

Dineshchandra Sen (1866-1939), the scholar extraordinary, was welcomed in the arena of Bengali authorship by such literary giants as Rabindranath Tagore, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Haraprasad Sastri, Hirendranath Datta, Nagendranath Basu and Ramananda Chatterjee immediately after the publication of the first part of his *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* (Bengali Language and Literature). Tagore, who reviewed the book in *Bangadarsan*, observed: 'we have seen in this book of Dinesh Babu a gigantic semblance of the Great Tree of History of Bengal with its multifarious branches and ramifications ...History has lived again in its pages'.

Perhaps this book alone was enough to give Dineshchandra literary immortality. But, after a brief interlude of writing a series of prose narrative retelling famous mythological stories of hoary past, Dineshchandra took another plunge into the rarefied field of painstaking research leading to the discovery of a number of delectable East Bengal ballads. This work also received unreserved praise from both the East and the West. Such outstanding writers and savants as Romain Rolland, Dr Sylvain Levi and Dr Dusan Zbavitel paid their highest compliments to Dineshchandra for these hitherto obscure ballads.

Narayan Chaudhuri, a renowned Bengali scholar and critic, seeks to trace the growth of the literary career of this fine scholar as well as to evaluate his outstanding contribution to Bengali literature—all in the brief compass of this monograph. The book may inspire the literary chers of today and hard days of unremitt



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DINESHCHANDRA SEN

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

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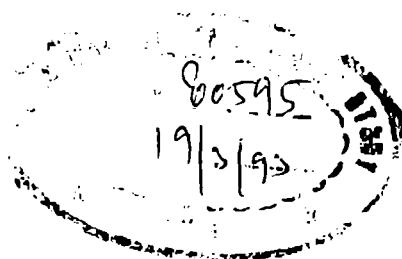
First published 1990

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Published by the Sahitya Akademi
and printed at
Prabartak Printing & Halftone Ltd.,
52/3 B. B. Ganguly Street, Calcutta 700 012

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Introduction

DINESHCHANDRA SEN (1866-1939) will be remembered by his countrymen for his many-sided contributions to the domain of Bengali letters but he will be chiefly remembered as the first major writer who compiled the history of the Bengali language and literature from its earliest written records till then available to the present times, that is, upto the advent of the Britishers in India, in a strictly chronological order and more or less comprehensive manner. It is not that he was first in the field to have attempted such a task ; he had quite a number of predecessors in this particular type of work who set the stage ready for his entry therein. Among them mention may be made of Iswarchandra Gupta, Rajendralal Mitra, Harishchandra Mitra, Harimohan Mukherjee, Mahendranath Chatterjee, Gangacharan Sarkar, Rajnarain Basu, Ramgati Nyayaratna, Bankimchandra Chatterjee and lastly, Rameshchandra Datta. Iswarchandra Gupta, renowned poet and editor, in the pages of his journal *Sambad-Prabhakar* chronicled the lives and careers of a large number of bards and poetasters who were rather slightly called *kavivallahs* in the then decadent conditions of Bengali society but nevertheless a force to reckon with in the areas of popular folk entertainment, in a systematic way as far as practicable ; whereas Ramgati Nyayaratna deserved special note due to the fact that his *Bangla Bhasha O Sahityabishayak Prastab* (A Dissertation Concerning Bengali Language and Literature), though brief and incomplete in its treatment, was the first serious effort to construct a coherent account of the subject on the basis of facts and data so far discovered. Bankimchandra and Rameshchandra also wrote on the subject but their writings, though valuable, were in English and hence could not reach a wider reading public interested in tracing the growth and development of the Bengali language and literature from its genesis to date.

So these had been the materials with which to make a beginning when Dineshchandra appeared on the scene to address himself to the stupendous labours of building a worthwhile connective narrative of the ancient, mediaeval and present stages of development of Bengali language and literature. He started his work in 1890 at the age of 24 and after six years of unremitting toil, dogged determination and immensely painstaking fact-finding research, was able to complete its first draft by 1896 when it was published. He was a school teacher at that time in a far-flung remote mofussil area of East Bengal but in his efforts at preparing a convincingly thorough as well as exhaustive annals of the Bengali language and literature he overcame all obstacles on the way by the sheer tenacity of his resolve and sincerity of purpose. Obstacles were many : paucity of resources, paucity of funds, difficulties of various sorts encountered in collecting *punthis* (hand-written manuscripts) from the villages, want of assistants to help him in the job, bad health, and so on. But undaunted, he egged on with his research with a single-minded devotion disregarding all handicaps in the process—physical, mental and psychological. The book he turned out thus could genuinely be described as the result of his single-handed endeavours in this direction and actually it was so. A second edition of the volume, fully revised and enlarged, was brought out in September 1901.

Bangabhasha O Sahitya, 1st Part (published on 2nd December 1896), for that was the name of the book, was hailed as a masterpiece in the field of historical writing so far as the compilation of the story of Bengali language and literature was concerned, and its author, Dineshchandra Sen, was acclaimed on all hands as the real pioneer in the field. Dineshchandra was then the headmaster of the Comilla Victoria School. When the book saw the light of day letters conveying unstinted praise and enthusiastic congratulations began to pour in from all sides, particularly from Calcutta. Almost all the leading lights of Bengal in the field of letters right from Rabindranath Tagore; Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Haraprasad Shastri, Hiren-dranath Datta (of Bangiya Sahitya Parishat), Nagendranath Basu, Ramananda Chatterjee to the editors of several well known literary magazines welcomed Sen in the arena of Bengali

authorship with open arms and some of them wrote highly appreciatory reviews in the pages of journals, eulogising the merit of the book in golden terms. When the book appeared in its second print within six years of its first issuance, Rabindranath wrote a detailed review in *Bangadarshan* (New Series) pointing out the uniqueness of this monumental production in approach and scope and observed : "We have seen in the book of Dinesh Babu a gigantic semblance of the Great Tree of History of Bengal with its multifarious branches and ramifications. ... History has lived again in its pages." (my translation).

So Sen became famous overnight with the publication of his very first venture in the field of historical literature. Since then till his death in 1939 at a fairly ripe old age of 73, his literary career was an unbroken record of success upon success both as an author and a teacher of literature with the sole exception of eight or nine years between 1896-1905 during which period he lay prostrate under an attack of a serious bodily ailment partly disabling him intellectually as well. The illness was the outcome of unmitigated labours undergone and extreme hardships endured in his frantic bid to collect handwritten old manuscripts from the rural areas in utter disregard of physical comforts and crass indifference to rules of health. Often he had to walk 15 to 20 miles a day to get at a manuscript stored in a commonman's hut and that too under severe stresses and strains of a difficult journey in hilly regions. The hard rigours of such hazardous excursions into the countryside day after day proved too irksome for a man of his health—his was a delicate constitution and a feeble frame—to bear and he broke down under its weight. For quite a long time he remained bed-ridden and he could neither move nor do any work.

