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EVOLUTION OF BENGALI LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Indian literature is full of various genres of literature in different languages. Bengali is one of the prominent languages in which literature enriched itself the most. Bengali literature refers to the body of writings in the Bengali language which has developed from a form of Prakrit or Indo-Aryan language. The Bengali literature has been divided into three main periods - ancient, medieval and modern. These different periods may be dated as: ancient period from 950 AD to 1350 AD, medieval from 1350 AD to 1800 AD and the modern one from 1800 AD to the present. Many literary scholars and intellectual minds belong to the Bengali literature. The present paper dwells upon the historical background of West Bengal along with the evolution of Bengali literature from the ancient period till date. The paper will focus primarily on the detailed study of eminent writers of Bengali literature whose works are being translated into various other languages so that their thoughts can be spread over the masses.

Key Words: Literature, Bengali language, West Bengal, Writers, Literary writings

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Historical Background of West Bengal

West Bengal is one of the major states of India situated in the Eastern part of the country. The History of Bengal comprises of origin of Bengal as a whole - including West Bengal and East Bengal (now Bangladesh). "Historical information about the Bengal region is available only from the Gupta period (320 - 520 AD)" ("History of Bengal"). The Guptas ruled Bengal from Magadh (now known as Bihar). The kingdom of Gour came into existence in Bengal after the decline of the Guptas. Shashanka (Gour) became the first ruler of Bengal who ruled around 606 AD. The various dynasties which ruled Bengal were: Pala dynasty, Malla dynasty, Senas, Devas, Sahi and Mughal dynasty.

The Pala dynasty (Buddhists) in Bengal began when Gopala was elected the king of Gour in 750 AD after Shashanka. Gopala ruled Bengal from 750 - 775 AD and later on succeeded by his son Dharmapala who ruled between 775 - 810 AD. Devapala succeeded Dharmapala to rule Bengal between 810 - 850 AD. They all strengthened the position of Pala dynasty in Bengal and made Pala dynasty most powerful dynasty to rule Bengal region. The decline in the power of Pala dynasty started with the rule of Narayanpala (854 - 908 AD.). Although Mahipala (reigned between 977 - 1027 AD) tried to resurge of Pala powers, but he was defeated by one of the kings from southern India. This defeat weakened Palas in Bengal and therefore witnessed various

independent kingdoms. The re-establishment of Pala dynasty took place under the rule of Rampala who reigned from 1077 - 1133 AD and Mandanpala was the last of the Pala kings (1143 – 1161 AD).

Apart from Pala dynasty, there were some other important dynasties which ruled in Bengal. Malla dynasty (Hindus) was established by Adimalla towards the end of the seventh century AD which ruled for a thousand year in the western part of the Bengal. The golden age of Mallas' rule in the region was under the reign of Virhambir. The dynasty of Senas (Hindus) was another important dynasty which came into existence with the first Sena king Hemantasena in 1095 AD. Hemantasena was the ruler under the king Rampala, thus it was only after the demise of Rampala that Hemantasena became the independent ruler. Senas became the major power in Bengal under the reign of Viyaysena (1096 - 1159 AD), the son of Hemantasena. Ballalsena and Laxmansena were other Senas who ruled Bengal after Hemantasena. "Since Senas were Hindus, Hindu traditions become stronger and more widespread in their kingdom" ("History of Bengal"). After Laxmansena, his sons Vishwarupsena and Keshavsena ruled over the Bengal region. After Sena dynasty, Deva dynasty was the last independent Hindu dynasty which ruled the eastern part of Bengal during twelfth and thirteenth century.

The ruling period of Palas and Senas witnessed the growth of Bengali language. Jaidev (twelfth century AD), the famous poet of Bengal, was named as 'Pancharatnas' in the court of Laxmansena. Jaidev composed *Gita Govinda*, one of the first literary works in Sanskrit during the reign of Sena dynasty in Bengal. Deva dynasty (Hindus) was the dynasty which ruled over Bengal in twelfth and thirteenth century after the Sena dynasty. Purushottamadeva was the first ruler of this dynasty, followed by his son Madhumathana or better known as Madhusudanadeva. He was succeeded by his son Vasudeva and Vasudeva was succeeded by his son Damodaradeva. Damodaradeva reigned from 1231 to 1243 AD was the most powerful ruler of Deva dynasty. He earned the title of "Ariraja – Chanura – Madhava – Sakala – Bhupati – Chakravarti" ("Deva dynasty"). Dasharathdeva was the last ruler of this dynasty who ruled around 1260 to 1280 AD. The Deva dynasty's rule ended over Bengal with the emergence of Shahi dynasty.

