

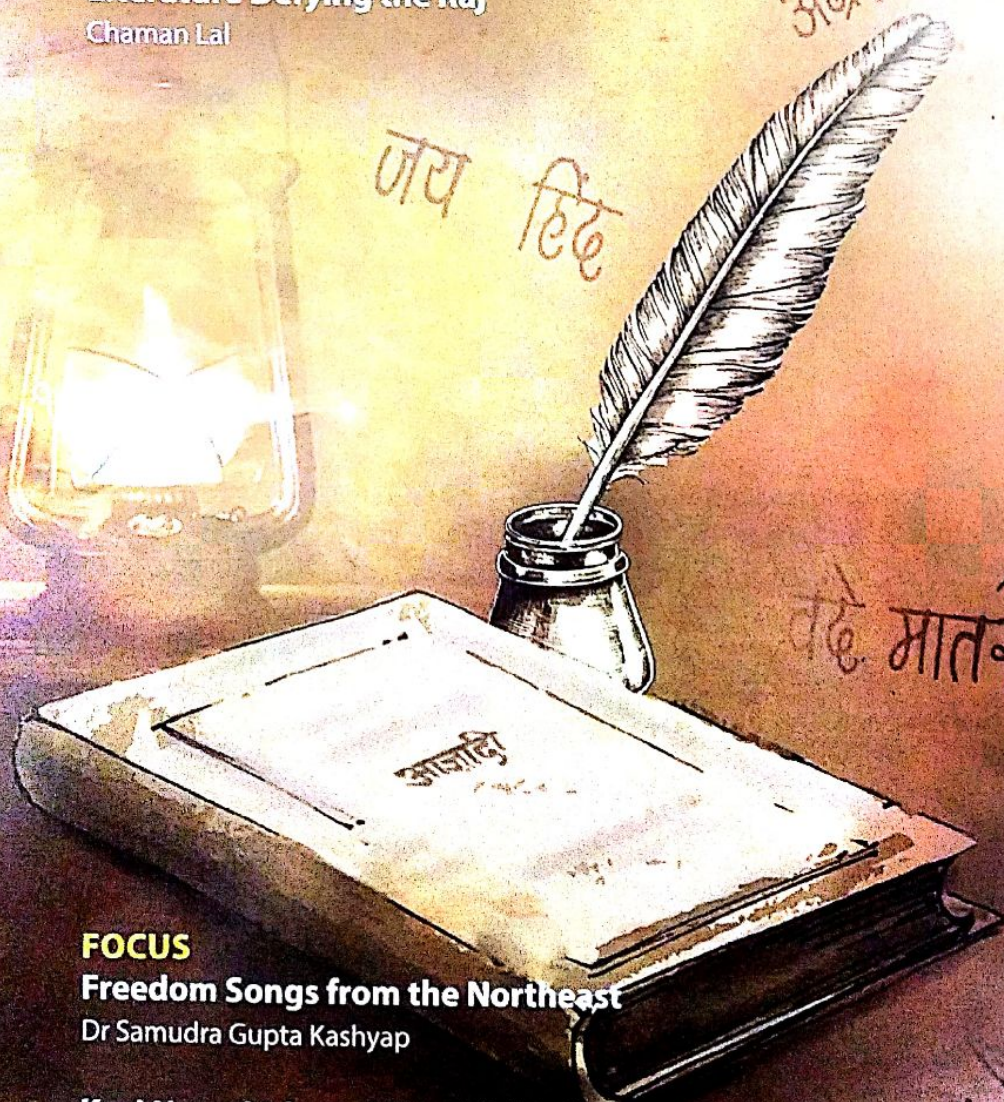
## Literature and Azadi

**LEAD****Partition Literature**

Manan Kumar Mandal

**SPECIAL****Literature Defying the Raj**

Chaman Lal

**FOCUS****Freedom Songs from the Northeast**

Dr Samudra Gupta Kashyap

**Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Youthful Rebellion**

Dr Anuradha Roy





## Words of Freedom

A freedom fighter from Bihar, who was fond of music, was once arrested from his home. While in prison, he sent a note to his family. The note when censored by the prison authorities was found to be highly seditious and conspiring against the British Raj. It had just a single line written in Hindi that read, *Is-Raj ke taar dheele kar do*. This was deciphered as 'Let the reign of this Raj (British) be loosened.' He was summoned by the authorities and inquired about the said note. The imprisoned nationalist humbly replied that he was misunderstood and he merely wished to convey to his family to 'loosen the strings of his musical instrument, Esraj (इसराज),' that he had left midway while being arrested. Such is the power of wordplay that was enough to shake the foundation of oppressors.

Words give the power to 'imagine' something that is beyond ordinary comprehension. They provide strength to 'write and document' incidents and experiences that act as valuable historical records for generations to come. They give the courage to 'express and act' against the wrongs collectively. Through this issue, we are revisiting the journey of these words and how they traversed throughout the freedom struggle, echoing the voice of millions of Indians.

In the struggle against the British oppression and the quest for freedom, this 'imagination' imbued with words led to the creation of fiction as strong as Anandmath which ignited the resistance movement. It also gave birth to songs, poetry and slogans that resonated with the masses and voiced their own expression against tyranny. These words invigorated the feeling of oneness and selfless love for the motherland. Poems and songs like Vande Matram, Sarey Jahan se Achha and Himadri Tung Shring se, instilled pride in our historical and geographical importance and reaffirmed the belief in the cultural richness of the land. These utterances also brought people together beyond caste and creed. Consider these lines by Kazi Nazrul Islam, '*Ei-he tomar daan/ Tomar hokey jiwani-dharan/ Tomar hokey pran.*' These words also brought people together as illustrated in the lines quoted in Dr Anuradha's piece, "Who is asking whether they are Hindus or Muslims?/ O helmsman, please tell them/ Those who are drowning are human beings, children of my mother!"

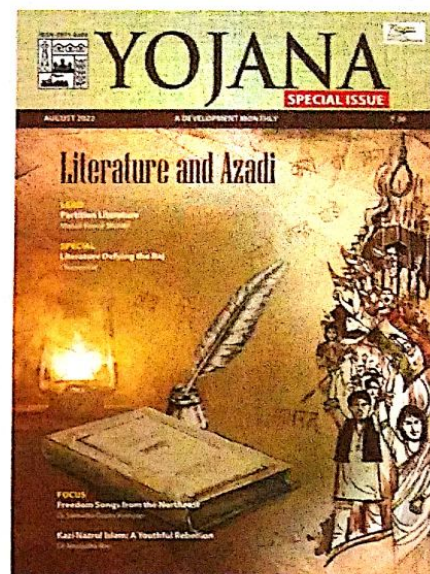
Unfortunately, there was so much happening around during this era that the truth of the times was stranger than the fiction. It was thus needed to record the injustice, brutalities and atrocities to build public opinion. This documentation was done through newspapers, pamphlets, books, and every piece of literature that revealed the British on paper, quite literally. Published works in all the Indian languages as well as in English made the misdeeds of British occupation threadbare and raised the collective conscience of the nation to set things right.

Ironically, these writings also recorded the countless stories of pain and suffering caused during the partition by our own comrades. Like a stinging well overflowing with blood-soaked corpses, their stench could be felt far and wide. These words didn't mince themselves. They witnessed countless brutalities committed due to the poison of hatred that had engulfed our society. This gave birth to Partition literature, as we know it. These accounts still make us reflect and retrospect on what went wrong.

When these words were used to 'express and act', they were equally creative, witty and artistic. Consider the plight of a British policeman somewhere in the erstwhile Bengal whose only duty for days would have been to watch the same patriotic play every day and to catch the actors red-handed for an act of sedition but he failed to find any reference. However, on any given day, the actors took the liberty of adding a few phrases in the form of an unscripted and impromptu 'gag' that filled the hall with a sense of patriotism and gave the performance a new meaning.

Then there were the clarion calls to 'act,' the war cries such as *Inquilab Zindabad*, *Karo ya Maro*, and *Tum mujhe khoon do, mai tumhe azadi dunga*, which became symbols and force behind the collective resistance.

This issue celebrates the words that inspired the ordinary men and women of pre-independence times for a common cause. These expressions of the freedom era have documented everything for us to read and understand the humongous efforts those generations made and the hardships they suffered. These words have seen it all. This issue is an ode to these musings. □





# Partition Literature

Manan Kumar Mandal

*The multilingual setup of Indian literature compels us to accommodate a multi-dimensional history of the state and the margin. Complex trajectories of colonial enterprise and nationalism have paved the road to contemporary modern Indian literature where anecdotes of history are interwoven in the literary expressions. The emergence of independent India has inspired Indian writers and narratives in many ways. Religious and social splits, rift, and ambivalence that have worked behind the political discourse of the Indian nation-state in the last two centuries had shaped modern Indian literature. Partition of the Indian subcontinent has devastating and cascading effects over generations. It changed the literary genres of many Indian languages like a watershed event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the animosity it unleashed, the malice carried over decades after decades. Literature produced with the reflection of Partition anecdotes has been classified as the Partition Literature—a new literary genre of 20<sup>th</sup> century which is paralleled with the holocaust literature, refugee literature, etc.*

**T**he symptomatic nature of literary reflections about partition in different parts of the globe can be seen where the centrality of the partition motif in the post-colonial world is one of the major attributes. The world has witnessed several partitions like Israel-Palestine, Ireland-England, the Partition of Germany (and of course its reunification), and Partition of former Yugoslavia, Partition of Korea and Vietnam, etc., throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In each case, the territorial partition proposal has created severe problems for the people of either side, and destabilised human lives for long. The human aspect of these sufferings are noted in the literary corpus of various languages. However, each newly emerged borderland has its own spatial character and cultural legacies, therefore literary reflections are manifold. In each case, the partition proposal was imposed or overseen by a stronger polity at the expense of a weaker one, instigating a 'moment of nationalism' which

produced reconfigured or new national identities. So, to explore Partition literature, it is necessary to look through the glasses of heterogeneous identities. Living in the post-colonial timeline, Partition literature not only opens up the counter-factuality of state craft, but also explores the space for the vicinity of lives in the states that fall apart. At the moment of decolonisation, the rationale behind such partition proposal has been questioned for long. A sense



*The human tragedy caused by the refugee crisis has been an important theme in Partition literature*

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of 'critical counter-factualism' may be seen in this attempt of re-reading of Partition literature.

The premise of Partition literature is developed as literary genre and accepted in 1970s, however it started with the advent of nation-state and the end of colonial enterprise. Examples can be drawn from the various parts of the globe. Palestinian writer Ghasan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* (1962, Palestine/Israel), Anton Shammas's Hebrew novel *Arabesques* (1988, Palestine/ Israel), A B Yehoshua's first Hebrew novel *The Lover* (1977, Israeli identity and diaspora), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980, Partition of India), Irish poet and novelist Seamus Deane's debut novel *Reading in the Dark* (1996, Ireland Partition), Korean writer Kim Won-il's novel *Spirit of Darkness* (1973, Korean Partition), Pak Wan-suh's novel *The Naked Tree* (1970, Korean Partition), Israeli writer Oz Shelach's *Picnic Grounds: A Novel in Fragments* (2003, Israeli diaspora), Bangladeshi writer Akhtaruzzaman Ilias's two Bengali novels, *The Soldier in the Attic (Chilekothar Sepai)*, 1987, Pakistan/Bangladesh Partition) & *The Saga of Dreams (Khoabnama)*, 1996, Pakistan/Bangladesh Partition), Yugoslavian writer Debravka Ugresic's novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1998) and *The Ministry of Pain* (2004) both correspond to the Partition of Yugoslavia, and finally it is worthy to mention Geetanjali Shree's Hindi novel *Ret Samadhi (Tomb of Sand)*, 2018, Indian Partition), the English title of whose won the International Booker Prize recently. Writers who suffered have expressed ostensibly and the genre continues with the complex trajectories of nation-state. This whole gamut of Partition literature emerged as a charged domain of cross-argumentative socio-political contestation and cultural discourse as well.

### Background

India is a thrice partitioned nation where three Partitions have taken place to form three separate states. If seen in the timeline, the subsequent events of 1905, 1947 and 1971 have shaped modern South Asia with the newly configured nation-state of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. The Partition of British India, the Bengal province and the Punjab province completed the process of decolonisation of India.



Partition literature often touches upon the hardships faced by the displaced population, in particular, women and children

With this complex process of socio-political and cultural progression, it is seen that language took an important role to integrate or disintegrate the historical realities. Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Sindhi are major constituents of such language-driven identities which inculcate the miniature of nationalism to the collective mind and to which literary endeavour corresponds. Riot-loot-terror-engulfed reality, loss of lives, crisis of refuge, psychological trauma

and subsequently, the inheritance of loss has shaken the entire generation of Indian writers who have experienced Partition holocaust. It is now accepted fact that almost one million people were killed, however scholars have claimed much more than this (2,00,000 to 2 million); 75,000 women belonging to different communities were raped and abducted or missing. Recent scholarship has shown almost 14.5 million were displaced between India and Pakistan (East & West/ 'Muhajir' & 'Udbastu'), whereas around 3.5 million people went missing. Migration continued in eastern part after three decades, till 1971. It shows the enormity of perpetual devastation in the process of Partition— 'a complex and convoluted human tragedy.' In 1946, from the 'Great Calcutta killing' to Noakhali riot, from Amritsar to Lahore, all roads were flooded with bizarre and uncanny incidents creating an unwanted binary of Partition over the emergence of new independent India— 'the other face of freedom.' Referring to the dominant voices of history, Mushirul Hassan commented, "More than historical accounts of independence and the Partition, the personal histories of uprootment speak volumes of betrayal of the noble ideals of Indian nationalism, of secularism, non-violence, and of a truly democratic state."

**Partition literature not only opens up the counter-factuality of state craft, but also explores the space for the vicinity of lives in the states that fall apart. At the moment of decolonisation, the rationale behind such partition proposal has been questioned for long. A sense of 'critical counter-factualism' may be seen in this attempt of re-reading of Partition literature.**

Chiefly, short story and novels are being noted in this category; however, a handful of poetry and drama has also been written on the Partition. Writers of Hindi and Urdu were pioneers in this field. Saadat Hasan Manto, probably the finest writer of Indian Partition, who experienced Partition violence, uncertainty, trauma in his personal life, fictionalised the reciprocation of human instinct to Partition event. Stories like 'Thanda Gosht', 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Khol Do', 'Dog of Titwal' may be read as the deepest remembrance of Partition trauma ever



written in Indian context. Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote some immortal poetry and *nazm* at the time of turbulence. Ample of epitaph written by several Urdu and Hindi writers of western side like Krishen Chander's short story (*Peshawar Express*), Qurratulain Hayder (*Aag Ka Dariya*, 1959), Yashpal (*Jhoota Sach*, 1958-60), Naseem Hijazi (*Khaak aur Khoon*), Rahi Masoom Reza (*Aadha Gaon*), Manohar Malgonkar (*A Bend in the Ganges*, 1964), Razia Bhatt (Bano), Intizar Hussain (*Basti*, 1979), Amrita Pritam (*Pinjar*, 1950), Bhisham Sahni (*Tamas*, 1987), K S Duggal (*Ma Pio Laye*, 1974), Khushwant Singh (*Train to Pakistan*, 1990), Kamleshwar (*Kitne Pakistan*, 2000), etc. These narratives are of traumatic experience, violence, rape and abduction of women, about tormented memory of refugee-hood and lives of unknown destiny. K S Duggal brought out a collection of poems called *Band Darwaze* (1959) and a collection titled *Dhoya Hoya Boohe* (The Half-Shut Door). After fifty years of Partition, referring to those titles, he wrote:

"It is easy to write about a traumatic experience, like the Partition of the Punjab, and the consequent dislocation, torture and misery it inflicted upon the affected people. And yet it is not so easy as it appears...who attempted to write on this theme seem to have been carried away so much by what they had witnessed that they lost all sense of balance. The tendency is to hold one side, or the other, totally responsible for the holocaust."

This has been argued by many writers who had experienced Partition. In recent times, Krishna Sobti in her last novel *A Gujarat Here, A Gujarat There* (2017) expressed how she was haunted throughout her life by the bizarre memory of murder of her childhood friend in Partition. The thematic disposition of Partition violence and uncertainty thereof gives a pattern which can be traced now. But after decades in continuity, Partition theme as invoked in recent fiction clearly shows new tendencies. Perpetual traumatic amplitude has been replaced by the complexities unleashed.

On the other hand, Bengali writers have responded somewhat late to this endeavour, however, three contemporary Bandopadhyay voices (Tarasankar, Manik and Bibhutibhusan) on Bengal Partition can be traced alongside. Ritwik Ghatak was probably the finest artist who portrayed Partition milieu with deepest sense of insecurity of human existence. *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar*, *Subarnalata* may be remembered for years. Nema Ghosh's *Chinnamul* anchored refugee time with honesty. Writers like Jibananda Das (*Jalpaihati*),

Amarendra Ghosh (*Bhangche Sudhu Bhangche*), Narendranath Mitra (*Palanka, Chenamahala*), Amiya Bhusan Mazumder (*Nirbas, Garh Srikhanda*), Santa Sen (*Pitamahi*), Annadasankar Ray (*Krantodarshi*), Narayan Sanyal (*Bakultala PL Camp*), Sunil Gangopadhyay (*Arjun, Purba Pashchim*), Samaresh Basu (*Saudagar, 'Adab'*), Jyotirmayee Debi (*E-par Ganga O-par Ganga*), Atin Bandopadhyay (*Nilkantha pakhir Khoje, Manusher Gharhari, Ishwarer Bagan* Trilogy), Gour Kishore Ghosh (*Jal Pore Pata Nare, Prem Nei*), Prafulla Ray (*Keya Patar Nouko, Shoto Dharay Boye Jay*), Debes Ray (*Barisaler Jogen Mandal, 'Refugee'*), Shirsendu Mukhopadhyay (*Ghunpoka*), Hasan Azizul Huq (*Aagunpakhi*), Amar Mitra (*Dhulomati, Dashami Dibase, Kumari Megher Desh Chai*) contributed to the corpus. Indian English writer or NRI writers of international repute have also chosen Partition theme as central idea in their fiction. Bapsi Sidhwa (*Ice*

*Candy Man*, 1989), Amitav Ghosh (*The Shadow Lines*, 1988), Jhumpa Lahiri (Short story: *Interpreter of Maladies*, 1999), Shauna Singh Baldwin (*What the Body Remembers*, 2001), Rohinton Mistry (*A Fine Balance*, 2001) are some of the examples. There are several instances of non-fiction and autobiographical writings in Bengali and Hindi or in English published in following decades which can be taken into account— *Supuriboner Sari* by Sankha Ghosh, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain, *Dayamayeer Katha* by Sunanda Sikdar.

