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Tutan Barman

Assistant Professor, Department
of Sanskrit, Sripat Singh College,
Jiaganj, Murshidabad,
West Bengal, India

Bengal's contribution to biographical modern Sanskrit literature

Tutan Barman

Abstract

A major feature of modern Sanskrit literature is Biographical literature. The tradition of writing literature by enlivening live has been going on since ancient times. Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacaritam* is the first Biographical Kāvya written in Sanskrit. However, in recent times, especially in the 19th – 20th and 21st centuries, the extent of which has increased significantly. Biographical literatures have high literary value on the one hand and on the other hand ancient history can be known to a large extent through literatures. The contribution of the Sanskrit scholars of Bengal and Maharashtra in the creation of Biographical Modern Sanskrit literature is remarkable. And the main focus of the article is Bengal's contribution to Biographical Modern Sanskrit Literature. In particular, the article tries to throw some light on Jaṭindra Bimala Caudhurī's 'Bhāratlakṣmīnāṭakam', Ramā Caudhurī's 'Nivedita-Niveditam', Birendra Kumāra Battācārya's 'Siddhārthacaritam' and Nityānanda Smṛtīrtha's 'Vaṅgkīrti-Vidhānam'.

Keyword: biographical literature, literary values, enlivening live, modern sanskrit literature, ancient history

Introduction

An important or significant aspect of Modern Sanskrit Literature is Biographical literature. Biographical works present history or biography as public, as well as possessing high literary value. Biographical works have made other and fundamental contributions to a large body of modern Sanskrit literature. The range of modern Sanskrit literature is vast, extensive and comprehensive. In this regard, it deserves special mention; Biographical literature is also very extensive in Modern Sanskrit literature. Numerous Sanskrit *Dṛśyakāvya* and *Śravyakāvya* have been written in the 19th to 21st centuries, depicting the characters and lives of famous kings, queens, women, historical characters, political leaders, social reformers, great men, intellectuals, freedom fighters, famous poets, famous writers, advocates of religion and spiritualism, etc. which is one of the main features of the multiplicity of Modern Sanskrit literature. We can make our life and personality beautiful and noble by taking inspiration from this Biographical literature. Biographical *Kāvya* in Sanskrit literature first comes to mind as *Aśvaghōṣa's Buddhacaritam* and *Bāṇabhaṭṭa's Harṣacaritam*. Since the composition of this couplet, the level of Biographical literature has increased successively and Sanskrit literature has been enriched with it. Among the Sanskrit –loving pundits whose tireless work, mind and sincere affection for the culture led to the creation of Biographical literature, the names of *Śrījīva Nyāyatīrtha* of West Bengal, *Jaṭindra Bimala Caudhurī*, *Ramā Caudhurī*, *Nityānanda Smṛtīrtha*, *Sītānātha Ācārya*, *Birendra Kumāra Baṭṭācārya*, *Amiya Nātha*, *Pañcānana Tarkaratna*, *Kālīpada Tarkācārya*, *Kṣamā Rāo* of Maharashtra, *Biśbanātha Keśaba*, *Ramākāṇṭha Miśra* of Bihar, *Yuvaraj* of Kerala, *Parameswar*, *Shrimati V. Balmmal* of Tamil Nadu, *Śivaprasāda Tribedī* of Panjab and many others are particularly noteworthy.

Methodology

It is a theoretical work based on historical research which explores the details of Biographical Modern Sanskrit Literature by Bengali writers and tries to find out the importance of Bengal's contribution in Modern Sanskrit Literature which is biographical and this is more valuable in the present society.

Corresponding Author:

Tutan Barman

Assistant Professor, Department
of Sanskrit, Sripat Singh College,
Jiaganj, Murshidabad,
West Bengal, India

Results and Discussions

It is impossible to give an overall assessment of the variety and diversity of the dynamic nature of Biographical Modern Sanskrit literature in this short essay. Therefore, for the convenience of discussion, I am presenting the content in two parts---

1. Presenting a short list of Biographical modern Sanskrit literature written by Bengali scholars.
2. A comprehensive introduction to selected Bengali scholars and one *Drśyakāvya* each

