

# Dinesh Chandra Sen's Two Books: 'Behula' and 'Phullora'

## Abstract

Mangalkavya of the middle ages has been a topic of discussion and debate among the researchers of the world. As a result there has also been a steady rise in readership of Mangalkavya as more and more people have started reading it. Previous studies have revealed that Mangalkavya was composed from 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and it is regarded as a part of history of the middle ages. Dinesh chandraSen (1866-1939) is one such historian, who keeping in mind the narrative tradition of Manasamangal and Chandimangal composed the prose narratives of Behula(1907) and Phullora(1907) in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was only possible for a true patriot like Dinesh chndraSen to represent these two female characters in stories that not only reflected the tradition and culture of Bengal but also reflected the nationalistic fervour of India. This study seeks to reveal whether in his endeavour Dinesh chandraSen had shown any originality and novelty keeping in mind the European/ Western trend of comprehending literature and history.

**Keywords:** Bengali History, Representation of Past, Self Pride, National Literature, Historicity, Narrative of Mangalkavya, Behula, Phullora, Prose Narrative, Recovering History, Indigenous Culture, Analysis of Manuscripts, Glorious Period, Dinesh Chandrasen.

## Introduction

After the creation of MangalKavya, related criticism did not stop. This discourse saw the gradual rise of a particular type of perspective. In this regard David L Curley's book "Poetry and History: Bengali MangalKavya and Social Change in Pre-colonial Bengal"(2008) is worth mentioning. Another mentionable book is JawharSircar's "The Construction of the Hindu Identity in Medieval Western Bengal: The Role of Popular cults". The 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of this book entitled 'The Role of MangalKavya' is especially important. France Bhattacharya's "The NathSampraday and the Manasa Story" and Tony K. Stuart's "The Process of Surface Narrative: The ManasaBhasan" are important research works in this regard. Apart from theseMangalKavya related discourses could be seen in many books and articles and magazines (Tobu Eklavya/ MangalKavyaBiseshsankha/ edited: DipankarMallick and Mangalkavya and Mangalcharcha/ edited Tapas Bhowmik). These writings mainly analysed Mangalakavya from various perspectives like folk-history, contemporary social life, the economy of the period as shown in the MangalaaKavya etc. These discourses show us the approximate dates of composition of these are from 15<sup>th</sup> century to 18<sup>th</sup> century. These studies have shown the different aspects of MangalKavya as well as the varied scope it encompasses. MangalKavya is pretty well received in the modern period as well. We have seen that modern Bengali literature has been tremendously influenced by the literature of middle ages. However our research area does not concern the whole of the medieval period but rather focuses on the study of Mangalakavya. We have seen that in the first 50 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many literary works have come into shape in the model of the narrative of Mangalakavya. Most of these works have focussed on particular incidents, characters and sometimes on the journey as well. This study intends to deal with these issues and we start this discussion with Dinesh Chandra Sen.

## Review of Literature

Dinesh chandraSen's literary practice related discussion is mainly dependent on his popular book "Bangabhasa o sahitya" with the background of the narrative framework of Mangalkavya, the significance of Dinesh chandraSen's work has been analysed and evaluated by some



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studies and writings. Mohinimohan Sardar's "Kabikankan Chandi: BoichitrerAnusandhan" (July 2010) briefly discusses this issue. Another important work is Parthojit Gangopadhyay's "Chhotoder Mangalkavya", which was published in 2016 and edited by Tapas Bhowmik, published in the special issue (relating to Mangalkavya) in Karak Magazine. Another book worth mentioning is Tapan Bar edited "Acharya Dinesh chandraSen: Sardhosatoborsher Sradhyanjali" (October, 2016). Apart from these, Baridbaran Ghosh's edited introduction to "Pouraniki" of Dinesh Chandra, published in 2015, is also noteworthy. In the year 2017, no related literary work has been found so far.

