INTRODUCTION

Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini, two plays composed by Upendranath Das deserve special notice. Certain events associated with the production of these plays are of historical significance. This is precisely why the plays have been chosen for the project of translation. Since the plays are set in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, an attempt has been made to study these from the social perspective. It being the time of the British Raj, the relation between the colonized and the colonizer has also been studied, with special emphasis on how the Indians retaliated the oppression of imperialism. Since the staging of Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini had been associated with two events, namely the marriage of Golapsundari in 1875 and the enactment of the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876, these events need to be separately studied. These events being associated with the stage, a brief study of the journey of the Bengali theatre from Lebedev’s theatre to the public theatre together with the introduction of actresses has also been included.

Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini are domestic plays depicting a faithful picture of the colonial Bengal. Most of the social issues of the nineteenth century find mention in these plays. The Bengal Renaissance had already made its appearance in the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus the list of dramatis personae includes enlightened youths as well as people who are still in the dark. The evils of the British rule are also portrayed, together with a study of the resistance offered by the colonized. Besides, annotations have been provided to help the readers who are not familiar with the source language.

The aim of the thesis is to translate Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini and study them from the colonial and postcolonial perspective. The study has been divided into two parts. The first part deals with the study of the various issues related to the plays and their production. It
includes a study of the nineteenth-century colonial Bengal. It also studies the journey of the Bengali theatre – from Lebedev's Bengally Theatre through the amateur theatres to the public theatre of Bengal. The second part contains the translation of the plays, followed by detailed annotations. The problems of translating these plays will also be discussed. The life of the dramatist and the merit of his composition find a place in the appendix. It has been shifted to the appendix to preserve the continuity of the study.

The study of colonial Bengal has been split into four sections. The first section deals with the superstitions and evil practices prevalent in the nineteenth-century Bengal. The evils of sati or the immolation of the widow on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, the miserable condition of the widow who chose to stay alive, the problems of polygamy and child marriage were like cancer in the society. The thesis studies the various reform movements launched to put these to an end. The reformers indeed had a very difficult job in curing the society. The next section deals with the introduction of western science and philosophy and the consequent widening of the outlook. After the youths received education, they turned to social reforms. They fought for women's education, which is the subject of the third section. It shows how education helped women to contribute to the overall social welfare. However those of them who were not fortunate enough to receive education, failed to come out of the dark ages of the past. The last section deals with the emergence of various societies and associations. The educated youths were member of these societies and worked to bring about proper social reform. They used these societies and the journals to voice their ideas and reach out to the masses. The thesis also shows how the Indians resisted the colonizer. It studies the various forms of retaliation, including the formation of armed groups and also reducing the British to ridicule.
The thesis also studies how people gradually developed a taste for drama. It begins with the opening of Lebedeff’s Bengally Theatre. This is followed by a discussion of the founding of various amateur theatres. This in turn leads to the opening of the public theatre in Bengal. The thesis also discusses the recruitment of the actresses and how the society reacted to this change. The discussion of how the public board was founded and also the reaction of the society towards the introduction of the actresses are necessary for the study of the events related to the staging of Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini. The staging of Surendra-Binodini on February, 1876 led to the enactment of the Dramatic Performances Act, while after the production of Sarat-Sarojini at the Bengal Theatre, Golapsundari was married to Goshthabihari Datta. Since these two events had far-reaching consequences on the stage and society, they have been separately studied.

The thesis has many Bengali quotations that are followed by their translations. All translations are mine. The spelling of Bengali proper names uses the current standard Bengali pronunciation. The only exception lies in the spellings of ‘Rammohun Roy’ and ‘Vidyasagar’. This has been so retained because they themselves used these. Though the Young Bengal also used different spellings for their names, the standard form has been retained. However, Sanskrit words like ‘Veda’, ‘Kalidasa’, etc. have been so written, because a different spelling might confuse the reader.