Chapter-I

Introduction

Culture refers to a state of human intellectual development or behavioural manners. The social and political forces that influence the growth of a human being are together defined as culture. Indian culture is rich and diverse and this ‘unity in diversity’ is unique in its very own way. Our manners, way of communication, style of living and social conduct are some of the important components of our culture. Despite the advent of modernisation in terms of lifestyle, our values and beliefs remain largely unchanged. One can change one’s way of clothing, eating and living but the values one imbibes are intrinsic to his character as these are richly bound and deeply rooted to our sensibility which is moulded by the cultural ethos.

The culture of India has been shaped by the long history of India, its unique geography and the absorption of customs, traditions and ideas from some of its neighbours as well as by preserving its ancient heritages, which were formed during the Indus Valley Civilization and evolved further during the Vedic age, rise and decline of Buddhism, the Golden age, Muslim conquests and European colonization. India does not have a strong uniform national culture. India's great diversity of cultural practices, languages, customs, and traditions are examples of this unique co-mingling over the past five millennium. The various religions and traditions of India that were created by these amalgamations have influenced other parts of the world too. Most Indians emphasize the country's cultural diversity, tolerance of difference, and receptiveness to foreign influences.¹

Indian culture, with its varied fragrances and mixture of different traditions, languages and practices, very typical to a particular region, has been enriched all through its journey of immortality by the rich literature of its time. Although it is not possible to have a direct acquaintance with the literature of our various languages, we can easily get an insight into these works through their translated versions, irrespective of our regional and cultural background. Each of the great languages of our country like Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Gujarati, Marathi, Kannada, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, is not merely the language of a part of India, but is essentially a language of India, representing the cultural evolution in its manifold forms. It goes without saying that acquaintance with the classical works written in these languages will help us to savour the infinite variety of India’s cultural heritage and also imbibe the ethos reflected therein.

Writing in India in all the languages has been profoundly influenced by writing in England in particular and Europe in general. We have in all our regional languages, essentially our own ‘Romantics’, ‘Victorians’, ‘Georgians’ and ‘Modernists’. The regional literature has contributed in its own way to the common pool of world writing in English. It widens and deepens the basis of our cultural knowledge making people realise the essential unity of India’s thought and literary background.

Earlier, the Sanskrit language with its depth, richness and magnificence, overshadowed and prevented the growth of other regional languages. Later on, the
Persian language also came in the way of this growth. This perhaps explains the delay in the full development of our languages. “The pen is mightier than the sword” and where else can this be proved to be truer than Bengal? Over a period of centuries, Bengal has given birth to numerous writers and poets who have with their powerful strength of words heralded a new world. They were the architects of modern Bengal and much of their contributions are acclaimed today to be one of the best in the history of literature. The brave writers and poets mesmerized the modern world with their revolutionary thinking and are still a major influence in shaping the present day Bengal and India.

Bengali language emerged gradually from ‘Prakrit’ and ‘Apabhrahmsa’. In the beginning we find devotional and lyric songs and also mystical poetry which is later followed by narrative poetry. Gradually, literary prose developed with drama and finally fiction. Dating back to over 1200 years, Bangla literature is one of the earliest ones to have brought poets and writers from various other religions to contribute in it and interact on the grounds of secular humanism. Marked by the presence of such elites as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Peary Chand Mitra, Kali Prasanna Sinha, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rabindra Nath Tagore, it was a period when Bangla literature found a new form both in the fields of original works and translations in the form of poetry, drama, novels, short stories and essays. Renowned for its collection of short stories, it was the modern and the post-modern periods of Bangla literature that brought forth this aspect through eminent writers like
Satyajit Ray, Manik Bandopadhyay, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay, Raj Shekhar Basu, Premendra Mitra and the likes, though the seeds had already been sown in the early modern age.

With the consolidation of the British power and spread of English education, English began to exert an increasing influence which is evident mainly in two directions: one, adoption of English words which had no synonyms or near synonyms in Bangla or the objects signified by the words were unknown in the land; two, development of a Bengali literary prose style under not very direct influence of the English language and literature. There can be no question of conscious imitation or borrowing here, but modern Bengali prose possesses many idioms, turns and twists of expression, which undoubtedly reflect the thought pattern of English.

