



A Rare Intellectual Dynamite: Dr. Biki Das On Shastrabirodhi (Anti-Classical) and Neem Literature

A Critical Study of Dr. Biki Das's Work on the Bengali Literary Movement by Subhajit Bhadra

We seldom encounter books that stimulate the imagination and compel us to think anew. The book under review is a work of literary criticism that explores a relatively unexamined area of Bengali literature. Originally written in Bengali, the book is authored by Biki Das, an academic and Ph.D. holder. It is a rare work that sheds light on anti-traditional Bengali prose and *Neem* literature, both of which represent significant departures from the established conventions of Bengali literary practice. Through this study, Das offers readers a serious work distinguished by its originality of thought and erudition.

The book is a substantial work of nonfiction and literary criticism that examines anti-traditional and *Neem* literature, movements that challenged established literary conventions and influenced the development of postmodern Bengali literature from the 1950s through the 1970s and 1980s. Das has undertaken extensive research, and the fruits of his knowledge and scholarship are evident throughout the book. This is not a conventional work intended for a general readership; rather, it will appeal particularly to serious readers, writers, scholars, and academicians interested in Bengali literature. Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian Nobel laureate, once observed, "Living means fighting within you the ghosts of dark power, writing means putting on trial your inmost self." Das's book demonstrates a similar engagement with the complexities of literary creation and critical self-examination.

Dr. Das has undertaken a commendable task by producing a book that challenges readers to engage deeply with its arguments and methods. In the context of the new directions taken by Bengali literature, sensitivity and compassion remain important dimensions of literary expression, and Das successfully incorporates both into his critical approach. His method is anti-traditional, while his attitude is experimental and informed by postmodern sensibilities. The cover of the

book was designed by Hiran Mitra, a renowned illustrator. Interestingly, Mitra had previously expressed opposition to Neem literature, creating an intriguing connection between the book's physical presentation and its subject matter. The book follows tradition only insofar as it creates a new tradition of its own; even its typography reflects an experimental approach. In this respect, the work corresponds to T. S. Eliot's emphasis on the importance of imagination in literary creation. Das demonstrates extensive knowledge of his subject and avoids unnecessary repetition. Although some of his critical propositions are unconventional, his central focus remains consistent throughout the work. The book also possesses a distinct title and subtitle that reflect its thematic concerns.

The book brings to light two movements within Bengali literature that sought to challenge the foundations of traditional Bengali literary practice. Das's principal achievement lies in his analysis and presentation of this unconventional body of literature through a sincere critical perspective and an experimental mode of interpretation. The book is the product of sustained research, and the author follows contemporary conventions of Bengali spelling and usage. Readers encounter an unfamiliar mode of literary expression in which the language is forceful and intellectually provocative. The result is a work that presents an important phase in the development of Bengali literary history.

Literary movements are not new, but the emergence of anti-traditional and Neem literature from Bengal represents a distinctive development. Neem literature began to establish itself prominently in the 1970s, although its roots can be traced to the 1950s, when the Bengali writer Bimal Kar advocated a new approach to short-story writing through his concept of "Short Story: New Technique." Neem literature emphasizes personal expression in creative writing, mathematical proportion, changes in literary experience, and

new forms of grammar. It also challenges conventional assumptions about the relationship between human beings and nature by asserting that human beings and even insects possess equal claims to natural resources.

Neem literature advances several unconventional propositions:

(a) Life does not necessarily follow logic or rational explanation, and human experience does not possess a predetermined future.

(b) Writers should move from conventional artistic practices toward unconventional modes of expression.

(c) Writers should employ intense and provocative imagery in representing the center of human experience and realization.

(d) Literature should have no place for arbitrary rules or pseudo-intellectualism.

(e) Literature consists of dangerous choices of words, satire, and the blind alleys of human existence.

(f) Literature requires new styles of prose, humor, satire, and unconventional forms of cross-reference.

(g) The poet is comparable to God.

(h) Life does not possess any inherent meaning.