The ordeal in his case might have persisted longer had not many a rich and influential man of a benevolent disposition, both Indian and European, generously come out at that time with substantial help in cash and kind to see him through the crisis. It was during one such crucial moment that Sen came in contact with Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, the then Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University and in fact the all-in-all of that reputed learned body and caught the latter's fancy.

Since that fateful meeting with Sir Asutosh the rise of Dineshchandra Sen was one long chain of unfettered achievements alike in the world of scholarship as well as material prosperity. He became the Ramtanu Lahiry Fellow of the Calcutta University and ultimately the Professor and Head of its newly started Department of Bengali in 1919. Credit must principally go to Dineshchandra for establishing this new department of Bengali, in post-graduate teaching, the first of its kind in university education, although Sir Asutosh helped him much in this respect with his active collaboration all throughout.

The above-mentioned facts and events will be dealt with in some more details in the following chapters. For the time being, suffice it to say that the life of Sen provides us with a rare example of how a middle-class Bengali youth with ordinary academic attainments and none-too brilliant creative talents could rise to a dizzy height of wordly success by the sheer force of indefatigable industry and a strong-willed mind to put that industry to its proper use heedless of all sorts of obstructing circumstances and extraneous considerations. He was a self-made man, to say the least about him.

The saving grace of his character from his early childhood, however, was an innate love of literature and an intense infatuation for the poetry of the Vaishnava lyricists, especially Chandidas. This redeeming feature of his life grew more pointed as days passed and became an integral part so to say of his personality and was seemingly embedded at its very core. Dineshchandra recorded in one place of his autobiography, *Gharer Katha O Jugasahitya* (Reminiscences of My Life and the Literature of the Epoch), to the effect that one day in course of conversation with a class-mate of his talks veered round to the topic of their respective ambitions in life. Dineshchandra said : I would become a poet. If I fail in that mission for one reason or another, I would surely become an author. And mind it, as an author if I happen to live in an humble cottage, that cottage would be the meeting place of hordes of learned men who would bow their heads in reverence to it.

The boy made this assertion when he was a mere boy of ten. We are not only intrigued but simply staggered at the breath-taking nature of the boast, coming as it does from the

lips of an ordinary school boy who was neither a prodigy nor a precocious child. But it was no idle boast. The boy's words proved prophetic. For what he had told to his fellow-mate by way of bragging, probably to impress the latter, had actually come to pass in real life. Sen's *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* had by then been published. This made him famous overnight and he was being spoken highly of in literary quarters everywhere. But he was then lying seriously ill at Comilla with no hope of early recovery. For better treatment he was brought to Calcutta and lodged in a poor-looking incommensurate rental house of Shyampukur. But that house became in no time a hub, a meeting place of so many. Scores of eminent persons from various walks of life of the city paid regular visits to his modest dwelling in their earnest desire to render him help in some form or another. So we see that what had been uttered in a fit of boyish swagger very early in life ended by being true in reality.

Sen wrote in his autobiography that on another occasion when he had been a student of second-year class he made an entry in his diary to this effect: "I shall become the foremost poet of Bengal. Failing that, I shall surely become a historian. If being a poet is beyond my capacity, there is no force on earth to prevent my becoming a historian and acquiring the esteem derived from the laboriousness of such a calling." In this case also the words rang very prophetic and in terms of real life turned out to be cent per cent true. For Dineshchandra became a historian indeed and established his position in the field without any shadow of doubt.

But Dineshchandra Sen was a historian with a difference. He recorded the facts and happenings of the literary history of the Bengali people in a most diligent fashion and as faithfully as it was possible for him to do so. Considering the paucity of materials to work upon in the then undeveloped conditions of literary research of any kind in our country, his penmanship in recording such 'dry-bones' of facts and dates of history had a peculiar flavour of its own in that his prose was all throughout surcharged with a poetic quality which made an instant appeal to a reader's heart by the sheer magic of its lyrical resonance. As a pioneer in that particular field

of literary labours in which he was more or less a lone traveller traversing the whole ground all by himself and doing the entire spadework almost single handedly, he had undeniably many loopholes in his work to fill up and sometimes arrived at erroneous conclusions (to wit, his conclusions about the identities of Badu Chandidas and Dwija Chandidas he had mistakenly equated the two with Chandidas, the supreme lyricist) leaving the area open for future researches in the line to rectify these serious defects, but who could resist the bewitching charm of his style which even by set standards of prose writing reached an acme of artistic excellence hard to beat. Judging by the finesse of his sonorous poetic prose, at times highly effusive and at times highly emotionally loaded, it seems that his dream of becoming a poet frustrated at the beginning of his life found a rather joyful vicarious expression in the art and craft of his works. A thwarted poet thus transferred his love of poetry into his prose in an ingenious way.

Of course we do not generally approve of such ornate and embellished modes in historical prose—the prose style of a historical work should be matter-of-fact in its approach and simple in its diction and must as far as possible be free from flourishes of poetic fancy and things of that sort; but we want to make an exception in the case of Dineshchandra Sen who was a class by himself. Although he wore the mantle of a historian upon himself foursquare indeed, even then he was a historian by accident. By a fitful twist and turn of circumstances he might as well have become a belletrist of first magnitude. His real field of self-expression, to our mind, lay in that of creative prose, as will be evident in several of subsequent publications like *Ramayani Katha*, *Behula*, *Sati*, *Phullara*, etc. But of these more when we shall have the occasion to deal with these books in a greater detail. For the present let us remain content with noting what Brajendranath Banerjee, a literary historian of repute and a biographer of Sen, had to say about the latter's attitude to literature and style of writing. This is what he wrote :

Among the literary groups of Bengal Dineshchandra Sen had cut out a distinguished niche for himself. The story of a

severe struggle amidst most adverse circumstances of early life waged by him to collect quite a large number of hand-written old Bengali *punthis* (manuscripts) in order to construct a sizeable history of Bengali language and literature is bound to fill the mind of each and every lover of literature with reverential awe. Dineshchandra was not only an indefatigable collector of moth-eaten *punthis*, he was also a genuine connoisseur of the art of the Muse by virtue of his being endowed with powers of poetic imagination. The *padavalis* of the Vaishnava poets, particularly Chandidas, by their innate sweetness, used to satiate his thirst for poetic beauty. He had been engaged in the worship of the goddess of poetry at the prime of his life. After that he deviated from the path of poetic pursuits and switched his allegiance to the onerous duties of compiling a history of Bengali literature. The life and career of Dineshchandra provides us with a glaring example of how very difficult tasks could be accomplished by dint of painstakingness, industry, perseverance, diligence, etc. (*Sahitya-sadhak Charitmala*, Book No. 90).

