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Sahitya Akademi

meet the author

Bimal Kar





Almost all private conversations of Bimal Kar begin with a sincere declaration, 'I am sick, I must die' a la the refrain of Thomas Nashe. While this does not necessarily signify a death-wish, the discerning reader knows that this obsession with disease and death plays a key-role in determining the nature of Bimal Kar's writing. This obsession may be traced back to the history of a very prolonged early sickness. Confined to bed, he saw the world without slipping out of his grip and created a world within as a substitute, perhaps. As a result, the reality outside, as it is seen or interpreted by the worldly people, has hardly ever inspired his creative fancy. Those who feel elated to see their tailored reality projected in the out-world, may find Sri Kar's writings wanting in realism, but he never loses sight of his chosen goal—reaching the core of human soul.

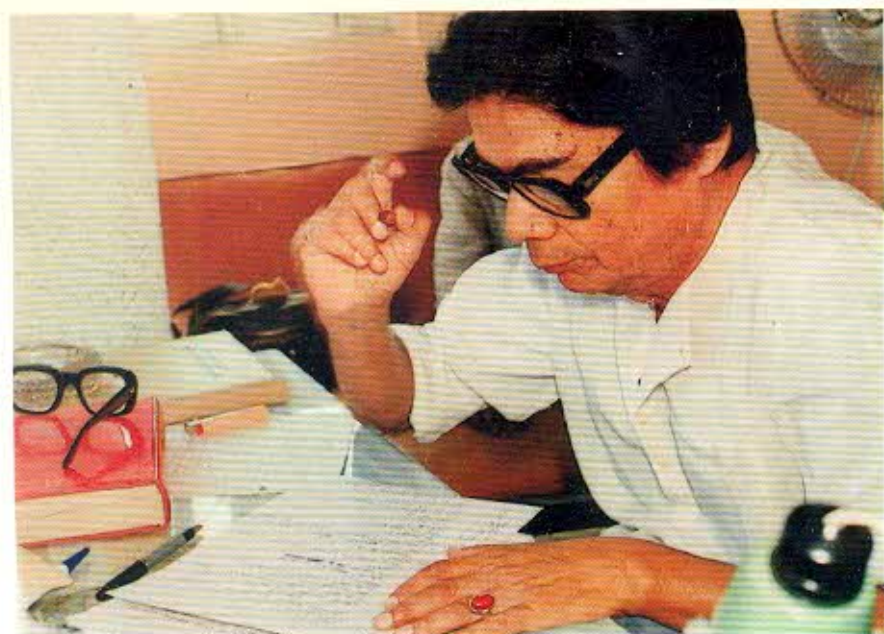
Born at Sankhachura, a remote village in the district of 24 Parganas in West Bengal in 1921, Sri Kar passed a major part of his early years outside Bengal, as his forefathers had left Bengal in their youth in search of profession. Passing a long period of their lives

in Jabbalpur, Allahabad, Gaya and adjoining places they somewhat settled in Bihar, near the Bengal border. Like their profession in the railways, they lived on wheels. Here one may discover a resultant characteristic in Sri Kar's mental make-up—he has not written even a single story on the village life of Bengal. He has written either on the city life of Bengal or the life of a human habitat outside Bengal.

When the first short story of Bimal Kar entitled 'Ambikanather Mrityu' (The Death of Ambikanath) was published in 1944 in an avant-garde magazine called *Prabartak*, he was working in Asansol in the Ammunition Production Department. After two months he joined the Accounts Department of the Railways in Benaras. But the Benaras life appeared awfully dull to him. He took transfer to Asansol, but found no excitement there too. Ultimately he resigned and escaped to Calcutta where a struggle for existence began. To earn his bread, he did all kinds of sundry things including writing help-books for school students, ghost-writing, running a printing press on lease-terms, working in a monthly journal, etc. Even he himself launched a journal with the ultimate aim of becoming a business tycoon.

Bimal Kar's first novel *Hrad* (The Lake) was followed by *Jhar O Sisir* (The Storm and the Dew), later renamed *Banabhumi*, in which he ignored the prevalent conventions of the fictional form. In 1952 in collaboration with some of his friends he started a literary tri-monthly called *Uttarsuri* in which his famous short story 'Indur' (The Rat) was published.

Deoyal (The Wall), a trilogy written in the perspective of the Second World War, the Bengal famine, the August Movement, the political disorder during 1939-1945, etc, delineates the pains and sufferings of the middle and



An inner chaos crying for order

the lower-middle classes of the period. The then political atmosphere and social erosion, the human greed and moral degradation, all have found their finest expression in this masterpiece of the author. A rare document of the period, its appeal, however, is more human than documentary.