The changing power from one dynasty to another, resulted because of the struggle between Turks and Afghan invaders in Delhi, affected Bengal too which led to the foundation of first Muslim dynasty of Bengal in the form of Sahi dynasty. Iliyas Shah, the founder of the Iliyas Sahi dynasty (1342 -1412 AD), was the first independent Muslim ruling king of Bengal. He ruled Bengal from 1342 - 1358 AD, followed by his son Sikandar Shah (1358 - 1390 AD). Other Muslim rulers of Iliyas Sahi dynasty were Azam Shah (1390 – 1411 AD), Hamza-Shah (1411 – 1413 AD), Muhammad Shah (1413 AD), Bayazid Shah (1413 – 1414 AD), Firuz Shah (1414 – 1415 AD), Mahmud Shah (1435 – 1459 AD), Barbak Shah (1459 – 1474 AD), et al. Alauddin Hussain Shah (1494 – 1519 AD), considered as the greatest of all rulers of Shah dynasty, brought cultural renaissance during his reign. His reign witnessed an incredible development in Bengali literature. Kabindra Parameshwar wrote *Pandabbijay*, a Bengali adaptation of the *Mahabharata* and eulogised Hussain Shah as the incarnation of Krishna. "Bijay Gupta wrote his *Manasamangal Kavya* during his reign. He eulogised Hussain Shah by comparing him with Arjuna" (Sen 189). The Shahi dynasty ended its rule with Nasiruddin Nasrat Shah, son of Hussain Shah, who ruled Bengal from 1519 to 1533 AD.

The Muslim rule in Bengal witnessed the expansion of Islam in the region, starting with the independent local dynasty in the form of Sahi dynasty. With the invasion of Turks who were also Muslims, a powerful Muslim empire was established in India. In 1526, Babur, ruler of a small kingdom in Turkestan conquered northern India and paved the way for the Mughal dynasty. The emergence of the Mughals in North India too had a strong impact on the Bengal region. Babur became the first ruler of Mughal dynasty (Muslims) who ruled from 1526 to 1530 and his son Humayun became the emperor after his death. During this period, Sher Shah Suri (alias Farid Khan), an Afghan established himself as the ruler of Bengal. Sher Shah Suri (1472 – 1545) defeated Humayun in 1539 who had marched towards Bengal to rule over the region. Sher Shah Suri's reign lasted from 1540 till 1545 and his successors ruled Bengal till 1553 AD. By 1554 AD Humayun again invaded due to the inner conflicts among Suris. Humayun died in 1556 AD and was succeeded by Akbar (1542 – 1605 AD). Akbar was a remarkable soldier like his grandfather, Babur. He made Mughal dynasty different from all

the rest of the dynasties with his supreme leadership. He paid keen attention to the welfare of the society as a whole. In spite of being a Muslim himself, he showed equality towards other religions also. His non-discriminating behaviour reduced the conflicts which existed earlier between Muslims and non-Muslims. During the rule of Akbar, the entire region of Bengal passed into the control of the governors appointed by the Mughal emperors who ruled Bengal till 1716.

The Nawabs grew in power when the Mughal power began to decline in Bengal. In 1717, Murshid Quli Khan became the first nawab of Bengal who was the founder of the nawabi regime in Bengal. He was the first independent ruler of Bengal who released Bengal from the control of Delhi rulers (Mughal Empire). After his death in 1725, he was succeeded by his son-in-law Suja-ud-Din (1725 - 1739). Other nawabs of Bengal were Sarafraz Khan who ruled from 1739 - 1740, Alivardi Khan (1740 - 1756) and Siraj-ud-Daula (1756 - 57). The nawabi regime ended in Bengal with the defeat of Sirj-ud-Daula in 1757 at the field of Plassey by British army. Thereafter, all the nawabs were mere puppets in the hands of the British army. "After the Battle of Plassey the whole of India came under the imperial control of the British" ("History of West Bengal").