In Europe, the Renaissance had embellished the spoken language to a tremendous extent. Realistic stories, earthly in essence, began to be composed in diverse European languages, but they had to wait till the eighteenth century to reach the zenith in the sphere of fiction and novels. Richardson, Goldsmith, etc., in English and Goethe in German introduced the novel as an exquisite art form. The nineteenth century saw the growth of several classic novels in English, which greatly inspired the birth of Bengali novels. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the region of Bengal, in undivided India during the period of British rule, witnessed an intellectual awakening. This was in some way similar to the
Renaissance in Europe during the sixteenth century. The Indian society during this movement questioned existing orthodoxies, particularly with respect to women, marriage, dowry system, caste system, and religion.²

The Bengal renaissance can be said to have started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1775-1833) and ended with Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), although there have been many stalwarts thereafter embodying particular aspects of the unique intellectual and creative output.³ Nineteenth century Bengal was a unique blend of religious and social reformers, scholars, literary giants, journalists, patriotic orators and scientists, all merging to form the image of a renaissance, and marked the transition from the 'medieval' to the 'modern'.

It was through the immense influence of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, that Bengali culture, society, education, and literature took a giant leap forward. In 1814, he arrived in Calcutta and engaged in literary pursuits, translating Sanskrit to Bengali, writing essays on religious topics and publishing magazines. Roy used the Bengali language, for the first time, as an effective medium of transliteration, discussion and debates. He established a cultural group in the name of ‘Atyio Sova’ (Club of Kins) in 1815.


The substratum of the roots of Bengali culture finds prolific mention in the words of Samaren Roy:

Throughout her history, Bengal has faced series of invasions, physical and cultural. Exploitation by constantly changing monarchies had disturbed Bengal’s social and economic condition over the centuries. Towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, primarily because of the advent of new conquerors from the West and consequent impact of new ideas and opening of new economic opportunities, a new class of people came into social prominence and assumed community leadership. A tremendous upsurge of social, economic and intellectual activity, hitherto unforeseen in India, developed in Bengal and thus the nineteenth century came to be widely recognised as the Bengal Renaissance. In order to effectively match the new ideas and their protagonists, the Bengali orthodoxy also rose to the occasion contributed in large measure towards this new creative cultural activity. This cultural resurgence is the dominant factor responsible for Bengal’s progress and her elevation to the position of leadership in Indian life and society, which Bengal had maintained throughout the first half of the present century. In the process, Bengalis became proud of their cultural and intellectual achievements.4

**Novel**

Bengali fiction in its proper sense, that is an original treatment of life and manners in Bengal, was initiated by Peary Chand Mitra (1813–83) who used the pen-name ‘Tekcāmd Thakur’ probably meaning Baldpated Holy Man in his original Bengali writings which include six books – picaresque fiction and moral sketches, moral lessons and didactic and spiritual tales – all primarily intended for women readers. In his later days, Mitra was interested also in spiritualism and theosophy. His rich and varied experience, however, was only partially utilized in his social sketches and didactic tales.

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Mitra’s first and most representative work, *Alarer Gharer Dulal* (Pampered son of a Front Rank family) is the first specimen of original fiction that appeared first in the penny monthly magazine (*Māsik Patrikā*) in 1855–57 and in book form in 1858. It narrates the tragic career of the elder son on an elderly man who had made money but lacked proper education and good sense. The boy was allowed to do as he liked and this finally brought ruin upon him. The younger brother was a good boy and he ultimately saved his brother. The story is palpably didactic and lacks the completeness of a mend. Mitra’s characterisation is not only good but also brilliantly sparkling at times. The episode, though scrappy, glows with life and humour. The ways of the middle-class gentry, in the neighbouring towns on the Hooghly in the early nineteenth century, are sharply delineated which we find nowhere else in contemporary literature.