Table 1: A short list of Biographical modern Sanskrit literature written by Bengali scholars

| Author | The name of the <i>Drśyakāvya</i> | The main Character of the <i>Drśyakāvya</i> | Publication / Composition etc. |
|---|--|--|---|
| Śrījīva Nyāyatīrtha (1893-1992 A.D.) | Mahākavi Kālidāsam Śrī-Śaṅkarācārjyavaiabhava Vivekānandacaritam Nigamānandacaritam | Mahākavi Kālidāsa Śaṅkarācārjya(Advaita Vedantist) Swāmī Vivekānanda Ācārya Nigamānanda | |
| Jatindra Bimala Caudhurī (1893-1992 A.D.) | Bhāratalakṣmīnāṭakam Deśabandhu-Deśapriyam Subhāṣa-Subhāṣam Śrī-Śrī-Mahāprabhuharidāsam Bhārata-Vivekam Viśva-Vivekam Bhāratajanakam Bhāratāhṛdayārabindam Rakṣaka Śrī-Gorakṣam Bhāskarodayam Pṛitviṣṇupriyā Śaktiśāradam Bhārata-Bhāskaram Bhuvana-Bhāskaram Ānandarādhām Vimala-Yatīndram Niṣkiñcana-Yaśodharam Amaramīram | Rāṇī Lakṣmī Bāī Cittarañjanadāsa Subhāṣacandra Basu Jabana Haridāsa Swāmī Vivekānanda Swāmī Vivekānanda Mahātmā Gāndhī Arabinda Ghoṣa Gorakṣanātha (saint) Rabīndranātha Ṭhākura Viṣṇupriyā Śrī Sāradāmaṇī Rabīndranātha Ṭhākura Rabīndranātha Ṭhākura Śrīkrṣṇa-Śrīrādhā Rāmānuja (12th century A.D.) Yaśodharā Mirabai (1504-1563/1573) | 1967 A.D. 1972 A.D. 1963 A.D. 1959-1960 A.D. (staged) 1963 A.D. (staged) 1963 A.D. (staged) 1958 A.D. (staged) 1972 A.D. |
| Ramā Caudhurī (1911-1991 A.D.) | Nivedita-Niveditam Prasanna-Prasādām Yugajīvanam Abhedānandam Caitanya-Caitanyam Harināmāmṛtam Śaṅkara-Śaṅkaram Bhāratācāryam Bhāratapathikam Agnivīṇānāṭakam Ganadevatānāṭakam Yatīndra-Yatīndram Rāmacaritamānasam Rasamaya Rāsamaṇī Dīnadāsa-Raghunātham | Sister Nivedita Sādhaka Rāmaprasāda Rāmakṣṇaparamahansa Svāmī Abhedānanda Caitanyadeva Caitanyadeva Śaṅkarācārya (post gupta period) Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) Kazi Nazrul Islam (1898-1976) Sri Tarashankar Banerjee (1898-1971) Jatindra Bimal Chaudhuri (1909-1964) Tulsidāsa (1532-1623) Rasmani Devi (1793-1861) Raghunātha | 1977 A.D. 1977 A.D.(pubd.) 1962 A.D. |
| Bīrendra Kumāra Battācārya (1917-1982 A.D.) | Siddhārthacaritam Kavi-Kālidāsam Śrī-Gītagaurāṅgam | Gautama Buddha Mahākavi Kālidāsa Gaurāṅga Caitanyadeva | 1970 A.D. 1974 A.D. |
| Nityānanda Smṛtīrtha (Born in 1923 A.D.) | Baṅgkīrti-Vidhānam Deśabandhu-Prakīrtanam Subhāṣavijayam Ātmanivedanam Dharmasamsthāpanam Tailaṅga-Vandanam Bhaktarāmaprasādām Raghunanda-Vandanam Bhaktiharidāsam Tarkācārya-Pravandanam Śrī-Gadādharaśambhavam Mātrdarśanam Śrī-Jānakīnātha-Vandanam Kālidāsaḥ Tapovaiabhavam Śrī-Sītārāmārbhivam Śrī-vyopadeva-Vandanam Vidyāsāgara-Vandanam Śrī-Lokanātha-Prakīrtanam Amaravīravṛttāntam Suśīlajīvanam | Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy (1882-1962) Deśabandhu Cittarañjana Dāsa Subhāṣa Candra Basu Praphulla Cākī Jagadguru Śaṅkarācārya Tailanga Swami Rāmaprasāda(1720-1781) Raghunandan (16th Century A.D.) Haridāsa Kālīpada Takrācārya(1888-1979) Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886) Sādhaka Sarvānabda Paṇḍita Jānakī Śāstrī (1874-1971) Mahākavi Kālidāsa Śrī Rāmagopāla Smṛtīratna (1873-1946) Śrī Sītārāmadāsa Onkāranātha Vaiyākaraṇa Vyopadeva Paṇḍita Īśvara candra Vidyāsāgara (1820-1891) Śrī Lokanātha Brahmācārī Śāhīda Kṣudīrāma | 1987 A.D. |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|-----------|
| | Vira-Vāmācāraṇam Siddha-Sītānāmam Tarakarātnābhivandanam | Viplavī Suśīla Candra Senagupta Vamacarana Chattopadhyaya (1838- 1911) Śrī Sītārāmadāsa Ōṅkāranātha Paṇḍita Pañcānana Tarkaratn (1866- 1940) | |
| Amiya Nātha Carkavartī (?- 1970 A.D.) | Śrī-Kṛṣṇacaitanyam Harināmṛtam | Caitanyadeva Caitanyadeva | |
| Datta Dīneśa Candra (Born in 1891 A.D.) | Subhāṣagauravam | Subhāṣa Candra Basu | 1968 A.D. |