### Aim of Study

Regarding ancient history of Bengali literature, Dinesh Chandra Sen had said that while reading the verse poems of Chandidas, he had felt a strong urge to write about the history of ancient Bengali literature.<sup>1</sup> His book entitled "BangaBhasa o Sahitya" was published in 1898. The introduction to the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the book reveals that the author had started the project with a lot of love for the Bengali literary history. From the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the massive work to recover Bengali literary history had started. At the initiative of HaraprasadSastri 'Boudhyagaano Doha' was discovered in 1907. BasantaRanjan's efforts led to the discovery of SriKrishnaKirtan in 1909. When these discoveries were being made, Dinesh Chandra was engaged, quite away from the public eye, in his own research. Regarding this Dinesh Chandra says in his memoir that he had started to write a history of Bengali literature keeping in mind the history of English literature and at this time he came across a notification from the Peace Association of Kolkata which stated that the best essay related to Bengali language and literature would be given a prize, a medal. Since Dinesh Chandra was himself doing a lot of research work related to this, he wrote an essay and naturally got the medal. With this essay he himself said that he had started writing the history of Bengali literature and language in the year 1890.<sup>2</sup>

We can say that this writing of Dinesh Chandra could be read along with the discoveries of Haraprasad and Basantarajan. But then the question arises why this could be done?

The answer lies in Bankimchandra's literary thinking. Bankim Chandra had claimed in 'Bangadarshan' magazine in the Bengali year of 1287 that a history of this Bengali literature is needed, without this Bengalis could not grow as human beings. We have to understand in this regard that Bankim was not talking about a linear history of Bengal, but rather he meant the cultural identity and to rejuvenate the great literary culture of Bengal. It is in this that he believed that it would reveal a golden period of Indian history. In this regard we have come across the research work of Khetra Gupta. In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter named 'Desh-kal', in page number 48, of his book "Bangla UponasherItihas"(5<sup>th</sup> edition, May 2015) he had said that before 'Bangadarshan' Bengali thinking was mainly focussed on two different aspects

– that is namely history and philosophy. History helps us to escape the sad reality of the present by upholding the glory of the past that is full of interesting events that showcase the pride of any race and hence is above mundane life. History gives us a glimpse of the glorious past and helps us to immerse in the illusion of that glory. Hence, for this reason History is most precious to man. Dinesh Chandra Sen could be regarded an important pillar in this tradition.<sup>3</sup> We could say that Dinesh Chandra had a special sense of history, a kind of historicity of thought. In his book "Ghorer Katha o Jugsahitya" (1922) shows us what a true researcher can hope to achieve. Dinesh Chandra had wished that he would become the greatest of Bengali poets, but if he failed to do so, he would most certainly and undoubtedly try to become the best historian of Bengali literature and no one could stop him from being that. There is no doubt that he has indeed achieved that. His penchant and love for history had made him a great and interesting historian. The versatility of Dinesh Chandra is verified by JadunathSarkar's comment on his capacity as a remarkable historian.

It is quite evident that much of Dinesh Chandra's historical thought encompassed and upheld the tradition and culture of Bengal, especially of rural Bengal. This is quite evident when one after another he was writing books like 'Ramayani Katha'(1903), 'PadaboliMadhurjyo' (1937) or even when following the narrative pattern of Mangalkavya in books like Behula(1907) and Phullora(1907). Dinesh Chandra's deep affinity for Indian literature and tradition is clearly evident in his book "BangaBhasa o Sahitya" (1898), where in the introduction to the fifth edition (15 Dec, 1926) he gives expression to the following thought. He protested against the stringent implementation of English language. In his informed protest, he says that though it is necessary and unavoidable that English should become the language throughout India, what deeply disturbs him is that English should be the medium through which other subjects like Mathematics and phonetics has to be studied, he clearly delineates that talking like a British is not the ideal, it might be important to know English language but knowing the accent and fashion of talking like the British is a bit too much he believed.<sup>4</sup>

Dinesh Chandra's this love for language could be interpreted as an expression of his love for the nation as well. This is also evident when we see that on one hand he had toured and collected Gopinath Dutta's Dronaparva, Rajendra Das's Sakuntala, Rajaram Dutta's Chandiparva and other manuscripts and on the other hand he had given us a detailed study of Bengali literary history. This is in contrast to the western/ European point of view of looking at history and this proves him to be a genuine historian of the middle ages. This clearly shows us that he has revealed a tradition in Bengali literary history. In this regard mention may be made of his different works in both English and Bengali, they are – 'Ramayanikatha' (1904), 'Jwara Bharat' (1908), Sati (1917), 'Chaitanya and his companions' (1917), 'The

Folk Literature of Bengal' (1920) and 'Padaboli Madhurjyo' (1937).