The foreign influences like Portuguese, Danish, Dutch, French and British started affecting the country in late seventeenth century. In 1690, the British came to Bengal as traders and started strengthening their grip over the entire region. This powerful grip was exposed by British army in the Battle of Plassey. In 1764, after the Battle of Buxer, Bengal became the part of British Empire, Calcutta was officially declared the capital of India in 1772 which was shifted to Delhi in 1911. This was also the phase of Bengal renaissance and Brahma Samaj reform movement in the State. In 1947, when India attained independence, Bengal was divided between India and Pakistan. East Bengal was given to Pakistan whereas West Bengal remained with India.

The present day West Bengal is about 300 miles from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, surrounded by three international boundaries, namely, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. On the east of West Bengal lies Bangladesh, on the west Bihar, Assam lies on the north and Orissa is on the south. Besides the beautiful physical features from the Himalayas in the North to the Bay of Bengal in South, West Bengal is known for its rich literary background as well. Many eminent literary personalities of Indian literature belong to the West Bengal state.

Evolution of Bengali Literature: The Bengali literature can be broadly divided into following periods:

Ancient Period (950 AD – 1350 AD)

The spread of Aryan languages in Bengal region started in third century BC with the conquest of Bengal by the Mauryas. In ancient period, the Bengali literature is survived through forty-eight spiritual hymns known as *Charyapada* (twelfth century) composed by Buddhist monks. "The composers of the *Charyapada* hymns include Luipa, Bhusukupa, Kahnapa and Shavarpa" ("Bengali literature"). These are the mystic songs written by Buddhist seer-poets which expressed the experience of enlightened state. Except these spiritual hymns, there is no trace of literature in ancient period; hence, it can be called as dark age in the history of Bengali literature. No significant Bengali literature has been found in this age after *Charyapada* till medieval age.

Medieval Period (1350 AD – 1800 AD)

The medieval period is well known for Ramai Pandit's narrative poem *Shunyapurana*. The collection of lyrical poems in Apabhramsa (dialect of medieval period in Bengal) named *Prakrtapaingala* is the part of Bengali literature in medieval period. During this period, literature developed in three main areas: Vaishnava literature, Mangala literature and translation literature. This period also witnessed the beginning of Muslim Bangla literature. The medieval period in the history of Bengali literature witnessed the growth of literary writings. Besides the composition of lyrics and poetry, genre of translation came into existence in medieval period and many Sanskrit texts were translated into Bangla language. There was also the age of *Kavyas* which described the supreme power of gods and goddesses. The poet Baru Chandidas was the greatest of Vaishnava writers who translated Jaidev's Sanskrit lyrics of Radha and Krishna into Bangla. He composed various verses in fourteenth century.

The names of several poets who went by the name of Chandidas have been found in the middle ages: Adi Chandidas, Kavi Chandidas, Dvija Chandidas and Dina Chandidas. The confusion about whether there were one or several poets called Chandidas is known in Bangla literature as the 'Chandidas riddle'. ("Bengali Literature")

The Muslim ruler Sultan Alauddin Hussein Shah, his son Nasrat Shah during the rule of Shah dynasty (1493 - 1538) in Bengal, not only led to the social, political and cultural prosperity, but also nurtured Bengali literature. It was during the rule of Narsat Shah that Bengali poets started composing lyrics and Kanka (a Bengali poet) wrote *Vidyasundar Kahini* in 1502. Padavali or lyrical literature became famous in this period where the innumerable poets wrote the story of Radha and Krishna. Some of these poets were Chandidas, Govindadas, Lochandas, Jnanadas, Rayshekhar, Narottam Das, Narahari Das, Balaram Das, et al.

Srikrishnavijay, translation of the Sanskrit *Shrimadbhagvata* was composed by Maladhar Basu in fifteenth century. The translated work, also known as *Govindamangal* or *Govindavijay* was believed to be the earliest translation work in Bangla. Krittivas Ojha (fifteenth century) was the first to translate *Ramayana* into Bangla. In the seventeenth century, Chandravati, widely considered as the first woman poet of Bengali language, wrote *Ramayanagatha*. Kavindra Parameshwar's *Mahabhart* (1525) was the first Bangla version of *Mahabhart*. The most important and popular Bangla *Mahabhart* was composed by Kashiram Das, an eminent poet of medieval Bengali literature, around 1602 - 1610. The final version of the Bangla *Mahabhart* was printed at Serampore Press in 1801- 1803. This version became more popular than other Bangla versions because of its refined language.