Prof R. N. Rai asserts the antiquity and the essential magnitude of literature in translation in his words:

When we make a survey of Indian fiction, we do find that so many classics of Indian fiction such as Premchand’s *Gaban* and *Godan*, Srilal Shukla’s *Ragadarbari*, Jainendra’s *4*, Nirmal Verma’s *Wei Din*, Krishna Baldeo Vaidya’s *Usaka Bachapan*, Ajneya’s *Apne Apne Ajanwi*, U. R. Ananthamurthy’s *Sanskar*, Madhavaiah’s *Padmavati*, Indira Goswami’s *The Shadow of Kamakhya*, Gopinath Mohanty’s *Paraja*, Chandrashekhar Rath’s *Yantrarudha*, Indira Parthasarathy’s *Nandankhatai* have been translated into English, but it is a fact that many more are yet to be translated into English and other languages of the world. A comprehensive and systematic effort is needed to ensure that not only fiction but other genres of Indian literature are properly translated in order to make the world aware of the glorious aspects of our Indian literature. It is an undeniable fact that if Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Virgil, Dante, Pirandello, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Brecht, and other distinguished
writers of the world had not been translated into English and other languages of the world, the world would have remained poorer than it is.\(^5\)

Bengali novels occupy a major part of Bengali literature. Though the first Bengali novel was *Alarer Gharer Dulal*, the Bengali novel actually started its journey with *Durgeshnandini* written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. According to Anand Shanker Ray and Lila Ray, “when the novel was introduced in Bangla in the middle of the nineteenth century, the form itself was new, the prose in which it was written was new, and the secular tone was new in a country hitherto wholly dominated by the religion and the society for which it was new”.\(^6\)

In 1857, the famous ‘*Sipahi Biplob*’ (Sepoy Mutiny) took place. Its immediate fallout was the ‘*Neel Bidroho*’ (Indigo Revolt) which scattered all over the then Bengal region. This Indigo Revolt lasted for more than a year (1859–60). The literary world was shaken with its repercussions which found expression in the dramatic work published from Dhaka in the name of *Neel Dorpon* (The Indigo Mirror) written by *Dinabandhu Mitra*.

**Poetry**

*Michael Madhusudan Dutt* (1824–1873) emerged as the first epic-poet of modern Bengali literature. Dutt, a Christian by conversion, is best known for his Ramayana based masterpiece, *Meghnad Bodh Kabbo* (The Slaying of Meghnadh),

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\(^{6}\) *Bangla Academy Charitabidhan* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, Second enlarged edition, 1997).
which essentially follows the poetic tradition of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. He is also credited with the introduction of sonnets to Bengali literature and he ruled the Bengali literary world for more than a decade. He will remain immortal in the history of Bengali literature as the founder of *Amitrakshar Chhanda* or blank verse (rhyme less verse) and as its best exponent. His first poem in this verse form was *Tilottama Sambhava*, which was published in 1860. Almost all his poems, save *Brajangana Kabbo* were written in blank verse. His other notable poetic creation includes *Veerangana Kabbo*.

Madhusudan culled the ingredients for his poetry from the Sanskrit Puranas and epics. At times, he even explored foreign literature and collected his theme or ingredients for poetry. Besides, he also composed a sonnet and named it *Chaturdash Padi Kavita*. Some great novelists like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay developed the newly introduced genre in such a way that what was ‘new’ changed into ‘matured’ through their works. Almost all these literary activities went on in full swing in Kolkata.

**Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay**

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) did for Bengali fiction what Michael Madhusudan Dutt had done for poetry, that is, he brought in imagination. Chattopadhyay was more fortunate than Dutt as he did not have to build his own diction from the very start. The prose style was already standardized. What
Chattopadhyay did was to break its dry monotony, prune its ponderous verbosity and give it a twist of informality and intimacy. His own style developed as he went on writing.

Chattopadhyay, following the model of Ishwar Chandra Gupta, began his literary career as a writer of verse. However, he realized soon that his talents lay in other directions, and turned to fiction. His first attempt was a novelette in Bengali submitted for a declared prize. The prize did not come to him and the novelette was never published. His first work of fiction to appear in print was Rajmohan’s Wife (published serially in Indian Field in 1864). It was written in English and was probably a translation of the novelette submitted for the prize. Durgeshnandini (Daughter of the Federal Lord), his first Bengali romance, was published next year (1865).