The qualities of head and heart that went into the making of the personality of Dineshchandra and referred to above by Banerjee could be brought to fruition possibly because of the fact that Dineshchandra was highly ambitious from the very start of his life. Harboursing too much ambition in one's heart of hearts regardless of the extent of capabilities one has in him to translate it into reality often leads to disastrous results. But ambitiousness has a saving quality and it can be said in its favour that when a man is inspired by a fire of ambition ever burning in his heart, he thinks nothing of heaping upon himself untold sufferings simply to realise that ambition in practice. The goal that he sets before his eyes in the form of a high-pitched ambition constantly goads him to forward-looking action and impels him to achieve more and more inspite of his being subjected to the worst of miseries on his march to progress at every step.

The above observation can aptly apply in the case of Dineshchandra Sen. He was prepared to endure, and actually endured, the most unspeakable hardships simply because he wanted to become a poet and if he somehow failed in that

mission, a historian at least. That he fanned the flame of this twin ambition in his heart of hearts from his very childhood days was quite evident from his boast that he would become either of the two—a poet or a historian. Yes, it was doubtless a boastful assertion and we are rather amused by the tone of bragging that lurks behind every word of that assertion. But we must not forget that the young man, however raw and inexperienced about the ways of the world he was, was not only an ambitious youth but was highly self-reliant. An extra degree of confidence in himself and his own powers provided him with the necessary prop to sustain his ambition all through. To this was added an extraordinary power of endurance and perseverance that were instrumental in performing the rest of the job. It was not enough to lull ambition in the heart, it must be backed by self-reliance and also assiduous industry into the bargain. Dineshchandra had all these three qualities in him in ample measure and the result was a foregone conclusion.

A study of the literary life of Dineshchandra reveals that it is divided into three main sub-divisions. First, his role as a successful chronicler of the growth and development of the Bengali language and literature from the earliest available records to the time of the advent of the Britishers in this country; second, his prose narratives in inimitable style of quite a number of famous Indian mythological stories of old. Third and last, his unforgettable role as the discoverer and resuscitator of an impressive number of East Bengal ballads which have been proved to be invaluable gems of Bengali folk literature. But for his pioneering efforts at their recovery, they could as well have been lost into the limbo of oblivion.

The last category, according to Western critics, were deemed the best publications and as such received unreserved praise from some of the well-known Indologists of Europe. Apart from the fact that Lord Ronaldshay, Governor of Bengal, wrote Foreword to the first volume of the series—it was in four volumes and these were published in 1923, 1926, 1930 and 1932 respectively—, such outstanding writers and savants as Romain Rolland, Dr. Sylvain Lévi, Czechoslovakian scholar Dr. Dusan Zbavitel paid the highest compliments to

Dineshchandra for bringing these hitherto obscure ballads from the districts of Mymensing, Dacca and Faridpur to the gaze of the educated elites of the East and West alike and spoke most eulogistically of the unadorned and yet irresistible beauty of the simple love stories told in songs and verse compositions forming the body of these ballads. The ballads collected from Mymensingh like *Malua* and *Mahua* were of the finest variety from the standpoint of sincerity of emotion and a bold exposition of the innermost sentiments of the heart in a rustic though uninhibited language. These books were published in Bengali and English almost simultaneously. The English renderings naturally received wider audiences.

In between the above-mentioned three types of publications Dineshchandra wrote quite a handful of books on Shri Chaitanya and Vaishnavism and towards the close of his life brought out a gigantic treatise in two volumes encompassing the anthropological, ethnic and cultural history of the Bengali people scattered over vast territories of land, areas by far wider than proper Bengal. It was entitled *Brihadbanga* (1935). Some say it was his *magnum opus*. Others differ on the point.

Life and Career

DINESHCHANDRA SEN was born on 3rd November 1866 at Bagjuri, his maternal uncle's house in the district of Dacca, East Bengal (now in Bangladesh). Their ancestral home was at Suapur, a village situated in the same district. They hailed from a respectable Vaidya family of the neighbourhood, who were known for their proficiency in the practice of Ayurvedic medicine and love of learning. They were fairly well-to-do people judged by the standards of rural economy and the heads of the family wielded considerable authority on the village folks by virtue of their hereditary influence in the locality. His father's name was Iswarchandra Sen and the mother was Rupalata Devi, a daughter of Gokul Krishna Munshi, the well known Government Pleader of the Dacca District Judges' Court, an affluent man who had a palatial mansion for a dwelling house in their village home. Dineshchandra's grandfather, Raghunath Sen, was a peculiar admixture of opposite qualities. On the mundane plane he was quite a high and mighty type of a man in the fashion of a village jotedar but at the same time he had in him an ingrained love of nature which prompted him to build a spacious garden house by the side of their ancestral home. In this garden house he planted hundreds of saplings with his own hand and nursed them into their full growth with great care and loving tenderness. The big orchard he had thus brought into being was a marvel to look at and also a source of aesthetic pleasure as a joyful sight.

By the time Iswarchandra Sen, father of Dineshchandra, had grown into manhood, winds of liberalism in the field of religion and other allied spheres had begun to blow in the upper layers of the society in Bengal. East Bengal also could not remain immune from the prevailing influence of this new climate of religious and social ferment. It was mainly due to

the spread of Brahmoism, a non-conformist religious cult opposed to idolatry which, though of metropolitan origin, gradually gained so much momentum as to percolate to the towns of East Bengal. Iswarchandra, a graduate and Headmaster of the Dhamrai School, caught contagion of this new wave of change and became a devout adherent of the tenets of Brahmo Dharma though he was not formally initiated into the fold of that sect. He was iconoclastic in his outlook and practised the precepts of non-idolatry as far as practicable.

The family of the Munshis into which Iswarchandra had married was on the other hand intensely traditional in their Hindu beliefs and practices. The Munshis in their village home used to observe very pompously all the principal festivals of the Hindus—worship of mother goddess Durga, Kali, Saraswati and other deities. Iswarchandra, the fond son-in-law of the house, was naturally invited to these festivals, but he, though present, did not participate in their hilarities and tried as far as possible to keep away from them. Anything idolatrous was anathema to him, so he preferred to shut himself up in his room while others joined and enjoyed the revelries of ceremonial *arati* (invocation to the goddess or god by means of offerings of incense, lighted lamps, etc.), *balidan* (animal sacrifice), etc.