So we can see that he is representing the middle ages in his works. English educated Bengalis, it can be said, had no particular interest or were rather indifferent to the tradition of Bengali literature of the middle ages. They were not at all aware of the true Bengali tradition. The editor Asitkumar Bandhopadhyay had said in the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of Dinesh Chandra Sen's "Bangabhasa o sahitya" (1985) that prior to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century educated Bengalis never really cared about Bengali literature of middle ages. He further adds that they were intoxicated by the English language and history and remained content in that. They were quite indifferent to the tradition of India or Bengal- their lack of knowledge was the main reason for this but probably an inferiority complex also existed in them.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Dinesh Chandra wrote two prose narratives- Phullora and Behula taking the characters from Chandimangalkavya and Manasamangalkavya respectively.

Behula (1907) is actually a prose narrative book which uses the narrative framework of Manasamangal. Though he himself had said that he had put very little imagination in it but still he also says that he had taken a different perspective and this is where it attracts our interest. Behula was first published in 1907 independently, later it was published in 1938 in the book Pauraniki. Apart from Behula, other stories like Phullora (1906), Sati(1907), Jwara Bharat(1908), Dhara-Drona (1913) were also given place in the book. The first edition came in Shraban 1340 of Bengali calendar that is August 1934 and the next edition came in Phalgun 1372 of Bengali calendar (march 1965) and the latest came in the Bengali year 1421 (Jan 2015) with BaridbaranGhosh as editor. It has to be mentioned here that the latest edition has omitted certain important sections like Dinesh chandraSen's introduction in the first edition and the introductory note of Dinesh chandraSen to the two stories Behula and Phullora. In the first edition of Pauraniki, it can be seen that in the introduction Dinesh chandraSen had dedicated 'Behula' to king of LalgolaSrijuktoRaoJogindranarayan. After the story of Behula, the author himself had mentioned his name. The reason for this is that RaoJogindranarayan had paid for the publication of the book. Now the most important question that arises out of this is that why did Dinesh Chandra write this book. The song of Manasa was quite prevalent in Bengali society and it even served a religious purpose. From the point of view of popularity, Chand Bene was the most popular character. The reason for this is that some Bengali historians and critics believed Chan Bene to have originated very near to their homeland. According to mythology and the myth of medieval gods and goddesses, there were very few who could match the personality, the stature of Chand Sadagar. This provided Bengalis with a sense of pride. Therefore, evidently Chand Sadagar occupied the popular imagination of many works of Bengali literature.

Dinesh Chandra himself talks about this in the introduction to the first edition of Behula providing a list. He says that 16 kms west of Burdwan, there exists a place called Champaknagarand nearby there is a river called Behula. Lakhinder's marital house is also present there on the other hand there is another champaknagar in Tripura. In Assam- Bhraman travelogue it is written that people of Dhuburi believe that Chand Sadagar resided there. There is a place called Mahasthan near Bagdudar, which many believe was the regime of Chand sadagar. Some people say that Chand lived in the banks of Rongriver in Darjeeling. Some others believe that he resided in Sankagram in Dinajpur.<sup>6</sup> Therefore it is evident that in greater part of Bengal, many people from different areas have tried to bring Chand sadagar closer to themselves. However, for a prolonged time people were unaware of the whole mythology of Manasa. English educated Bengalis were especially ignorant of this tradition. This was clearly stated in AsitkumarBandopadhyay's edited Dinesh chandraSen's book Bangabhasa o Sahitya, in the ninth edition. In this context Dinesh chandraSen's opinion is also same. In the introduction to the first edition of Behula he says about the tradition of Manasabhasan song. He says that people enjoy this song in the monsoon in the Bengali month of Shraban in places like Barisal and Srihatta. This song carries with it a special flavour of Bengal which seldom reaches the English educated Bengali people. So it is difficult to deem them as true Bengalis or true Indians and so they are not at all fit to represent the nation as they are ignorant of the tradition of Bengal. Looking at this view it can be argued that Dinesh chandraSen had a particular love for nation. He wanted to bring forth the true nationalistic spirit of the nation, through its glorious past. Behula and Phullora stand as prime examples in this regard.<sup>7</sup>