The oldest of the extant *Mangalkavyas* is *Manasamangal*, composed in 1495-95 AD by Vijay Gupta. Another version of *Manasamangal* is *Manasavijay* by Bipradas Pipilai, fifteenth century poet of Bengal. These *Mangalkavyas* describe the greatness of Gods and Goddesses. "Mangalkavya ("Poems of Benediction") is a group of Bengali Hindu religious texts, composed more or less between thirteenth century and eighteenth century notably consisting of narratives of indigenous deities of rural Bengal in the social scenario of the Middle Ages" ("Mangal-Kavya"). Another genre of *Mangalkavya* is *Chandimangal* which belongs to the Puranic goddess Chandi. The famous poets of *Chandimangal* are: Manik Datta, Madhavacharya, Dvija Madhav and Mukundaram Chakravarti.

The Muslim poets also enriched Bengali literature during medieval period. They introduced narrative and romantic poems in literature which were the adaptations or translations of Arabic and Persian romances. Shah Muhammad Sagir, Jainuddin, Muzammin, Sheikh Faizullah, Daulat Uzir Bahram Khan were important and renowned Muslim poets in the medieval history of Bengali literature. Other Muslim poets of medieval period included Nabi Bangsha, Syed Sultan, Haji Muhammad, Musar Sawwal, Seikh Paran, Shab-i-Miraj, Muhammad Khan, Sheikh Muttalib, Abdul Hakim, Qamar Ali, Muhammad Fasih, Sheikh Sadi, Heyat Mamud, Abdul Hakim et al. There was considerable development of Bengali literature by Muslim poets towards the end of the medieval period. *Yousuf Jolekha* by Shah Muhammad Sagir and *Nabibangsha* by Syed Sultan became popular literary creations in the medieval period. Other works of Syed Sultan included *Sobemeraj*, *Rasul Bijoy*, *Iblish Nama*, *Gyan Choutisha*, *Gyan Prodeep*, *Podaboli* and *Jaikum Rajar Lorai*. Abdul Hakim depicted the life of Muhammad (prophet of God) in his famous work *Nurnama* (Story of Light), well-known for Hakim's patriotism and his affection for Bengali language.

Daulat Qazi (1600 - 1638) a renowned Muslim poet of medieval period wrote *Satimayna o Lorchandrani* which was the first Bangla romance. Daulat Qazi did not complete the poem which was later on completed by Alaol-Ali Abbas Husaini (1607 - 1680) another popular Muslim poet of the era. Alaol wrote *Saifulmuluk Badiuzzamal* (Persian narrative about the romance of prince Saifulmuluk and fairy princess Badiuzzamal). His literary work *Padmavati* was believed to be his finest poem. *Shikondernom*, *Tohfa*, *Shoptopoykar* and *Ragtanama* were another works by Alaol. *Nasirnama* by Maradan (1600 - 1645) and *Chandravati* by Quraishi Magan Thakur (seventeenth century) became the part of late medieval period.

The decline of the Mughal Empire in late medieval period (around 1700 - 1800) and the establishment of British and European trading powers in Bengal region affected the literary creation. However, the tradition

of *Mangalkavya*, Vaishnava literature and translation work continued. Hindu Puranas and Islamic thoughts influenced the literary productions of medieval period to a great extent which resulted into *Padavali* and *Mangalkavya*. *Padavali* writers of eighteenth century included Natavar Das, Narahari Chakravati, Dinabandhu Das, Jagadananda et al. The versions of *Chandimangal* continued to be composed in late medieval period. *Dharmamangal* (subgenre of *Mangalkavya*) grew in this period, with several poets, including Mankiram Ganguli, Ramkanta Ray, Narasingha Basu, Sahadev Chakravarti et al.

Bharatchandra Ray (1712 - 1760), the greatest poet of eighteenth century, wrote *Nagastak* and *Gangastak* in Sanskrit and *Satyanarayaner*, *Panchali*, *Rasamanjari*, *Annadamangal* in Bengali. *Annadamangal*, a Bengali narrative poem, eulogized Hindu goddess Annapurna (form of Parvati) worshipped in Bengal. *Annadamangal* contained eight episodes and three parts: *Shivayan- Annadamangal*, *Vidyasundar Kalikamangol* and *Mansingha-Annapurnamangal* and narrated the story of Parvati. In the age of decline in the literary creativity, Ramprasad Sen (1721 - 1781) was an exception because of his sincere devotion to the literature. He composed *Shaktapadavali*, *Vidyasundarkahini* and *Krishnakirtan*. Other poets of this genre were Radha Kanta Mishra, Nidhiram Acharya, Kavindra Chakravarti, et al.