#### Chronicles, Collections & Initiatives

Indian Partition historiography has been well-developed since 1950s. In

first five decades, it was committed to 'high politics' and gradually new lights of feministic stance, oral narratives from the survivor, caste angle, etc., have got incorporated. Starting from *Pakistan or Partition of India* (1945) by B R Ambedkar, *Awake Hindustan!* (1945) by Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee, *Divide & Quit* (1961) by Penderal Moon, *Freedom at Midnight* (1975) by Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre to *India Wins Freedom* (Maulana Abul Kalam Azad), the non-fiction narrative goes on with argument and counter argument. In Bengali, Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay wrote *Udbastu*, where his experience as a Government official responsible for rehabilitation work has been noted in detail. *The Marginal Men* by Prafulla Chakrabarti is another gigantic individual attempt to explore records of refugee rehabilitation and their status in West Bengal. Ample biographical accounts have been written like *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachor* by Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Jibon O Bibhagpurba Banglar Rajniti* by Abul Hashim, *Jukto Bangladesher Sesh*

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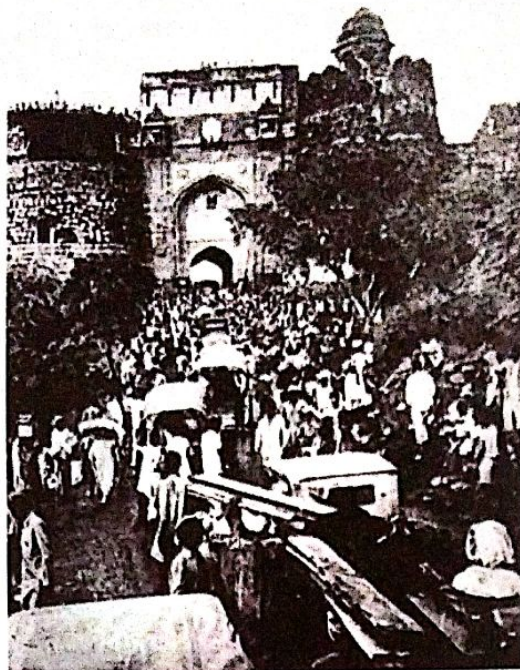


*Adhyay* (on Fazlul Huq) by Kalipada Biswas, *Bharat Keshari Jugapurush Shyamaprasad* by Tathagata Ray, etc.

After fifty years of independence of India, a new wave of studying Partition with new perspective was created by some of the feminist scholars like Urvashi Butalia (*The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*), Ritu Menon & Ritu Memon (*Border & Boundaries*), Jashodhara Bagchi (*Trauma & the Triumph*), Veena Das (*Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*), etc., after seven decades of Indian Partition more new approaches are coming in the name of 'new history'— where people from the margin and third generation approach to interpret history have created more space.

Namely, Jaya Chatterjee (*Bengal Divided, Spoils of Partition*), Ayesha Jalal (*The Sole Spokesman, The Pity of Partition*), Vazira Faizala-Yacoobali Zamindar's book *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern India*, Yasmin Khan's *The Great Partition*, Anam Zakeria's *The Footprint of Partition*, Aanchal Malhotra's *Remnants of a Separation*, Ananya Jahanara Kabir's *Partition's Post-Amnesias*, Pippa Verdi's *From the Ashes of 1947* are some notable works. In fictionalising Partition, the attempt of third generation writer can be seen in *Victory Colony 1950* by Bhaswati Ghosh, *Parted Earth* (2021) by Anjali Enjeti, *Midnight's Furies* (2015) by Nisid Hajri, etc.

Several collections of short story and poetry in Bengali, English and Hindi can be identified in this regard to see how this literary genre continued to exist among the readers. Bengali and Indian short stories in translation compiled by Manabendra Bandopadhyay in two volumes titled *Bhed Bibhed* (1992), and Debes Ray's *Raktamanir Hare* (1999 & 2003) includes Bengali translation of sixty-two short stories written in various Indian languages. Bashabi Fraser compiled forty Bengali short stories in her title *Bengal Partition Stories* published in 2008. One of the finest collections in this regard is Alok Bhalla's *Stories About The Partition of India Vol I, II & III* (1994) in which sixty-three Indian short stories have been translated into English. He classified four categories of Partition stories, "reflecting the ways in which the writers tried to make sense of events which were otherwise unimaginable." Stories that commonly talk about anger and negation, about lamentation and consolation, and stories of the retrieval of memories may be taken in general for the first-generation who witnessed Partition. More interests have been noted for inheritance of collective memory and



*Trauma, anger, despair and a sense of loss associated with leaving one's home was portrayed in various literary works related to Partition*

amnesia in subsequent generation who have engaged themselves in this field. A corpus of oral narratives of either side are also adding value to this accordingly. A series of personal narratives of some Hindu refugees published in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in 1950s and subsequently compiled by Dakkhinaranjan Basu titled *Chere Asa Gram* (1975). On the other hand, a police officer who travelled from Hoshiarpur to Lahore by train at the time of Partition violence wrote an Urdu account called *Hoshiarpur to Lahore*. These two books have been republished in the recent years, showing the demand of Partition narrative among the readers till date.

## Epilogue

In the last few decades, Partition literature has received enormous attention of the readers and scholars across the globe. Huge corpus of literary texts on thrice Partitioned Indian sub-continent needs re-reading in present context. A plethora of Urdu and Hindi writings is available in the domain of Partition literature. On the contrary, the presence of Bengali writings on Partition are little unclear at national level due to lack of translation into Hindi or in English. Today, agencies and publishing houses are instrumental in flourishing Partition theme in South Asia. However, the aftermath of Partition in Indian subcontinent and its neighbouring nations with its complex trajectories has given the rise to new genres like Borderland studies, Migration studies, Dalit studies, Memory Studies and other interdependent state affairs emerged after the Partition. Consequently, the focus has shifted to ordinary lives along the border with different layers of livelihood. After 75 years of independence, the re-reading of Partition literature can essentially be an exposition of a new life of Indian sub-continent. □

*Photo credits: NMML, New Delhi*

## Endnotes

1. For a comparative study on patterns of Partition memory and Partition literature in reference to nation-state, see Joe Clery (2002), *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State*, CUP;
2. Jill Didur (2001), "Lifting the Veil? Reconsidering the Task of Literary Historiography," *Interventions* 3.3 p.446-51;
3. Anna Bernard (2010), "Forms of Memory : Partition as a Literary Paradigm," *Alif* 2010 p.9-33
4. Mushairul Hasan (1997), *India Partitioned : The Other Face of Freedom* Vol I&II, Roli Books, New Delhi.
5. Haimanti Ray (2018), *The Partition of India*, OUP
6. *Pangs of Partition: The Human Dimension*, Vol II (2002), Setter & Gupta Ed, ICHR & Manohar, New Delhi.
7. *Stories About the Partition of India* (2013), Ed. Alok Bhalla, Manohar, New Delhi.



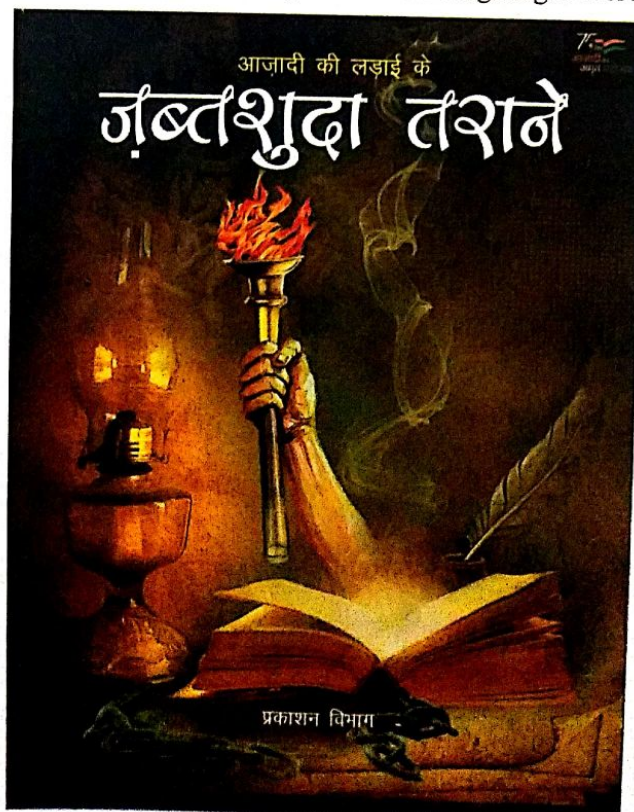
# Literature Defying the Raj

Chaman Lal

*Oppressors around the world in different eras tried to discourage the ideas that were against the established system. But despite this suppression, human civilisation and culture have developed along with the freedom of ideas and resistance. Banned poetries reflect the zeal for freedom of the country from foreign rulers, and sacrifices to achieve the goal and sufferings in the process.*

**D**uring the colonial rule, the printing press and newspapers grew and the first Indian, rather Asian, a weekly newspaper, *Hicky's Bengal Gazette*, edited by James Augustus Hicky, came out on 29 January 1780, after East India Company had occupied large parts of India in 1757 after the defeat of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula in War of Plassey. Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India, appointed by the Company in 1773, crushed the *Gazette* within two years thereby ceasing its publication from 30 March 1782. Various laws were brought by the Company to suppress the Indian press and writings against British rule. Lord Wellesley, the Governor-General enacted the first Censorship of Press Act in 1799, Regulation III of 1818, under which Lala Lajpat Rai was sent to Mandalay jail in Burma, and then a series of oppressive laws like Licensing Regulations Act 1823, Press Act of 1835 or Charles Metcalfe Act, Licensing Act 1857, etc., were enacted during East India Company rule.

*Payam-e-Azadi* (Message of Freedom), an Urdu paper under the editor Mirza Bedar Bakht, supported the first war of Indian Independence in 1857. It is believed that he was publicly hanged and the readers of this paper, from whose houses its issues were found, were also punished by the Company. Many papers in various Indian languages were banned or penalised during the 1857 war.



Post-1858, the Sedition Act 124-A was enacted and used to suppress the ideas of freedom fighters like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who was sentenced to six years of imprisonment and his paper *Kesari* was subjected to prosecution. In 1898, the scope of 124-A was widened by inserting Clause 153-A for causing disaffection among classes. Later, 295-A was also made part of that law. These laws enacted by the British colonial regime to suppress freedom struggle, incidentally continued in all three countries—India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, even though British Government scrapped this law in its own country. In

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1898, the Official Secrets Act and later, Indian Post Office Act and Indian Customs Act, all controlled the books and publications. Finally, the Indian Press Act of 1910 became the master act which was amended from time to time.

Through provisions of these various Acts in States and at the Central level, books and other publications were banned and publishers were heavily fined and jailed. Gerald N Barrier in his 1974 published research, 'Banned Controversial literature and Political control in British India-1907-1947', has given many details about these banned publications. Later, Gurdev Singh Sidhu in his research on banned literature on Bhagat Singh, and a few Hindi scholars like Santosh Bhaduria and Rustom Roy had done some more research in this area. Perhaps other scholars in various Indian languages have contributed to this area. Gurdev Singh has listed 66 publications in Indian languages and three English publications, which were banned. National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi, and British Library, London, are the two biggest repositories of banned Indian literature as British colonial rulers used to send a copy of each banned publication to London, where these publications are preserved. As per Barrier, consolidated listings at the National Archives of India, New Delhi have more than a thousand banned publications in nine Indian languages including English, while British Museum has over 1500 and India Office Library, London had 1095 of the same. India Office Library and British Museum records are now merged in the British library. NAI itself has published a few selected banned works of literature in some volumes. Looking at the titles of banned publications in various languages, the keywords which emerge to identify the subject of these banned publications are— Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, Azadi, Inquilab, Deshbhakti, Geet Tarane, Khooni, Phansi, Desh, Watan, Zulm, Zalim, etc. Some other sources of these records are in Pakistan's Punjab State Archives at Lahore; repositories in Cambridge University UK; South Asia Research Centre in Chicago University; Ghadar Party Archives in Berkeley University, California; New York Public Library; Canada and National Archives of Singapore along with many countries where Ghadar party literature was sent.

Out of these banned publications, the Publications Division of India, New Delhi, that publishes this journal, Yojana as well, published selected poetry first in 1987 and then in 1998. In 2021, on the occasion of celebrating 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Indian freedom, these two publications

have been reprinted and revised, added with artistic sketches with each poem or song. One of these publications' title is— *Azadi ki Ladai ke Zabtshuda Tarane* and the other title is— *Zabtshuda Geet: Azadi aur Ekta ke Tarane*.

*Zabtshuda Geet: Azadi aur Ekta ke Tarane*, roughly translated as 'Banned Songs: Songs of Freedom and Unity', was edited by Ramjanam Sharma in 1987 and its 2021 reprint has sketches by many artists along with the poems. Ramjanam Sharma, the editor of this book, has mentioned in his editorial that as per NAI records, 264 poems in Hindi, 58 poems in Urdu, 19 in Tamil, 10 in Telugu, 22 each in Punjabi and Gujarati, 13 in Marathi, 9 in Sindhi, 11 in Odia, 4 in Bangla and one in Kannada were banned. Many of these were published in Devanagari script, in translation or original. *Zabtshuda Geet* is a selection of poems written in the Devanagari script. Around 41 poets' names have been mentioned, other poems are by unknown poets among a total of 59 poems. Many well-known poets and their poems such as Rabindranath Tagore, Iqbal, Makhnall Chaturvedi, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, and Ram Prasad Bismil are included in the collection. However, a more ambitious collection is under the title— *Azadi ki Ladai ke Zabtshuda Tarane* roughly translated as 'The Banned Songs of War of Independence.' The 1998 first edition has been beautifully and artistically reprinted with aesthetic sketches on 112 poems by 100 identified poets and 12 by unknown poets in 135 pages. In this larger collection, some poems and poets are common while the selection is quite versatile. Iqbal's poem, *Sare Jahan Se Achha...* is a part of these collections. Among well-known Hindi poets, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's celebrated poem- 'Jhansi ki Rani' is presented as *Azadi ki Devi*. It narrates the bravery and valorous fight against the British rulers. It brings a pictorial scene of a fight on the battleground and how the queen of Jhansi laid down her life at the age of 23, but not before killing many British soldiers. Makhnall Chaturvedi's *Pushp Ki Abhilasha* or 'The Desire of a Flower' is a small but

**The first collection of banned patriotic poetry collection published by the Publications Division was under the title of – 'Zabtshuda Geet: Azadi aur Ekta ke Tarane', roughly translated as Banned Songs: Songs of Freedom and Unity. It was edited by Ramjanam Sharma in 1987.**

touching poem espousing the cause of freedom. In this poem, a flower's desire is to be thrown on a path, where 'the brave ones are going to offer their heads to liberate motherland.' A flower is thought of adorning the hair of women or offered to kings, but the poet's imagined flower wants to honour the martyrs of the motherland. Shyamlal Gupt Parshad's famous *Jhanda ka Geet*— 'The Song of the Flag' is included— Vishv Vijai Tiranga Pyara/Jhanda Ooncha Rahe Hamara.



Martyrs Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaqullah Khan were both great poets, while the poem *Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna...* long ascribed to Ram Prasad Bismil is a poem written by another poet, namely, Bismil Azimabadi. The poem is popular enough to be produced in many films on the lives of revolutionaries, especially sung so melodiously in Manoj Kumar's film *Shaheed*, based on the life of Bhagat Singh. This poem begins with this couplet— *Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai/Dekhna hai zor kitna Bazu-e-qatil mein hai.....*, meaning: the desire to offer our heads (for freedom) is in our hearts/ (we) Have to see how strong are killer's or murderer's arms! Martyr Ashfaqullah Khan wrote poetry in Urdu, few words from his poems are included in this collection, expressing his innermost emotions— *Watan Hamara Rahe Shadkam aur Azad/ Hamara Kya Hai, Ham Rahe, Rahe na Rahen...*— Our country should be happy and free/ Does not matter, we live or not live...

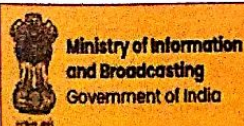
Tagore's poem *Bharat Prashasti* or 'The Praise of Bharat' is included in the collection. Poet Jyoti Shankar (Master Noora) wrote in 1930— *Bharat na Rah sakega Hargiz Ghulamkhana/Azad Hoga, Hoga Aata Hai weh Zamana*, meaning India will not stay Slave/ It shall be free, that time is coming... Hindi poet Chakor's 1930 poem— *Kisan* depicts the agonising life of Indian peasants under British rule which was oppressing peasants by patronising Indian feudal lords, who were supporting the British colonial regime.