The next novel Kapalkundala (1866) is one of the best romances written by Chattopadhyay. His next romantic work, Mrinalini (1869) marks his first attempt to set the story against a larger historical context. This book marks the shift from Chatterjee’s early career in which he was strictly a writer of romances, to a later period in which he aimed to simulate the intellect of the Bengali speaking people and bring about a cultural revival through a campaign to improve Bengali literature. He began publishing a month literary magazine, Bangodarshan, in April 1872, the first edition of which was filled almost entirely with his own work. The magazine carried serialized novels, stories, humorous sketches, historical and
miscellaneous essays, informative articles, religious discourses, literary criticism and reviews.

*Vishabriksha* (The Poison Tree, 1873) was the first novel of Chattopadhyay to appear serially in *Bangodarshan*. Chattopadhyay’s next major novel *Chandrashekhar* (1877) suffers markedly by two parallel plots, which have little common ground. The scene is once again shifted back to eighteenth century. The next venture being *Rajani* (1877), followed by *Krishnakanter Uil* (Krishnakant’s Will, 1878) added some amount of feeling to imagination, and as a result it approaches nearest to the western novel. The plot is somewhat akin to that of ‘The Poison Tree’. The only novel of Chattopadhyay that can truly be considered historical fiction is *Rajsimha* (1881, re-written and enlarged, 1893). *Anandamath* (Mission House of the Anandas, 1882) is a political novel, which depicts a Sanyasi (Brarmin ascetic) rebellion that erupted in North Bengal in 1773. Chattopadhyay’s next novel *Devi Chaudhurani* was published in 1884 and his final novel was *Sitaram* (1886).

Some critics, like Premnath Bishi, consider Chattopadhyay as the best novelist in Bengali literature. They believe that few writers in world literature have excelled both in philosophy and art as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay has done. They agree that in a colonised nation Bankim could not overlook politics. He was one of the first intellectuals who wrote in a British colony, accepting and rejecting the status at the same time. Bishi also rejects the division of Bankim in ‘Bankim
the artist and Bankim the moralist’ – for Bankim must be read as a whole. The artist in Bankim cannot be understood unless we understand him as a moralist.

**Short Story**

Another significant contributor of Bengali literature was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820 – 91), in whose lap Bengali literary prose obtained balance and rhythm, without compromising precision and expressiveness. He was the first Bengali prose writer with the proper feeling for the correct word, and for this reason, even the long-winged lexical words used by him are not felt as foreign or bizarre. The sonorosity of Vidyasagar’s solid style had a subtle charm, which few of his imitators and followers could achieve, and none but Rabindranath Tagore could surpass.⁷

Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941) stands high above in stature, stride and sweep as a genius whose characters seem to be alive till now, fresh in breath, mind and memory. His art is an amalgamation of finesse and cohesion in form, matter and feelings as would have been otherwise incomprehensible in our language. He is rooted deep to the soil of his land. Tagore is hailed as the creator of the true short story in Bengali (1891) and the genre has been rendered the best in his art till date. His short stories are more than hundred in number and manifold in variety. Tagore's characters are absolutely simple and plain to thrive on humble living and

small miseries. His short stories present a variety of form and content and can be compared favourably with the best in any language.

Some significant examples of literature in translation are the three short stories, *Ritual and Reform* by Rabindranath Tagore, *Matchbox* by Ashapurna Debi and *Club for Tender Spirits* by Rajsekhar Basu; which intensely speak of the socio-cultural set-up, norms, bindings as well as the crude cultural complacency that entangle the hearts and minds of people.

The original story *Sanskaar (Ritual and Reform)* by Rabindranath Tagore is a part of *Galpaguchchha (Collection of Stories)* published by Visvabharati Publications and translated from Bengali by Proshenjit Gupto, a translator and writer living in Iowa City. The narrator Girindro (chief of mountains, the Himalayas) strongly disbelieved the orthodox social tenets, but he could not raise his voice against injustice. He was restrained from delivering his act of justice and equality by his wife who impersonated the social clutches and this hypocrisy made him feel as a coward in the society.

