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meet the author

Amiya Bhusan Majumdar





As a matter of fact, I believe that beyond the colonial city and consumer goods' storehouse named Calcutta, the vast land from Midnapur to Birbhum, Purulia to Nadia border, from the north of Uluberia to the border of Sikkim, which is indeed considered a hinterland, where scores of dark-complexioned bear-look-alike farmers slog in knee-deep slush to grow food for the colonial city and to maintain the supply of dearness allowance of the so-called labourers, the land which saw indigo revolt, farmers' revolt, and Santal revolt, where Bankimchandra laid out the locale of Sanyasi revolt, where seven out of ten Bengalis reside – that land, much bigger than Calcutta, is really our motherland, be it Bakkhali or Sukna or the slope of the Ajodhya hills. I am not estranging myself from Calcutta. I am trying to ask Calcutta: Come out of the limbo of westernization, look, this is your motherland, love her, it would not cost you your life. You are sinking in mud, stifling in smoke, and yet how long would you hide behind the Anglo-Saxon mask?

This is Amiya Bhusan, a litterateur off the Euro-centric track, a writer without the colonial hangover. Very

much alive to the currents and cross-currents of time and space, he had a different tale to tell, and that too in a different mode. In his first novel *Nayantara* he focussed on a mid-nineteenth century scenario – land and society of a remote village on the Padma, but connected with Calcutta, the capital of colonised India. The eponymous novel centred around the heroine but it seemed to be a fiction of one hundred years of colonial rule. The novel dwelt on the undaunted growth and consolidation of imperialism, the crisis of land right of the landlords in the face of colonial omnipotence, the inner contradiction of the age-old Indian society, the quest of religion for a new truth and such other aspects. Serialised in the Bengali journal *Chaturanga*, as part of a trilogy, the novel received a mixed response. While Birendra Chattopadhyay, a well-known Bengali poet, found it lacking in modernity for its exposition of a decadent feudal culture, Dhurjyotiprasad Mukhopadhyay, celebrated sociologist and fictionist, praised it beyond Amiya Bhusan's expectations.

Almost at the same time (from May 1953 onwards) the second part of the proposed trilogy, entitled *Gar Srikhanda*, was serialised in the *Purbasa*, a journal edited by the poet Sanjay Bhattacharya. Unique in structure, the novel does not follow a linear growth of a single story. Set in a time-span of four years between the famine of 1942 and the partition of 1947, it presents the lives of the landless, land-hungry, land-greedy and land-occupants. There are so many human characters but the protagonist is none but the *Gar Srikhanda* (Srikhanda the fort). The river Padma, which plays a vital role in the development of the novel, accommodates both temporal and eternal times. The book, immediately after its publication, received a lot of acclaim, both for its thematic



Receiving Sahitya Akademi Award

and stylistic novelty. Birendra Chattopadhyay who had earlier expressed his reservation about *Nayantara*, described the new one as a modern classic along with Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*, Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay's *Hansuli banker upakatha* and Manik Bandyopadhyay's *Padma nadir majhi*.

The third part of the trilogy, which was tentatively entitled *Sir Raj Chandra*, was finally dropped from the author's scheme for ever.

The next two novels, *Dukhiar kuthi* and *Nirbas*, were published in book-form in the same year, 1959. In *Dukhiar kuthi*, Amiya Bhusan made a commendable use of a tribal dialect, which accentuates the authenticity of the locale, yet never makes the narrative inaccessible to the readers. In *Nirbas*, the whole story is narrated from the perception of Bimala, the central character, exhibiting a distant proximity with the stream of consciousness.

In the sixties Amiya Bhusan concentrated on short stories. Two collections, *Panchakanya* and *Dipikar ghare ratri*, were published in 1962 and 1965 respectively. These stories presented the author's vision of life and existence. He writes in 'Je

sagnika': 'It seems that Mahendra has been able to reach an edge of life. Is it the real success of life? Or does the real success lie in the weary footprints on the dust of the road which human beings leave during their run to the destination?' But Amiya Bhusan's writings never replace the art by theory. It seems as if his visions are assertive in form but interrogative in feeling and meaning. In the story 'Sada makarsa' (white spider), the writer points out that there is no substitute for questions: 'The question you have asked can't be answered straightaway. If it can be asserted who does do what and at which time and why, then everything about the world is said and framed. Can a man's mind be ever described in such a limited periphery?'