Table 2: A comprehensive introduction to selected Bengali scholars and one *Drśyakāvya* each

| Author | The name of the ŚravyaKāvya | The main Character of the ŚravyaKāvya | Publication / Composition etc. |
|--|---|---|---|
| Pañcānana Tarkaratna (1866-1940 A.D.) | Pañcānana Tarkaratna | Pārthāśvamedhamahākāvya | 1962 A.D. (pubd.) |
| Kālīpada Tarkācārya (1888-1892 A.D.) | Jogibhakta-caritam | Maharshi Nagendranath | |
| Nityānanda Smṛtītīrtha (Born in 1923 A.D.) | Śaṅkaramahānubhavam Tāraṅkānāthavaibhavam | Śaṅkarācārya Tāraṅkānātha | |
| Sītānātha Ācārya (Born in 1939 A.D.) | Ōṅkāranātha-Vandanā Anukūlacandra-Vandanā Śaratpraśasti Īśwaracandra-Vandanā Śāstrimaraṇam Rabīndrapraśastih | Śrī Sītārāmadāsa Ōṅkāranātha Anukūla Thākura Sarat Chandra Chatterjee Pṇḍita Īśwara Candra Vidyāsāgara Lal Bahadur Shasti Rabindra nath Thakur | 1998 A.D. 1998 A.D. 1998 A.D. 1998 A.D. 1998 A.D. |
| Dīnanātha Tripāthī | Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇacaritam (CaritaKāvya) | Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa | |
| Datta Dīneśa Candra | Subhāṣagauravam | Subhāṣa Candra Basu | 1968 A.D. |
| Narayancandra Bhattacharya | Idana-caritam | Idana | 1882 A.D. |
| Kalidasa Vidya Vinoda | Śivāji-caritam | Chatrapati Śivāji | |
| Ramacarana Bhattacharya | Umā-caritam | | 1900. |

1. Jatindra Bimala Caudhuri (1909-1964)

Jatindra Bimala Caudhuri, one of the Bengali poets, was born in 1909 in the village of *Kadūrkhila* in *Caṭtagrāma* district of present day Bangladesh. He was the Principle of Sanskrit College, Calcutta. He was also the Secretary of *Baṅgīya Saṃskṛta Śikṣā Pariśad*, Government of West Bengal. He was the joint founder and Secretary of *Prācyabānī* (Institute of Oriental Learning) of Calcutta. He died prematurely in 1964. In last 10 years of his life he composed 30 Sanskrit dramas.

Bhāratlakṣmīnāṭakam

Rani Lakshmbai is a bright female character in the history of Indian freedom struggle. The play is an extraordinary dramatization of the life, career and struggle of the historical character Rani Lakshmbai. In the drama, the abstract content of history has been embodied by the poet with extraordinary descriptive power. The plot of the play is as follows- description of Rani Lakshmbai and Gangadhar Rao's bereavement on the death of their son, adoption of a relative's son named Ananda Rao, when Gangadhar Rao's death, Lord Dalhousie's attempt to take over Jhansi in the wake of the Expropriation policy (*Sbatbabilopa Nīti*), 23-year-old Rani refused to give up Jhansi and opposed the company to protect her kingdom, after the death of *Tātiyā Topī* in the Sepoy War, she led the rebels in battle and sacrificed her life on the battlefield to protect the motherland.

