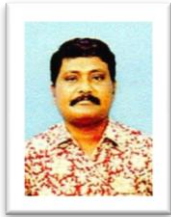


A Brief Outline of the Proposed Dissertation on: Binoy Majumdarer Kabita o Kabya Bhavana (The Poetry and Thoughts of Binoy Majumdar)

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Abstract

In the rich world of Bengali poetry, Binoy Majumdar's works have a separate place as path-setter. But unfortunately few studies have been made on him primarily because his poetry is abstruse and because he has not subscribed to any set beliefs. Bengali poetry has run through the traditions of Jayadeva (c.1170-c.1245), Rammani or Rami Rajakini (14th century), Bharat Chandra Roy Gunakar (1712-1760), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the 'Kolloi' literary movement (1923-1935), the Marxist genre and the 'Hungry Generation'. Binoy had healthy respect for all of them but was not shackled to any of them. During 1961-1965, he joined the Hungryalist movement, started by Malay Roy Choudhury in November 1961 at Patna in Bihar, having left the 'Krittibas' group and was considered the guru of the movement, but he left it soon to trudge his lonely journey.

Binoy Majumdar felt spiritually close to Sudhindranath Dutta, Buddhadev Basu and Bishnu Dey, who handled their tasks intellectually and often with rare sensitivity. Their sharp, pithy, expressive, and avuncular ideas and crisp and effective diction impressed him immensely. But the poet Binoy found closest to his heart was Jibanananda Das, the poet of surreal smell and touch, and Tagore. He has even confessed that whenever he was in trouble in his writing or in his personal life he always sought direction from Tagore's poetry. Nevertheless, he saw life through the prism of sexuality just as D.H. Lawrence did and sought communion with nature through the trills and thrills of sex. The difference was that sex in Binoy's poetry did not end in satedness and peace and in a realization of divinity as in D.H. Lawrence. Even then it gave a distinctive connotation to his poetry.

Binoy's distinctiveness as a poet becomes evident when it becomes difficult to put him in a group. As much as an individual so much as a poet he is alone. When all other poets of comparable talent or genius of his time did well for themselves in their professional, social and personal life, he chose to live the life of a recluse in a remote village in West Bengal in spite of being a first-class mechanical engineer of the famous Shibpur Engineering College.

Many of Binoy's poems have been translated in other languages. His poetry has influenced other Bengali poets as well as poets in other Indian languages. But in spite of this, no worthwhile research has been undertaken on his poetry and poetic thoughts till now. Keeping this lacuna in view the present research has been undertaken to fill the knowledge gap.

Keywords: Literary Research.

Introduction

Like most other literatures, Bengali literature also started with poetry as the earliest form of literary expression. It began with the Charyapada or mystical poems in the Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism during the Pala reign from the 8th to 12th century CE in Bengal. It passed through the medieval period of Jayadeva (c. 1170), Dwija Chandidas (14th century CE), Krittibas Ojha (1381-1461), Chandravati (1550-1600) and Kashiram Das (16th century CE) and reached the modern age with Bharat

Chandra Rai Gunakar (1712-1760), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), Biharilal Chakraborty (1835-1898), Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay (1838-1903) and Nobin Chandra Sen (1845-1925). Finally it found its fruition and culmination in Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and continued to find its way in the poetry of later-generation poets like Binoy Majumdar (1934-2006) who represented a distinctive stage of its development.

The period between Bharat Chandra and the modern poets was dominated by the kabyals or folk poets like Ramnidhi Gupta (1741-1839) or Nidhu Babu, Kalidas Chattopadhyay (1750-1820) or Kali Mirza, and Hensman Anthony (1786-1836) or Anthony Firingee who used to sing their poetry to the audience. Poetry was also sung during the ancient and the medieval period to the audience who used to listen to it in a gathering. So, the words, imagery and the structure used in poetry were such that these could be easily understood by the crowd. The introduction of printing in the last quarter of the 18th century changed the character of Bengali poetry. Now it was no longer the property of the masses but the preserve of only those who could read them. This elitist aspect had a profound effect on the form and content of Bengali poetry.