Rupalata Devi, Dineshchandra's mother, true to the tradition of her father's family house, was on the contrary a highly pious lady inured to the practices of a conservative Hindu household and observed all such ceremonies in a devoted spirit. So naturally there was a clash of outlook between the wife and the husband and we have it from the testimonies of Sen as recorded in his autobiography that this ideological conflict between his father and mother persisted throughout their lives. Differences of opinion sometimes verged on quarrels because neither of them was prepared to yield ground to the other in matters of their respective stand on religious matters.

Let me narrate a day's incident to illustrate how the boy fared in this feud between the father and the mother in matters of faith.

One day Iswarchandra was explaining to the boy the many merits of worshipping a formless God and fulminating against

the evil of idolatry in an animated manner when mother suddenly burst into the room and sharply rebuked her husband for trying to wean her only son away from the path of virtue by injecting into his tender mind so many blasphemous notions of religion and senseless iconoclastic ideas. She literally snatched her son from the clutches of his father and left the room with him in a huff. Father, always mild-natured and calm, looked at the departing pair in an embarrassed perplexity.

It can thus be imagined that torn between such conflicting ideologies on the domestic sphere that subsisted between his father and mother, son's life in point of religious affiliations was rather confused and directionless in his boyhood days. But since he was the only male child of the family after the birth of eleven daughters one after another of whom quite a number had died in their infancies, he too being born as a twin along with a daughter, he was lucky enough to enjoy the love and affection of both the father and the mother in profusion inspite of their having sharp divergences in matters of faith.

Divided in his loyalties to the father and the mother on questions of religion Sen found himself in an unenviable position so to say and understandably passed many an unhappy day in his frantic bid to resolve that psychological conflict within himself. But what was his actual stand in the matter? We do not get any clear answer to this query from the pages of his autobiography. The testimonies reveal that he was strongly attached to both father and mother but did he have any Brahmoist inclinations in him in his boyhood or youth? No definite clue is available to find credence for arriving at such a conclusion. Rather we have contrary evidences to suggest that he was firmly on the side of his mother regarding religious beliefs. Apart from the evidences of disclosures made in the autobiography the very nature of his future literary work and its characteristic trends is a living witness to the fact that he was thoroughly imbued with the ideals of Hinduism from head to foot and imbibed its values in a manner which had made a lasting impression on his mind and outlook and left a deep imprint on his literary productions thereafter.

Besides, on the personal plane, Sen seemed to have a deeper attachment to his mother than father. He wrote that when his mother died he felt so desolate and alone that life became meaningless to him and he even thought of ending his life by throwing himself in the river. The thought of a motherless existence haunted him day and night and appeared to have sucked all the joy out of him for days together.

As is the case with all Indian Hindu grandmothers and mothers, Dineshchandra also learnt the rudiments of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* while a child in the lap of his mother. Besides he was fortunate enough to have an endearing elder sister in the person of Digbasana Devi who used to recite verses from the *Chaitanyacharitamrita* and other Vaishnava poems and also *Krittibasi Ramayana* to Dineshchandra and other children of the similar age-group in the evening under the dim light of a flickering earthen lamp. The readings were so sweet and sonorous that they enthralled the child beyond measure and seemed to transport him to a higher region of all joy and bliss. This ecstatic feeling of an imaginative flight into the dreamland of fancy which he had derived from his first contacts with the Vaishnava poets and the Bengali *Ramayana* persisted throughout his life and grew more and more intense with the passage of time. Particularly the recitation of lyrics from Chandidas filled his mind with extreme delight and he could reproduce many a poem of Chandidas from memory even when he was a boy of a very tender age although naturally he was unable to comprehend the subtle beauties of their inner implications because of the age bar. Chandidas was a life-long infatuation with him, a sort of a poetic obsession which never left him. Also the *Ramayana* was a source of constant inspiration to him.

As a school boy, first at Suapur pathsala then at Dhamrai where his father was the headmaster of the local high school and then at Manikganj, he was a none-too-attentive pupil and neglected his studies all throughout. Class-texts did not attract him in the least while all the time he was found immersed in reading all sorts of 'outbooks', good, bad and indifferent, that cast a spell on his boyish imagination. He even forgot to eat and sleep if he could come by a book after his heart. In class lessons he was particularly weak in Mathe-

matics for which he had a regular horror. Perhaps he cultivated this 'horror' consciously enough because of the mistaken impression that to be a 'poet' it was necessary to be weak in Mathematics or all that sort of things (This wrong notion still persists among a sizeable section of young scholars inclined towards a romantic love of poetry or for that matter poetic way of living !). But curiously enough, the boy was strong in English all through, even though this did not just square with his love of early and mediaeval Bengali literature. This queer combination of contrary likings was made possible perhaps due to the benign influence of Purna Chandra Sen, Headmaster of the Manikganj School, who was at once a proficient teacher of English and a connoisseur of Vaishnava poetry. Dineshchandra received from him a firm grounding in English which stood him in good stead in later life while the teacher was able to instil in the boy a genuine liking for the fine beauties of the Vaishnava *padavalis*. Sen recorded his deep sense of gratitude to this able teacher for his indebtedness to him in these two subjects in the pages of his autobiography quite fervently.

Iswarchandra had by then given up his job as the headmaster of the Dhamrai School and took up the calling of a lawyer. He was then practising in the Court of Manikganj. Brahmo ideology continued to fascinate his mind here also as ever. Apart from being a non-official Brahmo preacher he even wrote two books on the principles of that neo-faith, one a drama entitled *Satyadharmoddipaka Natak* and the other a collection of Brahmo songs entitled *Brahmosangit Ratnavali*. When not otherwise engaged, he was always found in deep meditation and in a worshipful mood. He never uttered a lie in his life and never became angry. He remained stolid under all circumstances and never betrayed anxiety or nervousness except on two occasions when he had become visibly moved on the score of the safety of his son, the only male child in the family. Without showing it in outward expression he deeply loved his son. During the concluding years of his life he became highly enamoured of Baul songs. He died in 1886. Such was his intense devotion to the cult of non-idolatry that at the time of his passing away one aged woman relative of theirs beseeched him to utter the names of

Durga and Kali and seek their blessings but he turned his back on her in disgust !