Rani Lakshmbai's fighting spirit, patriotism; fearlessness inspired the people of India to patriotism. When the king wants to know the queen who is mourning for her son – what is the source of your determination?

Then the queen's answer---- "*deva! mantra mama vande mātaramiti pañcākṣaraḥ, devatā cāsya janānī janmabhūmiḥ, tadbhaktiśca rakṣākavacamiti jānīhi*" / Rani's reply touched everyone's heart.

2. Ramā Caudhuri (1911-1991)

Ramā Caudhuri, daughter of Sudhanshu Mohan Basu, was born in 1911. Born in an aristocratic family, Ramā's student life was full of genius. *Jatindra Bimala Caudhuri*'s wife was *Ramā Caudhuri*. She received her D.Phil from Oxford University. She adorned the post of Acharya in Brabourne College for 30 years. After that, for 7 years, Rabindra Bharati University's first female Vice-Chancellor undertook administrative activities.

Nivedita-Niveditam

A drama based on the life and virtues of Sister Nivedita. The play was twelve scenes. The dramatist has narrated the main content of the play in *Nāndīśloka*. In *Nāndīśloka* some extraordinary adjectives are applied to the character of Sister Nivedita. Such as - '*akṣamālinī*', '*vivekacaraṇbandinī*', '*lakṣyapālinī*', '*punyaśloka*', '*dhanyajībanā*' etc.

The first scene of the play describes Margaret's meeting with Swami Vivekananda in London in 1895.

In the second scene, Swamiji answers all the questions raised in Margaret's heart at a domestic religious discussion meeting in London in 1896. Swamiji's reasonable reply satisfied Margaret. Swamiji exhorted everyone to devote themselves to the service of the world. Swamiji's following words deeply moved Margaret -----

"mārgāreṇ / (svāmivivekānandamanukṛtya) "sarvaṃ kalvidam brahma" "tat tvamasi" / (svagatam) akasmāt romāñcita - kalevarāhaṃ jātā vākyayoretayoruccāraṇmātreṇ / "sarvaṃ kalvidam brahma" "tat tvamasi" / aho ! aho madhuratamo'ayaṃ bhāvo mahattamaśca /"

Third scene Margaret wants to get Swamiji as her Guru. Swamiji said ----- "*saumye !..... tato nāhaṃ tava guruḥ / tava gurustu jagadguruḥ śrīrāmakṛṣṇaparamahamsadevaḥ, nānyo nānyaḥ /"*

In the fourth scene, Swamiji sends a letter to Margaret -----
*"he mahāprāṇe! uttiṣṭha! jāgrhi! jagat sāmpratam
 jantraṇādagdham / kiṃ śobhate nidrā tbayi ?"*^{iv}

After receiving the letter, Margaret's determination – she will devote her life to the service of poor Indian people.

The fifth scene makes Margaret's first encounter with Sri Sri Sarada Devi. Margaret is Nivedita at Swami Vivekananda's initiation in the sixth scene. Later scenes show Nivedita's public service, the establishment of the Nivedita Girls' School, Sriguru's last visit and the final scene of Sister Nivedita's *Mahāsamādhi* on 13 October 1911. Her last quote was ----- "The boat is sinking, but I shall see the sunrise."

3. Birendra Kumāra Battācārya (1917-1982)

Birendra Kumāra Battācārya was born in 1917 in present day Bangladesh. He was a senior IAS officer who was engaged in the administrative service of the West Bengal Government and the Central Government for many years. He authored many books in English, Bengali and Sanskrit. He started writing in Sanskrit in 1967. His first written *Kāvya* is *Kālidāsacaritam*. The second work is *Gītagaurāṅgam*. His collection of sonnets is *Kalāpikā*. He composed 12 plays in Sanskrit.

Siddhārthacaritam

The poet composed this eight-act play on the life of Gautama Buddha in just two months. The increasing violence, war and unrest in the society in recent times made the poet sad. He realized that the preaching of Buddha's message of peace is very necessary to establish peace in the society. Inspired by this idea, he wrote the play. The books he mentioned as source books for the drama are----- '*Avadānaśatakam*', '*Buddhacaritam*', '*Sarvadarśanasamgrahaḥ*', '*Abanindra nātha's 'Baṅgīya Nāṭaka'*', Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's 'Indian Philosophy' etc. The name of each *aṅka* of the play is respectively----- *Haṃsarakṣaṇam (prathama aṅka)*, *Dharmavicāraṇam (dbitīya aṅka)*, *Samvegopattiḥ (trīya aṅka)*, *Abhiniṣkramaṇam (caturtha aṅka)*, *Tapaścaraṇam (pañcama aṅka)*, *Bodhiprāptiḥ (ṣaṣṭha aṅka)*, *Dharmavyākhyānam (saptama aṅka)* and *Punarmilanam (aṣṭama aṅka)*.