Modern Period (1800 AD - present)

The modern period of Bengali literature started with the foundation of Fort William College in 1800. The powerful prose literature developed in this period along with the rise of periodical literature and new poetic genres. The writers of modern period experimented with different forms of literary writings. The poets in this period consciously transcended the traditional verses to the modern poetry which brought changes in the theme and structure of the poetry. Essay-writing, plays and novels made their powerful presence in the modern period. Dom Antonio's *Brahmin-Roman-Catholic-Sangbad* was the first Bangla book to be printed in late seventeenth century. The foreign rulers of Bengal in eighteenth century learnt Bengali language for the compilation of dictionaries and the books of grammar. The Portuguese missionary Manoel da Assumpcam wrote the first grammar of Bengali language named *Vocabularioem idioma Bengalla, e Portuguez dividito emduas parts* in 1743. Nathaniel Brassey Halhed (1751 - 1830) wrote the first Bangla grammar titled *A Grammar of Bengal Language* (1776) which was printed in 1778 from Hughli press. This grammar helped the English in learning Bangla. At the same time, apart from grammar, law books needed to be translated for the administrative purposes, thus a lot of law books were translated and published in Bangla. *Cornwillas Code* (1793) became the major work about the body of legislations and laws in modern period of Bengali literature.

The pioneer of Bangla prose was William Carey (1761-1834) who came to Bengal for missionary work. He composed *Mathi Rachita Mangal Samachar*, Bangla translation of Bible in 1800. William Carey fully devoted himself to write text books and later on joined Fort William College which had been established in Calcutta in May 1800 to prepare civil servants for the administrative services. One of the subjects in the course was the local language but this subject faced difficulties due to the lack of Bangla texts books. Then a team of scholars of Bengali language led by William Carey started writing text books in Bangla. The scholars who helped in the development of Bangla prose along with William Carey were: Ramram Basu, Chandicharan Munshi, Tarini Charan Mitra, Rajib Mukhopadhyay, Golaknath Sharma, Mrityunjay Vidyalkar et al. Calcutta School - Book society established in 1817 also took the initiative to write text books in Bangla. The main writers from the society were Tarini Charan Mitra (1772 - 1837), Ram Comul Sen (1783 - 1844) and Radhakanta Deb (1783 - 1867).

The modern period of Bengali literature also witnessed the genre of essay writing, initiated by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and reached its zenith with Bankimchandra. Some of Bhudev's works in this genre were *Bijnan Rahasya* (1875), *Vividha Samalochna* (1876) and *Krishnacharita* (1886). Other essayists included Troilokyanath Sanyal (1840 - 1916), Kaliprosanna Ghosh (1843 - 1910), Chandranath Basu (1844 - 1910), Ramdas Sen (1845 - 1887), Chandrashekhore Mukhopadhyay (1849 - 1922) et al. The trend of lyrical poems was manifested in modern period through *Kavigan* and *Jatra*. The trend-setter of lyrical poetry, Biharilal Chakravarty (1835 - 1894) became popular for his poetic work *Saradamangal* (1879). Other poets of nineteenth century were

Surenranath Majumder (1838 - 1878), Akshay Kumar Baral (1860 - 1919), Rajanikanta Sen (1865 - 1910), Govindadas (1854 - 1918), Girindamohini Das (1857 - 1924), Kamini Roy (1864 - 1933) et al.

The blank verse and sonnet form in the Bengali literature were introduced by Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824 - 1873). Michael initially started writing in English but soon moved to writing in Bangla. His epic *Meghnadbadh Kavya* (1861) was the combination of eastern subject with western techniques and style. His sonnet's collection titled *Chaturdashpadi Kavitali* was published in 1866. Michael established modernism in Bangla plays as well. *Sharmistha* (1859), Madhusudan's first play, was based on the *Mahabharata*. He used blank verse for the first time in his second play *Padmavati* (1860) which was based on a Greek classical story. *Krishnakumari*, written in 1861, was the first successful tragedy in Bangla by Madhusudan Dutt. Dinabandhu Mitra followed Madhusudan and wrote *Nildarpan* (1860) which depicted the merciless exploitation of Bengali farmers by English Indigo traders. The other playwrights who made significant contribution to Bengali dramatic genre were Dwijendra Lal Roy and Girish Chandra Ghosh.