**Hindi poet Chakor's 1930 poem— 'Kisan' depicts the agonising life of Indian peasants under British rule which was oppressing peasants by patronising Indian feudal lords, who were supporting the British colonial regime.**

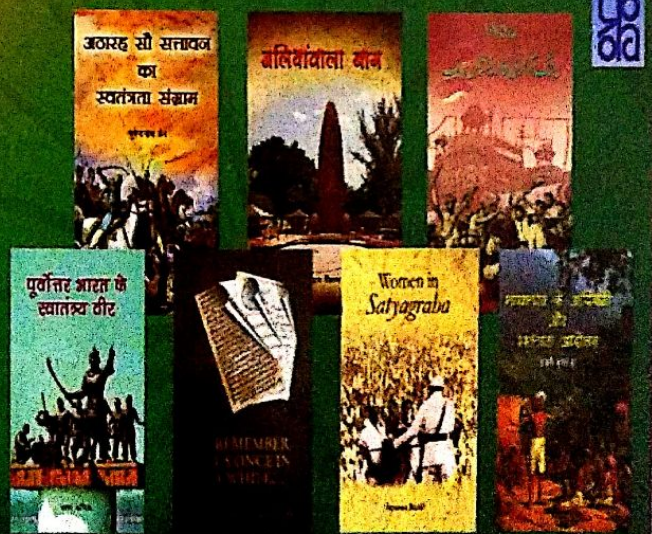
On Hindu-Muslim unity during the freedom struggle, poet Hamdam wrote a poem— *Pyara Hindostan Hamara*, a couplet which depicts the spirit of those days— '*Hindu Ho Ya Musalman, Keh De Mukhalifon Se/ Hindi Hain Ham, Watan Hai Hindostan Hamara.*' It conveys to the rulers that whether Hindus or Muslims, tell the opponents that we are Indians (*Hindis*) and our country is India (*Hindustan*). India or Bharat

which became the technical name as mentioned in the Indian Constitution after independence was known popularly as Hindostan prior to partition in 1947, as a pro-Indian British poet Ernest Jones wrote a poem on 1857 War of Indian Independence— The Revolt of Hindostan.

Numerous eminent poets like Jan Nisar Akhtar, Sahir Ludhianvi, Hafiz Jalandhari, Hasrat Mohani, Makhdoom Mohiudeen, Tika Ram Sukhan, Sohan Lal Dwidey, Ali Sardar Jafri, Brij Narayan Chakbast, Swami Narayannand, Pandit Mela Ram 'Wafa', etc., are included in these collections. The marked incidents of freedom struggle— 1857 War of Independence, 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre, 1922 Chauri Chaura, 1927 Kakori case martyrs— Bismil-Ashfaq, Naujwan Bharat Sabha and Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) of Bhagat Singh and other revolutionaries, assassination of John Saunders and Michael O'Dwyer, 1929 Assembly bomb case, and Quit India Movement of 1942, etc., all these have been covered in these poems included in Publications Division's special editions. □



# आजादी का AMRIT MAHOTSAV



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# Bengali Theatre: Defying Colonial Ban

Dr Sunetra Mitra

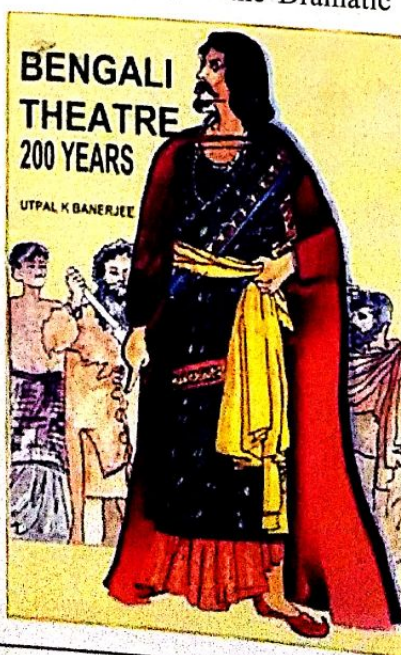
*By depicting India's heroic past, the dramatists inspired patriotism, encouraged participation in the freedom struggle, and offered an antidote to spreading cultural colonisation. The colonial public theatre in this way became reflective of national character and in a sense was a system of organisation and consumption that modelled national behaviour.*

**T**he proscenium theatre in India began in the two colonial metropolises of Calcutta and Bombay towards the second half of the eighteenth century. However, it was not before 1850s that plays written in Bengali started to be staged in the lavish private theatres of the Calcutta aristocracy with very limited viewers. Throughout the 1860s, these elite controlled theatres presented a number of outstanding plays addressing contemporary, social themes like widow remarriage, polygamy, class and racial oppression, etc. The theatres aroused popular interest and the very restrictive nature of these theatres led to the emergence of the public theatre that grew upon the enthusiasm and determination of the educated, middle class youth for whom the new medium held enormous scope for entertainment and voicing their opinions. The new public theatre embraced a wider audience and preferences as its ingredients. Having attained its own autonomous status as a valid artistic/performative articulation, this theatre responded to the socio-political situation.

The colonial government had to employ a strategy to control institutions like the theatre that would prohibit any tendency "likely to excite feelings of disaffection to the government established by law in British India," or "likely to deprave and corrupt persons present at the performance," or was "otherwise prejudicial to the interests of the public." The increasing popularity of the plays made the government sensitive towards portrayals that were "obscene,"

lacked in "morality" and went against "public interests." The actor or owner of the theatre flouting these conditions was liable for punishment "on conviction before a Magistrate with imprisonment for term which may extend to three months or with fine or with both." The Great National Theatre of Babu Bhuvan Mohan Niyogi was soon singled out for violating these parameters. The farce, *Gajadanand Yuvaraj* came under censorship and its acting was stopped. The police came down heavily on the theatre for alleged derision of High Court lawyer, Jagadanand Mukhopadhyay for his excessive loyalty towards the ruling class. Following this, censorship was clamped on the play, *Surendra-Binodini* on grounds of vulgarity and obscenity even though the real provocation was the depiction of a British official as a rapist. Many of the actors were also put under custody. Later that year, the Dramatic Performances Act (1876) was passed and

public theatre was effectively barred from using overtly subversive political messages. The Act extended to the whole of India and by the powers it conferred on the local governments, it could stop the performance and suppress or forfeit any drama, which, in its opinion, may be considered seditious, obscene or defamatory. Within the next three months, the Vernacular Press Act was also passed into law by the same government by Lord Lytton on November, 1877. Thus, both the stage and the press were suppressed. Though the latter was removed by Lord Ripon, the Dramatic Performances Act continued to operate for the next seventy years.



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The Dramatic Performances Act effectively marked the end of direct political activism, what little had been demonstrated, in the Bengali public theatre, although some plays continued to be proscribed at the slightest hint of any seditious intent. Thereafter, most plays produced by the commercial companies looked mainly at making money. Garrulous advertisements to attract bigger audiences became commonplace. Making plays commercially viable became the biggest concern for even director-producers like Girish Chandra Ghosh. Ghosh's plays were packed with socio political significance. For example, in *Sribatsa-Cinta*, Ghosh expressed the need for violent political upheaval. Thespian Utpal Dutt noted that it was the French Revolution that he was talking about in *Sribatsa-Cinta*, where the macrocosm of the gods was integrated with the human world. In the 1890s, when Ghosh wrote and directed *Chanda*, it dealt once again with the theme of revolution and political intrigue. In this play, he displayed his ability to analyse dictatorial regimes, a lesson he perhaps drew from observing the situation then in India. *Chanda* narrowly escaped proscription on account of being a historical play.

The political and social concerns of the Swadeshi Movement were aptly reflected in the theatre of the period. Indeed, the theatre was harnessed for political ends during this era. The plays had no apparently subversive ideology as— the censorship laws saw to it. Nationalism and patriotism were propagated in the garb of other themes. The playwrights gave political interpretations to history and myth, motivating people to adopt the way of Swadeshi. Aparesh Chandra Mukhopadhyay noted that the year 1905 heralded the 'historic age' in Bengali theatre. He particularly mentions the contributions of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in literature and Girish Ghosh in theatre in translating the spirit of nationalism to these very powerful outlets of public opinion. Girish Ghosh's plays like *Siraj-ud-Daula* had to go through a lengthy and stringent censorship before the police approved it for the stage in 1905. Likewise, *Mir Qasim* (1906) and *Chatrapati Shivaji* (1907) as well as Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod's *Palashir Prayaschitta* and *Nandakumar*— all had their first runs, usually of twenty-five weeks each, in their officially approved versions in the period 1905-7, the early years of the Swadeshi Movement. While *Chanda* and *Chatrapati Shivaji* were plays set in pre-British India, *Siraj-ud-Daula* and *Mir Qasim* were directly about how the British came to rule Bengal. Thus, the latter were banned with good reason

on the part of the government. In the last two plays, Ghosh did not use metaphor. The subject itself was metaphoric. Siraj was the last independent ruler of Bengal who lost the Battle of Plassey more due to treachery than chivalry of his enemies. The story of *Mir Qasim*, on the other hand, was that of a titular head who saw his kingdom being destroyed as his power to save it. Both plays presented history with great accuracy and patriotic fervour that it became difficult for the British administration to ignore them. Girish Ghosh became the producer-playwright of a new national-popular mode of dramatic narration. Girish Ghosh and his contemporaries utilised the familiar rhetorical power of dramatic verse to reach the popular on the affective register. In this, they were consciously using techniques borrowed from traditional *jatra*.

Aparesh Chandra Mukhopadhyay noted that the success of the play *Siraj-ud-Daula* reversed the sagging fortunes of the Minerva Theatre. Theatre management appreciated the popularity of such themes and emphasised staging plays with similar contents to earn more revenues. The leading theatres of the city namely the Star, Emerald, and Classic fully utilised the favourable situation created by the popularity of these plays. Correspondingly, there was a surge of such plays and soon the mythological plays were replaced by more tangible, historical accounts that dealt with characters from history. While these plays definitely strengthened the financial base of the theatre companies, the authenticity and quality of the plays deteriorated correspondingly. Sensationalism and gimmicks became the hallmark of the historical plays. These plays and many of the lesser directors and theatre managements capitalised on the sentiments that had swept across the length and breadth of the country, thus exploiting the appeal of nationalism and using it as a saleable commodity, comments Aparesh Chandra.

Drawing upon historical subjects was readily adopted by the theatre companies as an easy path to quick success and popularity. Dwijendralal Ray's later plays like *Mebar Patan* or *Fall of Mewar*, introduced in the stage the notion of universal brotherhood against

the background of Mughal Rajput conflict. The other play on Rana Pratap too had touched upon this notion. The plays were successful commercially. Of course, a lot of compromises were affected keeping in mind the audience taste and preferences.

However, the competition that ensued over the depiction of historical plays remains incomplete without referring to the play, *Pratapaditya*

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Popular drama assumed political dimension in India, a trend that became stronger in the 1940s and in the years after independence. Banning of the original play could not effectively stop the ideas they propagated.

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of Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod, the play first put up by the Star Theatre on Saturday, 15 August 1903. The other play of this genre that aroused intense public interest as well as reflected the spirit of competition among theatre groups comes out very neatly from the staging of the play, *Chattrapati*. It was directed and written by Girish Ghosh and opened at Kohinoor Theatre on 15 September, 1907, with *Chattrapati* being enacted by Danibabu. Amarendranath too was staging the play at Minerva, himself playing the title role. The depiction of the same character by two most eminent actors created sensation among the viewers.

The way nationalism was used as an effective way of pulling audience becomes evident from the way a victory over the colonisers by a native football team was used for advertising the successful running of a play, thereby heightening its appeal. The play was *Baji Rao*, at the Great National Theatre which was then working under the tutelage of Amarendranath Dutta.

While plays with mythological content continued to be in vogue, one could not overlook the diminishing religiosity which was gradually engulfing the society with its concomitant implication for the stage from the third decade of the twentieth century. The sweeping developments of the 1930s inaugurated an era of playwrights who reverted to socio political subjects. But the transition from mythical to more down-to-earth, contemporary fares took some time to be accomplished. The credit for giving a twist to the *puranic* tales to suit the current time goes to Manmatha Ray. The humanitarianism and rationalism of the plays of Dwijendralal Ray and Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod found newer expression in his works. Coupled with this was his emphasis on the psychological aspect—the intense conflicts and dilemmas that characterised the age arising from various kinds of frustrations. *Debasur* was one such play with a strong mythical storyline yet distinct for presenting a theme related to the present situation. The play voiced the dissent of the aggrieved and an agitated person, Debasur, against the excesses of political subjugation. The play went against the way a mythical play usually unfolded and this change was all the more evident in the play *Karagar* (Prison), which dealt with the birth of Krishna in the prison of King Kansa. It was staged in 1930 when the entire country was seething under the impact of the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the play, Kansa was the oppressive British government, while Vasudeva led the struggling masses with a non-violent struggle.

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**Nationalism as a subject was ably exploited for the cause of theatre—a cause that not only fortified the economic foundations of the theatre but also popularised it at a time when other kinds of subjects were not much available for stage adaptation.**

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The tendency to impart nationalist spirit to the characters can be seen in the play *Gairik Pataka* (The Saffron Flag) by Sachindranath Sen. Prabodhchandra Guha of Manomohan Theatre using his rapport and connection with police department stalled the staging of the play for few nights. Few weeks later, an advertisement announced that an understanding has been reached with the government and the ban on the play was removed. Acting resumed and there was unprecedented rush to watch the play. More plays on contemporary political developments and Gandhian politics were produced and ran with mixed fortunes. Popular drama thus assumed political dimension in India, a trend that became stronger in the 1940s and in the years after independence. Banning of the original play could not effectively stop the ideas they propagated.

Despite government prosecution and eventual proscription of play in public theatre, a successful play was re-enacted from its printed text by local troupes and amateur enthusiasts in district towns and even villages, using variety of enclosed and open spaces with makeshift stages located in public buildings, schools or the private mansions of landlords. A further problem was posed by what British officials referred to as the 'gag'; the practice of actors interpolating lines that were not part of the scripted dialogue. Surprise visits by the police during performances were not sufficient deterrent. The plays successfully performed the idea of nationalist resistance of imperial dominion on the public stage and thus, inevitably, on the political stage of colonial India. Thus, nationalism as a subject was ably exploited for the cause of theatre—a cause that not only fortified the economic foundations of the theatre but also popularised it at a time when other kinds of subjects were not much available for stage adaptation. The commercial theatre made the principle/ideology of nationalism accessible to an indefinitely large and undifferentiated audience. Nationalism as an ideology was detached from the high culture of the elite politics of Congress, associations and aristocratic ritual, and became open and available to citizens prepared to pay for admission. More than historical authenticity, the stage used history to promote nationalism. The public that this stage addressed was treated as equal, emptied of specific characteristics of status, family and individual personal identity. The new theatre brought about an aesthetic revolution of new technologies. These theatres institutionalised the enactment of meta-historical nationalist fantasies. As Rakesh Solomon



pointed out, the dramatists utilised such subjects because the audience was intimately familiar with these historical and mythic plots and personalities and was thus alert to their accumulated meanings, associations, and resonances. Such coded sources facilitated subtle, indirect, and surreptitious communication. Just as importantly, the audience loved and revered the heroic characters, whether from history, legend, myth, or religious epic. Given such an attitude, the playwrights of the Indian resistance could count on their heroic characters' veiled political exhortations to carry nearly religious sanction and urgency. Not accidentally, these stories, then as now, also guaranteed crowded theatres. Finally, in the context of the Independence movement, simply by depicting India's heroic past, the dramatists inspired patriotism, encouraged participation in the freedom struggle, and offered an antidote to spreading cultural colonisation. The colonial, public theatre in this way became reflective of national character and in a sense was a system of organisation and consumption that modelled national behaviour. 'Tradition' became the motif deployed to legitimise nearly every innovation in political, social and cultural identity. History thus becomes the dearest ally as well as potentially the greatest threat to those seeking to re-fashion popular and community perceptions to political or economic ends. □

## Endnotes

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# Cinema as Vanguard of Nationalist Movement

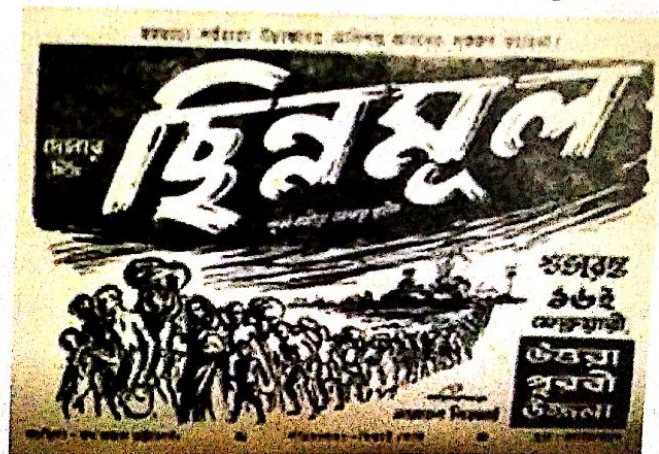
Amitava Nag

After implementing the Dramatic Performances Act in 1876, the British were quick to understand that cinema had a bigger potential to influence public opinion. Expectedly, India's Cinematograph Act was passed in 1918 during the dying months of World War I, with effect from 1 August 1920. Based on the British Cinematograph Act 1909, the Indian version's objective was nothing less than censoring the content of films to be exhibited for public consumption. With the advent of talkies, Bengali cinema drew its inspiration from the rich literary tradition viz. novels of Saratchandra Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and occasionally, Rabindranath Tagore. The importance of content was observed since then, one of the reasons why in popular jargon, Bengalis even now refer to a film as a 'boi'/'book.'

**A**n ordinance was promulgated in 1876, empowering the British-run Bengal Government to ban performances of any play they found scandalous, defamatory, seditious, obscene, or otherwise prejudicial to the public interest. In no time, the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 was imposed to check the revolutionary impulses of Bengali theatre. Playwrights who wished to attack the colonial rule soon turned to mythological plays to shield their nationalist messages to evade censor's actions. With the heightening of the 'Swadeshi' movement at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bengali theatre tended to venerate the past more than any time before. It is in this context of fervent patriotic expression in the different art forms from the early days of the twentieth century that we need to review the role of Bengali cinema in reflecting the country's freedom struggle.