Although the main focus and narrative of the story remains heavily influenced by Mangalkavya, very often the author's imagination and creativity changes the perspectives and nature of the stories. Dinesh Chandra Sen's Behula'(1907) could be cited as an example here. In the introduction to the first edition of the book, Dinesh Chandra Sen has clarified on this subject. He said that in the original song of Manasa in ManasaMangalKavya there were many things that could not be touched upon by him in his petty book. There was detailed description of the mercantile activity of Chand-sadagar, however if those were to be included in 'Behula', then it would have unnecessarily burdened the whole story. For this events like the death of Pauraniki, the destruction of guabari,etc, have been skipped. Pauraniki is also called Dhanantori in many palces. Bijoy Gupta named the palce as sankurnagari and had addressed him as sankurgarudi in many instances. Dinesh Chandra Sen further adds that he had followed this ancient poet in using this name. Some poets have called the servant of Chand sadagar 'Nera' as 'Tera', Dinesh Chandra says that he had accepted the names of Ketakadas and Khemananda. And hence he clarifies he has not used his own imagination in the story.<sup>8</sup>

While talking about the writing of Behula, Dinesh Chandra Sen had further said that poems like MangalChandi, Bishari, Sitala show the conflict between 'Saibya' and 'Shakta'. The cult of 'saibya' has no conflicting ideologies; it is uniformly followed, whereas the cult of 'Shakta' has multiple ideologies which can diverge from one another. Chand Sadagar, being a 'saibya', has often been mocked by many poets; stubbornness has often been criticised rather than appreciated. Dinesh Chandra has expressed his views in this regard. In his story Dinesh Chandra has given a detailed description of chandsadagar as the lord of Champak nagar, and the fact that is chandsadagar who is responsible for the social acceptance of Manasa. The hatred of chandsadagar for Manasa has also been mentioned. It is quite evident that in this regard, chandsadagar has often been described and characterised by many folk poets.

Dinesh Chandra had also stated that while creating Behula, he had considered both ketakadas and khemananda as separate poets, and had followed them as such. However, we can also see the influence DwijaBangsidas in Dinesh Chandra's Behula. This can be seen especially during the events of the Sen's and 'Dinga' Chand sadagar. Although Dinesh Chandra has himself mentioned that he is indebted to DwijaBangsidas, certain extracts from the text show the originality and novelty of Dinesh Chandra sen. Dinesh Chandra himself says that DwijaBangsidas had used chandi in the context of manasa in a particular way, however he himself had deviated from the pattern followed by the ancient poets.<sup>(9)</sup> In this way Behula has been created through numerous editions, changes and evolutions. In the fifth chapter the conversation between chandsadagar and Sanaka regarding the marriage of Lokhinder is worth mentioning as it provides a lot of humour for the readers. The language used here is coherent lucid and simple. This Chand sadagar has no trace of the state's man like, serious chandrathar of ManasaMongalKavya.

Here Chand sadagar is represented as a very homely character, who wishes to understand his wife Sanaka. The description given by the author is very touching where he says that Chand sadagar understood that his wife was not happy with him. He thought that if he tell his wife about the fate of his son then she will be pained, besides he himself doubted the prophesy, and thus the news of his son's marriage deeply influenced Chand sadagar and he did not know what to do.<sup>10</sup> This description clearly represented Chand sadagar as a very sensitive man, unlike the very stubborn and grand, serious lord of ManasaMongalKavya. Here Chand sadagar is represented as homely, sensitive and frustrated man. In this it can be said that the fierceness of his character has been diminished to a great extent here. We can see that after the return of Behula and Lokhinder to the mountain of Syantali, Chand Sadagar has expressed the anxiety of his loneliness uttering the verses of 'Nirbansatakam'. The nineteenth chapter of Behula has the verses of 'Nirbansatakam'.