The short stories and novels became part of Bengali literature with the literary creations by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876 - 1938). He depicted the daily life of Bengali people through his novels. Pramatha Chowdhury (1868 - 1946) introduced the format of short stories in Bengali literature. Other well-known writers of this phase were Jagadish Chandra Bose, Naresh Chandra Sengupta, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Upendranath Gangopadhyay, Monilal Gangopadhyay, Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay, Jaladhar Sen, Nirupama Devi, Sita Devi, Shanta Devi, Hemendrakumar Roy et al.

The renaissance in modern Indian literature started with Raja Rammohan Roy (1775 - 1833). The Bengal renaissance, socio-cultural and religious reform movement during nineteenth century, also began with Rammohan Roy. During this period, Bengal witnessed an intellectual awakening which questioned the prevailing orthodox thinking of the society - status of women, the caste system, child-marriage, widow-remarriage, superstitious beliefs and religion. Rammohan Roy had great command over English language, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar wrote about his contribution to the Indian writing in English: "Rammohan Roy although he could be named as the first of the Indian masters of English prose, was great in so fields that he belonged to Indian history more than to mere Indo-Anglian literary history" (33).

Kashiprasad Ghosh (1809 - 1837), one of the founder pillars of Indian literature also belonged to Bengal. He stood as equal as Henry Derozio in his contribution to Indian English literature. Ghosh edited an English weekly journal *The Hindu Intelligence*, his collection of poems *The Shair and other Poems* (1830) stood at a high place in literary history of India as well. Besides his literary career, Ghosh expressed his opinion of the *bhadralok* (well-mannered person) community in Bengal. As per Ghosh, the *bhadralok* community included all gentilefolk belonging to the rich and middle class segments of the Bengali society.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824 - 1873), started his writing career while he was at Hindu College in Calcutta. During his student-life at Hindu college, his poems in English and Bengali got published in *Bengal Spectator*, *Literary Gleamer*, *Calcutta library Gazette* and *Library Blossom*. Through his style and content of writing, he removed the stagnation in Bengali literature. He introduced the blank verse in the play *Padmavati* (1860) which opened the way for blank verse literature. Madhusudan's epic poem *Meghnad-Badh Kavya* (1861), written in blank verse, was based on the *Ramayana*. The epic was written in nine cantos which gave uniqueness to the Bengali poetry. Madhusudan was the literary figure of real genius who added new dimensions to the Bengali literature with the introduction of Bengali sonnet and blank verse in the literary writings.

Bengal was the epicentre for renaissance which gave literary scholars to the world. Another scholar from Bengal was Toru Dutt (1856 - 1877). In 1875, she translated French poetry into English with the title *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. Despite Bengali, English and French she also learnt Sanskrit and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* was the compilation of her translations from Sanskrit literature. Another contributor of literature from Bengal was Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), cousin of Toru Dutt. Romesh Dutt wrote novels in Bengali and translated his two novels into English named - *The Lack of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909). He narrated historical surveys in large number like - *A History of Civilization in Ancient*

India, Hindu Civilization, The Economic History of British India, India in the Victorian Age and A Brief History of Ancient Modern Bengal. His greatest achievement was the Bengali translation of *Rig Veda*. Iyengar stated about his achievement:

To turn from Toru Dutt to Romesh Chunder Dutt is like passing from the bud and the flower to the ripened fruit; from Erato and Melpomene to Clio and Calliope; from Ushas, rosy fingered and short-lived, to the toiling Sun on the ascendant; from infinite promise to impressive achievement. (44)

Manmohan Ghose (1869 - 1924) was another sparkling star of Indian literature from Bengal. He was the elder brother of Sri Aurobindo and had English education at Manchester and Oxford. In 1898, his collection of poems - *Love Songs and Elegies* got published. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872 - 1950) is the outstanding literary figure from Bengal. His contribution to Indian literature and upliftment of his works at global level is remarkable. His long poetic career has given him the recognition as the literary master of Indo- Anglian literature. Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* - a work of prose art is considered as the greatest philosophical religious book. The most outstanding work of Aurobindo is *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* which is in three parts, divided into twelve books and forty nine cantos. M.K. Naik observes in *A History of Indian English Literature*:

Savitri was continuously revised by the poet almost till the end of his days and shaped into an epic of humanity and divinity, of death and the life divine. A sort of poetic philosophy of the spirit and of life, and an experiment in mystic poetry cast into a symbolic figure. (69)