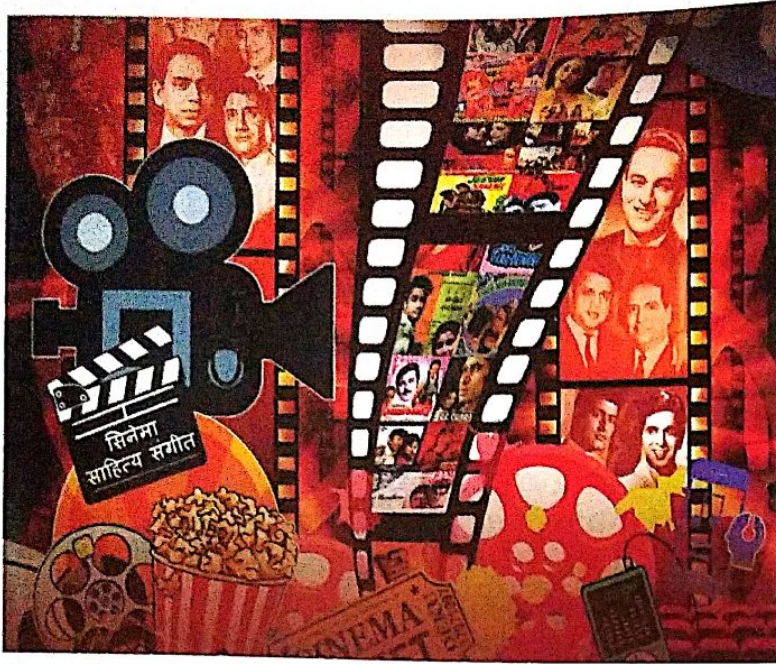
In 1795, a Russian linguist and indologist, Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev started proscenium drama in Calcutta, the then capital of British rule in India. These productions, translations of European plays in Bengali with native actors is arguably considered the pioneer of modern Indian theatre different from our traditional one, derived from Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra*. During the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bengali bard Madhusudan Dutt was involved with the theatre at Belgachia, which was a pioneer of modern, western-influenced theatre. Dutt

composed the play, *Sharmistha*, in the western style, in 1858, based on the story of Debjani-Yayati of Mahabharata. It is considered the first original play was written in Bengali language. The following year, Dutt penned two farces: *Ekei ki bole Sabhyata?* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare ro*. While in the first, he satirises the addiction, disorderly conduct and immorality of the English-educated young Bengalis, in the second, he exposes the secret debauchery of the conservative and corrupt socialists of the conservative Hindu society. Although these socially aware plays were performed and appreciated, the first 'Swadeshi' play was Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil Darpan* that depicted the horrific tragedy of indigo farmers in rural Bengal and the



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the might of the Mughals to save Jessore (now in Bangladesh). Plays upholding religious unity alongside the strong wish of freedom from foreign forces seemed fervent. In the month of January, 1906 itself, at the two leading theatres of Calcutta— Star and Minerva, the following plays were staged and performed— Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod's *Padmini*, Dwijendra Lal Roy's *Rana Pratap Singha*, Amritalal Basu's *Shabash Bangali*, Girish Ghosh's *Siraj-ud-daula*, and Haranath Bose's *Jagaran*. The influence of Rajput heroes not only enriched the Bengali plays but also other literary forms notably by Dwijendra Lal Roy (whose song 'Dhana Dhanye Pushpe Bhora' / 'A land rich in grain and flowers' from his play *Shah Jahan* remains to be one of the most popular patriotic songs till today). Incidentally, a year back, when *Rana Pratap Singha* was regularly been staged at the Star Theatre, mourning was observed on 6 September with no show or entertainment on that day.

British atrocities against them. The play written in 1859, portraying the contemporary indigo revolt, was staged a few years later in 1872 by Girish Chandra Ghosh. Ghosh established the National Theatre in the same year and the first performance of Bengali commercial-stage happened with Mitra's controversial, yet poignant play.

Not far away, at the Tagores', Rabindranath was exploring the ideas of spiritualism and individual identity, and in parallel raising questions on the collective vision of nationalism through *Chitrangada* (1892), *Raja* (1910), *Dakghar* (1913) and *Raktakarabi* (1924). Expectedly, *Nil Darpan*'s popularity go well with the British authorities who banned the performance of the play. The Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 was imposed to check the revolutionary impulses of Bengali theatre. The Act ensured that the flurry of nationalist plays after *Nil Darpan* which all rocketed to popularity, started to become rare. The police atrocities were rampant and the punishments severe. Interestingly, while the British came down heavily on the open 'swadeshi' theatre, they were somewhat indifferent to the mythological ones.

With the heightening of the 'Swadeshi' movement at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bengali theatre tended to venerate the past more than any time before. It was Lord Curzon's implementation of the partition of Bengal in 1905 which served as fodder to strong nationalist sentiments amongst Bengalis. However, Curzon's 'divide and rule' policy actually angered the Bengalis prior to 1905. In 1903, Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod's *Pratapaditya* reflected the latent wish of the race through Pratapaditya, a powerful zamindar of Bengal who raised his sword against

In 'Jatra', the indigenous folk version of proscenium theatre without walls, the winds of patriotic vigour started flowing freely during that time. The most famous exponent of 'Jatra' was Charan Kabi Mukunda Das (original name Yajneshwar De). 'Jatra' had always drawn heavily from mythology. With Mukunda Das, there was a spread of political awareness that somehow complemented the problems in holding 'Swadeshi' meetings. The popularity of 'Jatra' amongst the masses ensured that Mukunda Das's productions became big hits with the audience. Drawn between black and white representing evil against the good, these plays inescapably portrayed the British as the new form of evil in juxtaposition with Indian revolutionary symbolising the good. Born and brought up in what is now Bangladesh, Mukunda Das's sweep was across the whole of undivided Bengal. His activities were soon termed as seditious and he was imprisoned particularly for a song— 'Chilo dhangolabhara, Shwet indurekorlo sara', meaning 'The granary was full of paddy, The while mice ate it all.' The 'white mice' refers to the British, obviously. Incidentally, long after the Swadeshi movement, Mukunda Das's songs were popular even later during the Non-Cooperation movements of the 1920s.

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**After implementing the Dramatic Performances Act in 1876, the British were quick to understand that cinema had a bigger potential to influence public opinion. Expectedly, India's Cinematograph Act was passed in 1918.**

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After implementing the Dramatic Performances Act in 1876, the British were quick to understand that cinema had a bigger potential to influence public opinion. Expectedly, India's Cinematograph Act was passed in 1918 during the dying months of World War I, with effect from 1 August 1920. Based on the British Cinematograph Act 1909, the Indian version's objective was nothing less than censoring the content of films to



be exhibited for public consumption. On top of it, this cinema from its birth has remained an expensive affair. It is in this context of fervent patriotic expression in the different art forms from the early days of the twentieth century that we need to review the role of Bengali cinema in reflecting the country's freedom struggle. While the rest of India relied heavily on mythological and historical films even after talkies became the norm with

*Alam Ara* in 1931, Bengali cinema already had socially relevant films starting with the silent *Bilet Ferat* in 1921. However, unlike the other art forms which were familiar, cinema was new and dynamic. The migration from silent films to talkies, for example, was fraught with uncertainty and scepticism. An art form that is even now heavily dependent on the West, not only for the ever-changing techniques but also for the raw materials no wonder intimidated the Indian filmmakers, including the Bengali ones of the time. The importance of cinema as a tool of propaganda was not envisioned by the British alone. In a Congress conference from 30 October till 1 November 1939, at Calcutta, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose advised the members from Faridpur district (now in Bangladesh) to form a film collective for the spread of cinema. Incidentally, the art magazine *Rupamancha* dedicated to film and theatre was one that started the same year. It was one of the earliest Bengali magazines that dealt with cinema.

With the advent of talkies, Bengali cinema drew its inspiration from the rich literary tradition viz. novels of Saratchandra Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and occasionally, Rabindranath Tagore. The importance of content was observed since then, one of the reasons why in popular jargon, Bengalis even now refer a film as a 'boi'/'book.' With the rise of Pramathesh Barua

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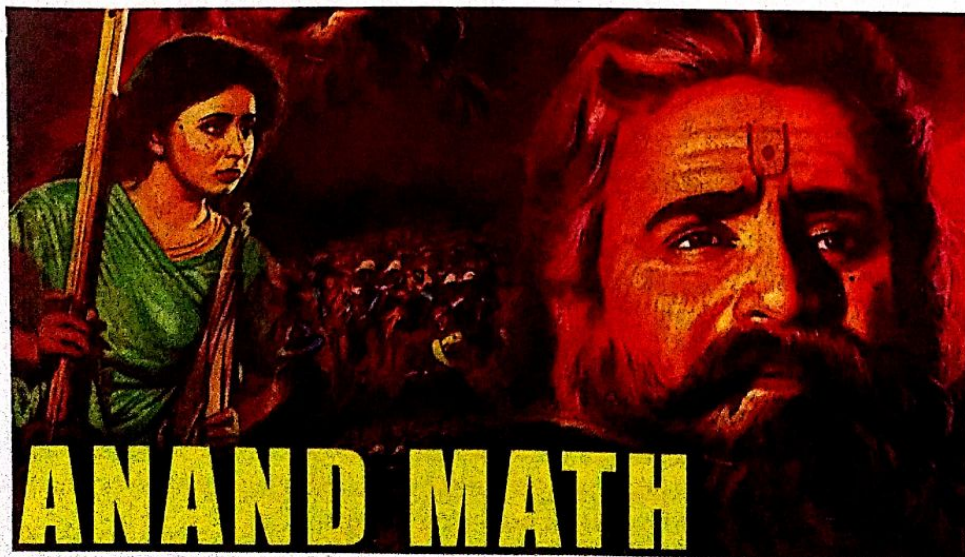
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since the mid 1930s, the ascent of a star was introduced. Barua's maudlin melodrama swept the elite Bengali audience although his films were also anchored in strong literary conventions. Since the turn of the new century, Bengal's tragedy was manifold. The attempted partition of 1905 was followed by the shift of capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911. The manmade famine of 1942-43 was next in line and the severest at that time

which shattered the Bengali confidence and emotional sanctity. Quite a few Bengali artists and filmmakers including Bimal Roy, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, and others started drifting away to a more stable and significantly more viable Bombay. The World War II that ended in 1945 gifted dark despair to the whole India, including Bengal. Raw stock materials became expensive, black marketeers gained prominence. Studios including the most prestigious, the New Theatres, suffered losses and lost their enterprise. As per the data from Panna Shah's 1950 book, *The Indian Film*, between 1942 and 1945, the number of films in Bengali language reduced from 15 to 9, almost becoming half. It is to be kept in mind that the film industry in Calcutta not only produced Bengali films but films in other languages as well. While films in Urdu and Tamil started drying up with the years, Hindi films were still being made. The War, the famine, the exodus from Calcutta to Bombay, all resulted in the industry becoming weaker by the day. The Bombay film industry had already established its monopoly of the pan-Indian market. In 1946, with a sudden buoyancy of raw money in the market, the Indian film industry experienced an unprecedented boom as Bombay produced 150 films (143 Hindi, 1 Gujarati, 2 Marathi, 2 Tamil, and 2 Telugu) vis-à-vis Calcutta's meagre 23 (15 Bengali and 8 Hindi). The disparity widened in the next two years and apart

from exceptions including Debaki Bose's *Chandrasekhar* (1947), the Bengali film industry slowly moved into a strangulating cash crunch. It can be safely left for conjecture what could have been the future of the film industry had it not been the freedom of India that also meant the momentous partition of Bengal. The partition, apart from its psychological effect, impacted the very base of Bengali cinema's home market.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Bengali cinema produced socially aware films which, as





explained above, seldom attacked British imperialism and oppression. In his seminal book *Bengali Cinema* (1991), Kiranmoy Raha explained the reason of absence— "In the thirties, the (revolutionaries) who gave their lives for their patriotic beliefs were loved and admired for their courage and sacrifice and became household names in Bengal. In 1942, the 'Quit India' Movement was launched. The nationalistic movement also acquired new social concepts which defined and gave utterance to the expectations of workers and peasants. But Bengali cinema of the period did not seem to notice any of these things. For socially conscious and politicised people, like Bengalis who had been in the vanguard of social, artistic, and political movements in India, this was surprising. Apprehension about films being banned under the censorship rules was no doubt a serious and weighty reason. But there is no reliable record of serious attempts having been made to make films which could circumvent the rules and yet get the message across." In *Cinema and the Indian Freedom Struggle* (1998), Gautam Kaul went a step further and analysed – "The very limited response of Bengali cinema to the freedom theme must have other factors too...I attribute it to the disposition of those financiers of Bengali films who preferred gambling their wealth more freely in races at Calcutta's Royal Turf Club than in films on the freedom themes. Their business was sustained by contracts and dealings with British administration and could not afford to bite the hand that fed them their daily bread. Again, perhaps Bengali nationalism preferred to focus on the modernisation of society and religious reforms as a prelude to political self-assertion, a tradition which also found itself in other vernacular cinemas prominently." Yet, there were a few attempts within the predominant silence to make patriotic films. Sushil Mazumdar was one director to notice who made films on contemporary politics mixed with social issues viz. *Muktisnan* (1937), *Pratishodh* (1941) and later after independence, *Soldier's Dream* (1948), *Sarbahara* (1948) and *Dukhir Iman* (1954) to name some. Apart from these, Ardhendu Mukherjee made *Sangram* (1946), Sudhirbandhu Bannerjee directed *Bande Mataram* (1946) while Satish Dasgupta brought on celluloid Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Pather Dabi* with the same name in 1947, five months before 15 August.

Understandably, it was just after the independence that several films were made that demonstrated the hardships of a captive nation. Films such as *Bhuli Nai* (1948, Hemen Gupta), *Joyjatra* (1948, Niren Lahiri), *Chattagram Astragar Lunthan* (1949, Nirmal Chowdhury), *Biplabi*

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***Biyallish* was set in 1942 and garnering restlessness around the Quit India movement. Poignantly shot, the film depicted how an Indian police officer representing the brutally autocratic British Empire betrayed the nationalistic passion of fellow Indian freedom fighters. The film ends with India's independence and an urge to identify the betrayers of the revolution.**

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*Khudiram* (1951, Hiranmoy Sen) and *Biyallish* (1951, Hemen Gupta) revealed the latent anger that the filmmakers harboured and were wary of expressing earlier. Of these, *Bhuli Nai* was set against the 1905 partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon while *Chattagram Astragar Lunthan* was based on the failed raid of the colonial government's Chittagong armoury in 1930 by a group of young Bengalis under the leadership of a schoolteacher Surya Sen, affectionately remembered as 'Master Da.' Whereas, *Biplabi Khudiram* was based on one of Bengal's most popular patriots, the teenage Khudiram Bose, who was

hanged in connection with the Muzaffarpur bombing of 30 April 1908. *Biyallish* on the other hand was set in 1942 and garnering restlessness around the Quit India movement. Poignantly shot, the film depicted how an Indian police officer representing the brutally autocratic British Empire betrayed the nationalistic passion of fellow Indian freedom fighters. The film ends with India's independence and an urge to identify the betrayers of the revolution. Bengal's pioneer, the New Theatres studio, apart from a series of socially aware films that were on the verge of being termed political, made *Pehla Aadmi* in 1950 directed by Bimal Roy. Shot in Hindi for the pan-India audience, the film depicts the heroic exploits of Bengal's very own Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army.

It is to be remembered that the celebratory 'Freedom at Midnight' might have bolstered filmmakers of Bombay and Madras but it meant less for those in Calcutta. There was a general belief that independence is traded in lieu of partition, that the earlier nationalist idealism was somewhat being vitiated. Incidentally and unfortunately, some of these films faced the wrath of the censor board of an independent nation fearing mass agitation against a nascent government, still trying to tread difficult waters. The tragedy of partition resurfaced in Nemai Ghosh's *Chhinnamul* (1950) and later in the films of Ritwik Ghatak. Critically accepted much later, these films were generally not very successful commercially, probably because the audience's wish was otherwise. The city of Calcutta was teeming with migrants, first from the villages during 1942-43 and then in thousands post-partition from East Bengal. They carried the wounds of separation and the tragedies of trying to be part of a new and somewhat ruthless milieu. The mass psyche wanted a fresh look at identity and so was born the rural-urban couple in Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen. In parallel, a host of comedy films started becoming popular. □



# Freedom Movement in Central India

Dr Sushil Trivedi

*Indian Independence movement was a people's movement that gained strength as it progressed. This transcended regional and class differences and became an expression of the collective resolve of the people of the entire country. Generally, the history of the freedom movement is described from the defining moments of the first freedom struggle of 1857. The noticeable feature of our historiography is the repeated mention of some regions and classes in the freedom movement, but the contribution of tribal areas and its people is often ignored.*

**E**ven before 1857, the tribal people had revolted against the British in India time and again. The British had to struggle to establish their authority in the tribal areas. References to such revolts are not easily available. Although the contribution of tribals was significant in the freedom movement that took place before and after 1857 across the country, the movements that took place especially in present-day Chhattisgarh in central India are touched upon here.

### Tribal Uprisings before 1857

After winning the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and acquiring the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa in 1765, the East India Company began efforts to annex Chhattisgarh. Most of the central part of Chhattisgarh was under the control of the Maratha rulers of Nagpur, and the rest of the area was ruled by different Princely States. The British got their first success in 1800, when the Raja of Raigad signed a treaty with the Company and made Raigad a part of the Government. They annexed the Maratha empire after its defeat in the war at Nagpur in 1818, and began to rule the central region of Chhattisgarh. However, in Bastar, the south of Chhattisgarh and Surguja in the north, several tribal rebellions arose to save tribal people from the slavery of the Company's Government.