By the time Tagore came on the scene, Bengali poetry had branched into various departments such as ballad, hymn, epic, lyric, champu (prose and verse form) and poetical plays. He imbibed the traditions and enriched all these branches with his genius and took the Bengali poetry to a new height. He made the language of poetry simple, rhythmic and expressive. He even used the prose form in his later poetry and liberated Bengali poetry from the shackles of metre. In the hands of these great poets Bengali poetry acquired certain attributes which made possible a century later the writings of a rebel and unorthodox poet like Binoy Majumdar.

Attributes Of Bengali Poetry

During the early and the medieval period Bengali poetry was basically religion-based; although Padmavati (c. 1648) of the great Bengali bard Alaol (1607-1680) of Chittagong or the folk ballads of the Mymensingh region of the erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh) collected in Maimansingha Gitika written during the medieval period were surprisingly secular in outlook. Even Chandravati, widely considered to be the first woman poet of the Bengali language, was without a trace of religious narrowness in her Ramayana. One reason of this was that Pathan and Mughal rulers of Bengal were, by and large, non-intrusive in socio-religious matters and they ardently encouraged and patronized Bengali literature. A number of poets of the medieval period sang their praise.

There is evidence to suggest that the early Bengali poets knew Sanskrit, while the poets of the medieval period were acquainted with both Persian and Sanskrit. Poets of the early modern era were well versed in English and had a fair amount of knowledge of Sanskrit and sometimes Persian as well. The secular literature written in these tongues might also have influence their mindset.

The medieval streak of secularism continued in the poetry of Bharat Chandra in spite of the fact that he had to deal with Hindu gods and goddesses in his Annada Mangal Kabya. Michael Madhusudan Dutt went a step further and made Meghnada the hero and Rama the villain of his masterly epic Meghnadbad Kabya. His concept and treatment of the Ramayanic lore is surprisingly modern even by today's standard. Similarly, the Radha of his Brajangana Kabya is not the Vaishnavite Radha possessed of demure celestial virtues found in the poems of Vidyapati and other Vaishnava poets; she is an extraordinarily enlightened and attractive modern woman capable of taking care of herself and others. This aspect of Bengali poetry finds a revolutionary expression in Binoy Majumdar's poetry when his 'goddess' has the loftiest place on earth in his lap ('Amar koler cheye beshi uchcha, sammanito kono/ Ashan e biswe nei, ar se-ashan Iswarir', meaning 'More loftier holier than my lap/ No place exists on earth, and that place is for my Goddess').

Apart from secularism which was its forte from the past, Bengali poetry acquired its powerful diction and variety of ideas, expressions and imagery from English and other European literatures during this period. The English education influenced modern Bengali poets to a very large extent particularly since the era of the poet-cum-editor Iswar Gupta (1812-1859). Though Gupta was a strong critic of English ways and education (especially for women), the genre of his poetry and his crisp diction were singularly English in character.

Not to speak of Madhusudan who considered himself more English than Englishmen and wrote English better than many well-known English authors of his time, a typically Bengali poet and journalist like Rangalal Bandyopadhyay (1827-1887), who was three years younger than Madhusudan and famous then for his poetical work Surasundari, advocated that the English style of writing should be followed in Bengali poetry to enhance its quality. His own poetry was quite modern and powerful in its imagery and diction.

Post-Tagore Scenario: 'Kallol' Age & 'Communist' Poetry

As it has been already mentioned, Tagore introduced a new élan in Bengali poetry with the help of simple and expressive words and a variety of rhythmic structures. Poets who came after him were immensely benefitted by his innovations. They tried to shake off his influence by using new ideas and imageries and metres and often failed. However, among those who could plough their own furrows the most notable were Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), Jibananda Das (1899-1954), Sudhindranath Dutta (1901-1960), Gokulchandra Nag (1895-1925), Premendra Mitra (1904-1988), Buddhadev Basu (1908-1974), Achintya Kumar Sen Gupta (1903-1976), Manish Ghatak (1902-1979) and Bishnu Dey (1909-1982). Together they are known as belonging to the 'Kollol Group'.