But even a staunch Brahmo like him and supposed to be an adherent of social reforms—the Brahmos of the day were known for their opposition to many old social customs and actually uprooted quite a number of them—could not prevent himself from succumbing to a very old practice prevalent in the country and gave his consent to the proposal to give his son in marriage to a child bride, at a very tender age. Dineshchandra was only twelve years old when he married Binodini, daughter of Umanath Sen, head-clerk of the Collectorate at Comilla, a girl of seven years only. Perhaps the father relented to the proposal of marrying his son to a mere kiddy at the insistence of his wife who was every inch a traditional Hindu mother eager to see her only son married at the earliest possible opportunity. Of course this is only a surmise of ours, the reality might have been so or otherwise.

The boy after passing the Minor School examination in the Third Division from Manikganj for a time carried on his studies in a Comilla high school living in the house of his father-in-law and that of a near-relative by turn. But he soon returned to Dacca to prosecute his studies from a Dacca school. Dineshchandra passed the Entrance examination of the Calcutta University in 1882 and was placed in the Third Division. He passed the F. A. examination of the same University from the Dacca College in 1885 and this time also was placed in the Third Division.

The above academic records show that Dineshchandra was not at all a good student by the yardstick of usual educational standards. But he made up for these poor performances in curricular examinations by his impressive progress in non-curricular studies. While a college student he was chiefly known as a budding poet with a rosy future before him, and not only that, he also demonstrated his powers as a debater and lecturer of merit. He could speak extempore in both Bengali and English with a fluency that won the admiration of students and teachers alike. And the subject-matters of his lectures also were not less stupefying. He often lectured on Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Shelley and Tennyson, sometimes straying as far as Dante. This on the one side, on the

other side quotations from the Vaishnava lyrics and Mangal Kavyas of the 'mediaeval Bengali literature recurred in profusion on his lips while dealing with a literary discussion during a debate or a public speech.

How to account for this strange anomaly between his poor academic performances and his seemingly brilliant outside records? A boy who put up such a dismal show by passing all the three examinations noted above in only the third grade could quote extensively from Shakespeare, Milton, Byron and others in his outside speeches—a rather unbelievable example of queer co-existence of opposites which evokes bewilderment at the first instance. What is the underlying reason of this blatantly apparent dichotomy between the performance of the class-room and that in the outside field? It is not perhaps far to seek.

The initial bewilderment or disbelief will probably disappear if we remember that Dineshchandra was a voracious reader of English books from his childhood. He somehow developed a strong liking for the English language from his early school days. It is recorded in his autobiography that while he was a student of the minor school at Manikganj he learnt by rote several cantos of Byron's *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan* without of course understanding the implications of their latent meanings. As a college boy he could reproduce from memory quite a substantial portion of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and often recited Milton's verses in his lectures. The four major tragedies of Shakespeare, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, were learnt by him by rote. Not only Shakespeare, he was acquainted with the works of some of Shakespeare's contemporaries like Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Webster, Philip Massinger, Ford and others. He also waxed eloquent on how Shakespeare was indebted to Holinshed's *Chronicle* and Marlowe's *Edward II* in the conception of some of his dramatic plots. From Chatterton's *Death of Charles Badwin* to Tennyson's *Ulysses* and Browning's *The Last Ride Together*. Lines of all noteworthy English poems occurred on his lips by fits and starts as if he was on the soil of England though in appearance he looked a frail-looking funny middleclass Bengali youth with nothing in him suggestive of an Indo-Anglian background.

Sen's love of English developed from his very childhood and was traceable to the influence father exerted on him during his early formative years. Iswarchandra was very proficient in English and as a Brahmo preacher could deliver pulpit lectures in English fluently enough. He used to contribute articles in the *Englishman* and other journals of the day. He had in his house-library bound volumes of compilations of periodical essays as contained in Addison's *The Spectator* and Steele's *The Tatler* and Boswell's *The Rambler* and books of poems of Alexander Pope, John Dryden and Oliver Goldsmith, in keeping with the practices of the English-educated Bengali gentry of the day. He was particularly fond of *Rasellas* and a book named *Life of Emperor Charles the Fifth*. The experience these early contacts with well known English books in his home environ made a deep impression on the boyish mind of Dineshchandra who aspired to be a writer like the authors of these books. In another context Dineshchandra wrote in his memoirs that upon reading Tain's history of French literature in two volumes he wanted to write a history of English literature. Also his dream of compiling a full-fledged history of Bengali literature could not have come to fruition at all unless he had imbibed in his school and college days a fervent love of the English language and literature gleaned from a wide reading of English books, both prose and poetry.

Dineshchandra passed the B.A. examination of the Calcutta University as a private student while he was working as a teacher in a school at Habiganj in the district of Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) in 1889 and got a second class honours in English. Perhaps this was the only academic attainment to which he could refer with some degree of self-satisfaction during his whole educational career. He appeared in this examination as a private student because his regular college life was cut short by the death of his father and mother in 1886-87. Mother died within six months of the passing away of her husband. Also at this time his young sister breathed her last. Misfortune never comes singly, it more often than not comes in a bunch. Confronted with a triple calamity such as this brought about by almost simultaneous bereavements of father, mother and sister, Dineshchandra had no other alter-

native but to discontinue his studies in the college and seek employment somewhere for a living. For the family's economic position was getting worse day by day and with the death of the father, the only earning member of the family, Sen found no other course open to him but to do what he did under the circumstances—cutting short his regular college career in search of a livelihood.

Fortunately he got a job as an assistant teacher in a Habiganj school. Therefrom he appeared in the B.A. examination as a private candidate, as referred to above. But he did not stay at Habiganj for long. He soon got an appointment as the headmaster of the Sambhunath Institution of Comilla on a monthly salary of Rs. 50/-, a meagre pittance by modern standards but not inconsiderable an amount by the standards of those days. But the condition of the school was deplorable and it might close down at any moment. So sensing the rot Sen lost no time in finding employment in another institution named Victoria School and here also he became appointed as the headmaster. With his joining the Victoria School, the fame of the institute spread by leaps and bounds and the number of alumni increased manifold. The results of the yearly class examinations and the annual Entrance examinations showed such marked improvement that Sen as a headmaster was a much sought after figure in the locality. He became popular not merely as an educationist but also as a man of letters in the town. For by then he had begun to contribute articles to various literary magazines of Calcutta and elsewhere. In fact he soon became a key man in the town for his many sided activities and those quite valued at that. Attracted by his qualities of head and heart even many highly placed Government officials showed eagerness to cultivate friendship with him and felt proud to count him among their acquaintances.