The play has 275 verses. The poet has used 15 songs and 70 new *chanda* in the play. The song contains the use of *Alaṅkāra*, especially the use of *Anuprāsa Alaṅkāra*. Every song is based on melody and rhythm.

Example:

amjanādājale kamjanāsuśitale; dadarśa sāyam nu
 hiṃsanakram,
 tīraśālmalītale śyāmaśyādvalācale,
 sunīlaratnābhakṣṇacakraṃ /
 na tvam cārubrate sujāte na-kuryāste bhīrūpadapātena
 prakāmpānviṭam panthānam bhujāṅgaśritaṃ te vakram //^v
 kāmayase narasuta cirasukhakāraṇam / dhārayase karamuta
 niyatijadāharaṇam
 nijamano mānayame / svayamaho māraṇaśe
 mūḍhamate kuru nuta-surapadadhāraṇam //^{vi}

4. Nityānanda Smṛtīrtha (1923 A.D)

Nityānanda Smṛtīrtha was born in 1923 in Jessore district of present Bangladesh. He had vast erudition in various branches of Sanskrit literature, especially *Vyākaraṇa*, *Nyāya*, *Purāṇa*, *Smṛti* and *Mīmāṃsā Darśana*. He has taught '*Korābāgāna Catuspāthī*' and *ṭola* for more than 50 years. *Paṇḍita Smṛtīrtha Mahāśaya* is a poet, dramatist, translator, critic, orator and essayist. He wrote 115 plays, 10 epics and more than 30 essays in Sanskrit. He has written 5 plays and more

than 60 articles in Bengali language. He was honoured with the President Award in 1994.

Vaṅkīrti-Vidhānam

The discussion drama is written on the life of renowned physician and politician Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy (1882-1962). The play has 5 acts. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's extraordinary personality is revealed in the play. Bidhan Chandra Roy's patriotism is easily known in the words of the poet-----

janānīvaraputro yaḥ sakale'smin mahītale /
 janānīm parihāyātra katham bā sthātumarhati //^{vii}

The plot of the play is as follows: Rejection of Governor post by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, solving refugee problem, trying to solve unemployment problem by establishing transport company, arranging land distribution to landless, making Durgapur an industrial city, urban planning of Kalyani, adopting various plans for rural to urban development, reforming education system, his attempts to restore the Sanskrit language, his administrative skills and above all his duty to the public as a great physician.

The play begins with praise of Motherland-----

yā janmabhūmi satataṃ dayādrā
 nānopacāraiḥ kṣitīvārīrūpā /
 śasyādimūrtiḥ virājamānā
 sā pātu juṣmān vahukīrtimagnā //^{viii}

Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's career as depicted in the play makes the above praise worthwhile.

Conclusion

Looking at the creation of modern Sanskrit literature, we see that the genre of Sanskrit Biographical literature is not weak at all – rather, the quality and place of Biographical literature in both qualitative and quantitative terms deserves special praise. In this regard, Biographical Modern Sanskrit literary works are most abundant in India in Bengal and Maharashtra. In view of the above discussion it can be said that poets of modern age have followed the ancient tradition but with some modifications. There have been radical changes in the nomenclature of *Kāvya*, content, use of language, use of *Alaṅkāra* and *Chanda* etc. Therefore, along with ancient famous characters, characters of legendary great men etc., characters of freedom fighters, characters of notable political leaders, characters of social reformers, especially famous women characters have become the subject of Biographical literature. In most cases, history has been presented accurately. In most cases, poets have limited their imagination in *Kāvya*. As a result, Biographical literature effectively presented real history to the public.

Finally, if the dramas (*Bhāratalakṣīnāṭakam*, *Nibedita-nibeditam*, *Siddhārthacaritam*, *Vaṅkīrti-Vidhānam*) described in the discussion article are read properly, we can undoubtedly say that the dramas are worthwhile in qualitative judgment. Every poet deserves praise for the difficult task of expressing real truth through literature without distorting history.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Chaudhuri, Roma, Niveditaniveditam, III Act/ p-30, Calcutta, 1979

^{iv} Ibid, IV Act/ p-36

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