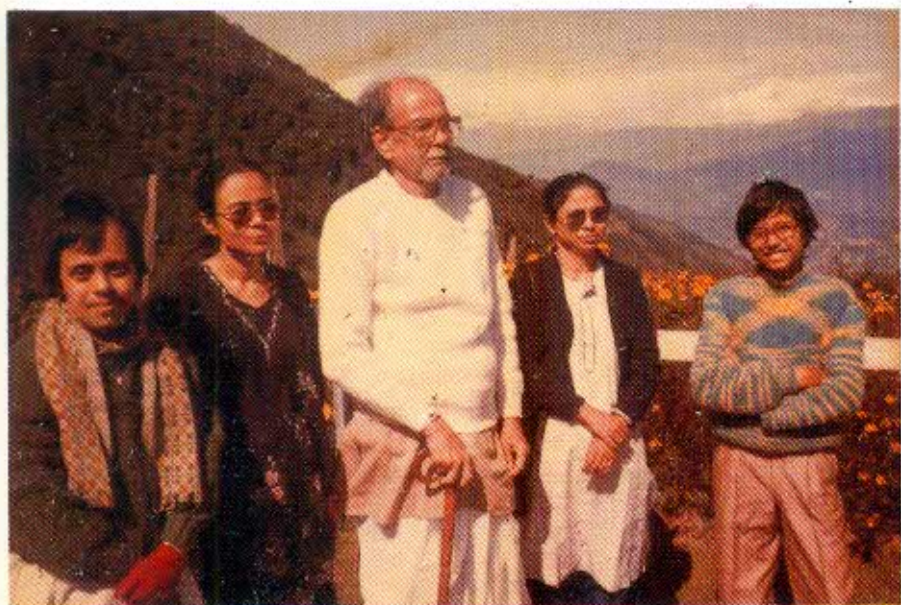
*Mahishkura upakatha* (The sub-narrative of Mahishkura), a novelette of eighty-three pages, is centred round a small village called Mahishkura. As the author described it, the village, if seen from the sky, would look like an island in the vast green sea. It is so small, so insignificant and so encompassed in trees and undergrowth that one should better go in procession of jeeps to discover it. The journey also creates

an ambience of happiness and subdued excitement: one can expect the sudden appearance of wild animals. In an environment of picnic one may plan an anthropological or a sociological study of the land as it seems that the people of the place are the descendant of a human group who losing their path in the forest, protect their disintegrated identity like the eye-balls. It seems as if Amiya Bhusan would tell us a story of a land, far from the madding crowd, with sylvan beauty. But as the novel progresses through various economic and social events, one discovers that all forests, like all pieces of land, are possessed by someone. The author writes that for a moment of time, even if someone apportioned the being of a wild ox or buffalo, he would not find the wildness of the forest anymore, as the forests are no more themselves, they are of someone.

*Bilas Binay Bandana* makes a modern experiment with the tradition of sinking-of-the-boat tales culminated in Rabindranath's *Noukadubi*. The word 'modern' (*adhunik* in Bengali) has a different semantic connotation to Amiya Bhusan as he questions: Are you still in the age of the story of the sinking

of the boat? Will all problems be solved, if the lost-wife ultimately returns to the husband? The novel thus offers to present a counter-reality of Tagore's *Noukadubi* (The sinking of the boat). The conflict of Binay and Bilas, centring round Bandana, ultimately leads to a catastrophe, leaving Bandana alone. The problem of identity is one of the central points in this polyphonic novel of Amiya Bhusan.

*Rajnagar* deals with the life in mid-nineteenth century in Bengal. For its vivid portrayal of life and characters, narrative power and structural design, the work has been hailed as a major contribution to contemporary Bengali literature. The nineteenth century – which is called the period of renaissance, the age of cultural revival in Bengal, which brought about a number of changes in the Hindu-Muslim land of Bengal – has been explored and explained in so many ways. The novel *Rajnagar* in the perspective of the nineteenth century, presents the preciousness of the love of life across various periods of time. The novel has so many ups and downs, what remains till the end is life and the ultimate state of life. Here life signifies the aesthetic delight and love.



