ‘substantially shaped’ their ‘academic lives’. It is of no interest to the readers as to how Visva-Bharati ‘substantially shaped’ their ‘personal lives’ and why the identity of another co-researcher of the ‘text’ has been set aside ridiculously.

The ‘list of places & houses’ (pp.128-129) indicates that the researchers have tried to make a photographic inventory of the ‘buildings, mansions’ where the ‘Poet’ stayed at least for a night within the geographical territories of West Bengal. They lucidly trace the events associated with Tagore and his stays in these ‘buildings, mansions’. For database they have used the available biographies, letters of Tagore and memoirs of different personalities associated with Tagore to explore the yesteryear conditions of the houses. The researchers claim that they have visited the houses for verification of their contemporary conditions. Therefore, we can guess that the recent photographs have been taken by the researches during their ‘field visit’. Simultaneously they have used ‘old photographs’ of the original from

different archives. The stylish presentation and illustration of the numerous photographs (earlier period and contemporary) are appealing enough for casual reading. The authors further claim that they have not only accumulated ‘information about the buildings, mansions concerned’ but also traced the ‘possible links between the Poet’s creative life and the specific period of time he spent in a particular building’ based on an examination of biographies alone and not the other creative works which the poet himself claims as reflections of his creative self. Therefore their claim to attempt to trace the ‘possible links between the Poet’s creative life and the specific period of time he spent in a particular building’ is only partial. Adequate research works in this direction is lacking. Here it would be pertinent to refer to the poet’s instinctive opinion that his abode is difficult to find and locate at a particular physical space. He builds his abode in his mind. We don’t know how restless this process is. His abode is embedded in his creative mind and not tied to a physical space.

This state of the poet’s mind must be intertwined in his writings. Amar Mitra in his article ‘*Kothai Abantipuri*’ tells us that ‘no wonder, poet’s imagination is veracious in his realm of poetry. And indeed, it becomes an inviolable vow within the spiritual kingdom of reader. It stirs up the wish to see both the urban Kolkata of Tagore and Ujjain of Kalidas as the very same. Without having wings, this city takes flight to Ujjain, and Ujjain flies over the sky of this city. Shipra and Gandhabati fall into the Ganges, making a new confluence in the Elysium of imagination’. Tapobrata Ghosh in ‘*Rabindra-jijnasur Diary*’ takes us to an unknown world through the Tagore’s poetry ‘*Swapna*’ of the book ‘*Kalpna*’. He decodes the Tagore’s created illusion from the text and empirically establishes how Tagore has transformed his city Kolkata to Ujjain.

From the ‘text’ we can objectively summarize the whole research in the following table.

Name of places in wider sense and number of exact places are shown in bracket	Number of Houses				
	Existing in proper conditions	Doesn’t exist	Damaged	Changed	Total No.
Kolkata and Suburb (12)	5	5	2	3	15
South Bengal (10)	7	3	1	1	12
Hills (6)	8	1	2	2	15
Santiniketan (2)	9	6	-	-	15

Total No.	29	15	5	6	57
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It will be convenient to the readers or researchers for their perusal and it will also be valuable to the West Bengal Heritage Commission for implementing the outcomes of the project. Finally 57 houses are identified in 30 places of West Bengal in this book.

Some lacunae however are evident. It is an outcome of a project that was financed by the West Bengal Heritage Commission but the authors have not mentioned the title of the project and its tenure. The dates on which the recent photographs have been taken ought to have been recorded. This would have added value to this book as an authentic chronicle of the various houses of Tagore. Under this situation, the temporal yardstick of the contents of the book is difficult to establish.

Different spellings of a single word have been used, examples are Konarko (p.9)/ Konaarko (p.128); Asantuli (p.9) / Aasasaantuli (p.129)/ Aasantuli (p.129); Basabi (p.9) / Basobi (p.128); Mongpou (p.9)/ Mongpu (p.125, 129). Other observations on spelling are about Chunchura (p.9, 57, 129) and Chandannagar (pp.9, 59-62, 129) which are currently referred to as Chinsurah and Chandernagore in administrative parlance.

The style of in-text citation and reference list of the book under consideration is unscientific. Usually within the text of the research, the author's name is given first, followed by the publication date and page number. A reference list at the end of the research contains the full details of all the in-text citations. In the in-text citation, name of the book is appeared first then page number. But in the 'bibliography' it is appeared as 'Jagadish Bhattacharyya, *Kabimanas* vol 1 Kolkata 1377 vol 2 Kolkata 1407' (p.130). According to 'APA Style' the citation in reference list would look like this: Bhattacharyya, J. (2000). *Kabimanas* (Vol.2). Kolkata: Bharabi. In several places the Bengali calendar years have been cited but their corresponding counterparts in the English calendar are not. Sometimes the Bengali and the English calendars have been used interchangeably leading to avoidable confusions. The in-text citations and the reference list are discordant not only with respect to the 'APA Style' of reference citation but also with respect to any other standardised method. The book entitled 'Rabindranather Santiniketan o Sriniketan' edited by Tapan Kumar Som is listed in 'bibliography' as 'Santiniketan o Sriniketan' (p.131). The information regarding the history of Guesthouse (p.79) is paraphrased from the article of Buddhadeb Acharya named 'Rupantare Santiniketan' from the same book without appropriate citation. Eight 'old photographs' (pp. 6, 8, 9, 31, 77, 90-91, 95, 97) obtained from the book 'Faces & Places of Visva-Bharati' by Shambhu Shaha remain unacknowledged (plate 5, 6, 8, 9, 20, 46, 50, 78). Four photographs

(p.6, 31, 77, 97) are presented in a distorted manner. The perspectives of these photographs have been changed (plate 20, 46, 50, 78).

The quotations from ‘Pitrismriti p13’ and ‘Pitrismriti p211’ (p.17, 20) are not matching with available original text. The edition of the book ought to have been cited. None of the books listed in ‘bibliography’ contain the name of publishers. The reference to the manuscript of Tagore’s letter in p.98 of the ‘text’ given as: ‘Rabindra-Bhavan Archives, File no: 878 (i), Picture no: 86-87’ is incorrect, because the word ‘picture’ should have been stated as image. The translations of original Bengali letters, memoirs etc. do not mention the name of the translators. Except these types of mistakes the book is worthy to compete with any international publication.

Note: Reviewer acknowledges the contributions of Arundhati Das and Manjari Bhattacharji for the English translation of the portions of original Bengali article of Amar Mitra and for editing this review respectively.