

Decolonising Bengali Theatre: A Study of Selim Al Deen's *Kittonkhola* and *Chaka* as Postcolonial Resistance Drama

Tanmoy Mazumder

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Jashore University of Science and Technology, Jashore,
Bangladesh.

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Abstract

Selim Al Deen, a prominent figure in Bengali theatre, questions the hegemony of Western forms in literature through his *dvaitadvaita* (dualistic dualism) theory and fusion theory of art and literature. Modern art and literature in Bengal, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, was shaped by European art and literature in its form, structure, and content. Modernity imposed literary styles that undermined the potential of Bengal's own ancient literary traditions, which include the rich rural forms of literature, such as *jatragan*, *palagan*, *puthi*, *pachali*, *geetnatyo*, *natyogeet*, *kothokota*, etc. The well-defined and static genres of European tradition pushed these literary traditions to the margins of Bengali literature, where these were regarded as forms of low culture or low literature, in contrast to the literary "highs" created through the modern traditions. Selim Al Deen in Bengali theatre and drama counters this modernity by resisting its genre style, structure, form, and content. The subaltern literary forms rooted in rural Bengali tradition and in the lives of marginal people come to the centre in Deen's literary experimentations since 1980s. *Kittonkhola* (1985) and *Chaka* (1991) are two well-known among many such dramatic works by Deen, where attempts to decolonise Bengali theatre and drama through newer forms, structures, subject-matters, and even punctuation are obvious. This paper, by studying *Kittonkhola* and *Chaka*, explores Selim Al Deen's counter-modernist struggle for self-identity of Bengali theatre and drama. Deen's use of *dvaitadvaita* style, fusion, and non-western punctuation are, on the one hand, a postcolonial resistance to European modernity and, on the other hand, stylistically postmodern. Further, they symbolise his search for a distinct identity of Bengali theatre.

Keywords

chaka, decolonisation, *dvaitadvaita* philosophy, *kittonkhola*, *kathanatyo*, marginal literature, resistance drama, subaltern people

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Introduction

Bengali drama had its distinct place among all the genres of modern Bengali literature, from its inception in the nineteenth century Bengal through patronisation of the British colonial rulers to the post independent Bengal, in both Indian West Bengal and Bangladesh. Bengali drama has developed since then, as literature influenced immensely by European values and characteristics, and by severing its ties to the pre-colonial Bengali drama. However, development of drama in Bengal has not been a homogenous one. Although it has been dominated by a blind adherence to European tradition, some of Bengal's most celebrated writers have dabbled in form experimentation and resisted European modernism. I would, especially, name Rabindranath Tagore for his "gitanatya" (musical-drama) such as *Shapmochon* (1931) and "nrritya-natya" (dance-drama) like *Chitrangada* (1936). Tagore, in various aspects, endeavoured to take inspiration from India's own literary traditions. The content and characters of Tagore's plays are mostly inspired by classical Indian mythological tales and epics. The subaltern is also present in Tagore's plays in different forms and aspects. He is the only shining star in pre-independent India's Bengali drama who writes on and upholds Indian history and tradition, and he is the only one of his kind. In independent India Bengal Badal Sircar "was an influential Indian dramatist and theatre director, most known for his anti-establishment plays during the Naxalite movement in the 1970s and taking theatre out of the proscenium and into public arena" (Gosavi 4637).

Sircar's proscenium theatre is known as "Third Theatre" which is egalitarian in nature. However, both Tagore and Sircar have their limitations. They are unable, in their writings, to connect the rural people and traditions of Bengal to the same extent as Deen. In this scenario, I will discuss Selim Al Deen (1949-2008), a post-independent Bangladeshi dramatist who not only challenges classical and modern European tradition of drama and theatre through Bengal's own literary traditions of hundreds of years, but also bring the subaltern voice and lives in theatre. Selim Al Deen, a Professor of Drama & Dramatics department at a reputed university in Bangladesh, worked relentlessly to search and find Bengal's ancient pre-colonial marginalised literary genres celebrated and kept alive by the subaltern classes after the advent and imposition of modernity. He, together with Nasiruddin Yusuf, a prominent stage director, established "gram-theatre" (village-theatre) to spread this subaltern voice in Bengali drama to every corner of Bangladesh in the 1980s. In this way, Selim Al Deen is following in the footsteps of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who, in the 1970s in Kenya, decided to use his Kamiriithu project to

reconnect “itself to the national tradition of the empty space, of language, of content, and of form” (Thiong’o 42). Selim Al Deen's goal was the same. Thiong’o’s *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) is a clear resistance to the colonial legacy of Africa- its language, literature, and culture. He says goodbye to English as his vehicle of writing literature: “This book ... is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way. However, I hope that through the age-old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all.” (Thiong’o xiii). Thiong’o chooses the path of resistance to the hegemony of Europe in Africa through language and literature that ultimately dominates the culture. His criticism of Afro-European tradition of post-independent African literature as necessarily neo-colonial is also regarded as his radical stance of literary resistance. Similarly, I argue Selim Al Deen as a voice of resistance to European modernity in Bengali literature and culture, the reflection of which is found in his literary pieces. In an end note to *Kittonkhola* he asserts-

“এই নাটকের গঠন পদ্ধতিতে আমরা প্রাচীন ও মধ্যযুগের পূজা উৎসবকেন্দ্রিক মৌখিকরীতির বাংলা নাটকের সম্ভাব্য

আঙ্গিক ব্যবহার করতে চেয়েছি। এ ক্ষেত্রে ইউরোপীয় নাটকের প্রচলিত রীতির নাটকের মুখোমুখি দাঁড়াতে হয়েছে

আমাদের।” (দীন ১১০)

(... in the form and structure of this play we used an oral tradition from middle age which was centred around worshipping festivals as a possible way of writing Bengali drama. For this, we had to challenge the much-practiced European tradition). (*Kittonkhola* 110).

The phrase “postcolonial resistance” has its wide range of meaning. However, this paper focuses on postcolonial resistance literature. To be simple, the word resistance means- “the act of fighting against something that is attacking you, or refusing to accept something” (dictionary.cambridge.org), while “postcolonial” refers to a condition “existing or occurring after a period of colonization” (collinsdictionary.com). This brings in the idea of postcolonialism, which Professor Ato Quayson describes as:

a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies and at the level of more general global developments thought to be the after-effects of empire. Postcolonialism often also involves the discussion of experiences such as slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender and place as well as responses to the discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy, anthropology and linguistics. The term is as much about conditions under imperialism and colonialism proper, as about conditions coming after the historical end of colonialism. (Quayson, “What is postcolonial literature?”)

Postcolonial is an identity imposed by colonialism and its effect, which is termed postcolonialism. Resistance is an effect of postcolonialism as Quayson states. Postcolonial, hence, does not mean a time after the end of colonialism, rather it begins from the very moment of colonial occupation, which creates new experiences for the colonised people. Postcolonial resistance includes writing of literature as an expression of those lived experiences, and also as a voice of defiance to accept colonising beliefs which deny centrality to local history, culture, and tradition.

Selim Al Deen’s dramas from the mid-1980s, thus, might be called literature of resistance- resistance to the European hegemony in Bengali drama and theatre. His objectives are to-

“ক। নাটকের চলতি পরিসরকে ভেঙ্গে ফেলা।ও খ। ইউরোপীয় নাটকের তীব্র ঘটনাবৃত্তের বদলে এ নাটকের কাহিনীকে মঙ্গলকাব্য বা গাজীর গানের গল্প গাঁথুনির সমান্তরাল করে তোলা।(দ্বীন ১১১)।

(a.

to break down the practiced form of drama, and b. to create a story parallel of drama with *mangakavyo* or *gazir gaan* instead of the intensive action focused European drama.) (Deen 111). So, Deen uses tradition to challenge modernity in the literature. The hegemony of European values in modern Bengali literature is, hence, resisted through, as I claim, postmodern practices. How is it postmodern? Selim Al Deen’s literary resistance is postmodern because it challenges the so called literary high values in Bengali literature. The high literature is challenged by the popular, the traditional, the common, the rustic, the low- the subaltern. The “grand” narratives of writing drama is decimated by a new narrative- a narrative that promotes tradition of the marginalized, drama that emphasizes literary fusion instead of static division of genres, by promoting a new philosophy of “*dvaitadvaita*” art, and cancelling extensive authorial control by rethinking the use of punctuation marks in contrast to European tradition.

The objectives of this paper are to: investigate Selim Al Deen’s drama as a resistance to the hegemony of European literary tradition on Bengali literature, probe Deen’s core philosophy of Bengali drama, find out the place of subaltern in Deen’s drama, and, lastly, understand the postmodern nature of Selim Al Deen’s philosophy of drama. Hence, this study focuses on Selim Al Deen’s philosophy of art and theatre, which is inspired by the subaltern tradition of Bengal practiced for centuries, but pushed back into the margins of the society by European modernity. By analyzing *Kittonkhola* and *Chaka*, this paper will also explore the subaltern as the prime subject of Deen’s art. It will evaluate the methods and techniques used by Deen to create a new form of drama, a fusion of various genres. So, first, I will try to understand the colonial legacy and European influence on Bengali drama; second, I will analyze the two aforementioned plays by Deen to understand the various characteristics of his unique philosophy of Bengali drama, and, finally, I will evaluate Selim Al Deen as a post-independent resistant literary figure in Bangladesh.

Conceptual Framework

This study offers a reading of Selim Al Deen’s dramatic works in the light of postcolonial criticism. Within the broader framework of postcolonialism, its major focus is on some of the key ideas and concepts such as hegemony, decolonisation, resistance, resistance-literature, subaltern, etc.

Postcolonial criticism as a theoretical framework “seeks to understand the operations- politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically- of colonialist ideologies” (Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, P. 418). Postcolonial critics often analyses the colonial ideological forces which “pressed the colonized to internalize the colonizers’ values and, ... promoted the resistance of colonized people against the oppressors” (Tyson, p. 418). Therefore, postcolonial resistance in any form is equally old as the inception of colonial rule itself. The colonial ideology assumes itself superior to native culture and tradition. As a result, the natives are termed as “savage, back-ward, and undeveloped”, and with the help of their advanced technology they destroy the “religions, customs, and codes of behavior” of the subjugated people. (Tyson, p. 419). The colonising power sees themselves “at the center of the world” and pushes the colonized “at the margins” (Tyson, p. 419). They see “European culture as the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted” (Tyson, p. 420), which is termed as

Eurocentrism. This Eurocentric ideology, to illustrate, pervaded “the British schools established in the colonies” (Tyson, p. 421) such as India and Nigeria “to inculcate British culture and values in the indigenous peoples” (Tyson, p. 421) so that these newly educated class remain loyal to the colonisers believing in their supremacy and help them in averting local rebellion. This creates a hegemony of power for the colonisers.

The term hegemony was popularised by Marxist thinkers, Gramsci and Althusser. However, it is an important idea for postcolonial critics too. In simple words it is Europeans' domination of non-Europeans. It does not mean military authority or forceful domination, rather it is domination by the colonisers through indirect consent of the local community. As Nayar asserts, “The dominant culture constructs myths, belief systems and practices through which the subject culture is presented as inferior and vulnerable.” (p. 87). The coloniser's language, culture, and religion destroy the individual's sense of rootedness in his/her own culture” (Nayar, p. 87). This colonial hegemony does not end with the formal culmination of colonisation. Political independence of colonies does not necessarily bring intellectual liberation since the hegemony of the White master continues in all the elements of modernity that they brought with them. From language to literature, from political system to law, from education system to history, almost all the things are shaped by colonial modernity and fossilized in the mind of the people of the former colony. This paper analyses Deen's dramatic arts as a response to counter the European hegemony in Bengali theatre. Therefore, to end hegemony, decolonisation is the best way.

In postcolonial studies, declonisation refers to “the cultural-intellectual-philosophical attempt to escape colonial forms of thinking” (Nayar, p. 45). Decolonisation is necessary to reach a consensus because European ideas have shaped the culture and vision of former colonised subjects. European legal, educational, religious, and literary hegemony made colonial subjects feel inferior and primitive. During the anti-colonial struggle, decolonisation, as a part of nationalist movement, reawakened indigenous ways of life, including their myths and beliefs. Following the attainment of political independence, the process of decolonisation required the recovery of pre-colonial myths and images with the goal of maintaining native traditions and cultural practices that were unaffected by Europeans and the intellectual legacies they left behind. This is often termed as resistance by postcolonial critics.

Anti-colonial resistance can take various forms. However, to simplify it, there are two important categories: violent to non-violent resistance. While armed resurgence might represent violent one, literary writings and art are forms of non-violent resistance. Harlow in *Resistance Literature* (1987) discusses several types of resistance. For her, resistance literature, like the resistance and national liberation movements it reflects and in which it can be said to participate, not only explains a challenge to the codes and canons of both the theory and practice of literature and its criticism as these have developed in the West, but also demands recognition of its independent status and existence as literary production. (Harlow, p. xvi). “Furthermore,” Resistance literature “challenges traditional generic and formal categories by breaking down conventional literary divisions and hierarchies ... and offering alternative patterns of periodization (... to replace the Eurocentric ones)” (DeShazer, p. 9-10). While Fanon explains the necessary violent nature of resistance against the colonizer in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), he also “believes that fighting the colonized is not only physical or materialistic but also mental and emotional. ... that this kind of hatred from the colonized to the colonizer is emotional and psychological which creates some kind of inner resistance. This ... creates self-consciousness ... represented in forms of cultural awareness against the colonizer.” (Mahmoud, p. 76). This is called non-violent

resistance. Resistance through literary writings is non-violent resistance, which Selim Al Deen's dramas represent.

Another major concept used in this study is the idea of subaltern. While in its origin it refers to a junior army officer, it was popularized by Gramsci as a term that depicts "classes of people with little political and cultural power." (Nayar, p. 143). According to Gramsci, any group that is excluded from a society's dominant hegemony and are called subaltern. He further adds that the history of any given nation is almost always the history of its elite classes, while the history of the nation's subalterns is ignored or forgotten as if they lacked a culture, a history, or a political voice. It is not allowed to represent oneself. In simple term "subaltern refers to any person who is subordinated due to their community, caste, class, race, ethnicity, physiology, gender, sexual orientation etc." (Maurya, "Spivak"). Ranajit Guha's *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* editors adopted the term. This group known as "Subaltern Studies Group" wanted to present a more accurate history of South Asia's oppressed people and communities. Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" offered a critique to the writings of this Subaltern Studies group. She especially criticised "their tendency ... to articulate a subaltern consciousness and common voice" (Felluga, P. 295). However, if we look back to the pioneer of the term, Antonio Gramsci, he "was interested in writing a history of the subaltern classes, thus countering the tendency of traditional history to represent only the history of the dominant group." (Felluga, P. 295). Deen's objective is the same in his dramatic works. He represents the subaltern to counter the dominant dramatic tradition of Bengal that excludes and marginalises the rustic subjects.

It further uses a postmodernist term called "intertextuality" to understand Deen's artistic creation. When one text alludes to, quotes from, or otherwise makes reference to another, this is known as intertextuality. It's the way in which one text affects or is affected by the meaning of other texts through interaction and connection. Intertextuality, as a term, implies that "individual texts are inescapably related to other texts and that their meanings are correspondingly provisional and plural according to how these relations are discerned and highlighted ... intertextuality promotes a lateral reading across the surface of different interwoven texts." (Brooker, p. 146). The term is used "widely by critical theorists to understand the "textuality" that wove together discourses from across periods and media." (Felluga, p. 157).

The Present study, in the light of the theories and concepts discussed above analyses Selim Al Deen's *Kittonkhola* and *Chaka*. Through the framework of postcolonial criticism Deen's dramatic art has been probed to locate the elements of resistance in it.

The Colonial Legacy of Bengali Theatre

The very base of Bengali literature, if we consider the modern period, is explicitly shaped by Europe or European modernity. The British rule over India began in Bengal through the East India Company in the second half of the 18th century, and from that time European modernity stretched its radius of influence on almost all the sectors of Bengali politics and social life, including its literature. This intensified in the beginning of the 19th century when the British policy makers decided to create people Indian in look but English in soul for an easier way to rule over those "poor and rude" (Macaulay, p. 240) Indians. As Lord Macaulay says in his (in)famous 1835 Minute in the British parliament, "the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and ... until they are enriched from

some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. ... the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people ... can at present be affected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.” (240). For him “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted....” (240). So, he proposed to the British government to teach the natives English language and more than anything else. Hence, the politics of language was the first and most important tool to create an elite Indian class who helped them to rule the common people, and an ambitious middle class who will be obedient to their colonial master. Education became the most potent tool to do that. As a result, we see a plethora of missionary schools established in colonial Bengal in the 19th century. Introduction of English and European literature was a major tool to buy out the souls of young newly educated Indians, who became obsessed with the canonical literatures of European tradition. An obvious example is the notorious Young Bengal Group who, immensely influenced by their mentor the British teacher Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, started attacking all the old traditions their forefathers believed in and, one of the most talented one among them, Madhusudhan Dutt, who later became a Christian and took the name Michael to fulfill his aspiration to become a reputed European writer, started writing literature in English. Later, he concentrated on Bengali literature after being rejected by Europe; however, Europe kept an everlasting impression on his psyche, as even his Bengali literary pieces, from poetry to drama, are influenced by European tradition. He introduced European forms and structures to write Bengali literature. Hence, his writings became a fusion of European form and content with Indian content. The same goes for all the prominent poets, dramatists, novelists, and other authors. With European modernity Bengali literature became Bengali literature, which initiated the modern age of Bengali literature with rising popularity of European literary genres- poetry, novel, and, especially, drama. In the following I will discuss the colonial legacy of Bengali drama and theatre.

History of Bengali literature or drama can be divided into two clear categories: the pre-modern and the modern. The modern drama starts with the inception of European or British rule, as discussed above, in Bengal. The pre-modern literature is divided into two categories: the ancient and the middle age literature. Let's focus on the modern literature. Asutosh Bhattacharyya in his article “Bengali Drama” (1958) divides the drama of this Modern Bengali literary period into three periods: “early, middle and modern” (p. 80). For him, “From 1852, the year in which the first Bengali drama appeared, to the establishment of the first Bengali public stage in 1872 is the early period” (80). Drama in this period developed in amateur stages through patrons. “Translations from English and Sanskrit, imitations and experiments were the characteristics of this period” (p. 80), though some original talents such as Michael Madhusudhan Dutta were present.

“The middle period begins from the date of the establishment of the first public, stage in Calcutta in 1872 and extends upto the commencement of the Swadeshi Movement” (p. 80); finally, the modern for him begins from 1905 from the time of *bangabhanga* (partition of Bengal in 1905). He discusses how Bengali drama in the modern period developed through the themes of patriotism, history, and shying away from the earlier themes of mythology and religiosity and how intricacies of socio-economic lives of people took a more important place in it. He does not forget to mention the influence of “Ibsen's A Doll's House in their concern with the various problems of women” (p. 82), and the “influence of English dramatists like Galsworthy and George Bernard Shaw in their concern with social injustice and of Sigmund Freud in their analysis of character of men and women” (p. 82). He does not forget to mention

Tagore. To him “Tagore did not pursue the traditional course of development of the Bengali drama, nor did he have any successors in the line, which was uniquely his own” (p. 82).

What we get from his analysis is a total disregard of the possible existence of Bengali drama in pre-modern or pre-colonial time. This demonstrates how heavily colonialism and modernity impacted Bengali literature, so much so that a well-known critic left it out of his discussion of the history of Bengali drama. This goes to show just how much of an impact they had. Even Rabindranath does not fall in this modern category quite well as his engagement with tradition is somehow problematic to discuss; so he is “unique”.

S. K. Bhattacharyya in his article “Shakespeare and Bengali Theatre” (1964) while attempting to define theatre, acknowledges the existence of theatre in pre-modern India, which summons a simple meaning of it: “‘acting out’ some thing”, which “does not even need a special building and stage for it can take place in a threshing circle, in a street or on any piece of ground” (p. 27). However, that for him is a wide meaning. He rather is inclined to take a more European definition of it- “‘acting out’ something in a play house specially built for the purpose and on a stage well equipped with sets and scenery” (p. 27). For him, it sounds like “a paradox that though the theatre is very old in India, the modern theatre in Bengal is largely a gift from England—in particular, Shakespeare’s” (p. 27). Hence, the modern drama in Bengali literature is shaped by Europe and its literary canons. This influence is a result of the colonized educated middle class's desire to imitate the English, their masters. He describes the influence and mastery of Bharata in ancient dramatic writing in India, but the definition of modern theatre fails to understand the pre-modern Sanskrit “plays of Kalidasa, Sudraka, Visa khadatta, Bhavabhuti and other” (p. 28). This, again, portrays how the Bengali theatre and drama has been shaped by the European literature- especially, English, so much so that he even states- “As the dark age of the European Theatre ended with the Renaissance, so the dark age of the Indian Theatre ended with a similar Renaissance brought about by the contact of the Indian people with the European mind and culture.” (p. 28).

Manujendra Kundu in his article “Bengali Theatre: An Edifice on the Ashes of People’s Culture” (2010), thus, rightly claims that “the history of Bengali theatre is also a history of the proscenium stage” (p. 55), which was “unable to establish a direct communication with the people” (p. 55). The “colonized mind” of the playwrights and dramatists of modern Bengal and its theatre, “having seen the customs of the colonizers and considering them ‘progressive’ in character, ... immediately took to the ritual of ‘staging’ and the succeeding procedures.” (p. 55). The dramatic pieces of the modern Bengali literature, hence, took inspiration from the Anglo-American and European tradition, and only reproduced them in different ways. The difference has been the content, while the mere copying has been the form. The form and structure of Bengali dramatic works have up to now followed the Anglo-European genres. Not only are they influenced by Aristotle's theory of the six elements of drama (plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle), but also by Shakespeare's style and modern dramatists such as Shaw, Brecht, Pinter, etc. The content, however, was borrowed from this land- its history, mythology, politics, society, etc. However, even those are mostly a reflection of the lives, struggles, and expectations of the elite and bourgeoisie middle class. So, it failed to “establish a direct communication with the people” (p. 55)- the common mass. It, despite having a “very strong tradition of folk culture ... at hand ... unfortunately ... could not draw the attention of the educated, sophisticated city dweller.” (p. 55-56). The emerging educated middle class in the buzzing cities could not accept Bengal’s own tradition as something adequate to their taste; they refused the “low” cultural

productions. As a result, the subaltern voice expressed through the very rural Bengali literary traditions such as *jatra*, *palagan*, *kobigan*, *puthi*, and so on was rejected as a possible source of dramatic or literary expressions. So, in both form and content, Bengali drama could not become entirely novel. "Ironically", in the postmodern age this low has now found a space in this urban space, where "it is now appropriated to suit 'our' tastes whenever necessary" (p. 56).

M. Chakraborty in his article "Trends in Recent Bengali Drama" talks about this phenomenon as a recent trend. He points out to the rising popularity of *jatra*- an old rustic Bengali tradition of theatrical art. Drama presented in highly sophisticated theatre of modern times and *jatra* are not quite the same. The stagecraft is different. *jatra* is more like an open theatre. Chakraborty writes, "The stage is set in the centre and the audience watch the movements of the actors and actresses from all sides. The curtain never falls. The scenes take place in rapid succession till the end of the drama." (p. 105). However, this should not be considered as a rejuvenation of pre-modern Bengali literary forms as this trend was still looked down upon as low art, and the *palakaar* (who wrote the scripts of *jatra*) are not revered as much as the modernized dramatists and playwrights. Despite this, the popularity of *jatra* in Bengali theatre somehow throws light on the fact of modern Bengali theatre's colonial legacy and the necessity of rethinking Bengali drama and its position. In this context, I would discuss Selim Al Deen as a unique dramatist in post-independent Bangladesh. His contribution to Bangladeshi theatre and Bengali drama is remarkable in our journey of decolonising Bengali theatre. In the following sections, I will analyse his two famous plays *Kittonkhola* and *Chaka* to probe his philosophy of Bengali drama and his celebration of pre-modern Bengali literary traditions and subaltern subjects as his expression of resistance to the colonial legacy of Bengali theatre.

***Kittonkhola*: Redefining Modern Bengali Drama**

Selim Al Deen's *Kittonkhola* (1985), in numerous ways, is a redefinition of Bengali drama in modern times. In all three core elements of a dramatic work- the form, the structure, and the content, Deen's *Kittonkhola*, breaks away from the existing norms and practices- the Western legacy. Deen believes in the vast wealth of Bengali literature of the past. He saw the Europeans' conception of drama as a narrow one and also as a challenge to rediscover and revive Bengali theatre in light of its long and illustrious history. In his book, *Madhyojuger Bangla Natyo* (1996) he states-

সচারচর দেখা যায় আমরা 'নাটক' কথাটাকে এক পূর্বনির্ধারিত ইউরোপীয় ধারনার অমোঘ রূপ ও রীতির আলোকে

বিচারের পক্ষপাতী। ... বাংলা নাটকের অজস্র আঙ্গিক সহস্র বছরের ধারায় বাহিত হয়েছে কিন্তু আদম্ভ্য তার দেহমানে

অদ্বৈতের ঝংকার বিদ্যমান। নাটক হয়েও আমাদের নাটক গান থেকে আপনাকে বিচ্ছিন্ন করে নি, নৃত্যকে করেছে তার

ধমনী, কাব্যের গড়নটাকে প্রায় সর্বত্র করেছে আপন অঙ্গভারন, তার প্রানের নিখিল লোকায়ত জীবন ও ধর্মকে

অবলম্বনপূর্বক আসর থেকে আসরে পরিপুষ্ট হয়েছে। (দ্বীন, বাংলা নাট্য, ১৯)।

Generally, we see that the word 'drama', in our mind, is a preconceived concept in the light of European form and norm. ... Numerous forms of Bengali drama for thousand years have been flowing in our literature, but in its soul it has only one form. Despite being drama, it has not severed ties with songs; dance remains its artery; poetry has become its ornaments; from place to place it has been nourished by the rural lives and religious rites. (Deen, *Bangla Natyo*, p. 19).

As I have stated earlier, the content of Bengali drama has had its own legacy even in the modern times, as there is no shortage of issues and subjects in Indian subcontinent to have originality in content. However, regarding form and structure, the scenario is quite contrasting. Hegemony of European and British theatre is very much visible there. Deen's current play deviates from this. *Kittonkhola* is a play that in every aspect resembles Deen's statement above. The form and the structure are completely novel, while the content is also different in comparison to the writings of most of the Bengali dramatists. In its content, the drama portrays the subaltern people in a rural setting in the Manikganj district in Bangladesh. Marginal communities like the "Laua" (a distinct offshoot of the *Bede* community who lives and travels in boats in Bengal), the proletariat labour class people, poor *jatra* artists, and so on are the core voice of this play. It tries to connect with the common people of Bengal, who, as central figures, are mostly absent in most of the modern dramatists' writings. The form and the structure are unique creative creation of Selim Al Deen. It completely discards European tradition and takes inspiration from Bengal's own tradition.

The Content: Subaltern in its Core

The subaltern voice is the core of the *Kittonkhola* drama. The setting is a riverside village in a rural area in Manikganj district in Bangladesh in the mid-1970s. For Lutfar Rahman "byakti bishes noy somogro jonopod ebong er odhibasider jibonsongramer itibrrito ebong hridoyer roktokhorn natoker moulo bishoyer morjaday ovishilkto. (Not any specific character is the centre of this play, rather the whole countryside, the life-struggle of its people, and the bleeding of their heart is placed as the central theme of this play)" (Rahman 141). The story revolves around an annual tradition three-days village fair centred on a shrine named Manai Babar Majar. The magnanimity of its portrayal makes the fair itself a character in the play. All the characters, incidents, and actions rotate around it. The major characters are Sonai, Idu Contractor, Bonoshribala, Dalimon, Robidash, Chayaronjon, Subal Ghosh, Rustam, Bosir, Hukum Sardar, etc. However, the range of characters is so vast in this play that it takes an almost epic scale. The action is not a uniformed one; it is a rather a disparate one- made up of actions. The play progresses through the interactions of subaltern characters representing different segments of rural Bengal's underclass.

The pain of Sonai in losing his little piece of land to the deceitful Idu Contractor and Sonai's subsequent revenge on him by killing him ends the play. However, this is not the only action of the play. Sorrows of Sonai, his friend Bosir, Rustam, and Chayaranjan are the sufferings of marginalized people. On the other hand, crisis of Banashribala and Dalimon resembles the doubly marginalized low-class women's sufferings in a patriarchal society. Idu Contractor in the play is that powerful exploiter, who can seamlessly mingle with the subaltern and exploit them to his own advantage. Two central characters, Sonai and Banashribala, are victims of Idu's lust for both land and body. Banashreebala, a former prostitute who left prostitution and joined the *jatra* party for an honourable life, only finds honour in death- by committing suicide to save herself from Idu's lust for her body; while Sonai loses his land to him. The story thus circles around the lust of Idu, autocratic oppression of Hukum Sardar- the *laua* leader, and Subal Ghosh's greed for money, together with the sufferings and desires of the above-mentioned subaltern characters. Thus, the content of this play becomes a celebration of subalternity, which is synchronic to the subaltern rural area of Bengal of its time. Anupam Hasan in his article "*Selim Al Deen-er Natoke Prantik Manus o Somaj-jibon*" (Marginal People and Society in Selim Al Deen's Plays) (2008) reiterates this point:

“কিন্তু খোলা নাটকের কাহিনী তিনি নিরেট বাঙালি জীবন থেকেই শুধু গ্রহণ করেন নি; তিনি এ নাটকে সত্যিকার অর্থে নানান

শ্রেণী-পেশার প্রান্তিক মানুষের জীবনচিত্র উপস্থাপন করেছেন।”

(He has not simply taken the story of this play from the lives of Bengali people; he has truly portrayed the lives of different kinds of marginal people) (Hasan, “*Selim Al Deen-er Natoke*”).

The Structure and The Form: Rebuilding Tradition

If content is the story that is being said or told or communicated in a play, structure is the order in which it is presented or said. So, it is about the author's dictation to control the experience of the audiences or readers. Form is, hence, the way the dramatist says it, the plot development, characterization, diction, stagecraft, directions, act division, instructions, use of monologues or dialogues, music, songs, etc. Here Selim Al Deen rebuilds the Bengali tradition, and shows off his vast knowledge of pre-modern Bengali literary traditions and the existing hegemonic European practices. First, he challenges the static genre of drama in European tradition. In European practice, drama has its own distinct characteristics which are separate from other genres like epic, poem, song, or novels. J. A. Cuddon in *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines it as—“any work meant to be performed on a stage by actors.” (p. 237). Western tradition describes its features as in the follows:

The drama genre features stories with high stakes and a lot of conflicts. They're plot-driven and demand that every character and scene move the story forward. Dramas follow a clearly defined narrative plot structure, portraying real-life scenarios or extreme situations with emotionally-driven characters. (actingcolleges.com)

The focus on plot, conflict, characters, etc. is well evident in European norm. Aristotle clearly defines tragedy and comedy. The distinction between epic and tragedy is strongly argued by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. The European literary tradition is based on this Greco-Roman tradition though it has developed a lot further since then; yet the fixity in genre division is clear and evident in it too. The division of a play with Scenes and Acts are necessary, while stage directions vary from author to author. Modern Bengali drama follows these features too. Selim Al Deen poses a challenge to it in *Kittonkhola*. First, he attempts at creating plays of an epic scale. He shifts away from act division and uses *sarga*-division (somehow close to the concept of episode). *Kittonkhola* is divided into nine *sargas*, which is similar to Madhusudhan Dutta's *sarga*-division used in the epic, *Meghnadbadh Kavya* (1861). “A typical dramatic structure is linear, with events occurring chronologically” (bbc.co.uk) including exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. There has to be plots and sub plots, well defined characters, etc. Non-linear and cyclical structures are also found in recent times. The structure of *Kittonkhola* does not follow these features. The plot is more flexible, the action does not follow any unity.

There are several plots, but none of them can be called sub-plots. Events unfold differently and in an equally important way. Sonai, Banashree, Daliman, Idu, Subal- all have their own equal importance in the whole story. Mansur Bayati and his *kabigaan* does not seem like an inferior plot. On the whole, rather than developing a single action, there are several actions that rise and fall separately. The killing of Idu by Sonai might seem like the climax, but Banashree's suicide is another moment of climax in it. As a result, the structure of the play unfolds several threads in an epic fashion. These threads

have their own beginnings and endings, and they connect with one another to create an intertwined larger thread that is the play *Kittonkhola*.

The form of the play is anti-hegemonic. It, on the one hand, rejects European form, on the other hand, rebuilds the Bengali tradition. He rejects the hegemonic tradition by deviating from the well-defined form of European drama. He rather uses a “fusion genre”, where various streams of Bengali pre-modern and modern literary genres, not necessarily dramatic ones, can be intermingled. The middle-age Bengali epic traditions such as *mangalkavya*, *jatra*, *palagaan*, *kabigaan*, *puthi*, and *pachali* traditions are fused in *Kittonkhola*. The play is narrated by a *kathak* (narrator) who is the playwright himself. It begins with a *prostabona* (introductory song) by the narrator, which itself is inspired by the *prostabona* of *Dewana Madina* (a middle age Bengali romantic-tragic epic poem or *pala* written and sung by Monsur Bayati). The first *sarga* (part) starts with a song:

চল চল

সুজ্জি হেলে ।

চল মন গুরু ভোলা

চল যাই কিন্তুনখোলা । ... (দ্বীন ১৪)

(Let's go

The sun is setting down

Let's go my heart fond of your master

Let's go to *Kittonkhola*. ...) (*Deen 14*)

However, the second *sarga* begins with a narrative description of the fair. Thus, the whole play is a fusion of song, poem, narrative description, dance, which Selim Al Deen himself narrates as his intention to use the form of middle age Bengali oral tradition-

“কিন্তুনখোলা নাটকের রচনাকাল ১৯৭৮-৮০। এই নাটকের গঠন পদ্ধতিতে আমরা প্রাচীন ও মধ্যযুগের পূজা উৎসবকেন্দ্রিক

মৌখিকরীতির বাংলা নাটকের সম্ভাব্য আঙ্গিক ব্যবহার করতে চেয়েছি।” (১১০)।

(The play *Kittonkhola* was written in 1978-80. We wanted to use the shadow of the puja-centric oral tradition of ancient and middle age Bengali drama in the form of this play.) (p. 110). Therefore, he does not use the European Act/Scene division, rather he uses the epic Bengali epic tradition of *sarga*. For the author-

কিন্তুনখোলার সর্গ বিভাজন- দৃশ্য বিভাজন নয়। উপরন্তু সর্গকে অংক ধরলে দেখব যে এতে কোন গর্ভাঙ্ক বা দৃশ্যভাগ

নেই। আমাদের মতে দৃশ্য বিভাজন ইউরোপীয় নাটকের জন্য যেমন প্রয়োজনীয় ও যতটুকু দরকারি ভারতীয় রীতির

নাটক বা বাংলা নাটকের জন্য ঠিক ততটুকু প্রয়োজনীয় বা দরকারি নয়। (দ্বীন ১১১)

(The division of *sarga* in *Kittonkhola* is not scene division. Even if we consider it as Act division, we will see that there is no scene division within it. For us, scene division is essential or necessary for European tradition, but it is not as much necessary or essential for Indian or Bengali drama tradition.) (p. 111).

Further, this play does not make any single character the centre of action. Sonai may be the most important character in it, as his presence in the play is more than any other, but, he is not the central character. Banashree, Daliman, Rustam, Idu, Chayaranjan and so on have their own importance too. Thus, Deen challenges the importance of a central character found in European tradition. Again, the importance of plot or action over other elements is also discarded by the playwright- as there is no single important plot in it, as I have discussed earlier. *Kittonkhola*, in its form too, confirms resistance to

European hegemony in Bengali drama. It is, thus, a recreation of Bengali drama by voicing the subaltern through bringing the marginal Bengali rural people and their tradition into the mainstream theatre.

Chaka: Kathanatyto as a New Face of Bengali Drama

Chaka (The Wheel) was first published in 1991. Through this play Selim Al Deen introduces a new genre in Bengali drama- *kathanatyto*, which is also called *kathokata*. Syed Shamsul Haque, a renowned literary personality in Bangladesh, writes in his preface (1991) to the play:

বাংলার ধুলিতে ও কাদার পথে অনবরত দাগ কেটে যাওয়া চাকার প্রতীকে সেলিম আল দ্বীন মানুষের জীবনের যে

মৌল কথাটিকে দেখতে পান, সেই কথা প্রকাশের জন্য তাকে সন্ধান করতে হয় কথাবিন্যাসের নতুন একটি চেতনা-

সংলাপ নির্ভর নাটক তার কাছে যথেষ্ট মনে হয়না ... এমত মুহূর্তে আমাদের এই নাট্যকার এক নতুন সাহিত্য মাধ্যমের

আবিষ্কার করে ফেলেন- কথানাট্য- জ্ঞান নাটক, কবিতা, নাচ, গীত, উপন্যাস, উপকথা ও কথকতার সমাহার। (হক,

“ভূমিকা”, চাকা)।

(To express the the core saying that Selim Al Deen sees in the constant mark of wheel in the dust and mud of Bengal, he needs to search a new medium of expression in Bengali drama- one that will not fall short as traditional dialogue-based play... at this moment, our dramatist discovers a new genre-*kathanatyto*- which is a fusion of play, poem, dance, song, novel, stories, etc.) (Haque, *Chaka*, “Introduction”)

Kathanatyto (Talk-play) ushers a new dimension in the postcolonial resistance of Bengali drama to the European tradition. First, the subjects are the subaltern people, who are given central position or subjectivity in this form of play; second, this form of play rejects authorial control of the play over the readers or audience by discarding excessive use of punctuation; and third, *kathanatyto*, through its fusion of different forms of literary and artistic expression, rejects European legacy in Bengali drama and foregrounds marginalised traditions of rural oral Bengali literary traditions.

The play, *Chaka*, is a tale of four subaltern people, one dead body, and a cow cart with two bulls. The four people are: a cart-man, two labourers who are accompanying the cart-man to a distant place to work on paddy fields of Dil Sohagir Bil, and a Santal *dom* (a person who handles and cremates dead bodies). The dead body is of some unknown young man killed by police in a protest. A doctor in a government hospital gives fifty *taka* to the cart-man with a note on a paper, which mentions an unclear name and place for the destination of the dead-body. The four men are burdened with a responsibility that they are not supposed to take. They carry on the dead body in search of its home. They search for the location Nayanpur or Nabinpur, but they never find the exact location of the corpse, whose name, Hosen Ali or Hanef Ali, is unconfirmed. The irresponsibility of the government doctor takes its toll on them. Without food and rest, they carry on the dead-body in search of its home. Nobody in either Nayanpur or Nabinpur identifies the body, and they even refuse to take care of it. Further, the villagers attack these four men and their bullocks. The day ends, and even the night is coming to an end. The dead body starts decomposing. Hungry, tired, exhausted, and angry, they are disillusioned with humanity. In the end, these poor men themselves take the responsibility of the corpse. On the bank of a river, the unfed, unslept, and exhausted subaltern men dig a grave for it, and give the dead a proper burial. The play portrays the

subaltern experience in a cruel human society. They are given a voice of their own to express their desire, their hope, their sufferings, their anger, and their disillusionment. This is done through dance, song, poem, narratives- in a characteristic way of *kathanatyo*. Dharam Raj- the Santal (an indigenous tribal community in India), through his song and dance tells the tale of the sufferings of himself and his people. Sometimes he is full of joy, when he sings in the premises of the hospital:

বিবি কলাই দলাই মেশাই রাধিব

ডুবি ভরাই দিব গো

ভাইকে খাওয়ানো গুঝি গুঝি

পান গো

পানগো। (দ্বীন, চাকা, ১৭৩)

(Wife will cook a tasty food

Give us plenty

Will feed brother a lot of

Betel leaf

Betel leaf.) (Deen, Chaka, 173)

His songs and dance are then dedicated to Dharam Thakur (Santal god)- to him he prays. In the end, his sufferings are expressed through his songs, dance, and constant appeals to his god. The cart man has borrowed the bullocks from another person. He hopes to get some money by carrying paddy. The labourers expect some good wages by cutting and carrying paddy. However, in the end, they have to carry the dead body.

Md. Jahidul Azad in his article “Breaking Silence of Centuries: A Deconstructionist Approach to the Representation of the Subaltern in Al-Deen’s *The Wheel*” avers that “... the play depicts the subaltern identity in Bangladeshi context in different levels. The play represents the struggle of the subaltern and their journey. It also represents the life cycle of people, struggle for establishing own identity.” (Azad, p. 444). Through these subaltern people, Deen, thus, not only portrays subaltern experience of rural people, but also reconstructs the centre of Bengali drama, where subaltern struggle and identity can take the centre stage in place of the bourgeoisie middle class experience.

Selim Al Deen attempts to decolonise Bengali punctuation through *Chaka*. The modern Bengali punctuation marks were introduced by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar in mid-nineteenth century. His book “*Barna Poricahy*” (1851) is famous for its contribution to restructuring Bengali alphabets in a modern way. He also restructured Bengali punctuation marks for the first time in the light of English punctuation marks. Roni Ghosh says, “Vidyasagar reconstructed and reformed Bengali letters into twelve vowels and forty consonants. Not only that, he made the reader to stop in proper punctuation marks, by discovering the relation between breath-pause and meaning-pause. Which was previously not known to the writers.” (Ghosh, p. 47). Modern Bengali punctuation marks are thus imported from the English language in the colonial period. It became very popular among all modern Bengali writers, and was established as the mainstay of Bengali punctuation. The advantage of it is mainly authorial control. The author controls and dictates the reader, while reading, through these punctuation marks. The reader has little opportunity to perceive a text and its meaning in his own way. Selim Al Deen challenges modernity at this point through his *Chaka*. The punctuation marks he uses are pre-modern ones. Only three marks are found- *ek dari* (full stop), *dui dari* (double full

stop), and *taroka* (star). This lessens the author's control over the readers, but it gives the reader more freedom of perception. The meaning of the lines or text then depends more on the readers' perception than the author's intention. Deen claims:

ঢাকায় গদ্যপদ্যের দাঁড়ি-কমা-সেমিকোলন ব্যবহারের সর্বজন স্বীকৃত রীতি পরিত্যক্ত হল এই বিশ্বাসে যে বাক্যের

নিজস্ব পরিধিতেই এর অর্থজ্ঞাপকতা বিদ্যমান। তাই দাঁড়ি কমার ব্যবহার ছাড়াই একটি বাক্যের সুনিশ্চিত অর্থ জ্ঞাপন

সম্ভব। উপরন্তু আমি চাই আমার দেয়া চিহ্ন শাসনের পরিবর্তে নির্দেশক কিংবা অভিনেতা নিজেই নিজেদের সুবিধামত

বাক্যের চলনটা ঠিক করে নেবেন (দ্বীন, ঢাকা, ৬৪)।

(In *Chaka*, the all-accepted rule of using full stop, comma, semi-colon has been discarded in the belief that a sentence has its meaning in its own limit. So, without using full stop, comma etc. a sentence can express its meaning. In addition, I would prefer that the director or actor determine the necessary stops in a sentence rather than receiving my dictation.) (Deen, *Chaka*, p. 64).

Chaka, as a *kathanatyo* brings the marginal to the centre by rejecting the existing centre of Bengali drama. As previously discussed, the existing center is the Western legacy in modern Bengali literature. The legacy is a result of imposition of modernity in the colonial period. The pre-modern rural Bengal, the rustic people, and their artistic expressions were pushed into the periphery, as low literature and culture. As a result, modern drama in Bengal had little communication with the root of Bengali culture. Deen, through his *kathanatyo*, reestablishes the connection of modern theatre to that root. *Chaka*, in its content takes the subalterns as its subject; in its form (characterisation, diction, song, stagecraft, etc.) it celebrates the various pre-modern rustic literary forms; and in its structure the emphasis on tradition is quite evident. Poetry, songs, dance, narrative story-telling, etc. makes *Chaka* a true resistance to hegemonic literary traditions. Deen himself is not willing to call it simply a play. He keeps it as an open genre-

“ঢাকাকে কেউ যদি কাব্য বলেন আপত্তি করব না-গল্প বললে অধুশী হব না। আমি সব সময় চেয়েছি আমার লেখা নাটকগুলো

নাটকের বন্ধন ভেঙে অন্য সব শিল্পতীর্থগামী হোক। কারণ শিল্পে আমি দৈতাদ্বৈতবাদী।” (দ্বীন, ঢাকা, ৬৪)।

(If

anybody calls *Chaka* poetry, I won't object; if calls it story, I won't mind. I have always hoped that my writings will break away from the chains of drama and touch other genres, because in art I believe in dualistic-dualism.) (Deen, *Chaka*, 64). However, he sticks to classic Sanskrit tradition of scene divisions. He uses *lambaks* major sections; then, these three *lambaks* are divided by *tarangas*. He says-

“... সংস্কৃত কথাসরিৎসাগর এর রীতিটাকে ধ্রুপদী জ্ঞানে এর গল্পাবিভাজনরীতি মেনে চলেছি। কথাসরিৎসাগরের কথামুখ বা

কথাপিঠ এবং লম্বক ও তরঙ্গ বিভাগ ঢাকাতে মেনে চলেছি।” (দ্বীন, ঢাকা, ৬৪)।

(I have maintained the Sanskrit *kathasarisagar* style to divide the story because I consider it to be a classic. *Kathamukh*, *lambak*, and *taranga* as divisions of plot have been maintained in *Chaka*) (Deen, *Chaka*, p. 64). He, therefore, takes the ancient classical Indian tradition as his inspiration, but has discarded the European tradition.

The Dramatic Philosophy of Selim Al Deen: Resisting Modernity through Tradition

Selim Al Deen's drama propagates a philosophy which clearly resists European legacy in modern Bengali theatre. It is an undisputed fact that modern literary tradition in Bengal is the result of modernity in colonial times. In the field of literature or language modernity reformed the native aesthetic expressions resulting in the marginalization of

pre-modern and subaltern literary expressions. The major victim of modernity was the oral traditions. The mimic-men of India, as the colonisers desired, worshipped Europe as its ideal in every field. Modern Bengali theatre is also shaped by the European tradition. From Greco-Roman traditions to Shakespeare, Milton to Shaw, all were idealized by nearly every major Bengali writer, from nationalist Bankim Chandra to anti-colonial Nazrul. Tagore was an exception in some regards. However, the influence of Europe was more on the form and structure of Bengali drama than its content. In postcolonial times, the situation did not alter much. The nationalist and nation-building desires of dramatists still could not establish a connection to the root- the rural Bengali traditions. The mimic men's mind still could not accept the ancient and rural forms of Bengali literature as an equal to the colonial literature.

It was rather a direct result of the British educational system > and the new elements of proscenium stage, which later even penetrated the inner structure of native genres like *jatra* and destroyed their individuality.⁵ As a matter of fact, the socio-cultural languages of the poor and common people had no place in the coterie of an opportunist class born out of colonial governance. In other words, the history of urban Bengali theatre is a history of exclusion (of a large section of the people) and disdain (for the indigenous popular culture) by the aristocracy and the impressionable bourgeois citizenry. (Kundu, p. 56).

Even, the postcolonial dramatists in Bengal did not bother to address the issue. It is Selim Al Deen who from the 1980s worked on reestablishing Bengal's own tradition in theatre. He thus countered European legacy in modern Bengali drama in a very radical way. He challenged the relevance of European division of genre in literature in Bengali drama. His book *Madhyajuger Bangla Natyo* (1996), illustrates various literary forms and expressions, from elite to subaltern, popular in pre-modern Bengal. His philosophy of Bengali drama has been a result of his extensive research on those pre-modern Bengali literary expressions. His belief in *dvaitadvaita* (dualistic dualism) philosophy in art, fusion of genres, and focus on ancient punctuation technique is a pathway to liberation of Bengali drama from colonial influence.

The *dvaitadvaita* philosophy discards European genre system in literature. This philosophy is inspired by the ancient Indian Vedanta philosopher Ramanuja (1017–1137 AD) and his philosophy is called Vishishtadvaita. Ramanuja propagates the Vedanta philosophy of God's non-dualist dualism. For Ramanuja "the relation between the infinite and the finite is like that between the soul and the body. Hence, non-duality is maintained, while differences can still be stated. Soul and matter are totally dependent on God for their existence, as is the body on the soul." (britannica.com).

In Bengal, this philosophy became popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth century during the time of Shree Chaitanyadeb and his Vaishnava philosophy. The concept of *paramatma* (God or the supreme soul) and *jibatma* (life on earth) as both distinct but one, where *jibatma* is separated from *paramatma*, and only craves to be united again with the *paramatma*, was extremely popular. It took many metaphors later; for example, *Vaishnav* singers imagined Krishna as the *paramatma* and Radha as *jibatma*. Radha's restlessness for Krishna is compared to *jibatma*'s desire to be reunited with *paramatma*. Baul singers and philosophers in Bengal also adopted and popularised this concept. The pre-modern literary expressions in medieval Bengal are dominated by this philosophy. In literature, Deen adopts this artistic philosophy and defines it as follows:

কোনো সৃষ্টিকর্মের মধ্যে আমরা যখন সমকালে আধুনিক শিল্প সংজ্ঞায় শ্রেণিকৃত গল্প, কবিতা, সঙ্গীত, রাগরাগিনী,

চিত্রকলা, উপন্যাস এর সবগুলো বৈশিষ্ট্য আনুপাতিক অবস্থানের পরিবর্তে নৈসর্গিকতায় সান্বীকৃত হতে দেখি তাকে

তখন দ্বৈতাদ্বৈতবাদী শিল্পরীতি নামে অভিহিত করা যায়। উপর্যুক্ত বাক্যটি দ্বৈতাদ্বৈতবাদী শিল্পতত্ত্বের আঙ্গিক লক্ষণের

সংজ্ঞা রূপে গৃহীত হতে পারে। (সেলিম আল দীন রচনা সমগ্র ৬, ৫৪৫)

(In any creative art, when we see all the characteristics of various modern genres of art- story, poetry, song, tune, painting, etc. are present, not in a simple equal ratio but assimilated in a natural aesthetic desire, it can be called then *dvaitadvaita* art. This line can be taken as a definition of *dvaitadvaita* art.) (Selim Al Deen *Rachonasmogro* 6, p. 545)

Selim Al Deen's *Kittonkhola* and *Chaka* are specimens of *dvaitadvaita* art. Both plays develop a natural progress with various forms of art- poetry, song, dance, story, etc. are assimilated to the plot/s in a colloquial mode. Through that it presents the natural manner of ancient rural artistic expressions in Bengal- expressions that were inseparably connected to the lives of subaltern people. The features of *jatra*, *palagan*, *puthi*, *kobigan*, *pala*, dance, story-telling, etc. are thus integral to his dramatic art. The European style of art and its hegemony of influence in Bengali drama are countered by Deen's *dvaitadvaita* philosophy. His fusion of genres aids this philosophy in its resistance to Western influence on modern Bengali theatre. The important aspect of his art is how various genres work seamlessly in his plays. They do not seem forced or manipulated. This is possible because of the subaltern setting and subject of his plays. To illustrate, both plays, *Kittonkhola* and *Chaka*, are set in a rural and rustic setting. Prose and poetry, dance and song similar to happiness and sorrows are part and parcel of rustic people's lives in Bengal, which is mainly an agricultural society. Chayaranjan, in *Kittonkhola*, to forget the trauma of his adolescence, when he lost his parents at the hands of Pakistani military in the 1971 liberation war and was also sexually abused by Subal Ghosh in the opera party, gets drunk and starts dancing in the *tarikhana* (a type of rural pub), and Dharamraj, in *Chaka*, starts singing and dancing on his journey with the bull-cart, it does not look out of context.

The rustic setting makes room for all kinds of expressions to be part of human lives. The cart-man's tale of the two bullocks, the songs of the paddy-field labourers are consistent with the rural environment of *Chaka*. The traditional village-fair in *Kittonkhola* makes it easy to accommodate a *laua* woman in the play. Daliman's singing and the sale of various products, as well as the *kobigan* competition between Shamsal Bayati and Hashem, are precisely what fairgoers enjoy. Therefore, Deen's fusion of various literary genres is reflective of the subaltern lives he portrays in his dramatic art. The majority of contemporary dramatic works in Bengali theatre fail to connect with these subaltern subjects; as a result, they become plays for the bourgeoisie middle class, modelled after the colonial literary legacy.

Moreover, Selim Al Deen's rejection of English punctuation marks in his play is an important stand of resistance. The philosophy that works behind his decision, as mentioned earlier, is to provide more freedom to the actors and readers. This symbolically is also a rejection of colonization of Bengali language and literature. Bengali people were shackled and had their literary expressions stifled by the politics of language imposed on them by the colonial British Empire. The free and colloquial tradition of pre-modern literature was relegated to oblivion, and English-educated middle-class Bengali writers chose the so-called high literature of Europe to reshape modern Bengali literature. The introduction of English punctuation was excessively

prosaic and autocratic, whereas the more poetic and rustic old Bengali punctuation marks were symmetric with the free and spontaneous language and expressions of the countryside.

Selim Al Deen's philosophy of art and drama, in addition to being a form of postcolonial resistance to modernity, is also postmodern. It is postmodern because it challenges the so-called grand narratives of modernity in Bengali literature, blurs the line between so-called high and low literature. The modern Bengali literature, which is based on the "high" values of European literary traditions, is challenged by the "low" literature of the rustic Bengali mass. The fusion of genres in his dramatic works, depicting the stories and histories of rural folktales, *mangalkavya*, *palas* etc. is also a postmodern device of intertextuality- a key feature of postmodernism. Intertextuality occurs when one text refers to another. Interaction and connection between texts affect their meanings. *Kittonkhola* as a dramatic text is intimately connected to other texts and Bengali folkloric traditions and pre-modern literature. The readers and audiences can connect the drama with those other texts. Constant references to Mansur Bayati and his *kabigaan*, different *mangalkavya* of medieval Bengali tradition, *puthi*, *palagan*, folksongs, and so on make *Kittonkhola* a true intertextual text.

Finally, Selim Al Deen's philosophical resistance is also a search for a new identity for Bengali people, especially Bangladeshi theatre. As a freedom fighter, he attempts to establish a link between the secular, non-communal origins of rural Bengali literary expressions and the existing, colonially-influenced modern Bengali literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, decolonisation of Bengali literature has a long way to go, but Selim Al Deen's work since the 1980s has left an indelible mark on Bangladeshi theatre. His Gram Theatre movement (theatre in villages movement), involvement with the Dhaka Theatre group, and position as a respected university professor enabled him to leave behind a large number of disciples who continue to work in theatre based on his philosophy of drama even after his death. Deen was successful in discarding the "low" tag from many rural and subaltern literary traditions of Bengal. The *jatra*, *palagan*, *kabigan*, *puthi*, *pachali*, etc. did not get place in the "high" literary traditions in modern Bengal. They were discarded as "low" art and often ridiculed as *bot-tolar sahitya* (a location in Kolkata, India, from which these inexpensive works were published during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). Imposition of Western education system in India in the early nineteenth century paved the way for modern influence in Bengali literature. The educated classes regarded European traditions superior and adopted their form, structure, and even punctuations to express their own experiences, which were mostly urban, bourgeoisie, and detached from the rustic roots of Bengal. Deen in his initial years of literary endeavours was also influenced by modernity. His plays in the 1970s are examples of that. However, his research on Bengali drama of the middle age opened his eyes to the vast treasure of Bengali dramatic and literary tradition. His extensive readings of those literary forms, which were mostly rustic, oral, performance-based, and connected to daily lives and rural festivals, encouraged him to reshape his writings. This resulted in his plays with *dvaitadvaita* philosophy. *Kittonkhola* is the first of his series of plays based on this philosophy. Through *Kittonkhola* he reconstructs post-liberation Bangladeshi theatre. European legacy gets rejected, while subaltern people and tradition get their voices heard. Theatre gets a new life in tradition. The epic scale that he introduces in drama writing through this play is still unmatched in Bengali drama. The vast range of characters, expanded plot structure, traditional form together with song,

dance, music, melody, *palagan*, *kabigan*, narrative structure, etc. makes it a celebration of subaltern forms and existence. With *Chaka* he introduces *kathanatyo*. It allows him to experiment with a new form of dramatic art, thereby destroying the fixed literary genres of Europe. *Chaka* becomes a play that can be, at the same time, called a poetry, story, or novel. Further, Deen's use of pre-modern Bengali punctuation marks rejecting well-established modern ones, and claiming it more appropriate for Bengali drama than those imported Western punctuation marks, is a statement that only underlines his consciousness to the ancient Bengali literary tradition. His philosophy of drama, at the same time, represents postmodern intertextuality. He diminishes the boundary between so called "high" and "low" literature. Deen is looking for a way to give Bengali drama its own identity apart from the European literary canon. Selim Al Deen's dramatic works and his philosophy of art require further studies. The vast area of rural tradition and subaltern subject that he brings in on the stage of Bengali theatre is remarkable. The impact of his *dvaitadvaita* philosophy on Bengali theatre in recent decades necessitates more investigation. It is required to know if his philosophy has only been used in his own works or if it has spread to other Bengali dramatists as a sense of resistance. It remains to be seen, too, if Deen's philosophy still resonates in this time of rapid globalization and extreme capitalism.

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The Author:

Tanmoy Mazumder

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Jashore University of Science and Technology,
Jashore, Bangladesh.

Email: tanmoy_eng@just.edu.bd

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0441-5567>