Born in a conservative Bengali family of North Kolkata on 8 January 1909, Ashapurna Debi was one of the first female writers who stood out against all odds and claimed her justified place among the Indian authors. She published her first poem in a children’s magazine named *Shishu Sathi* at the age of thirteen. Her very first book was for children – *Choto Thakurer Kashi Jatra* published in 1938. Her first novel came out six years later named *Prem O Proyojon* (1944). She received
the Jnanpith Award (1977) for Pratham Pratishruti, received Rabindra Puraskar, and Honorary Doctorate Degrees in Literature from several universities and many Government Awards. She was elected Fellow of the Sahitya Akademi in 1994. Her short story Deshli-baksho (Matchbox), translated from Bengali by Proshenjit Gupto, and is a heart-rending portrait of the state of women where they are forced to bury their swerve of emotional outburst, anger, pain and remorse. The protagonist Nomita has enormous fire within herself to ignite many raging fires, but she is unable to burn away the mask of her husband's high-mindedness and large-heartedness of forwarding monetary help to her mother on one hand and abusing her family as a family of beggars, on the other. She is so over-burdened by the baggage of family values that she has to adorn a plastic smile forever.

Rajsekhar Basu, or Parashuram, was one of the most venerated figures of 20th century Bengal. A leading light of Bengali literature, Rajsekhar was a remarkable personality. He was a chemist by profession, but his expertise ranged over the fields of mechanical engineering, cottage industries, linguistics, lexicography and the scriptures. Above all, he was a humourist par excellence, and an astonishingly creative writer. Rajsekhar entered the world of letters in the 1920s. His first book of stories, Gaddalika was well-received. Rabindranath found the book delightful. The story Kachi Sansad (Club for Tender Spirits) was first published in a collection of short stories titled Kajjali in the 1920's and translated from Bengali by Gopa Majumdar, a well known translator of Bengali literature into English. Brojen, an advocate by profession, had heard of 'Kochi Sansad' whose
members were very fastidious about their membership rules, and the process of initiation was an arduous, even horrific affair. Being one of the benefactors of the club, Keshto adorned a weird look to declare that he was independent, self-reliant and without a care in the world. Prosperity and ignorance made his sub-conscious mind go out of hand and made him behave almost like a lunatic, leading him to many embarrassing situations. His conscious mind was not at fault at all and so at a crucial stage he realised that he could not pretend to be different from the society to which he belonged.

Sarat Chandra Chatterji’s works (1876 – 1938), not to say, ushered in an instantaneous fame and continued popularity, which remains without a parallel in our literary history. His earliest writings highlight a striking influence of Bankim Chandra Chatterji. In Devdas (written in 1901, published in 1917), Parinita (The Married Girl, 1914), Biraj Bau (Mrs. Biraj, 1914) and Pallisamaj (The Village Commune, 1916), one may not find much difference in the themes and their treatments as reflected in the works of Bankim Chandra, with a trance in a modernistic setting and in an easier and more matter of fact language. The influence of Tagore’s short stories and novels Chokher Bali and Gora is reflected in some of the novels and short stories of Chatterji. His attitude was sympathetic towards women repressed at home and tortured outside. He is critical of the contemporary society when it does not agree with his own ideas but he never flouts the accepted moral of the Hindu society at any time.
The journey of the evolution of Bengali literature is further enlightened in the words of K.R. Srinivas Iyengar as:

Trailing behind the Bankim-Tagore-Sarat ‘triune glory’, some other outstanding novelists – Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay, Manik Bandopadhyay, Naini Bhaumik, Gajendrakumar Mitra, Manoj Basu, to name only a few have been scouring the ocean of everyday life in Bengal and presenting artistically the calm as well as the storms, the surface froth as well as the unplumbed depths. 