With son, daughters and grandson

*Madhu Sadhukhan*, a novelette of only sixty-eight pages, is another stunning book by Amiya Bhusan. With its two classic qualities – greatness of perception and a meditative height of language – the book may be called a visual epic. Content-wise it deals with business, travel, war, food, woman and death in a strangely juxtaposed fashion and with an alert first-hand knowledge of place, things and characters handled. Its visual aspect is so distinctive that many critics have talked about its tremendous potentiality of yielding a cinematic classic.

*Chand Bene*, set in the eighth and ninth-century Bengal, describes the struggle of a man of commerce who seeks to extend his business to the Mediterranean sea, beyond the expectations of his times. That was a time when India was cornered by the Arabian traders. The market forces were in their control and one was to sell his products in the terms fixed by the Arabians. At that time Chand Bene came to sell his own products in his own terms. To present this phenomenon the author borrowed the name of the protagonist from the *Mangalkavya*. In a four-part structure (parts are mentioned as waves in the novel), the author presents the then

society and life almost in photographic details.

Why do I write? – Amiya Bhusan poses the question and replies – to discover myself. But this question still haunts him even after fifty years of his writing career. The discovery of one's own self may sound quite baffling. It seems as if one does not belong to the external environment, neither he associates himself with the ugly, joyless and limited existence. It is a kind of escapism, a negative attitude to life. But like sleep, laugh and love, literature is the land of escape of the fictionist. As in the most urgent sleep the real world stays like a dream, so in this land of literary retreat, Amiya Bhusan the fictionist sits face to face with the real world. Here he not only discovers himself, but creates himself everyday.

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## A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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At a literary gathering



## COLLECTION OF STORIES

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### DIPITAR GHARE RATRI

Calcutta, Signet Book Shop, 1965; 202p. 2nd ed. 1990.

### SRESTHA GALPA

Calcutta, Banisilpa, 1986; 248p. 2nd ed. 1994

### EI ARANYA EI NADI EI DES

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At writing table

Prakasani, 264p.

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Calcutta, 1957

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### NIRBAS

Calcutta, Neolit Publishers, 1959; 148p.

### MAHISHKURAR UPAKATHA

Calcutta, Anvesha, 1981; reprint 1986; 83p.

### BILAS BINAY BANDANA

Calcutta, Anvesha, 1981; 161p.

### RAJNAGAR

Calcutta, Aruna Prakasani, 1984; 404p.

### MADHU SADHUKHAN

Calcutta, Banisilpa, 1988; 68p.

### FRIDAY ISLAND ATHABA

### NARAMANGSA BHAKSHAN O

### TAHAR PAR

Calcutta, Pratibhas, 1988; 148p.

### BIBIKTA

Calcutta, Raktakarabi, 1989, 130p.

### CHAND BENE

Calcutta, Granthalaya Private Limited, 1993; 495p.

## A Chronology

- 1918 : Birth at Kochbihar town in West Bengal in the maternal uncle's house. Original home at Pakuria in Pabna district, now in Bangladesh.
- 1939 : Graduation  
Job at Post and Telegraph Department
- 1940 : Marriage with Gauri Devi
- 1943 : The play *The God on Mount Srinai*
- 1955 : Published his first novel *Nil Bhuinya* in book-form
- 1957 : Published *Gar Srikhanda*, in book-form
- 1962 : First collection of short stories, *Panchakanaya*, published
- 1972 : Tribritta Puraskar
- 1976 : Retired from service as Deputy Postmaster
- 1983 : Published the novel *Rajnagar*, earlier serialised in the journal *Chaturanga*
- 1984 : Uttarbanga Sambad Sahitya Puraskar
- 1986 : Bankim Puraskar of the Government of West Bengal  
Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel *Rajnagar*
- 1993 : Published the novel *Chand Bene*