Comilla was the place which laid the foundation of Sen's future greatness. For here in this small mofussil town of East Bengal he started in all seriousness the groundwork of that important activity which was to make him famous in the coming days as a pioneer historian of Bengali language and literature without a peer. The activity under question referred to the labours he underwent in collecting *punthis* of old Bengali

texts, mostly couched in a verse form from the many remote areas of the countryside lying in the districts of Tipperah, Noakhali and Hill Tipperah. Of course, he had started collecting manuscripts even while he was working at Habiganj and it is said that at the time of his repairing to Comilla with a view to joining his new duties as the headmaster of the Sambhuanath Institution he carried with him several cartloads of handwritten manuscripts gathered from the different villages of Sylhet district. But facts show that the real foundation of this new type of work, at once labourious and painstaking, was laid in the town of Comilla.

The district of Tipperah of which Comilla was the head-quarter and the adjoining district of Noakhali and also Hill Tipperah (now known as Tripura) abounded in old *punthis* of various sorts which generally were kept preserved in the huts of ordinary workingmen like 'goalas' (milkmen) or 'kamars' (ironsmiths) or 'kumars' (potters) or similar such men of this category or peasants and the other agricultural labourers living in the villages of these three districts. Sen's coming to Comilla and staying there as a resident was a blessing in disguise in the sense that the district of Tipperah in particular was full of *punthis* and *pattas* that might serve as a useful nucleus upon which to construct a literary history of Bengal of the ancient and the mediaeval period in a more or less convincing manner. So it was rather a happy coincidence that his place of work as a teacher and his place of work as a collector of historical material for his intended ambitious book should coalesce in a smooth blend. It was an accidental coincidence no doubt but nevertheless a seemingly destined coincidence.

Sen has described in his autobiography in great detail how he often traversed long distances on foot to reach a far off small village in an unaccustomed countryside just to procure a rare copy of a manuscript of Maladhar Basu 'alias' Gunraj Khan's *Premtarangini* or that of a *Padmapuran* or *Manasamangal* written by an unknown poet of the region. On rough weathers negotiating muddy roads and paths full of cesspools posed a problem; it was heightened the more when it came to the question of trekking along undulating fields and meadows lying at the foot of the hills. The eastern and the north-eastern side of the districts of Tipperah and Noakhali

were full of *tilas* (hillocks) and wavy terrain lands as these converged on the Tipperah hills. And sometimes in a frantic effort to get at a very valuable specimen of a rare copy of *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Sen thought nothing of walking a whole distance of 15 to 20 miles to and fro, sometimes alone, sometimes with a companion. One of his uncles, Kalishankar Sen, a deputy posted at Comilla, a tall and hefty man with a big bulk, during his inspection tour of the interior sometimes used elephant as his mode of transport. On such occasions as these Sen did not fail to accompany his uncle on elephant back especially if the manuscript-hunt promised to be a very rewarding one.

On one such expedition Dineshchandra came across a rare manuscript of *Paragali Mahabharat*. It had been in vogue in the district of Tipperah before *Kashidasi Mahabharat* was read or used. At first sight he had taken it to be a Prakrita version of the Mahabharata, thinking the word *Paragali* as a distortion of the word *Parakali* which again might have been perverted forms of *Parākālī*, *Parakrita* or *Prakrita*. But on a closer examination of the manuscript he discovered that his original notion was wrong and that it was nothing but an edition of the *Mahabharata* which the poet Kavindra Parameswara had written at the bidding of Paragal Khan, the sultan of Gour. This *Mahabharata* was at one time so extensively read that its *punthis* had been found in such wide areas as the districts of Dacca, Mymensingh, Tipperah, Noakhali and Chittagong and even the inhabitants of the district of distant Burdwan could be counted among its readers. Sen also during such hunts stumbled on a version of the *Mahabharata* composed by a poet named Sanjaya.

The manuscripts in question were often treated as the close preserve of the household and venerated as a precious heirloom. The village folk in whose homes they were generally found, though unlettered or at best having a modicum of knowledge of the three R's., had developed from generation to generation a rather superstitious awe of these precious family properties and could with very much difficulty be persuaded to part with them. They looked upon these belongings with such auspicious respect that to give these away in lieu of a mone-

tary consideration was unthinkable to them. They regarded such an act as a sacrilege.

Of course it cannot be denied that often hard penury induced them to part with these long-valued heirlooms of theirs with a heavy heart. Pressing needs of dire poverty knows no sanctity except that of filling the belly with food. Even a deeply religious man could make short shrift of his religiosity faced with abject hunger.

However, the difficulties listed above were not the only hurdles encountered by Sen during his manuscripts-collecting drives. There were hurdles of a different nature. The peasants or workmen concerned not unoften looked with suspicion upon a manuscript-searcher clad in gentlemanly robes. A sort of psychological resistance developed in their minds the very moment they got sight of a finely dressed townsman on the look-out for a *punthi* or *patta* stored in the upper niches (kulungis) or raised shelves constructed as makeshift contrivances beneath the ceilings of the house, usually called *machas* in East Bengal dialect.

To overcome such psychological barrier between a townsman and a villageman Sen often took recourse to a subterfuge or a ruse consciously enough. He often put on the garb of a Vaishnava mendicant or a 'Shakta' sadhu before he ventured to appear before the doors of a rural cultivator or an artisan belonging to the so-called depressed classes in quest of *punthis*. These tricks by way of make-belief ticked well and produced the desired result. The simple-minded people were easily duped by these clever methods and they lost no time in giving a fitting reception to the person out on an ardent manuscript-hunt.

Sen says that when he had collected more than hundred handwritten unpublished manuscripts by such and other methods, he began to write articles in the pages of *Sahitya*, the reputed literary journal of Calcutta, regularly. One article each month carried a description of the contents of one *punthi* at least, and in this way quite an impressive bulk of written materials had accumulated in the hands of the writer to serve as a basis for the preparation of the long-awaited volume for which these materials were being collected over the years.

I have mentioned already that the work on this book had started in 1890 and that the author continued with his labours in this direction for as long as six years at a stretch, resulting in the production of *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* towards the close of 1896. At first Dineshchandra carried on the work of manuscripts-collection drive solely by himself but as the volume of work increased he could not depend upon his lone labours in the field but had to look for assistance from outside. Upon his writing to the Asiatic Society of Bengal asking for help in this respect Haraprasad Shastri on behalf of the Society sent one of their men, Pandit Binodebihari Kavyatirtha of Bhatpara, to help him in his manuscripts-collection labours. Shastriji had prior information with him about the new type of work launched by Sen, hence his interest in the job. Directed by him, Binodebehari used to come to Comilla two or three times a year and accompanied Sen in his village tours and in this way rendered very useful service to Sen in the completion of his much-cherished project.

