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Sahitya Akademi

# meet the author

Atin Bandyopadhyay





Almost the entire world has been explored during the eleven months' journey through the ocean. If I cannot write a story then who else can?

Thus spoke Sri Atin Bandyopadhyay. The lines were published in the "Rabibasariya" of *Anandabazar Patrika* on 29 November 2015. With distinctive lyrical style, vivid descriptions of events and subtle analysis of situations he has brought life to his characters. As a result, many of his novels and short stories acquired documentary quality. His writings are relics of his experience as an uprooted man who has struggled a lot to earn his livelihood. The hopes, aspirations, disillusionment and pangs of separation from one's own homeland have been narrated with deep sensibility in his works. His vivid description of the rural life of Bengal is as picturesque as a photo album.

Sri Atin Bandyopadhyay was born in 1934 at Rainadi village, Dhaka of the undivided Bengal. It is a beautiful lush-green village near the river Sitalakshya, embraced by numerous rivulets and canals. As he grew up in a Brahmin middle-class family, he experienced the mutual respect and

love of Hindu-Muslim community which gradually turned into a relationship based on disbelief and violence. This made a great impact on the child's mind and later it was narrated in his magnum opus *Neelkantha Pakhir Khonje* which is considered to be one of the most poignant stories portraying the lives and times of Hindus and Muslims during the riot and violence that followed the partition of Bengal in 1947. Noted Bengali litterateur Syed Mustafa Siraj has compared this trilogy with the Greek tragedies and commented that the writers of our generation owe much to the author for this work. Sri Bandyopadhyay has also written a considerable number of short stories on partition of Bengal.

The tumultuous life during the partition described vividly in his short story "Kafir" is as follows :

"Not a drop of water could be given to the donkeys that evening. The cows too could be heard pleading from there sheds. And the intermittent shrieking of the horses meant that absolutely no one could escape from this horrible blood-bath. It was the middle of the night. Fierce flames leapt from the villages all around; wails of human beings reverberated through the empty field; and every now and then the air brought the stench of burnt flesh. A pall of heart rending distress descended over the villages as far as one can see, haunting the open fields like a phantom possessed. Almost everyone was fleeing. They were scrambling for escape routes either in the darkness of the field, or in the thickness of long grass or in the depths of the woods. Young women

were disappearing, never to be found again." – Tr. by Sheila Sengupta"

Atin Bandyopadhyay studied up to 9<sup>th</sup> standard in Panam high school and had to migrate to West Bengal at the time of partition in the year 1948. His family settled in Cassimbajar near Berhampur, Murshidabad district. He passed his intermediate examination from there. Riddled with immense poverty, he had to leave his home again to earn his livelihood. He tried every option to feed his family, worked as a truck-cleaner, weaver and ultimately sailed as a coal-boy in a steam ship. As a sailor he travelled to different ports in South Africa, South America, England, New Zealand and, Australia. His experience as a coalboy in the old steam ship S-S Seul-bank has been depicted in Novels *Samudra-Manus*, *Bidesini*, *Samudra Pakhir Kanna* and most notably *Alaukik Jalajan*, a part of "Neelkantha trilogy". Sri Bandyopadhyay has written for younger readership as well. Mentions may be made of *Binnir Khoi Lal Batasa*, *Annabhog*, *Udanta Tarabari*, *Gini Rahasya*, *Palaker Tupi*, *Dosti*

*Kishore Upannyas*, *Neel Timi*, *Fentur Sada Ghora* etc.

After his 11 months voyage, Sri Bandyopadhyay returned to Berhampur and completed his B-Com from Calcutta University in 1953. While studying B-com, his friends persuaded him to write stories based on his experience as a sailor. His first short story "Cardiffer Rajpath" was published in a little magazine *Abasar* in the year 1955. In the same year another short story entitled "Badsah Mian" was published in the same magazine. His first novel *Samudra manush* was published in 1958 from Mitralaya publication house. It bagged Manick Smriti Puroskar and immediately brought him to limelight.

After attaining his B-Com, Sri Bandyopadhyay went for Post graduate basic training at Banipur, Habra where he met Smt Mamata Banerjee. They were married in the year 1958, and joined Satui School, Murshidabad as teachers. Their first son was born in 1960 and second son in 1962.

In the year 1963 Sri Bandyopadhyay



As a sailor



With his wife

migrated to Kolkata with his family. He worked as a factory manager for few years and then joined Jugantar-Amritabaza Patrikar group as a sub-editor.

During his literary career, Sri Bandyopadhyay has bagged many awards including Manik Smriti Puroskar for *Samudra Manus* in 1958, Bhualka Puroskar in 1993 for *Panchajogini*, Bibhutibhusan Smriti Puroskar in 1998, Sudha Smriti Puroskar of Calcutta University, Tarashankar Smriti Puroskar, Bankim Puroskar in 1998 and in 2001, Sahitya Akademi Award for short story collection entitled *Pancasti Galpa*.

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#### A Chronology

- 1934 Birth in Rainadi, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- 1948 Migrated to West Bengal
- 1953 Graduation completed
- 1958 First novel entitled *Samudra Manus* got published
- 1958 Marriage with Smt Mamata Banerjee
- 1970 Famous novel entitled *Neelkantha Pakhir Khonje* got published
- 1976 Joined Jugantar Patrika as sub-editor
- 1998 Received Bankim Puroskar for novel *Dui Bharatbarsa*
- 2001 Received Sahitya Akademi award for short story collection entitled *Pancasti Galpa*



Receiving Sahitya Akademi Award from Ramakanta Rath