At this point Chand Sadagar could see a lean skinny old man sitting at the branch of a tree and constantly hitting the branch with his axe. He thought the man must be perverted. However, this incident is no trifle, from the point of view of irony; this incident reflects the ironic situation of Chand sadagar. Although Chand sadagar was 'Saibya', which meant ideologically he should not pray to any other god, but still he prayed and completed the rituals of Manasa puja and he did so with utmost humility. In this regard the text described what Chand sadagar did. He ordered that everyone must know that Chand sadagar would be doing the ritualistic prayer of Manasa and this news was spread throughout his city.<sup>11</sup> Finally the story Behula ends. The end of the story also shows the debate on the social judgment of Behula as 'Sati' or 'Asati'. The story for the most part shows the character of Chand sadagar, his revolt against the goddess and the final reconciliation and concluding religious contentment.

There is much speculation and difference of opinion regarding the time when Dinesh Chandra actually wrote 'Phullora' following the narrative pattern of chandimangalkavya. A popular critic had considered the year 1908 to be the creation date of this book.<sup>12</sup> The afore-mentioned critic had also said that the second edition was published in the same year-that is in 1908 itself. In BaridbaranGhosh's edited, pouraniki published in January 2015, it is mentioned in the editorial that the actual date of publication of the book is 1907. The book 'Acharaya Dinesh Chandra Sen: Sadhosatobarsho Sradhanjali' (October), has a list of the books of Dinesh Chandra Sen and it shows the publication date of Phullora to be the year 1907 as well. However, the verifiable document which clearly proves the date of publication of this book is the last paragraph of the introduction to 'Phullora', which was written in 6<sup>th</sup> Aghran, in the Bengali year of 1313 that is 1908 A.D. here Dinesh Chandra says that although he was inspired by some many other ChandiMangal texts, he was most influenced by Kabikankan'schandi in writing this book.<sup>13</sup>

This description is followed by the date of Bengali year 1313 or 1908 A.D. in this context it should be mentioned that by other ChandiMangal', Dinesh Chandra meant the text of Dwija Janardhan, Madhavacharya and LalaJyotnarayan Sen. Since most of the story follows the original text, we can see the childhood playing activity of Kalketu, his hunting expeditions, his marriage with Phullora, their conjugal life, all these have been delineated. Kalketu and Phullora'sconjugal life is full of economic misery, but still Kalketu wished to test Phullora to fully comprehend her. It is in this that the story takes a new turn and we can find the traces of a story. The characters of Kalketu-Phullora are representatives of a particular time.

The veracity of this comment of Kalketu in ChandiMongal is a matter of discussion. Kailas Chandra Ghosh in his book 'Bangala Sahitya Arthak Bangala Sahityer Utpatti o Kromonnotti Prodorshon' (1885) and Srikumar Bandopadhyaya in his book

'BongosahityauponyaserDhara'(1938), have praised Mukundu and were very much willing to call him a historian keeping in mind Mukundu's effective characterisation, lucid presentation of events and depiction of reality. However, the time-period of Mukundu has kept him away from this distinction. However the story of ChandiMongal, as represented by Dinesh Chandra Sen in Phullora has a sense of historicity in it. The conversation has changed in accordance of time. The conjugal life of Kalketu and Phulloradoes have a sense of pathos in it. Both of them are co-witnesses to pain. However, this pathos is not always a source of suffering or pain. Sometimes it evokes a special feeling or understanding as well. Even within the mundane life, Phullora finds her own heaven of love. She feels love and this is beautifully described by the author in the following manner.