'Kollol' refers to one of the most influential literary movements in Bengali literature which can be placed approximately between 1923 and 1935. The

name 'Kollol' derives from a magazine of the same name (which translates as 'the sound of waves' in Bengali). A number of other magazines that followed 'Kollol' can also be considered as part of the general movement. These include Uttara (1925), Pragati (1926), Kalikalam (1926) and Purbasa (1932). Influenced by Marxism and Freudian thoughts, their poetry is marked by honest soul-searching, direct and incisive though candid expression, and crisp unornamented diction. Among them, Nazrul made his presence felt as a rebel poet. He profusely penned his poems and songs, in form and content surprisingly diverse, so much so that his name is pronounced today alongside Tagore.

There was another group of poets who were overwhelmingly influenced by Marxian thoughts and who wanted to make poetry the vehicle for conveying communist viewpoint. Communism made an inroad in Bengal in the early twenties at the behest of M. N. Roy and Abani Mukherji. Although Kazi Nazrul Islam was an early convert to communism like his friend and latter-day communist leader Muzaffar Ahmed, his poetry, though it upheld the value of man, was devoid of any kind of communist jargon. Among the poets of this genre Dinesh Das (1913-1985) made a deep impact with his poem Kaste: 'Bayonet hok jato dharalo/ Kasteta shan dio, Bandhu', meaning 'However sharp-edged the bayonet may be/ (Don't forget to) whet and sharpen your sickle, Friend'. Other important poets of this genre of poetry included Birendra Chattopadhyay (1920-1985) and Subhas Mukhopadhyay (1919-2003). Bishnu Dey had also leftist predilection but the catholicity of his ideas and his aestheticism made him different from the poets of this genre.

Binoy Majumdar did not feel spiritually close to either Kazi Nazrul Islam or the 'Communist' poets, though he avidly read their poems. Rather he felt close to Sudhindranath Dutta, Buddhadev Basu and Bishnu Dey who handled their tasks intellectually and often with rare sensitivity. Their sharp, pithy, expressive, and avuncular ideas and crisp and effective diction impressed him immensely and often used *tatsama* words like them, though with a different intent, to create his milieu, but the poet he found closest to his heart was Jibanananda Das, the poet of surreal smell and touch.

It is true that in a poem of his collection titled Fire Esho, Chaka he has questioned the relevance of Jibanananda in life as well as in creativity, but he has not hesitated to acknowledge his greatness at the same time. Subsequently in his essay titled Kabita Parichay: Adbhut Andhar Ak he has analyzed Jibanananda's greatness. He later confided to a friend that he had always yearned to write poems like him but could not do so. In a very unlikely manner (considering his sensuous and unorthodox image as a poet), he has even confessed that whenever he was in trouble in his writing or in his personal life he always sought direction from Tagore's poetry.

Nevertheless, this did not deter him from seeing life through the prism of sexuality just as D.H. Lawrence did in his novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Like him, he sought communion with nature through the trills and thrills of sex. The difference between them was that sex in Binoy's poetry did not end in satedness and peace and in a realization of divinity as it did in D.H. Lawrence's novel. Even then it gave a distinctive connotation to his poetry.

'Krittivas' Group & Hungry Generation

In the early fifties a group of talented young poets began to write a new kind of bold experimental poetry and found a platform in a magazine that appeared in Kolkata under the title of *Krittibas* in July 1953. The editors of the inaugural issue of the magazine were Sunil Gangopadhyay, Ananda Bagchi and Dipak Majumdar. At some point of time Shakti Chattopadhyay, Sarat Mukhopadhyay and Samarendra Sengupta also edited the magazine. Apart from the above poets Binoy Majumdar was an important member of the group, although his detachment did not allow him to come to the forefront. The magazine played a highly influential role in the Kolkata literary scene for nearly three decades till its publication ceased in 1982.

During 1961-1965 several poets including Shakti Chattopadhyay and Ananda Bagchi left the magazine and joined the Hungryalist movement which was started in November 1961 by Malay Roy Choudhury at Patna in Bihar. The movement did not care for the norms of decency and portrayed reality as seen by the poets. As a result, poems written by the protagonists of this movement were often criticized for obscenity and vulgarity. Though the Hungryalist movement kept in touch with the Beat poets like Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Octavio Paz and Ernesto Cardenal, etc., its inspiration was original and it influenced Hindi, Marathi, Assamese and Urdu literatures.