**Tarashankar Bandopadhyay**


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Bandopadhyay joined the non-cooperation movement, the non-violent drive in India’s struggle for freedom in 1921. Later on he became an active social worker, helping the victims of the epidemic that ravaged the backward regions of Bengal. It is during this period that he came close to the so-called lower-strata of the society – the tribal, the 'bagdi', the 'dom', the 'sadgop', etc., from whom he drew most of his plots, stories, characters, and to whom he owed the dialectical accuracy of his language.

**Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay**

Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay (1899 – 1950) had been writing short stories, which appeared in Pravasi since 1922. With *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Road, 1929) and its sequel *Aparajito* (1932), based on his own life story, was created a masterpiece, leaving behind a striking note of nostalgic sympathy in the emotional reader. He was a lover of the flora, loved the hilly and wild land and this immense love is fully reflected in *Aranyak*. He was romantic and lyrical by temperament with a bias towards the occult and the spiritual.

**Manik Bandopadhyay**

Manik Bandopadhyay (1908–1956) made his first appearance in *Vangasri* with his *Divaratrir Kavya* (A Poem of Day and the Night, 1935) followed by *Putul Nacher Itikatha* (The Puppet’s Tale, 1936). These two novels brought attention and appreciation for the author for being an original and visionary writer. His works
reflect the philanthropist and keen observer of the varied dimension of common man in rural life.

Among the best-known novels and short stories by Banerji are Janani (Mother, 1934), Atasi Mami (Aunt Atasi, 1935), Pragaitihasik (The Historical, 1937), Mihi O Mota Kahini (Stories Thin and Thick, 1938), Padmanadir Majhi (The Boatman of the River Padma, 1939), Sahartali (The Suburb: two vols., 1940 – 41), Haludpoda (Burnt Turmeric, 1945), Chatuskon (Four square, 1948), Sonar Cheye Dami (More Precious than Gold, two vols., 1951 – 52), Haraph (Type, 1954), Halud Nadi Sabuj Ban (The Yellow River and the Green Forest, 1956).

Theatre

In 1831, Prasanna Kumar Thakur established the ‘Hindu Rangamanch’ at Calcutta and staged Wilson's English translation of Bhavabhuti's Sanskrit drama 'Uttar Ramacharitam'. The primitive Bengali theatre was influenced to some extent by ‘Jatra’. In the early years, themes related to society, religion, traditions and customs formed a major part of the contents of the plays.

As a sequel to this development, the horror of the Bengal famine, the aftermath of both the World Wars, the trauma of partition and the riots in the post-Independence era found emotive expressions in Bengali theatre. Before 1753, an amphitheatre named 'Playhouse' was established in the north eastern side of Calcutta's Lal Bazar. However, that was primarily used for staging English plays.
Bengali drama originally imitated both English and Sanskrit plays. In the initial phase of Bengali drama, pieces *Kirtibilas* and *Bhadrarjuna* had carved a distinct niche for themselves. In the mid-nineteenth century, many plays were authored whose themes revolved around issues like widow remarriage, child marriage etc., the notable ones being *Kali Kautuk Natak, Sapatni Natak, Bujhle Kina* to name a few.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt brought a remarkable change in the art of play-writing. He introduced 'tragedy' in drama inspired by the Greek school of drama. He was equally unrivalled in writing comedies and satires. Some of his remarkable plays are *Buro Shaliker Ghare Ron, Padmavati, Sharmista*, etc. In fact Dutta’s play *Sharmishtha* was the first Bengali play to be publicly staged in 1858. A distinguished playwright who succeeded Michael was *Deenabandhu Mitra*. His famous plays are *Sadhabar Ekadashi, Nildarpan*, etc.

*Manmohan Basu* was the epitome of the 'opera' style or musical drama with sung or spoken dialogues, dominated by an unflinching religious faith and mythological themes. The towering theatre personality in this era was *Girish Ghosh*, often regarded as the father of modern Bengali drama. One of his immortal creations was *Abhimanyu Badh*. Following the legacy of Girish Ghosh, Bengali drama flourished and eventually reached its golden phase under *Dwijendralal Ray*. Among his comic masterpieces figure *Kalki Avataar, and Punar Janma*, etc. He also wrote outstanding mythological and historical plays viz. *Pashani, Sita,*
Pratap Singh, Shah Jahan, etc. Rabindra Nath Tagore enriched Bengali drama with his symbolic and intricate plays, which were innovative and unique in concept. Some his immortal plays are Balmiki Pratibha, Dakghar, Mukta Dhara, Rakta Karabi, Taasher Desh, to name a few.