The Halba rebellion against the British (1774-1779) was marked by bloodshed and daring attacks. To capture Bastar, the British, with the help of the King of Jeypore and the younger brother of the King of Bastar, Dariyavdev Singh, formed a joint army and attacked

Ajmer Singh, King of Bastar in 1774. Ajmer Singh's army of Halba tribesmen conclusively defeated the British army. This war lasted until 1779, but the British were not successful. Later, Dariyavdev Singh killed Ajmer Singh by deceit. In this genocide, an attempt was made to wipe out the entire tribe. It can be said that this



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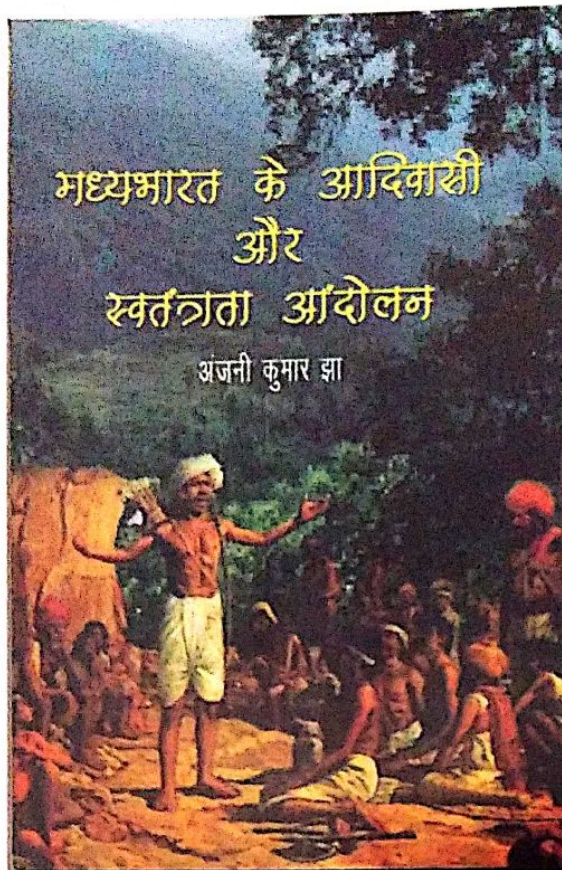


was the first rebellion against the British in India, and King Ajmer Singh of Bastar was the first martyr.

The fifth rebellion began in the Chota Nagpur region in December, 1831, when Kol tribesmen rose in revolt because of the discontent arising from the forcible occupation of tribal lands. This rebellion lasted till 1832, and then the British suppressed it by deploying a big army. It was followed by the sixth rebellion in 1833 when the British wanted to capture Bargarh. Under the leadership of Ajit Singh, ruler of Bargarh, the tribal people of Raigad fiercely opposed the British army. In this struggle, Ajit Singh was martyred.

After that, the seventh rebellion took place in the Tarapur region in Bastar in 1842. Dalganjan Singh, brother of Bhupaldev, the ruler of Bastar, was the administrator of Tarapur. Dalganjan Singh refused to raise the annual tax in his area. It was considered an act of rebellion by the British, and an army was sent from Nagpur to suppress it. The tribal people faced the British army under the leadership of Dalganjan Singh who was defeated and imprisoned. The eighth rebellion took place in Dantewada in South Bastar in 1842 by the tribals against the order of the British regarding the custom of human sacrifice. The British army from Nagpur was called to suppress this revolt. The tribal people fought fiercely with this army. After a struggle, the custom of human sacrifice was stopped and a permanent military system was established in Dantewada.

The new system for collection of rent, steps taken to change the traditional social, religious and political system, new rules implemented for forest management, and restrictions imposed on the production of liquor, all affected the unique tribal culture associated with their rights to water, forest and land. By resorting to these measures, the British also bruised the independent tribal consciousness. The tribals resorted to these revolts to protect their culture and autonomy, which is the historical legacy of the freedom



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struggle against the British in Chhattisgarh. In the history of India, there is no mention of these eight tribal revolts of Chhattisgarh before 1857. Still, these revolts are evidence of the relentless and revolutionary struggle of the tribal people against the British.

#### First Revolt of 1857 in Sonakhan

In 1857, Narayan Singh, the tribal landlord of Sonakhan of Raipur, revolted uniquely. A drought occurred in his zamindari area. The paddy deposited with a moneylender was looted and distributed by Narayan Singh to save his people from starvation. He had informed about it to the British officers posted in Raipur. At the same time, the moneylender complained to the British officials describing the act of Narayan Singh as robbery.

The British took no administrative measures to save the public from drought. Still, on the complaint of the moneylender hoarding grain, self-respecting Narayan Singh was arrested and imprisoned in Raipur jail. He managed to escape prison with the help of the native British infantry deployed in Raipur, and after reaching Sonakhan, he formed an army of tribal youth. The British sent a large army contingent to Sonakhan to arrest him. After fierce fighting, Narayan Singh was arrested and publicly hanged at Raipur on 10 December 1857. He was declared the first martyr of 1857 in Chhattisgarh by conferring the title of 'Veer' in independent India.

In 1858, tribal people revolted in Udaipur in the Raigad district. Following this rebellion, the brothers of the King of Udaipur were arrested and sent to the Andaman jail. The people of the Muria tribe of Bastar revolted in 1876. A large British army from the Orissa region was sent to suppress the rebellion. After a siege of about a month, the British succeeded. In 1878, the Rani of Bastar started a struggle against the British to protect her rights, lasting until 1882.

#### Bhumkal of Bastar

In 1910, there was a fierce people's uprising in Bastar itself, known in modern history as 'Bhumkal of Bastar.' The Muria tribesmen of Bastar defeated the British state and



took up an armed revolution to establish the 'Muria Raj.' Led by Gundadhur, this rebellion was meticulously planned and it rattled the entire Bastar region. The tribals targeted the British and attacked the government buildings. The flame of this rebellion, which started on 1 February 1910, continued to blaze for three months. Initially, Muria Raj was established in the whole of Bastar for some time, but Gundadhur's army could not sustain itself against the large army of British. Hundreds of tribal people were put to death in this struggle and thousands suffered harsh punishments.

The Northeast region of Chhattisgarh witnessed the Tana Bhagat movement, which started in 1916 and lasted till 1918. In its initial phase, this movement was violent but later, the followers of this movement joined the non-violent, non-cooperation movement and became a part of the mainstream freedom movement of India.

### Jungle Satyagraha

Another movement of Chhattisgarh— Jungle Satyagraha was launched in 1922 in a place named Nagari of Dhamtari district. It holds a unique place in the entire freedom struggle. The tribals had staged a 'satyagraha' against the authority, protesting over the low wages given by the forest department and the ban on carrying wood for use in cooking at home. Large-scale arrests were made in this movement, and satyagrahis

were punished. Later, the Forest Department brought changes in its functioning, and this movement was called off. However, in August, 1930, Jungle Satyagraha started again at different places in Chhattisgarh. During one such satyagraha, thousands of people gathered at a place called Tamera, and when the authorities tried to control the crowd, a woman named Dayavati slapped the officer. The situation was saved from worsening by the authorities. Some people were arrested. At one place, the police opened fire in which a person died. This movement continued till March, 1931, and it ended with the comeback of the Civil Disobedience Movement in India.

The history of the freedom movement is not just a description of events or a mere counting of incidents. Neither is it about describing the character of its heroes. The freedom movement is an analysis of the currents and counter-currents that formed the structure of the agitating society at that time. The collective consciousness of the people to be free was being expressed in the form of struggle, and it is necessary to recognise that consciousness and its expression. However, the consciousness of the common people about attaining freedom— especially of the tribal people in areas away from the major centres— is often not considered by historians. The history of India's freedom movement is incomplete without recognising the tribal consciousness. □

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# Freedom Songs from the Northeast

Dr Samudra Gupta Kashyap

The struggle for freedom movement for the Northeastern regions of India began when British had started occupying the present-day Northeast since the Treaty of Yandabo, signed with the Burmese invaders in 1826. Prior to that, the Burmese had invaded Assam and Manipur thrice, in 1817, 1819 and 1821, and occupied both which were then independent countries. The British, who had entered Assam with a promise of going back after expelling the Burmese, however stayed on after discovering tea and petroleum. Due to low literacy rate, for the majority of people across the hills and plains of the region, the spoken word—oral literature—was the only mode of transmitting social messages.

**F**olk songs of various genres spread the news far and wide, and freedom-loving and patriotic people began singing about their heroic deeds and sacrifice. A sizeable number of these songs and poems were lost in time due to non-documentation when people who had composed and sung them were alive. A few, some in bits and pieces, however have been collected and preserved by a couple of scholars.

*Khamti, Nagati, Garo, Khasiati,  
Lagate Dafala Miri,  
Ranga-chila habite bar-mel patisse,  
Firingik dharongoi buli.  
Bar-noir paniye patharkhan burale,  
Kharali ahudhaan baam,  
Firingi khedonte maro jadi marime,  
Kalaloi khiyati paam.*

(The Khamti, Naga, Garo, Khasi, Daffla and Miri—various tribal communities of the region—have organised a big meeting inside the Rangachila forest to trap the foreigners. Floods of the big river have submerged the paddy fields. Don't worry, we'll sow *ahu*-paddy (upland rice paddy) in the winter. In case we die while ousting the foreigners, we will remain immortal forever.)

This was how the message of the resistance against the British had spread in Assam, through oral poetry as early as in the 1830s. The British had started occupying the present-day North-east since the Treaty of Yandabo,

signed with the Burmese invaders in 1826. Prior to that, the Burmese had invaded Assam and Manipur thrice, in 1817, 1819 and 1821, and occupied both which were then independent countries. The British, who had entered Assam with a promise of going back after flushing out the Burmese, however stayed on after discovering tea and petroleum.



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Those were times when literacy rate was low among the Assamese and Manipuris. Most of the communities on the other hand did not even have a script. Thus, for the majority of people across the hills and plains of the region, the spoken word or oral literature, was the only mode of transmitting social messages.

While the first resistance movement in Assam (1828) was easily crushed and its leader Gomdhar Konwar was sent to a prison in Bengal where he died in custody, Piyoli Phukan and Jiuram Dulia Barua— leaders of the second resistance were hanged in 1830. Oral literature, folk songs of various genres— however spread the news far and wide and freedom-loving and patriotic people began singing about their heroic deeds and sacrifices.

When Maniram Dewan, Assam's greatest hero of 1857, was hanged in February, 1858, the effect of folk songs and ballads was so strong that people continued to sing them, making them inseparable from the freedom movement which grew intense with every passing year. One *bihu* song described Maniram as equally dear to the Assamese as is *bihu*, while a ballad— referred to as 'Maniram Dewanar Malita' (*malita* = ballad)— also gave a vivid account of his patriotic deeds, his contribution to the tea industry, his visits to Kolkata, his strategy to oust the British, his martyrdom and so on. These in turn worked as inspirational songs during the freedom movement. In the post-independence era, Bhupen Hazarika had sung a portion of that ballad in 'Maniram Dewan', an Assamese film of 1963.

Likewise, 'Phulaguri Dhewa' (October, 1861; *dhewa* in local parlance is a battle or war)— India's first peasants' uprising against the British regime which took place in Nagaon district of central Assam, inspired local villagers to compose oral songs. These songs described the protest which culminated in the death of several peasants in a police firing as several others were transported to the Andamans. Local history says, Bahu Kaivarta, one Phulaguri peasant, on returning from the Andamans after completion of his term, composed and sang several songs describing the incident. The Patharughat massacre (28 January 1894) in Darrang district, in which anywhere between 36 and 140 peasants and other persons were believed to have been killed in police firing, leading to the composition of several folk songs as well. The most significant among them is a 132-line ballad called 'Doli Puran', which was composed in the style of the *puranas*, and attributed to Narottam Das,

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a local villager who was a witness to the massacre. While the incident is remembered as 'Patharughatar Ran', the ballad is called 'Doli Puran' because *doli* means lumps of dry mud which the unarmed peasants had hurled at the police who charged them with fixed bayonets. Sung during the subsequent phases of the freedom movement, particularly in Darrang district, 'Doli Puran' is today considered an important ballad of Assam.

The twentieth century saw an upsurge in literary activities related to the freedom movement in Assam. The earliest recorded song is from 1916, when Ambikagiri Raichoudhury (*Assam Kesari*) composed a song, sung as the opening chorus, at the annual conference of Assam Association

in Guwahati. Assam Association was the first political platform of the province which became the provincial Congress in 1921. It went like this:

|| *Ei-he tomar bani, Bharat,*  
|| *Ei-he tomar daan,*  
|| *Tomar hokey jivan-dharan,*  
|| *Tomar hokey pran.*

(This is your message, Bharat, this is your gift/ We live for you, for you we give our lives).

In 1917, Raichoudhury wrote and sang, *E-je agni-beenar taan* (Tune of the *veena* of fire), at the Assam Association conference at Barpeta, in which he said, "This is not a song of laughter, mirth and relaxation/ This is a tune of the *veena* of fire which has made life and death one." So strong was the impact of Raichoudhury's songs across Assam that the government confiscated his book 'Shatadha' in 1924 because of its strong revolutionary content.

In 1921, when Mahatma Gandhi made his first visit to Assam, Raichoudhury and Karmavir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi spent a session with him to explain in detail how a number of songs composed by the two were spreading the message of freedom and non-violence in the province for several years. In 1926, the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Indian National Congress opened with a chorus, *Aji bando ki chandare/samagata virata/naranarayana roopa*, ('How do we welcome you, this supreme incarnation of humanity? We're a humiliated and dependent lot with a shrinking mind and heart/ We have no flowers, sandalwood paste and incense sticks.../ With our voice, strangled by shackles of slavery/ We can't produce a melody...') composed by Raichoudhury.



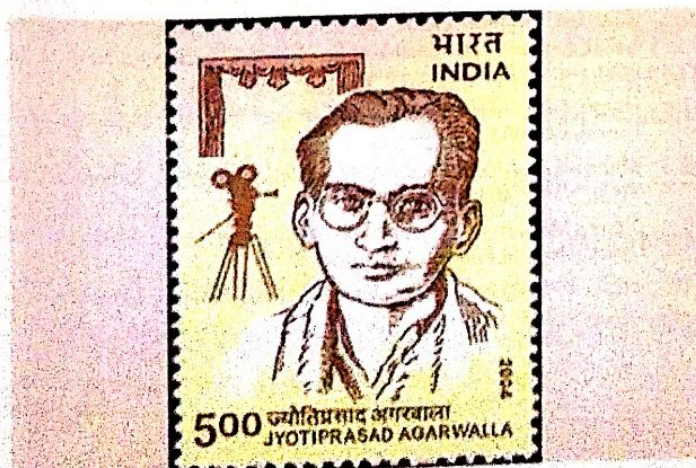
The 1920s to 1940s was the period when a large number of songs and poems were composed in Assam as part of the freedom movement. With Raichoudhury pioneering this particular movement of using songs and poems to add *Karmavir* momentum to the movement, other prominent leaders who contributed to this genre included Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Umesh Chandra Dev Choudhary, Parvati Prasad Barua, Nalini Bala Devi, Prasannalal Choudhury, Padmadhar Chaliha, *Agni-kavi* Kamalakanta Bhattacharyya, Ganesh Gogoi, Sankar Barua, Anandiram Das, Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Jyoti Prasad Agarwala.

One of the several of Nabin Chandra Bordoloi's songs which was highly popular was 'Aahbaan' (Invocation), which opened with the lines – *Deka-gabharur dal/ Veer-veeranganar dal/ Natun tejere rangoli rupahi/kar-hi dharani tal* (Groups of young men and women, groups of courageous young people/ Come, turn red this land of ours with your fresh blood.)

One poet whose songs and poems actually set a million hearts on fire across Assam was Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (1903-1951), and his lyrics continue to inspire the people even after 75 years of India attaining independence. Jyoti Prasad was a poet, lyricist, singer, musician, playwright and pioneer Assamese filmmaker, said to be the father of modern Assamese culture. He was a firebrand leader of the freedom movement who also held charge of the Congress volunteer force during the crucial Quit India Movement. A prolific poet and lyricist, Jyoti Prasad had composed around 400 poems and lyrics, of which at least 40 were directly related to the freedom movement.

One of his most famous lyrics goes like this:

*Biswa-bijayi nava-jawan,  
biswa-bijayi nava-jawan,  
Shaktishali Bharatar  
Olai anha, olai anha,  
Santan tumi biplabar:  
Samukh samar sanmukhate  
Mukti-junjaru hoshiar;  
Mrityu bijay kariba lagiba  
Swadhinatar khuli duwar...*



(World-conquering young soldiers of powerful Bharat/  
Come out, you sons of the revolution,/ Beware, the battle is  
just in front/ You'll have to conquer death/ By opening the  
door to freedom...)

Another song that continues to remain ever popular across Assam goes like this:

*Luitar parare ami deka lora,  
Moriboley bhay nai.  
Mukuti medhar mahan mejir  
Nejal firingati chai,  
Purohito jadi thitaley antori  
Trasate murchchaa jai,  
Ami agebarhi dingi pati pati  
Tejere balishal Jamey bowai...*

(We're the young men  
from the banks of the Luit,  
We've no fear of death.  
We're sparks of the spiralling fire  
Of the sacrificial altar of freedom,  
Should the priest be scared, step away and faint,  
We however shall continue to march ahead,  
Offer our heads,  
With blood flowing down from the abattoir...)

Set in the rhythm of a typical military band so that young people could actually march in a disciplined manner, the following song of Jyoti Prasad had also gained huge popularity during the freedom movement:

*Saju ha, saju ha, nava jawan,  
Saju ha, saju ha, nava jawan,  
Toi kariba lagiba agni-snan.  
Jivan-jauvan kari pranpan  
Rangoli kari de ranangan...*

.....

*Vajrakanthe biswak jana  
Satyar jai-gaan,  
Bukur tejere dhui de aji  
Bharatar apamaan,  
Saju ha, saju ha, nava jawan.*

(Get ready, O young soldiers  
You'll have to bathe in the pool of fire,  
And sacrifice your life and youth,  
While reddening the battlefield  
With your blood.