Binoy Majumdar was in the Hungryalist movement for some time and was held as a guru but he left the group because of his differences with Shakti Chattopadhyay and Sandipan Chattopadhyay who led the movement at that time. When Malay Roy Choudhury was prosecuted for obscenity in Kolkata, the *Krittibas* magazine openly declared in its editorial that it did not support the movement and had no connection with it. From the recently published letters of Sunil Gangopadhyay written to Sandipan Chattopadhyay it is known that he considered the Hungryalist movement a threat to the *Krittibas* genre of poetic writings.

While the bulk of Bengali intelligentsia was against the use of mindless obscenity and vulgarity in literature, a section of them advocated unfettered literary freedom as the basic necessity of a civilized society, holding that obscenity or vulgarity was an evolving concept in literature and that the reader alone could judge whether the use of it was mindless or superfluous in a poem. Literary opinion was also divided on the issue in West Bengal and Bangladesh, but Binoy and a few other poets like Ananda Bagchi expressed their opinion staunchly in favour of freedom.

During this time when the celebrated poets and writers like Shankha Ghosh and Debesh Das refused to stand by Malay Roy Choudhury, Binoy

Majumdar stood by him like a rock during his 35-month-long trial. Malay was sentenced to one month's imprisonment by the Bankshall Court of Kolkata for his poem Stark Electric Jesus in 1966 but was exonerated by the Calcutta High Court in the following year.

Binoy Majumdar's Distinctiveness as a Poet

Binoy's distinctiveness as a poet becomes evident when like Baudelaire or Mirza Ghalib it becomes difficult to put him in a group. As much as an individual so much as a poet he is alone. When all other poets of comparable talent or genius of his time did well for themselves in their professional, social and personal life, he chose to live the life of a recluse to pursue his vocation as a poet, whereas if he wanted he could live a more comfortable life than most for being a first-class mechanical engineer of the famous Shibpur Engineering College.

Apart from loneliness what strikes most in his poetry is the highly imaginative and complex thought process which makes it difficult to understand and enjoy it at first go. Even in a few comparatively simple lines of a poem like Bishal Dupur ('Paharer baro chhaya deergho hoye duure chole jay/ Mone hoy kichhu khoje, ager rater katha agami rater kathaguli, meaning 'The big shadow of the hill goes far away/ It seems it seeks something, perhaps something about last night something about the future nights') he can introduce a world within a world.

The poet is also very careful about using and sometimes coining words in his poems. He often uses tatsama words and the heroic couplets used by the older poets to create his effect. He is very imaginative and often obtuse in his imagery, but once the reader gets into it he is rewarded with a pleasure that is extraordinary. This is one area in which Binoy Majumdar was far ahead of his time. This is also the reason why the poetry-reading public is taking a new interest in his poetry now. A number of young Bengali poets now are following his techniques to write poetry. For his imagery and use of nature to express his emotions Majumdar is often compared with Jibanananda Das. This is an area that requires a thorough exploration.

As it has been stated earlier, Binoy Majumdar has used sexuality as a vehicle of emotions. In one poem he has even described sexual intercourse in such a manner that it connotes the life-process. He is the poet who can make use of a disease like tinnitus to interpret his idea of existence. In some of his efforts he has succeeded as a poet and

taken the reader to a new height of spiritual and metaphysical realization; and in some he has appeared to be earthy and crass. He has even been neglectful of his poetry in some cases as he has admitted himself in his essays on poetry.

Aim of the study

Exploration of Binoy Majumdar as a poet.

Conclusion

From the foregoing it would be quite apparent that Binoy Majumdar's contribution to Bengali literature is exceptional. Many of his poems have been translated in other languages. His poetry has also influenced Bengali poets as well as poets in other Indian languages. But in spite of this, no worthwhile research has been undertaken on his poetry and poetic thoughts till now. Keeping this lacuna in view the present research has been undertaken to fill the knowledge gap.

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