Iyengar too praises *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* in the following words:

Aurobindo created what is probably the greatest epic in the English language. I venture the judgement that it is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and perfect cosmic poem ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a primordial cosmic void, through earth's darkness and struggles, to the highest realms of super mental existence, and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence, and metaphorical brilliance. *Savitri* is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man's mind towards the Absolute. (129)

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838 - 1894) from Bengal was an eminent writer, poet and journalist who gave India its national song 'Vande Mataram', written in 1876 and published in 1882. He was not only the key figure in literary renaissance of Bengal but put Indian literature at different level of excellence. "In his lifetime Bankim became the literary dictator of fiction in Renaissance Bengal. He was the master of the Romantic as well as Historical Novels" (Iyengar 412). Bankim was a superb story-teller and a master of novel-writing:

Stories of his novels often turn around a conflict between two inevitabilities, two things that are equally necessary truths of human life. A social world requires definitions, a kind of a basic social map which defines permissions and prohibitions, at the same time, there are elemental drives of human nature which these social constructs are meant to discipline into reasonably safe forms but hardly can. The social and moral worlds in which men actually live are made up of these two dissimilar and contradictory elements - the desire that controls men and the constructs that make society. Much of Bankim's fictional movements arise from this central conflict between the inevitability of moral orders and inevitability of their transgressions. (Kaviraj 2)

Rabindranath Tagore was an extraordinary artist who made contributions to all genres of Bengali literature in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He dominated the Bengali literature through his literary genius for an entire generation and continued to do so even after his demise. Tagore's contemporary poets were overshadowed by him. Some poets tried to establish themselves in their own way like Satyendranath Dutta (1882 - 1922), Mohitlal Majumdar (1888 - 1952), Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899 - 1976) and Jasimuddin (1902 - 1976). Kazi Nazrul Islam's literary writings explored various themes like love, revolution and freedom. Nazrul wrote essays, short stories and novels but he was popular for his poetic genius. *Bidrohi* composed by Nazrul in 1922 made him distinct in the history of Bengali literature. In the same year, he started a bi-weekly magazine 'Dhumketu' which established him as a rebel poet and aroused the suspicion of British authorities about him. Some of his poetic works consisted of *Agni Bina* (1922), *Sanchita* (1925), *Phanimanasa* (1927), *Chakrabak*

(1924), *Natun Chand* (1939), *Morubhaskar* (1951), *Sanchayan* (1955) etc. *Rikter Bedan* (1925) and *Shiulimala* (1931) were the short stories written by Nazrul whereas *Bandaan Hara* (1927), *Mrityukshuda* (1930) and *Kuhdika* (1931) were the novels written by Nazrul. He also experimented with drama form and wrote *Jhilimili* (1930), *Aleya* (1931), *Madhumala* (1960) and *Pile Patka Putuler Biye* (1964). Some other well-known poets of this era were Atul Prasad Sen, Kalidas Roy, Karunanidhan Bandopadhyay, Chitta Ranjan Das, Kumudranjan Mullick, Narendra Dev, Bijay Chandra Majumdar, Jatindramohan Bagchi, Sabitriprasanna Chattopadhyay, Umadevi and Radharani Devi et al.

Atul Prasad Sen (1871 – 1934) was a Bengali lyricist and poet. His poetry centred on the theme of devotion and patriotism whereas Kalidas Roy (1889 - 1975) focused on the Vaishnava thoughts. He wrote nineteen books of verse. Roy's famous poems included *Chhatradhara* (The Stream of Students) and *Tiratna* (The Three Jewels). Like Kalidas Roy, Kumudranjan Mullick (1883 – 1970) was also influenced by Vaishnavism. His works included *Shatadal*, *Ujani*, *Bithi*, *Nupur*, *Dwarabati*, *Kuheli*, *Mukhosor Dokan* etc. Jatindramohan Bagchi (1878 – 1948) was the prolific contributor to the Bengali literature in modern period. *Lekha* (1906), *Rekha* (1910), *Aparajita* (1915), *Bandhur Dan* (1918), *Niharika* (1927) and *Mahabharati* (1936) were popular poetic collection by Bagchi. The modern period in the history of Bengali literature witnessed the various genres of literature. Besides verses; novels, short-stories, dramas and essay writing flourished in this period. The literary scholars of this period experimented with different forms of writings and enriched Bengali literature with their literary creative skills.

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