The novel *Kharkuto*, which literally means the dry straw, grass, twigs, etc, collectively, centres round Bhramar, a lively girl who has been suffering from a fatal disease and gradually heading towards her doomsday. Apparently a story of love between Bhramar and Amal, the main interest of the novel lies in the juxtaposition of two opposite faiths—Bhramar lives on with her inherent and unflinching faith in religion, love and God, while Amal, in spite of his spontaneous allegiance to love, suffers from faithlessness, doubt and suspicion like any other mortal being.

Bimal Kar himself considers his next novel *Purna Apurna* (The Complete and the Incomplete), to be one of his best. A voyage to the human psyche, the novel presents the inherent incompleteness of the so-called sovereign human world. None can compre-

hend the human life in its totality, but there are people who try to reach perfection, however imperfect the world may be. The novel suggests that a man can discover the meaning of life if he submits himself to a higher ideal with unconditional allegiance to the human values that have grown and developed through the ages.

Asamay (Hard Times), the Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel, is a moving tale of a middle class family of a railway doctor during the British period. Dr Ujjal Kumar Majumdar who describes the novel as a rare piece of artistry in the fictional history of modern Bengali literature writes, 'With a rare skill the author works out the mental processes of the characters on a very thin story line....The style is simple, sincere, and highly practical to suit the inward turnings of the characters whose first person reportings add depth and intimacy to the plot...'

His great success as a novelist notwithstanding, Bimal Kar's first love remains short story and it is as a short story writer probably that he demands greater attention. Stories like 'Indur' (The Rat), 'Manabputra' (The Son of Man-kind), 'Udbhid' (Seedling), 'Kachghar' (The House of Glass),

'Atmaja' (The Daughter), 'Pingalar Prem' (The Love of Pingala), 'Janani' (The Mother), 'Sudhamay', etc., immediately captivated the Bengali readers for their novelty, freshness and personally relevant thought and expression. The story 'Sudhamay', published in 1957, is a unique projection of his the then psyche. The youthful blood made him forget his early sickness but at that time the thought of death enveloped his total existence. The story is certainly an autobiographical one, but is the life presented in the story true of Bimal Kar alone? Can one be sure?

Shy, withdrawn and unassuming, Bimal Kar likes to believe that 'nothing fails like failure'. He could not become what he was expected to be — a doctor, an engineer, or a middle-level officer of the Railways. He has become exactly what his relatives and well-wishers did not want him to be — a writer. But it is the law of life that it hardly follows a law.

A Select Bibliography

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A rare moment of introspection

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 DANGSHAN, Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1974. 122p. 21.5 cm
 DEOYAL, Vol. I, Calcutta: D.M. Library, 1956. 19 cm
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 DUI SITER MAJHKHANE, Calcutta: Ananda Publishers
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 GRAHAN, Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1965. 167 p. 21.5 cm
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With his wife, Gita

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- BIMAL KARER SRESHTHA GALPA, Calcutta: Asa Prakashani, 1977. 275p. 21.5 cm
- JONAKI, Calcutta: Basanti Book Stall, 1955. 127p. 18cm
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- KACHGHAR, Calcutta: Classic Press, 1956
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Felicitation on winning the Akademi Award

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MISCELLANEOUS WRITING

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WORKS TRANSLATED INTO OTHER LANGUAGES

Gujarati : *Hrad*

Hindi : *Asamay, Balika Badhu, Ei Jubakera, Kaler Nayak, Kharkuto, Purna Apurna*

Malayalam : *Asamay*

Oriya : *E Abaran*

Punjabi : *Purna Apurna*

1946 : Assistant Editor, 'Parag', a literary monthly

1947 : Employment in 'Paschimbanga Patrika', a daily newspaper

1951 : Marriage

1953 : Published *Barafsaheber Meye*, first collection of short stories

1954 : Joined 'Desh', a weekly literary journal of the Ananda Bazar Group of Publications

1956- : *Deoyal* (3 volumes), the magnum opus, published

1961 : Published the novels *Keraniparar Kavya* and *Nirbasan*

1964 : The novel *Kharkuto*, later filmed as *Chhuti*, published

1966 : Published *Balika Badhu*, later filmed in both Bengali and Hindi

1967 : Ananda Puraskar

1975 : Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel *Asamay*

1981 : Saratchandra Chattopadhyay award of the University of Calcutta

1982 : Retired from the 'Desh'; Joined 'Siladitya', a literary fortnightly, as its editor; Narasingha Das Puraskar of the University of Delhi

1988 : Launched 'Galpapatra', a short story bi-monthly

A Chronology

1921 : Birth at Sankhachura in the district of 24 Parganas, W.B.

1939 : Matriculation from Kulti Maclean Institution

1942 : I.S.C.

Admission in Vidyasagar College for Graduation

1943 : Jobs in Ammunition Production Department at Asansol and East Indian Railway at Benaras



Receiving the Akademi award from Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji