

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

BIBHUTIBHUSHAN BANDYOPADHYAY

Born Muratipur, West Bengal, India September 12, 1894
Died Ghatisila, Jharkhand, India November 1, 1950

Biography

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay (also Banerjee) was a transitional figure between the early novelistic experiments in the 19th century and the fully-developed form of the 20th century in India. Indeed, his biography reads like a blueprint for creating a modern Indian literature with its blend of tradition and innovation. His grandfather was an Ayurvedic doctor, while his father was a Sanskrit scholar and professional storyteller (*kathak*). Born as the eldest of five children in a rural village, Bandyopadhyay studied at a high school that was one of the first modern schools in British India. He went on to study at Ripon College in Calcutta and graduated with a degree in Economics, History and Sanskrit. Although he was admitted to study for a law degree at Calcutta University, he was unable to pay the fees and became a teacher instead. This change of direction, though unwanted at the time, probably helped to produce one of the best-loved Bengali novelists of the early period. He was a teacher for only a short period before taking on a variety of other short-term appointments, such as secretary for a rich man. Eventually he returned to teaching in the region where he was a child and remained a teacher for the rest of his life.

He published his first piece of fiction, a short story, in 1921 in a Calcutta literary magazine. His first literary success came with *Pather Panchali* (translated in English as *The Song of the Road*) in 1929 and its sequel *Aparajito* (translated in English as *The Unvanquished*) in 1932. These two novels tell the harrowing story of a family, and especially its young son Apu, their life in rural Bengal and their forced migration to the big city. In total, he published 17 novels, 20 collections of short stories and several miscellaneous books (a travelogue, an autobiography, a translation of *Ivanhoe*, a Bengali grammar, and works on astrology and the occult). His eclecticism is notable but not uncommon among educated Bengalis and others of the time.

Bandyopadhyay's first wife died of cholera only a year after their marriage, a loss that haunted the writer for the rest of his life and arguably influenced the theme of loneliness that dominates his writing. He remarried in 1940, at the age of 46 and had one son.

Achievements

His debut novel, *Pather Panchali*, and its sequel, *Aparajito*, are considered masterpieces of Bengali fiction and regularly feature in syllabi in Indian universities. It is also true that these works are better known from the film adaptations made by Satyajit Roy: 'Pather Panchali' (1955), 'Aparajito' (1956) and 'The World of Apu' (1959). Most English translations of the novels have been truncated and are considered to fall short of the original. An excellent and complete translation is still awaited.

Works

Novels

Pather Panchali (Song of the Road)
Aparajito (Unvanquished)
Aranyak (In the Forest)
Adarsha Hindu Hotel
Ichhamati
Dristi Pradeep
Chander Pahar
Hire Manik Jale
Debjan

Bipiner Sangsar
Anubartan
Ashani Sanket
Kedar Raja
Dampati
Sundarbane Sat Batsar (incomplete)
Dui Bari
Kajol (completed by his son Taradas)
Maroner Danka Baje
Mismider Kabach
Aam Aatir Bhenpu

Partial list of short story collections

MeghaMallar
Mauriphool
Jatrabadol
Jonmo o mrittu
Kinnardal
Benigir fulbari
Nabagata