Besides sending a representative on the spot, Asiatic Society also helped Dineshchandra with occasional monetary remittances to enable him to carry on his research untroubled by financial worries at every step. Bangiya Sahitya Parishat also gave him financial support from time to time.

But a periodic financial assistance was like a drop in the ocean compared with the gigantic physical and intellectual labours Sen inflicted upon himself for days together in order to accomplish the task he had assigned to himself in a spirit of selfless dedication to the cause of Bengali letters. Holding aloft the banner of Bengali language and literature and unfurl it ever with flying colours was his life's dream, and signs of the first concrete shape of that dream coming to reality were in evidence with the publication of *Bangabhasha O Cahitya*, the first significantly ambitious book coming from his pen towards the enrichment of Bengali literature.

So this was the background of Dineshchandra Sen's coming into the limelight in the field of letters. As I have stated in the introductory chapter, scores of letters began to pour in from Calcutta and other places congratulating Sen unstintedly on his producing a monumental book of such scale and dimension on the subject of Bengali language and literature. Before

the publication of this valuable work nobody had an idea as to how vast and varied the field of Bengali language was and what precious treasures it stored in its bosom. Not to speak of ordinary readers, even those with an ingrained love of the mother tongue and its richness had little inkling of the beauty of its lyrical poetry and the attractiveness of its narrative verses. Sen's volume laid before their wonder-struck eyes the boundless panorama of a creative wealth spread over an entire period of nearly seven to eight hundred years of growth of Bengali language and literature prior to the arrival of the Britishers in this country.

But a beginning also had a beginning. Why Dineshchandra at all felt impelled to turn to the task of preparing a literary history of Bengal? What was the immediate provocation that transformed a lover of English literature into a lover of Bengali literature in terms of a concrete research work in the latter subject and quite a gigantic one at that?

A clue to the solution of this apparent riddle will be found in the fact that after his coming down to Comilla, Sen wrote some sporadic articles on different aspects of mediaeval Bengali literature in the pages of *Dasi* edited by Ramananda Chatterjee, *Salitya* edited by Sureshchandra Samajpati and other journals like *Navajeeban*, *Janmabhumi*, *Dhaccaprakash*, *Anusandhan*, etc. The said articles received wide praise from the reading public and even plaudits from the pundits. The editor of *Janmabhumi* wrote to him speaking highly of some of the articles published in his journal and sent him remuneration for them of his own accord. Ishanchandra Banerjee, well known then as a poet and brother of the celebrated poet Hemchandra Banerjee of *Britrasamhar Kavya* fame, wrote a long appreciatory letter to the editor of *Anusandhan* with reference to an article of Sen published in that magazine. In the meantime an organisation named 'Peace Association' declared a prize for the best writer of an essay on Bengali language and literature adjudged as such out of so many entries to be examined by the judges. They found Dineshchandra's essay on the subject to be the finest of the lot and endowed him with a cash prize.

All these factors taken together emboldened Dineshchandra to take up the subject of Bengali language and litera-

ture in all seriousness and urged him to plunge headlong into the pursuit and investigation of that subject-matter in right earnest. Since then his traversings along the royal roads of that language and also his sojourns into its lanes and by-lanes and even back-alleys went on unabated for months and years and at one time reached such great fever-heat of intensity as precluded any possibility of return from that journey. There was no question of his shying away from a challenge that gripped his entire mind and soul in the mid-way.

The result was *Bangabhasha O Sahitya*. The manuscript, a voluminous one even by the standards of those days, could not have been brought out in book form except without the munificence of Maharaja Birchandra Manikya Dev-Burman Bahadur of Tripura who was kind enough to finance the entire publication from the State coffers. Kings of Tripura, though feudal in their outlook in many other respects, were never found wanting in the patronisation of the arts and learning, a trait which largely distinguished them from many other members of their tribe. Bengali literature was immensely indebted to the Tripura Maharajas for the encouragement it received at their hands at different stages of its growth.

I have already said that the book was received with warm applause as soon as it was published. Rabindranath Tagore, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Hirendranath Datta, Nagendranath Basu and other prominent litterateurs of Calcutta wrote him congratulatory letters commending his works. Ramendrasundar, generally reticent, showered upon him fulsome praise in a letter which embarrassed Sen in no uncertain degree for the superlative terms it contained. Hirendranath reviewed the book in extenso in the pages of *Sahitya*. Ramananda Chatterjee wrote a lengthy review in his paper *Pradeep*. Haraprasad Shastri wrote two reviews, both in English, one in *Calcutta Review* and the other in another journal. His remarks were full of unreserved approbation of the book. Kshirodechandra Roy congratulated the author in the columns of *Nabya Bharat* in a language which showed both sincerity and critical insight. Many other monthlies and weeklies of Bengal paid high tributes to Sen for his presenting the Bengali readers with a book of such sterling merit.

But it was not for Sen to enjoy the fruits of this glory for

long without being burdened by misery. For misfortune soon overtook him in the shape of a grievous malady that confined him to bed for a number of years and rendered him inactive and idle in spite of himself. And this happened in the heyday of his success while he was basking in the sunshine of the fame he had acquired after undergoing such hard and enormous toil for years.

One evening Dineshchandra was sitting in the club room of the Comilla Public Library and chatting with friends when suddenly he felt a chill running down his spine and benumbing all the limbs. He felt as if his will-power had gone out of him and his body had no control over his senses. Just as Nature assumes a very gloomy and sombre appearance before a cyclone comes, Sen perceived the approach of a deadly calamity gripping his body and mind before he could realise its full import in terms of actual suffering.

Sen lost no time in returning home and immediately sent word to Babu Ananda Chandra Roy (subsequently made a Rai Bahadur), the founder-secretary of the Victoria School, with a request to see him without delay. Upon Ananda Babu's arrival, Dineshchandra broke down and burst out crying like a child in his presence. He told him frankly that all hopes that Roy had built around Sen about making him the principal of the college soon to be started by the name of Victoria College and rendering him financial assistance in the construction of a pucca house that Sen had planned to erect in his own village Suapur, were to be abandoned since he felt he had no power left anymore with him to fulfil all these obligations in a capacious manner. He even requested Roy to look for a new headmaster for his school.

Sen's fears about his supposed illness came true within a few days of his forebodings in this respect. The apprehended malaise struck him down to bed and rendered him practically an invalid. He could neither move nor work. It was sort of a physical-cum-mental disbalance that completely shattered his nerves and made him a shadow of his former self. Friends and relatives understood that this sudden breakdown of health and its consequent ill-effects was nothing but the accumulated result of an unregulated life lived for a long stretch of time burdened with toil disproportionate to rest to the utter

detriment of the physique one is normally endowed with by Providence. In Sen's case, all rules of health had been thrown to the winds as if to pave the way for his being overtaken by this sudden catastrophe.