.....  
Make the world hear  
with your thunder-voice  
The song of truth,  
Wash, with blood from your bosom  
The insults heaped on Bharat,  
Get ready, O young soldiers.)



Another mention which must also be made is of Bishnu Prasad Rabha (1909-1969), another great cultural icon who is fondly referred to as *Kalaguru*, whose poems and lyrics too had an electrifying effect on the masses of Assam during the freedom struggle. One such lyric of Rabha goes this way:

*Aai mor Bharati janani,  
Lakhimi dukhuni  
Bharatbashir hridayar rani  
Mor paranar  
Mor jivanar  
Senehi gosani  
.....  
Paranar aai  
Jivanar aai  
Kiyen bandini?*

(Bharati, my mother, my motherland,  
Resourceful, yet poor  
Queen of the people's hearts  
Goddess of my life, my heart,  
.....  
Mother of my life,  
Why is she imprisoned?)

Jiba Kanta Gogoi's 'Swadhinata Sangramar Geet' and Nirmal Prabha Bardoloi's 'Swadhinata Sangramar Asamiya Geet aru Kabita' have together documented a little over 200 songs and poems which were composed and sung/recited in Assam during the freedom movement. Assamese *biya-naam* (wedding songs), always composed extempore, too had reflected the freedom movement, many mentioning Gandhi, Tilak, Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and provincial leaders like Nabin Chandra Bordoloi and Gopinath Bardoloi.

Bhupen Hazarika had written a special song on the occasion of India attaining independence. Sung by one of his younger brothers immediately after the hoisting of the national flag at Tezpur on 15 August 1947, it was short 10-line song which goes like this:

*Bharat akashat hanhe  
Swadhinatar ushar pratik  
Chik mik swadhinata  
Jik mik swadhinata  
Bharatar buku natun uchah,  
Natun pratigya loi  
Purna swadhinata amaro lakshya,  
Aagbarhi jaon, shata shaheed aru kamya,  
Chik mik swadhinata  
Jik mik swadhinata.*

(In India's sky, smiles/ the symbol of the morning of freedom/ glittering freedom, sparkling freedom/ A new enthusiasm in the heart of India/ To attain total freedom

**A sizeable number of songs and poems, including oral lyrics and folk songs were lost in time due to non-documentation of the same when people who had composed and sung them were alive. A few, some in bits and pieces, however have been collected and preserved by a couple of scholars.**

with a fresh resolve is our goal/ the martyrs tell us, forge ahead/ glittering freedom, sparkling freedom.)

As far as other forms of literature are concerned, not much was obviously done in areas of fiction in Assam and Manipur. Regarding plays, one must however point at 'Labhita', an Assamese play written by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (1943). It both reflected and affected the freedom movement. Woven around the story of a young village woman who sacrifices her life amid the complicated

situation precipitated by the Second World War and the Quit India Movement which had simultaneously affected Assam as the War had reached the Naga Hills and Manipur, 'Labhita' continues to be enacted even today.

In Manipur, the most important popular piece of literary work that continues to instil a sense of patriotism among the people is 'Khongjom Parva', a traditional ballad originally composed (orally) by Leinou. He was a washer-man who happened to be a witness to the Battle of Khongjom, one of the most significant incidents of the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891, in which several hundred brave Manipuris had laid down their lives. Leinou wonderfully recorded the bravery and patriotism of the Manipuri soldiers in his orally-composed ballad which came to be known as 'Khongjom Parva.' A musical narration, 'Khongjom Parva' has over the years expanded its scope to include stories about other legendary Manipuri characters, as also some from the Mahabharata. □

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## Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Youthful Rebellion

Dr Anuradha Roy

*India's anti-imperialist national movement entered upon a new and vibrant phase after the First World War. Gandhi, as its newly emerged leader, was turning it into a mass movement by incorporating the lower echelons of society. His vision of a total social order based on strong moral values and his unique methods of achieving this goal took the country by storm. Even after Gandhi's withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement (September, 1920–February, 1922), the sense of a great awakening remained. The national movement acquired a strong social dimension as well as an international one. Along with impatience for all that were orthodox and restrictive, the spirit of freedom also involved an unbounded optimism, foregrounding the dream of a world free from injustice and inequalities, and full of love and liberty. Kazi Nazrul Islam became the chief vehicle of this spirit through both his literary and political efforts.*

**T**he national freedom movement broadened into a socially sensitive movement involving protests not only against British rule, but also regarding oppression of the poor, subordination of women, and all kinds of inequalities and exploitations. A longing for liberation of the entire humankind in every sense now permeated India's freedom movement. Another distinctive phenomenon that marked this period was a stress on youth as an effective agency in social and political regeneration. This was perhaps because the global war had increased the importance of youth all over the world who, after all, actually fought as soldiers in a war. A hope for regeneration of human civilisation through the power of youth was quite widespread among thinkers and writers within and outside India during the post-World War years. This cult of youth was based on the image of a rebellious, vivacious, freedom-loving, self-sacrificing, death-defying youth, having the potential of solving all national, international, social and political problems.

### Embodying the Spirit of the Age

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976) became a major icon of the national

movement in Bengal. His role as the leading poet of the freedom movement in the long decade of the 1920s largely owed to the political situation of that time. Born in a poor family in Churulia, a village located in district of Burdwan, South Bengal, Dukhu Mian aka Nazrul Islam, was still in school when the World War broke out. The adventurous boy left school to join the 49<sup>th</sup> Bengali battalion of the British Indian army and became a Havaldar there. He was not alone. Many middle-class and poor Indian youths similarly joined this War and though they went to fight on the side of the colonial masters,

quite a few of them believed that this was a patriotic venture because it would train subservient and unarmed people in the art of warfare, and that this training would prove vital for the success of the freedom movement. Nazrul shared such thoughts. This is evident from his novel, 'Bandhan-hara' (free from bondage), written amidst the War, while he was stationed in Karachi.

The international dimension added to the freedom movement, too, owed to the First World War and was reflected in Nazrul's war-time story 'Byathar Dan' (A Gift of Agony). The War evidently



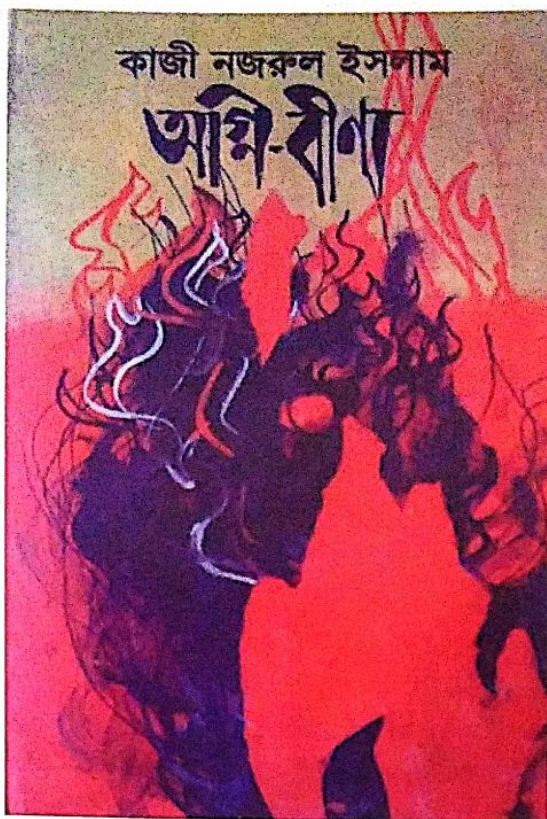
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inspired a romantic craving for a 'wider world' and generated a vague feeling of being at one with its inevitable destinies. The socio-economic message of the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) became internationally influential as well. In 'Byathar Dan', this new socio-political sensibility was clearly articulated. It is a story of two Indian soldiers who crossed the Soviet border to join the Red Army and felt proud and happy to participate in its altruistic efforts. In the post-War years, anti-imperialist movements were launched in many parts of the world and together they looked like an international phenomenon (which was to attain its logical conclusion after the Second World War). The Islamic world was plunged in a huge tide of anti-imperialism and reformism.

This found expression in one 'young movement' after another. The movement of the 'Young Turks' had created a sensation way back in 1908. After the First World War, the movement of Kemal Pasha in Turkey inspired many similar movements such as the 'Young Tartars' and 'Young Afghans.' All this impacted Indians, Kazi Nazrul Islam in particular.

In 1920, as his 49<sup>th</sup> battalion was disbanded, Nazrul returned to Bengal, boarded in a mess with his friend Muzaffar Ahmad, who was a budding communist and concentrated on writing. Two of them brought out the stridently anti-British daily *Nabayug* (launched by A K Fazlul Haq as the mouthpiece of his Krishak Praja Party). Nazrul joined Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement with great enthusiasm. At first, the gap between his philosophy of life and that of Gandhi did not seem unbridgeable. After all, Gandhi too was in favour of a just society and valorous resistance. While supporting Gandhi's non-violent *satyagraha*, Nazrul was actually building up the vocabulary of rebellious youth. His song 'Bhangar Gan' may be cited as an example. Here, he called upon the young Siva to blow the bugle of destruction to accompany the breaking of the prison. This song was composed in January, 1922, i.e., towards the end of the Non-Cooperation Movement. And in the same month, Nazrul's most famous poem 'Bidrohi' (The Rebel) revolving



around a young rebel, was also published. Though the rebel made no direct reference to the national movement, at one place of this long poem, he did pledge to fight for the oppressed. This created the possibility of transcendence of the destructive rebellion of youth into a constructive programme beneficial for the mankind. Besides, 'The Rebel' expressed a ranging fancy for 'the timid glance of the secret fiancé.' We must note that the politically and socially effective image of youth was often combined with its image of a lover, particularly in literature. However, the very mood of rebellion supplied an immense energy to the national movement. The poem created a sensation throughout the nation. We have evidence of this from reminiscences of few young men

who were to become reputed Bengali writers later—Achintya Kumar Sengupta, Premendra Mitra, and even the relatively apolitical Buddhadeb Basu, who said, '... I felt that I had never read anything like this before.' The poem 'Bidrohi' won Nazrul the sobriquet 'Bidrohi Kabi' or 'rebel poet.'

After Non-Cooperation, Bengal politics searched for alternative paths. Nazrul clearly showed the way in this direction. His weekly, 'Dhumketu' (The Comet) that emerged and disappeared like the same within a very short period of time (August-October, 1922), articulated the urge of the new age in a loud voice. The weekly was hailed as 'the triumphant flag of restless and rebellious youth.' It announced the objective of complete independence and prescribed for this a means that was somewhat vague but surely militant. This was at a time when the Congressmen were considering various options of constitutional covenants to be asked of the British rulers.

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Thus, it is no wonder that Nazrul became a major factor behind the revival of militant nationalism in Bengal during the 1920s. The revolutionaries were hugely inspired by his *Dhumketu*. The Jugantar Party even claimed it as its own organ. This phase of militant nationalism climaxed in the Chittagong Armoury Raid (1930), which was followed by a number of small-scale violent



incidents including the famous attack on the Writers' Building, the administrative heart of Bengal.

It has been said that Nazrul wrote the editorials of *Dhumketu* 'dipping his pen in blood instead of ink.' He also penned poems for the journal. It is here that he wrote the poem 'Anandamoyee Agamane' ('On the arrival of the Goddess of Delight', the mother goddess more popularly known as Durga), which opened with the following lines –

আরকতকাল থাকবি বেটি মাটির ঢেঁলার মূর্তি চাঁড়াল?  
স্বর্গ যে আজ জয় করেছে অত্যাচারী শক্তি-চাঁড়াল!

*Oh, how long will you remain hidden behind your earthen image? See, how the heaven is being ruled today by ruthless and powerful oppressors!*

This was an invocation of Durga on the occasion of her annual autumnal worship, appealing to her to suppress Mahishasur, who evidently personified the British.

Nazrul was sentenced to a year of rigorous imprisonment on a charge of sedition for this poem (January, 1923). His hunger strike protesting against the jail authorities' mistreatment of political prisoners (April-May) led to widespread anxieties and sympathetic protests. Rabindranath Tagore, the foremost Bengali writer of the time, sent a telegram urging him to give up fasting (though the telegram never reached Nazrul). Tagore dedicated to Nazrul his musical drama, 'Basanta' (The Spring, thus indicating youth which is regarded as the springtime of one's life). A massive rally was organised by two leading politicians, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and C R Das, to show solidarity with the poet.

After the Non-Cooperation Movement, there also emerged a fairly strong socialist-minded left alternative in Bengal politics, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution. Socialism dedicated to the cause of workers and peasants attracting even many militant nationalists. Nazrul edited the organs of the Labour Swaraj Party, the first socialist formation in Bengal—*Lungal* (The Plough) launched in December, 1925, which was renamed *Ganabani* in August, 1926. In both these journals, he wrote a number of poems not only protesting against the deprivation of the poor and hailing their awakening, but criticising the subordination of women, the hypocrisy and corruption of the priests of all religions, and inequality and exploitation embedded in socio-religious and economic power structures.

All the verse-books of Nazrul from 'Agni Bina' (1922) to 'Proloyshikha' (1930) and 'Chandrabindu' (1931)—contained numerous poems in the spirit of defiance and were constantly subjected to surveillance by the government. Indeed, quite a few of his books were proscribed. He not only preached political and social revolts in this defiant spirit, but also referred to military adventures, geographical discoveries, mountaineering and so on, glorifying the power of youth all the time while doing so. This spirit was also associated with the intensity of man-woman love, which moreover, was often extra-marital and considered 'greater than marriage.' This was a youthful protest against the stagnant patriarchy. Nazrul's love poems 'Madhabi-prolap' and 'Anamika' published in 'Kallol', a magazine which became both famous and infamous for being the voice of the 'youth agonised by the age' and revolting against the existing social order, created sensation. This period in Bengali literature has earned the epithet 'Kallolyug';

and one may also mention Kallol's cordial relationship with 'Samhati' that claimed to be the first journal for workers in Bengal. Kallol group was harassed by the police at least on two occasions for direct political reasons—for publishing Nazrul's verse-book 'Bisher Banshi' (The Flute of Poison) and Sanat Sen's 'Phansir Gopinath' (about the militant nationalist Gopinath Saha who was hanged for killing a white man). One aspect of the revolt preached by Kallol was a bohemian lifestyle as a marker of youth, and this was a marker of

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Nazrul too.

On the whole, the spirit of the age had two aspects to it—destructive and constructive. Along with impatience for all that were orthodox and restrictive, the spirit also involved an unbounded optimism, foregrounding the dream of a world free of injustice and inequalities and full of love and liberty. And Nazrul became the chief vehicle of this spirit through both his literary and political efforts. We may say that literature and politics co-constituted the spirit of the age, which was most brilliantly exemplified through Nazrul. But he caught the imagination of the Bengali youth primarily as a poet, with his passionate voice, resplendent language, unconventional usages and striding rhythm, which prompted the following comment from a contemporary—'Just like Galvani, Nazrul came to revive the youth power that lay in Bengal like a dead frog,' referring to an Italian biologist Luigi Galvani who had discovered twitching of muscles of dead frogs' legs when struck by an electrical spark.



## Preaching Hindu-Muslim Unity

The Non-Cooperation Movement had seen an unprecedented camaraderie between Hindus and Muslims. This, however, was followed by growing separatism among both the communities, which became a major stumbling block to the freedom movement. Fighting communal hatred was a major task that Nazrul set himself towards. He was steeped in both Hindu and Muslim cultures since his childhood. Throughout his life, he made many Hindu friends and married a Hindu girl. He was above any kind of religious orthodoxy and criticised both Muslims and Hindus for their bigotry and superstitions. The allegories and metaphors in his poetry drew equally from Hindu mythology and Islamic history and tradition. However, when he used words like 'Rudra' and 'Ishan', these seemed to be metaphors for destruction rather than names of Hindu gods. Similarly, when he paid tribute to Kemal Pasha and other radical leaders of the Islamic world, he evidently did not regard them as saviours in a religious sense, but thanked them for ushering in a sense of awakening in an atmosphere of stagnancy. He did try to create a composite literary language and a shared literary space accommodating both Bengali Hindu and Muslim sensibilities during a period when many were thinking in terms of two separate literary languages for Hindu and Muslim Bengalis. However, Nazrul naturally had a special concern for the community to which he belonged. Again and again he tried to induce the spirit of youthful rebellion in his co-religionists generally plunged in ignorance and superstitions. His non-communitarian approach led to much controversy and antagonised many Hindus and Muslims. But at the same time it cannot be denied that generations of Bengalis, both Hindus and Muslims, have been inspired by his poems such as:

‘মোরাএকইবৃন্তেদুটিকুসুমহিন্দু-মুসলমান’ (We, Hindus and Muslims, are two flowers in one bud), and above all, his song ‘Kandari Hushiyar’ (O helmsman, be careful) exhorting the helmsman leading the nation on a dangerous voyage. Nazrul composed the song for the Provincial Congress Conference of 1926 in the context of the rising tide of communalism. It includes these famous lines –

‘হিন্দুনাওরামুসলিম?’ – ঐজিঙ্তাসেকোন্ জন?  
কাণারীবল, ‘ডুবিছেমানুষ, সন্তানমোরমা-রা’

*Who is asking whether they are Hindus or Muslims?  
O helmsman, please tell them, “Those who are drowning  
are human beings, children of my mother!”*

Nazrul's life and creativity took a spiritual turn on the death of his son Bulbul in 1929 and his rebellious spirit got somewhat subdued. His was a free-wheeling spiritualism which drew upon Hindu Yogic and Tantric cults as well as Islamic Sufism. In this phase, he composed and set to tune a number of ‘Shyama sangeets’ (in devotion to the goddess Kali) and Islamic songs. In 1939, Nazrul's wife was struck down with paralysis and that was perhaps the final blow for him. Very soon, he became gravely ill himself, losing much of the function of his brain. But he remained a noble source of inspiration for not only his contemporaries, but also for future generations. □

**Note**– This piece has largely drawn from my essay ‘Jatiya Sangrame Jauband’ included in my collection of essays *Itihaser Harek Gero*, Anustup, Kolkata, 2019. I would also like to acknowledge Priti Kumar Mitra, *The Dissent of Nazrul Islam*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007. The fundamental basis of this piece is, however, constituted by the writings of Nazrul himself compiled in the multi-volume *Nazrul Rachan Sambhar*, Haraf Prakashani, Kolkata, 1970.

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## Role of Hindi Literature

Devendra Choubey

*Arun yeh madhumay desh hamara.  
Jahan pahunch anjan kshitij ko milta ek sahara  
Saral taamras garbh vibha par naach rahi tarushikha manohar  
Chitka Jeevan hariyali par mangal kumkum sara.*

– Jaishankar Prasad

**T**o understand any nation and its current contexts, it is necessary to explore the sources present in the folk and rural areas and history. After all, what are these references and sources that help in understanding the makings of the Indian nation? What would be the time for understanding them and their history? What would be the ideology? What would be the theory? These are some of the questions which always trouble history scholars.

Jaishankar Prasad says about India: *arun yeh madhumay desh hamara*. And then, in the collective consciousness of the larger society of the country, the aspiration for national liberation in the form of words resonates all over with the sentiments of national aesthetic as—*jahan pahunch anjan kshitij ko milta ek sahara/ saral tamras garbh vibha par naach rahi tarushikha manohar/ chitka Jeevan hariyali par; mangal kumkum sara*.

Although these feelings in the poetry of Jaishankar Prasad indicate the traditional nationalism of the Indian nation, writers like Bhartendu Harishchandra, Balkrishna Bhatt, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, and Acharya Ramchandra Shukla, Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Ram Vilas Sharma, etc., address it by associating it with national literature. It is also true that these creations inspired the Indians to stand prepared against the British Raj and create a historical form of nationalism in Indian society for which the country and its people are supreme.



The question is how to understand this form of nationalism created between 1857 and 1947. Should it be linked to the peasant movements of Gandhi, the Dalit references of Ambedkar, the revolutionary socialism of Bhagat Singh, or the radical nationalist attitude of Subhas Chandra Bose? It is a complex question, but what is important is the way Hindi writers like Premchand, Ramchandra Shukla, Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, etc., see it in caste contexts. Writers like Rabindranath Tagore of Bengal consider it as a hypothetical consciousness. Tagore sees a deep understanding of the civilisation and cultures of the subcontinent in that consciousness, which he tries to understand through his novels like *Gora* and works like *Gitanjali*. Meanwhile, Premchand sees hidden currents of rural civilisation in it, which he tries to understand by associating them with the agricultural way of life.

But the folk memories and the various versions of folk creation imprinted in those memories help to understand the nationalist creations between 1857 and 1947. For example, dividing this form of nationalism and its historical consciousness into the following periods of the history of the Indian Independence movement somewhat helps in understanding the structure of Indian nationalism. First, the Struggle of 1857 and its culmination; second, 1873 and Indian Literature, Press and Journalism; 1885, the Rise of the Congress and the rise of a new intellectual class;

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1905, the Partition of Bengal, the surge of the Independence movement; 1917, Gandhi, Ambedkar and the National stream of the Freedom Movement; 1942, Quit India Movement, Liberation context of Revolutionary Nationalism. Meanwhile, 1936 brought about a different meaning to the world of literature when the economically oppressed and socially exploited sections became the focal point of literature. It can be seen as nationalism of the oppressed and deprived sections, which Premchand alludes to in his novel 'Godan' published in 1936. Godan is a splendid example of peasant nationalism. Premchand, in his novel, has tried to understand the meaning of nationalism for the deprived and exploited society on the pretext of the characters of a farmer, Hori and a labourer, Gobar. An important task will be understanding nationalism and contemporary India based on these contexts and the literary works highlighting them.

### Indian Literature, Press and Journalism in 1873

What were the Rules and Acts that affected India after 1857, especially after 1873, whose resonance is perceptible in the world of literature and journalism and against which the consciousness of an intellectual nationalism in Hindi and Bengali-speaking society of North India is seen? Among them, two Acts made in 1858 are important: one, the Press Act, and the other, the Arms Act. It was the effect of these Acts that in India, from 1878 to 1947, many works, magazines, and books were banned by the British Raj, including Balkrishna Bhatt's *Hindi Pradeep*, Premchand's *Soz-e-Watan*, Sakham Ganesh Deuskar's *Desh Katha*, etc. The deep consciousness of resistance against the British Raj can be seen in these works. The biggest role of these works was creating a sense of discontent among the public against the British Raj. The Hindi writer Bhartendu Harishchandra played a big role in this. The poem *Swapn* by Mahesh Narayan, a poet of this period, while igniting a consciousness of resistance against these two Acts, points towards the same form of nationalism that John Plamenatz discusses. One can feel the consciousness of this intellectual nationalism in the following lines of Mahesh Narayan's *Swapn: Mahadev yeh raj swadhin karte* (Mahadev would have made this kingdom free).<sup>1</sup> Here, the poet uses the myth of Mahadev to avoid the clause of the British Press Act against him. It is also important to note that many Hindi writers of that period, including Balakrishna Bhatt, and Pratap Narayan Mishra have tried to understand Indianness through such myth, which sometimes some commentators associate with a particular religion. However, the reason behind using such analogies was that the British Raj's laws and writers were resorting to religious notations to protect them from these laws.

### 1885: Rise of the Congress and Emergence of New Intellectuals

One reason for development of a particular stream of Indian nationalism by poets like Mahesh Narayan or writers like Bhartendu Harishchandra, Balkrishna Bhatt, Pratap Narayan Mishra, etc., was the English education along with the formation of the Congress in 1885. As a counter measure, it gradually developed a deep affection in Indians for the motherland and the native language. It was because of the Congress, that the Indian intellectual class also got a space, the effect of which was that after receiving the English education, this section played a big role in the freedom movement as a middle class, as seen in Amritlal Nagar's novels like *Karwat* and *Peediyen*. Simultaneously, the Dalit renaissance also emerged in Maharashtra because of Savitribai Phule and Jyotiba Phule, which appeared on a bigger canvas in Indian Independence and social movements after 1920 following Ambedkar's arrival. The seriousness with which Hindi writer Radhamohan Gokul wrote on Dalit and women's issues in Hindi around 1890 is significant. One of his works, *Angrez Daku*, published in 1910, was also banned by the British. But it is unfortunate that none of his works find a mention in the history of Hindi literature. Among the critics of Hindi, Ram Vilas Sharma and Karmendu Shishir discuss him and consider his works an important part of the Hindi Renaissance. After understanding the policies of the British Raj, these writers, through their writings, developed a deep consciousness of patriotism in public. One can also say that the nationalist collective consciousness of resistance against the British Raj created by these writers on an intellectual level across the country is significantly visible in later Indian literature.

### 1905: Partition of Bengal and Surge of the Independence Movement

A later example is Rabindranath Tagore's works after the Bengal partition in 1905. The images of the Indian nation Tagore creates in *Gitanjali* and other works deeply affect the entire world, including India. This song composed by Tagore in *Gitanjali* alludes to Indian nationalism which can be called a peasant-centered cultural nationalism and whose development is visible in the works of Hindi writers like Premchand after 1930. It expresses the pain of the agrarian society of being separated from the land that introduces us to a new form of nationalism. The poignancy with which Tagore expresses the sorrow of Bengal in *Gitanjali* is very touching. In this collection of poems, Bengal is mourning after its partition, wishing for a better future, and praying for regaining its prosperity snatched away by the British Raj as follows: *Banglar mati, Banglar jol, Banglar bayu, Banglar*

The Dalit renaissance also emerged in Maharashtra because of Savitribai Phule and Jyotiba Phule, which appeared on a bigger canvas in Indian Independence and social movements after 1920 following Ambedkar's arrival.



phal/ Punyo hauk, Punyo hauk, Punyo hauk, hey bhagoban!/ Banglar ghar, Banglar haat, Banglar bon, Banglar Maath. Purno hauk, Purno hauk, Purno hauk, hey bhagoban!

It is the narrative of the Indian Independence Movement that the masses created with peasant nationalism. Among the nationalist leaders, Gandhi was the first to identify it. But its foundation was laid back in 1905 when the people across the nation, including Bengal, intensified their struggle against the British Raj. As a result, eminent leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, etc., joined the movement after 1905 and infused a new consciousness towards the nation, which gained immense strength after Gandhi's entry in 1917.

### 1917: Gandhian Influence

In fact, after the First World War, Gandhi went to Champaran in 1917 as soon as he returned from Africa and met the indigo farmers there. His meeting with the farmers of Champaran was a national event. The impact of Gandhi's travels on rural society across India was profound. He motivated farmers to join non-violent movements and be an ally in building a free and fearless nation. A folk poet of *Khari Boli* has enthusiastically described this active state of mind of resistance and creation in the following lines: *Sabarmati se chala sant, ek ahimsadhari/ jagti mein sannata chaya ghumi prithvi saari/ kampe kamariya haath mein lathi ek langotidhari/ ...ghar mein ja ja alakh jagaya, azadi ka path padhaya/ Khadi-dhari hamein banaya Bharat tera pujari*. An unknown poet of Bhojpuri has also mentioned Gandhi's similar effect: *Maan Gandhi ke bachanwa dukhwa ho jahiye sapanwa/ tan pe utaar kapda videshi, khaddar ke kail dharanwa*. Gandhi's influence on the public reflects in the following folk song by Haipou Jadonang, belonging to the Kacha Naga ethnicity and associated with the Kabui Revolution of Northeast India, in connection with Gandhi's visit to Silchar in 1927: *O Mahatma Gandhi! hamare raja ban jaiye/ aayiye ji aayiye!*

### 1942: Quit India Movement, Liberation Context of Revolutionary Nationalism

What happened to Mahatma Gandhi in 1942 when he was compelled to coin the slogan 'Do or Die'? The famous historian Shahid Amin in his article on Chauri Chaura entitled *Smriti aur itihās: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*, points out that at times the people or farmers wanted to see Gandhi as a fighter who should not only be a coordinator but also take up arms when the situation demands and confront the enemies. Such hints are also found in some folk poems. For instance, *khwab driver ne jo dekha vah mein karta jahir/ ek bayaban mein kuch gujar raha hai gard-o-gubar/ aa rahi fauj hai us simat se das bees hazar/*

The nationalist collective consciousness of resistance against the British Raj created by these writers on an intellectual level across the country is significantly visible in later Indian literature.

*aur hai Gandhiji fauj mein aala sardar/ aur sorajya ka is hath mein hai alam/ sare dushman ko vah karte chale aate kalam/ har ek angrez ke jab kaan mein pahunchi ye sada/jaisa socha kiya vah nang dharang bhaga...<sup>2</sup>*

In the above lines, the folk poet's desire that Gandhi had attacked the British as chief of the army of twenty thousand soldiers created a

distinct form of mass nationalism. It depicted him becoming violent for the cause of Swaraj and marching with the native army, attacking the British, and beheading them. On hearing this news, the British army panicked. Everyone ran helter-skelter, in whatever condition they were. Such imagery about Gandhi was rarely seen, but the public aspiration that he can also be violent is unimaginable and presented his image as a warrior.

The character of Indian nationalism seen between 1857 and 1947 points toward the nationalism of the common people, in which there is nothing other than the nation's liberation at the centre. The writings in Hindi literature or folk memories also focus on political emancipation and correspondingly raise the question of social emancipation with aplomb, in which the issue of women and Dalit emancipation comes up prominently. The images of nationalism created during the Indian Independence movement have been deeply discussed and debated by historians and intellectuals in many fields. That is why this period of Indian history is seen as a foundation of the Indian nation on which India, after 1947, was built. This India is as democratic and secular as it should be in the international arena and whose collective consciousness is centred on the Indian tradition of knowledge and thought process. □

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## Role of Urdu Literature

Dr Naresh

**D**espite being a geographic entity, India, before the advent of the East India Company, acutely lacked in having a sense of nationalism as its inhabitants considered their own States of residence, as their country and not India as a whole. The number of such States was beyond six hundred at that point of time. With the decline of the Mughal Empire and direct/indirect meddling of the Company, Indian Princely States started falling prey to the Company's diplomacy and military advances that culminated into British rule in India.

Much before the First War of Independence of 1857, Urdu poets had started expressing their anguish over the decline of rule of law, rampant corruption and loss of time testing human values. They composed the poetic genre 'Shahr-Aashob' (urban unrest) not only to record socio-political ground realities of their time but also to express their indignation at the political situation that prevailed. 'Shahr-Aashob', penned by poets like Shah Hatim, Ashraf Ali Fughan, Mohammad Rafi Sauda, Mir Taqi Mir, took lead in commenting on the disturbing political situation and ventured to criticise the ruling Princes as well.

A century before 1857, with the defeat of Shah Alam II, Mir Qasim and the Wazir of Awadh, Shuja-ud-Daula, in the Battle of Plassey in 1757, and Tipu Sultan's defeat and death in the Battle of Srirangapatna in 1799, nationalism had started taking shape in Urdu poetry. Many poems were written to mourn the death of Tipu Sultan.

The First War of Independence of 1857 became tumultuous as it stirred

the consciousness of Urdu poets whose expression of indignation at the Company rules resulted in destroying local industries and meddling with religious matters of the land. The defeat of Indian revolutionaries at the hands of the British led to an era of nationalism. Many Urdu poets who were composing poetry to induce courage and valour of self-sacrifice were hanged by the British. These included, among others, Rahim-ud-Din Ejad, Zafaryab Rasikh Dehlvi, Ghazanfar Sayeed, Aziz Dehlavi, Suroor Gurganvi, Ghyas-ud-Din Sharar, Qamar-ud-Din Shaida, Hadi Sambhali and Ismail Fauq.

Quite a few poets did not write revolutionary poetry, but jumped into the battlefield against the British. Poet Aziz Moradabadi brandished his sword



Some of the Urdu publications of DPD

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along with General Bakht Khan on the battleground. Ruswa Badauni was another Urdu poet to follow Aziz by sacrificing his life for the cause of motherland by fighting against the British.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Indian National Congress emerged as a major political party leading the freedom movement. Urdu writers and journalists boosted up the movement through their pen. Figures such as Munshi Sajjad Hussain, Mirza Machhu Beg, Ratan Nath Sarshar, Tribhuvan Nath Sapru Hijr, Brij Narayan Chakbast, Altaf Hussain Hali, Akbar Allahabadi and Ismail Merathi established themselves as literary protagonists of Indian culture and independence.

In 1906, Indian National Congress, in its Calcutta session, raised the demand for Swaraj (self-rule) and for boycotting of foreign items. The same year, revolutionary movement took off in Bengal that spread over North India in a short span. Poets like Hasrat Mohani, Chakbast, Zafar Ali Khan, Barq Dehlavi fanned nationalism and Maulana Shibli vehemently attacked the British. Urdu poets continued with their tirade against the British during Home Rule Agitation, Rowlatt Act (1918) and Jallianwala Bagh massacre (1919) and poets like Mohd. Ali Jauhar, Dr Iqbal, Mir Ghulam Bhik Nairang, Agha Hashr Kashmiri, and Ehsan Danish took forward the march of freedom movement and infused unprecedented enthusiasm in general masses. During third decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, a great number of Urdu poets including Tilok Chand Mehroom, Josh Malihabadi, Ravish Siddiqi, Hafeez Jalandhari, Mela Ram Wafa, Anand Narayan Mulla, Ehsan Danish, Ali Jawad Zaidi, Azad Ansari and to name a few, openly supported the freedom movement and filled the heart of their readers with absolute hatred for the foreign rule.

In 1936, the Progressive Writers' Movement started, which stood firm against the British rule and forcefully advocated the cause of national independence. Hundreds of poems, short stories, novels and articles appeared in Urdu newspapers and magazines, and a galaxy of Urdu poets appeared on the literary horizon. Poets such as Asrar-ul-Haq Majaz, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Moin Ahsan Jazbi, Makhdoom Mohiuddin, Ali Sardar Jafri and Kaifi Azmi added socio-economic problems of Indian society to the agenda for independence.

A bulk of Urdu literature is available against the two-nation theory of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his idea of partition. There is no dearth of poems written to eulogise national spirit.

**In 1936, the Progressive Writers' Movement started, which stood firm against the British rule and forcefully advocated the cause of national independence. Hundreds of poems, short stories, novels and articles appeared in Urdu newspapers and magazines, and a galaxy of Urdu poets appeared on the literary horizon.**

A fervent ebullition for national pride did not confine to Urdu poetry alone. Urdu prose, rather more forcefully, raised its voice of indignation and protest against the foreign rule. Urdu press, too, was agog with editorials and articles on the subject. Two such newspapers deserve a mention here. These were 'Urdu Akhbar' edited by Maulvi Mohammad Baqar and 'Payam-e-Azadi' edited by Azimullah Khan. It can easily be understood as to how much these papers were impacting the Indian minds that the rulers

looted Baqar Ali's house and put him to death. The British considered it a crime enough to demolish a house from where a copy of 'Payam-e-Azadi' was discovered.

Articles written by Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Maulana Hali and Shibli Nomani largely influenced their readers towards social awakening and nation building. Munshi Premchand, initially under the influence of Gandhi and subsequently impressed by Progressive Writers' Movement, was a nationalist to the core. His first collection of short stories, titled 'Soz-e-Watan' was banned by the British and its copies were confined to be set ablaze. Rashid-ul-Khairi, Azeem Beg Chughtai, Sudarshan Faakir, Ali Abbas Husaini, Sohail Azeemabadi, and Akhtar Orenvi are other Urdu story writers who took forward the message of India's freedom through their writings.