Bengali theatre continued its journey through 'Kirtivilas' of Yogendra Chandra Gupta, Bhadrarjuna of Taracharan, Kulin Kula Sarvaswa of Ramanarayana Tarkaratna and Neel Darpan of Deenbandhu Mitra. Social plays of Girish Chandra Ghosh, historical plays of D. L. Roy and artistic works of Rabindranath Tagore continued to attain to the status of realistic works and marked the beginning of the parallel theatre. Nevertheless, Shombhu Mitra and Utpal Dutt have given Modern Bengali theatre a thrust injecting new life into the existing traditions. They were the true inheritors of the great theatre tradition began by Sisir Kumar Bhaduri and Bijon Bhattacharya.

The famous actor and playwright Girish Chandra Ghosh, one of the pioneers of Bengali theatre, in his plays Siraj-ud-daula and Mirkashim, presented Muslim characters as patriotic nationalist leaders equally respected by Hindus and Muslims. Another famous playwright and poet Dwijendralal Roy, in his play Mebar Patan (The Fall of Mewar), set a bright example of Hindu-Muslim amity through the relation between Amar Singh, a Hindu prince and Mahabat Khan, a converted Muslim. Ritwik Ghatak, the famous playwright and actor and film director wrote Dalil (The Deed, 1951) which depicts the sorrow and agitation of
the people living in East and West Bengal following the partition of their motherland. The famous playwright and actor Utpal Dutt wrote *Itihasher Kathgoray* 1965 wherein he shows how communal disbelief and hatred generated by the outbreak of War between India and Pakistan gradually weaken and fade away.

The legendary stage artists Shombhu Mitra and his immensely talented wife Tripti Mitra went on to notch many successful productions for Bohurupee, a group formed by them, including *Dashchakra, Raktakarabi, Galilieo* and *Chand Baniker Pala*. Today their equally talented daughter Saonli Mitra is carrying on the production for this group. Bengal also had the likes of Ajitesh Bandopadhyay who founded Bohurupee and the great Badal Sircar, whose plays like *Evam Indrajit*, continue to fascinate the Indian psyche. Even Hindi theatre flourished in Bengal under the patronage of Shyamanad Jalan, Pratibha Agarwal and Usha Ganguli, Anamika, Padatik and Rangkarmee (or Rudra Prasad Sen Gupta). They may not be titans but their contribution to the keeping alive the vibrant tradition of theatre in Bengal is worth accolades.

**Badal Sircar**

In the 1960s and 70s experimental and avant-garde trends in Indian writing were seen in both poetry and drama. Some of the well-known plays include Girish Karnad’s *Tughlaq* (1964), a modern political satire based on the life of a sultan of medieval Delhi, Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar’s *Shantata! Court Chalu*
Ahe (Silence! The Court is in Session, 1978) and Badal Sircar’s Bengali play Evam Indrajit (And Indrajit, 1979).

Badal Sircar (1925 – 2011), the famous Indian dramatist has written more than fifty plays, of which Ebong Indrajit and Basi Khabar are well known literary pieces. Being actively involved with Bengali theatre, he rose to prominence in the 1970s and was one of the leading figures in the revival of street theatre in Bengal. He revolutionised Bengali theatre with his angst–ridden, anti-establishment plays during the Naxalite movement. He was awarded the Padmashree in 1972, Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1968 and the Sangeet Natak Academy Fellowship, Ratna Sadasya in 1997. His plays include Ebong Indrajit, Sheshnag, Basi Khabar, Baki Itihaash, Pagla Ghoda, Spartacus, Prastava, Juloos, Bhoma, Solution X, Baropishima, Sari Raat, Badi Buaji and Kavi Kahini which reflect the atrocities prevailing in society and the age-old hierarchical system.