Neem literature also addressed the lives of uprooted refugees who emerged as a consequence of the Partition of India and Pakistan in the post-1947 period. These unconventional writers attempted to depart sharply from the literary traditions associated with Rabindranath Tagore and other established writers. They challenged the classical rules of traditional Bengali literature and sought to create a new experimental literary voice.

The major proponents of Neem literature included Ramanath Roy, Subrata Sengupta, Ashis Ghosh, Shekhar Basu, Amal Chanda, Kalyan Sen, Balaram Bashak, and Sunil Jana.

Ramanath Roy opposed the practices of mainstream contemporary writers whom he regarded as constrained by unrealistic and superstitious modes of expression. In his view, literature should imitate the natural and spontaneous flow of life rather than encourage artificiality or rely upon contrived content. Roy maintained that there could be no eternal or immutable law governing literature. Along with other pioneers of Neem literature, he rejected conventional modes of literary expression. These writers also disregarded critics who argued that Neem stories did not constitute genuine stories. Neem, therefore, can be understood not merely as a literary movement but also as a philosophy of life based on unconventional forms of literary expression.

One of the principal writers associated with Neem literature advocated embracing the present while excluding the past and the future. This approach bears a resemblance to the Western concept of *carpe diem*, which emphasizes the importance of living in the present. Neem writers sought to write primarily for themselves rather than conform to the expectations of established literary institutions or audiences.

Dr. Das makes it clear that Neem writers did not emerge suddenly. Literary movements do not develop overnight or without historical causes. Their foundations are gradually established before they assume a recognizable form. Das demonstrates that the Neem writers were anti-classical in their approach and believed strongly in freedom of expression. They wrote openly about sexuality, boredom, repetition, and new forms of vigorous linguistic expression. According to some critics, the writings of Neem authors were vulgar. The Neem writers, however, regarded such supposedly vulgar

expressions as representations of genuine and suppressed human feelings.

The city of Durgapur emerges as an important *topos* of Neem literature. The writers associated with the movement published various magazines and sought to reshape established literary practices. Through these publications and experiments, they contributed to the development of an alternative literary culture that challenged the dominant conventions of Bengali literature.

Dr. Biki Das has chosen a subject that is both unconventional and experimental. His language is crisp, concise, and forceful. His imaginative universe enables him to explore an unfamiliar and unexpected territory of Bengali literary history and criticism. Das deserves recognition for his thoughtful choice of subject matter and theme, and the book offers readers considerable intellectual and literary value.

The book demonstrates Das's considerable potential as a significant voice in Bengali literary criticism, particularly in the study of unconventional literary movements. He has done justice to his chosen subject, and the freshness of his linguistic and semantic approach is evident throughout the work. His use of language is subtle, precise, and resourceful, allowing him to communicate complex critical ideas without sacrificing literary vitality.

The twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein famously observed, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Das's book invites readers to reconsider the relationship between language, literary expression, and intellectual experience. His substantial study will appeal to readers who seek freshness and originality in literary criticism. His style is engaging, and he succeeds in capturing the reader's attention from the beginning while sustaining it throughout the work. In this respect, Das's writing reinforces

the enduring critical significance of the relationship between style and authorship.

Finally, Shankhik Publication deserves credit for bringing such a serious and intellectually ambitious work to readers. Das's study offers a valuable exploration of anti-traditional and Neem literature and opens a significant area of Bengali literary criticism to further discussion and research.

Subhajit Bhadra

Subhajit Bhadra is a gold medallist in M.A from Tezpur University. He is a freelance writer, poet, critic and translator. He has published a number of books including *The Masked Protagonist In Jewish American Fiction*, *The Man Who Stole The Crown*, *The Rising Sun*, a book of poems in Bengali and a translated work titled *Selected Stories of Arun Goswami*.

He has written a book on *History of English Literature*. He has also been published widely in Indian literature, a bi-monthly journal of Sahitya Akadami. At present, he is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Bongaigaon College, Bongaigaon, Assam.

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