Next generation of the above mentioned writers produced noteworthy Urdu story writers like Saadat Hasan Manto, Krishan Chander, Akhtar Ansari, Upender Nath Ashk, Hayatullah Ansari, Ismat Chughtai and Rajinder Singh Bedi. These writers were indisputable in their concept of freedom from the foreign rule and building a new secular classless social order.

Urdu is the language that gave the slogan 'Inquilab Zindabad' (Long live the revolution) to Indian populace. It was Urdu that aired Subhas Chandra Bose's proclamation, 'Tum mujhe khoon do, main tumhe azadi doonga' (You give me blood, I will give you freedom).

I end this article by quoting an Urdu couplet that was popular during our freedom movement:

|| "Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai  
Dekhna hai zor kitna bazoo-e-qatil mein hai"

(Now my heart urges me to pay my head as a price for freedom. Let me see how powerful is the killer's hand.) □



## Contemporary Writings by Women

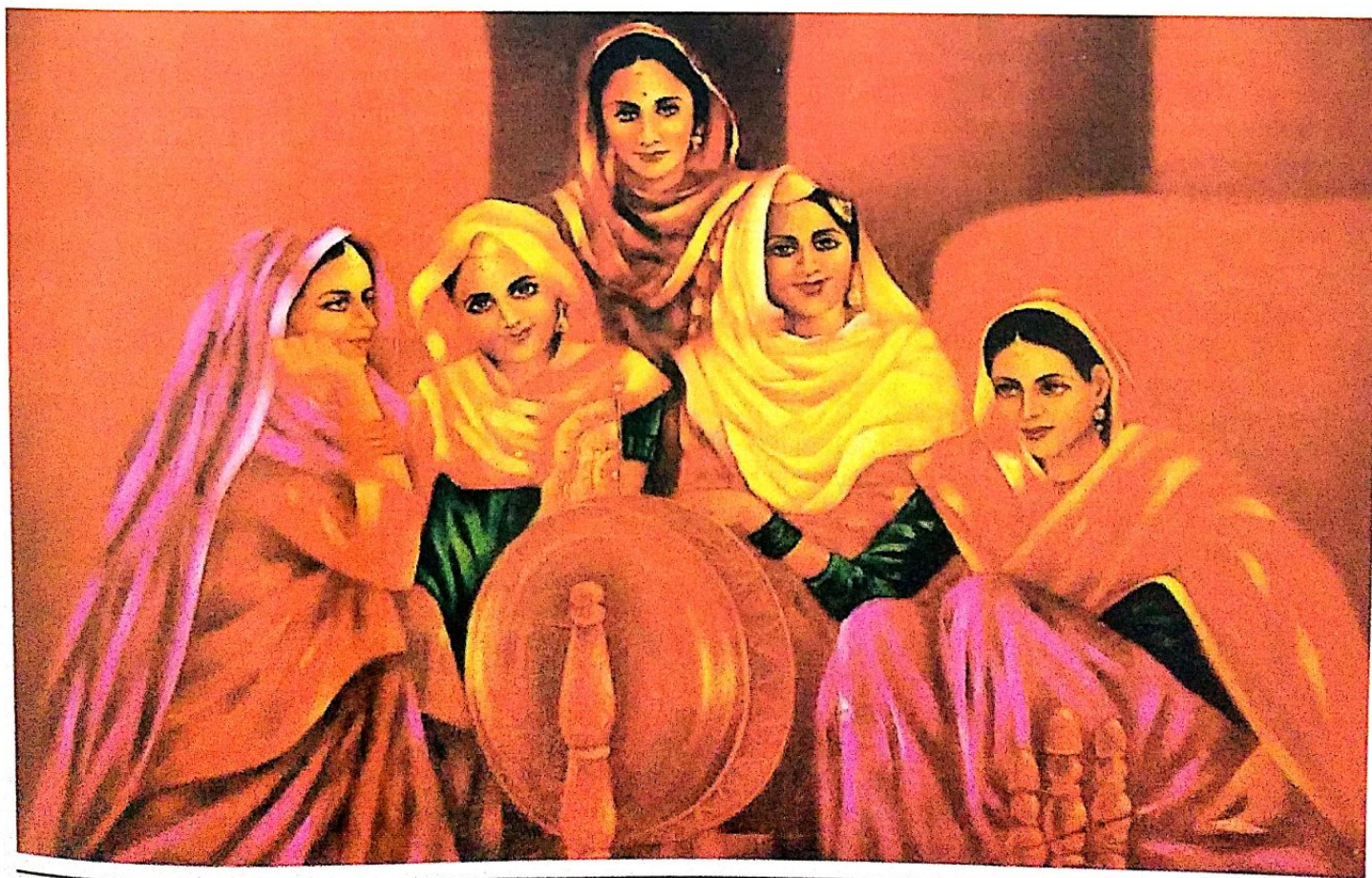
*Dr Garima Srivastava*

**S**ocial reformers believed that if the public is to be educated, then only native languages can become its medium.<sup>1</sup> The 'woman issue' was on the rise in the political scenario of this period of the nineteenth century, and both politics and gender were associated with each other at many levels. The conflict between the colonial way of life and western lifestyle and the ideological difference on the issue of women allowed the writers to clash and struggle.

By the late nineteenth century, Indian intellectuals were also concerned that women were not getting the education they needed. There was mutual disagreement on this issue as well. For example, Taraknath Vishwas wrote in the preface of *Bangiy Mahila*, 'There have been very few books which are worthy of women to read, or

which husbands can give their wives to read.'<sup>2</sup> Ramabai called upon American readers in *Hindu Stree Ka Jeevan*, 'All of you who are reading this book, think about the women of my country and wake up, come forward to liberate them from lifelong slavery and demonic miseries. Won't you come? Friends and well-wishers, educated people and humanists, I request you all who are interested in this or have compassion for your fellow brethren. Feel moved by the cry of Indian daughters, however weak it may be.'<sup>3</sup>

The analysis of women's autobiography helps to bring to the fore her society, community, agony, trauma, experiences of gender difference, and psychosocial and language expressions. In recent years, women's writing has become important for research and it is reconsidering



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the gaps and inconsistencies in cultural history.

Around 1920, Muslim women of elite families turned to study English in India. This new era of education created a class of educated women, comprised of women like Muhammadi Begum, Nazar Sajjad Haider, and Abbasi Begum, who started writing and getting published in magazines. Reading prose, letters, diaries, poems, and travelogues of women writers, thus far neglected, one gets to know that they were expressing the events of their time and society as well as personal experiences.

The autobiography of Begum Sultan Jahan of Bhopal, published in three parts in Urdu and English, appears to clash with parallel and intersecting currents of colonial power, the rise of nationalist ideology, and socio-religious reform movements. She was the Sultan of Bhopal State between 1901-1926. In comparison with western civilisation she established Islamic customs. Notably, most of the women rulers of Bhopal Princely State wrote autobiographies. These elite women adopted various forms of self-expression. Shah Jahan Begum (1838-1901) wrote *Tehzeeb-un-Niswan-o-Tarbiyet-ul-Insaan* (1889) to teach women how to conduct themselves. After the formation of Pakistan, women who were active in writing autobiographies can be judged from many perspectives, viz. what was their view on the cultural context and history in the changed circumstances following the partition and the dimensions of their association with gender issues.

*Ghubar-e-Karwan*, written by Begum Anis Kidwai (1906-1982), was published in original Urdu in incomplete form from Maktab-e-Jamia, Delhi, in 1983. A resident of Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh, Anis wrote a memoir titled *Azadi Ki Chhaon Mein* (1949) in which she gives an eyewitness account of the riots during the India-Pakistan partition and the problems faced by refugees. *Ghubar-e-Karwan* and *Azadi Ki Chhaon Mein*— are a woman's journey to being established as a representative. She mentions several changes in the Indian political scenario during the partition of India. Anis has taken stock of the socio-political conditions before and after the country's partition. At the same time, she reveals her dependence on her family to get the education and to decide the course of her life being a muslim. Besides, social and family compulsions on her being a woman, gender politics and censorship have also been mentioned. It is the first notable attempt from a woman's point of view to look at India-Pakistan in the years around independence.

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**The analysis of women's autobiography helps to bring to the fore her society, community, agony, trauma, experiences of gender difference, and psychosocial and language expressions. In recent years, women's writing has become important for research and it is reconsidering the gaps and inconsistencies in cultural history.**

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The experiences of British colonial power are recorded in the autobiography of politically active Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasool (b.1908) titled *From Purdah to Parliament*. Qudsia served as the Deputy President of the Council from 1937 to 1940. She was the first Indian Muslim woman to reach such a high position. Her autobiography is important because, in a patriarchal society, the percentage of utilisation of experience and potential of women with leadership abilities is very low.

Women's autobiographies in the post-Independence period can be seen as their literary evidence. They depict how society views women and vice versa, and what do women think of the socio-political changes around them? The role of social transformations and the desire for women's emancipation can be seen in the autobiographies of women who migrated to Pakistan. They appear to be trying to liberate themselves but also want to create their own identity in society. Reading these self-experiences unfolds the layers of conflicts of these women— be it with society, with family, or with themselves, as well as the contradictions of personality. What are the reasons that a woman chooses a genre like autobiography? Whoever reads the autobiography cannot stop appreciating the meta-literary gesture. A text that can mediate between the private and the public, as well as express self-experiences. These autobiographies can become documents for the colonial past and post-colonial present historiography. The partition of the country and displacement has matured them with experience, so now they create characters in their prose. The writings of these women in the autobiographical genre should be seen as an attempt to associate themselves with the national narrative and mark their presence in history as legendary historical characters. □

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# Gandhian Influence

Dr Dhwanil Parekh

The Revolt of 1857 can be considered as the beginning of the protest against British rule in India. The time span of ninety years, from 1857 to 1947, can be regarded as the period of Indian freedom movement. The particular time period and its sentiments have been captured and reflected by many Gujarati writers in their literary works. The freedom spirit is further bloomed in literature after Gandhi's arrival and comparatively reflected more in the writings of authors impacted by Gandhi.

**I**n *Sudharak Yug* (Reformist Era), Dalpatram wrote *Hunnarkhan ni Chadai* (Hunnarkhan's Invasion) and expressed his longing for freedom. Narmad has coined the word *Swadesh-abhiman* (The pride for the nation) and raised the zeal of people by writing— *Ya hom! karine pado fatheh chhe aage*. (Move forward. Victory is yours) Further, the *Pandit Yug* (Scholar Era) was a little passive in this regard and largely influenced by the new wave of education.

Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and founded Sabarmati Ashram in 1917 and Gujarat Vidyapith in 1920. These two institutions have played a pivotal role to initiate the freedom struggle in Gujarat. Many great scholars and writers such as Umashankar Joshi, Sundaram, Pandit Sukhlalji, Muni Jinviyaji, and Kakasaheb Kalelkar, were associated with Gujarat Vidyapith and contributed immensely to the field of Gujarati literature. Moreover, Zaverchand Meghani, Krishnalal Shridharani, Ramanlal V. Desai, etc., have also echoed the spirit of freedom struggle in their literary works.

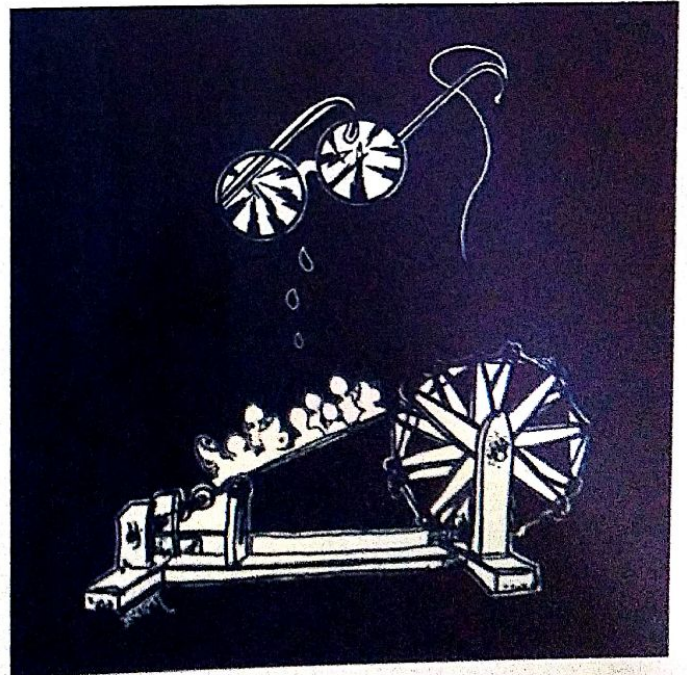
Under the influence of Gandhian thoughts and the influence of Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Umashankar Joshi has penned several poems. Many of them reflect his quest for freedom and sometimes they come with agony. The poet interrogates in the poem *Gulam* (The Slave),

*Hun Gulam?*  
*Svatantra prakruti tamam*  
*Srushitbag nu amul ful*  
*Manavi Gulam! — Gangotri*

(Am I a Slave?)

The entire nature is free  
 The precious flower of nature  
 And Human is a slave!)

Umashankar Joshi, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Sundaram, etc., have left their formal education and joined the freedom movement, and during this journey, they underwent imprisonment as well. At Visapur jail, Umashankar Joshi has written a one-act play collection *Sapna bhara* (The Stacks of Snake). In the poem, *Ek Chusayela gotala ne joyi*, the poet introduces his wish for becoming a tree of freedom.



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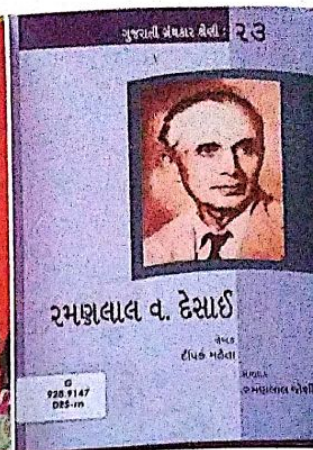
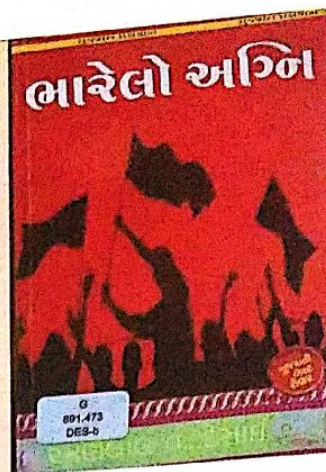


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Gandhi Yug (Gandhi Era) was the era of Umashankar Joshi and Sundaram. The latter expresses his outrage in the verse:

*Ghanuk ghanu bhangavu,  
tu ghan uthav mari bhuja,  
Ghanuk ghanu todavu,  
tu ghan utav mari bhuja. – Kavya Mangala*

(Many things are to be destroyed;  
you uphold hammers, my arms  
Many things are to be demolished;  
you uphold hammers, my arms.)

*Sindhudo* poetry collection by Zaverchand Meghani— whom Gandhiji has acknowledged as ‘Rashtriya Shayar’, was captured by the British Government. *Sindhudo* was one of the finest examples of Gujarati literature that expressed the sentiments upfront. He voices out blatantly:

*Hajaro Varshani Juni Amari vedanao  
Kaleja chirati kampavati am bhaykathao*

(The age-old sufferings of us  
Painful and disturbing miseries of us.)

Other than poetries, the essence of freedom struggle was also caught in novels and plays. One of the remarkable novels in this regard is *Bharelo Agni* (The Fire Within) by Ramanlal V Desai. The novel was written with the backdrop of the 1857 freedom movement, though the central character of the novel, Rudradatta was influenced by Gandhian thoughts. The title itself is very suggestive as it represents the hidden agony of Indians against the British Raj. The spark within people was ignited by Gandhian thoughts and finally resulted in the form of a freedom movement. Another important novel is *Padar na Tirath* (Pilgrim places at the outskirts of the village) written by Jayanti Dalal. The novel revolves around a protest against the British government. Although it depicts violence, it also provides a subtle example of public agitation against the government.

***Mangal Pandey* is a play by Jayant Khatri illustrating the 1857 Revolt. This is one of the noteworthy plays of Gujarati Literature depicting Mangal Pandey as a protagonist.**

Likewise, the novel *Padar na Tirath* turns out to be one of the most remarkable novels in Gujarati literature. The central character, Gopal in *Zer to Pidha Chhe Jani Jani* by Manubhai Pancholi ‘Darshak’ depicts glimpses of Gandhi; Darshak himself was also an active participant in the freedom struggle.

The plays *Zabak Jyot* by Krishnalal Shridharani and *Aaggadi* (The Train) by C C Mehta portray the tyranny of British rule. The play *Aaggadi* symbolises the exploitation carried out by the British. *Mangal Pandey* is a play by Jayant Khatri illustrating the 1857 Revolt. This is one of the noteworthy plays of Gujarati Literature depicting Mangal Pandey as a protagonist. The play revolves around strategies and plannings of the Revolt by Mangal Pandey, Nana Saheb Peshwa, and others against the British. During the freedom struggle, the world witnessed two World Wars. During this period, the tribal community of Gujarat also started protesting against the British Government. One of the tribal uprisings is known as *Mangarh Vighra*. The play *Mangadh* has been written about this rebellion and has also been performed.

*Aatham Delhi* (The Eighth Delhi) by Krishnalal Shridharani also depicts the agitation against the British Government. The poet wishes for the independence of the eighth Delhi which has been ruled by seven empires. In Pannalal Patel’s short-story *National Savings*, the native villagers are economically exploited by the British and the protagonist of the story, Ravaji, protests uniquely against injustice.

Many works of art have been written portraying Gandhiji, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and other freedom fighters. However, most of these plays are character-based. Three early eras of Gujarati literature— Sudharak Yug (Reformist Era), Pandit Yug (Scholar Era), and Gandhi Yug (Gandhi Era)— echo the ethos of the Indian freedom struggle and it has been reflected in various literary works. The freedom spirit further bloomed in literature after Gandhi’s arrival and comparatively reflected more in the writings of authors impacted by Gandhi. □