The textual description rhetorically asks the question that whether Phullora felt the pain of poverty when she rested her forehead on her husband's breast or when she engages in sweet love with her spouse, does she feel the need of warmth from warm clothes, or does she feel pained when her husband lovingly appreciates her cooking and asks her to eat, not knowing that there is nothing left to eat. Her husband's contentment fulfils and makes up for their poverty. Despite her hard labour, she finds her solace in the blissful embrace of her husband.<sup>14</sup>

Dinesh chandrasen's subtle description of the character Murari, represented the character in a much lively manner. He is shrewd character who is addicted to the business of money lending. So much so that he even fails to distinguish between food and earth. As a money lender he has been aptly represented by the author, who has imbibed in his body language the elements that reflects his persona to be that of a fierce loan shark. The cunning Murari is aptly represented when he contrives to trick innocent village people in borrowing money from him and thereby getting themselves entrapped in circular debts. The text shows Murari in the following manner. Whenever innocent village people came to Murari to return money borrowed or make due payment of interest, a cruel and cunning smile could be seen in his face peeping through his shrewd moustache that symbolise his scheming nature.<sup>15</sup> It is in this manner that we see the originality of Dinesh Chandra in recreating the story of Phullora.

### Conclusion

During the publication of Dinesh chandraSen's "Bangabhasa o sahitya"(1898), Rabindranath Tagore in his exalted appreciation had said that Dinesh chandra had enthralled us with the depiction of the vast treasure of Bengal's literary tradition spread in different branches encompassing the different aspects of Bengal's literary history. Rabindranath had also appreciated Mangal literature in essays like 'BatayanikerPatra', or 'shaktipuja'. Rabindranath had also analysed 'Behula'and 'Phullora'. In this regard a letter from Rabindranath to Dinesh Chandra is worth mentionable, which was published by Visva- Bharati Press in 'ChhithiPatro', number 10.37( Bengali year 1402/ 1995 A.D). This

was also published in the book marking the centenary celebration of Dinesh chandraSen's birth by PulinbihariSen in the Bengali year 1378(25<sup>th</sup>Baisakh), that is 1969 A.D. The aforementioned letter was edited by Sushil Roy in Visva-BharatiPatrika ( kartik-pous 1373 Bengali year) under the name of " ChhithiPatro: Dinesh chandraSen k likhito Rabindranath Thakur" (27<sup>th</sup> letter, pageno. 108).

This letter is yet to be preserved in the archives of Rabindra- Bhavan in Santiniketan. In this letter Rabindranath had talked about the two stories Behula and Phullora. In the letter Rabindranath says that he had just finished reading his book and admits that he is not any expert in reading texts from that genre and hence is incapable of comparing it with other texts, despite this he says that reading the text has given him given him much satisfaction. Rabindranath further adds that for a long time he had tried to encourage many to write a book related to Indian myth which could be read by the little boys and girls of India. This encouragement resulted in the creation of the book 'Gurudakshina' by the late Satish, he says that he is very fond of this book, and asks Dinesh Chandra to read this book. He also appreciated the effort that Dinesh Chandra had to put to realise this book and further adds that without simplicity of heart it was very difficult to have kept the simplicity of this story.<sup>16</sup>

In this context, it must be said that in Rabindranath's literary output Behula and the traces of yhe narrative pattern of Mangalkavya could be located in the ideological sphere of thinking. While writing the introduction to the book "Behula: An Indian Myth", by the non-Bengali writer SukhalataRao, Rabindranath had said:

"Mrs. SukhalataRao has caught in the web of her story the spirit of the village epic of Bengal. Behula, which has sprung from the heart of own people and has lived in oral traditions and folklore. Sung and performed by the local operatic troupes of this province. It gives us the picture of the ideal wife, her heroic sacrifice and conjures the atmosphere of home life in its humble majesty, touching simple hearts with the beauty and depth of its sentiments. I feel this English version of the story will find a large and appreciative audience."<sup>17</sup>

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7. Sen Dinesh Chandra, introduction, 1<sup>st</sup> edition,  
Behula, P.4
8. Sen Dinesh Chandra, introduction, 1<sup>st</sup> edition,  
Behula, P 5- 6
9. Sen Dinesh Chandra, introduction, 1<sup>st</sup> edition,  
Behula, P.7
10. Sen Dinesh Chandra, introduction, 1<sup>st</sup> edition,  
Behula, P 22
11. Sen Dinesh Chandra, introduction, 1<sup>st</sup> edition,  
Behula, P 52
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1908, in his book "Kabikankanchandi:  
BochitrerAnusandhan", which is part of the fourth  
chapter named "Bahurupchandikavya:  
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