Ananda Babu, a genuine benefactor of Sen, sensing the seriousness of the disease and the gravity of the situation consequent thereon, sent Sen's wife and children to his father-in-law's house and brought Sen to his own quarters for treatment. All forms of treatment, allopathic, homeopathic and ayurvedic, were tried but to no effect. Sen's ailment showed no signs of abatement or subsidence. Roy Babu was kind-hearted enough to grant Sen a long leave initially at full pay but later on at half-pay when the disease continued to be a protracted one and defied all treatment on the local plane.

For a change of place and for better treatment Sen was first brought to Faridpur and then transferred to Calcutta. In the introductory chapter it has been described how men of letters as well as men of wealth vied with one another in paying regular visits to the ailing scholar in a sincere desire to do him some good in an hour of dire distress affecting him severely both physically and mentally. In such calamitous times as these words of cheer and encouragement were as much valuable as help in the shape of cash and kind. In an hour of extreme depression and melancholia, not an unusual concomitant of a mental patient, consoling words were as much healing balm as close medical attention to tone up the drooping morale of the sufferer concerned. Among frequent callers were Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Nagendranath Basu, Hirendranath Datta (of Vedantic fame), Sureshchandra Samajpati (editor of *Sahitya*), Byomkesh Mustafi (of Bangiya Sahitya Parishat), Bipinbehari Gupta, compiler of the well-known book *Puratan Prasanga*, and others: while among medical practitioners who treated him freely were Dr. Nilratan Sircar, well-known homeopath of the day Dr. Chandrasekhar Kali, Kaviraj Vijayratna Sen, Jogindra Kaviraj, Dr. Satish Barat and several other physicians of repute. Dr. Chandrasekhar Kali had been a pupil of Iswar-chandra Sen, father of Dineshchandra, while Iswarchandra had been the headmaster of Dhamrai school and was deeply influenced by his personality as he recorded it in his reminiscen-

ces. Dr. Kali did not forget his debt to his old teacher of his school days and tried to repay it in some form by standing by the son of his guru in times of latter's dire need. Sen was much benefitted by his treatment and sage words of cheer coming as these did from a real friend, philosopher and guide to the family. Dr. Barat treated him as well as his sons.

The list of donors, on the other hand, was a very impressive one. It included men of affluence as well as influence like Maharaja Birchandra Manikya Bahadur of Tripura, Maharaja Manindrachandra Nandi of Cossimbazar, Maharaja Jagadindranath Roy of Natore, Raja Pramathanath Roy Chowdhury and Raja Manmathanath Roy Chowdhury of Santosh, Kumar Saratchandra Roy of Dighapatia, Kalikrishna Tagore and Gaganendranath Tagore of Calcutta and a few others. All of these generous-minded richmen helped him with monthly stipends at one stage or another of his period of illness. The Maharaja of Mayurbhanj once sent him a substantial amount through Barada Charan Mitra who had been a judge of the Comilla Court during Dineshchandra's stay at Comilla as the headmaster of the Victoria School.

Also at this time of serious crisis in the life of Sen quite a number of well-meaning European gentlemen placed in positions of authority came forward to render him assistance in one form or another. Mr. F. H. Scrine, Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong, was a sincere admirer of Dineshchandra's literary gifts and wrote him a long letter of congratulation upon the publication of *Bangabhasha O Sahitya*. He did not stop at that; on learning of the illness of Sen, he wrote to Mr. Martin, Director of Public Instruction, Government of Bengal and persuaded him to arrange for a literary pension in his favour. Accordingly a pension of Rs. 25/- per month was granted. (By the by, as far as my information goes this was the second literary pension in Bengal granted to an indigent author. The first such pension went to the blind poet Hemchandra Banerjee--N.C.). Linguistic historian Mr. Grierson also used his authority in some measure to influence the sanction of this pension.

After the publication of the second edition of *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* in 1902—Sen had still then been suffering and was confined to bed—Mr. Woodburn, Lieutenant Governor of

Bengal, wrote to several Maharajas to do something by way of rescuing Sen from the unhappy financial strains to which he had fallen by a sad stroke of misfortune. The Maharajas in question heeded his request. Mr. Macpherson, the then Chief Secretary of Bengal, arranged to collect donations in the name of Sen and sent these to the proper addressee.

Besides all these examples of high benevolence, spontaneous piece-meal donations coming from different quarters were frequent and many. The callers often at the time of their departure left with him small amounts to the tune of Rs. 100/- or thereabouts as a mark of respect to this ailing but devoted votary of learning and not as a mark of charity. Sen also received the gifts in the same spirit in which they were tendered. There was no question of his being favoured with these small gifts or acts of gratuitous relief.

Sen lay prostrate in bed under the weight of the disease for long four years from 1896 to 1900. Even after that, he was not restored to his normal health, only he was by then able enough to move and walk by himself without depending on others. It took another five years or so for him to gain full recovery and recapture his former physical fitness and intellectual powers. That is, by 1905-06 he was again his former natural self. So we see that at least for a period of ten years or so the vagaries of the grievous malady kept him immobile or more or less inactive before he could return to his normal routine of life and resume full-scale activities as in 1896 and before.

But this does not mean that Dineshchandra remained idle all the time. Even in his sick bed during the later stages of his illness he did not desist from exercising his brain and often took to dictation for preparing essays for the periodicals. At times when he felt well he even wrote in his own hand to contribute articles for the papers. In this way he earned not a negligible sum to enable him to defray household expenses. The donations and stipends were there to meet medical bills and other items of indispensable expenditure.

But running a family establishment of 6 or 7 heads with such uncertain incomes as these was on the face of it a very tough job and there were inevitable moments of crisis when Sen seemed to give up all hopes of regaining a firm footing in

the world. The children were growing and there were problems of providing them with a good education at school. Daughters were to be given in marriage to fit youngmen. The unsure character of his precarious living often hung heavy on his mind and at times he felt quite at a loss how to overcome these mounting difficulties all at a time.

In this hour of darkness a flicker of light seemed to appear before his dim eyes. With the death of Rajanikanto Gupta, the historian, the post of Examiner of Bengali had fallen vacant with the University of Calcutta. Dineshchandra decided to apply for this post and see Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, the key-man of the University, in this connection. One Saturday morning in 1901 he went to the Bhowanipur residence of Sir Asutosh and sought an interview with him. Sir Asutosh on seeing him present before his eyes expressed surprise that he should have been able to come to him in person to pray for the post. Sen felt bewildered at the expression of surprise in the eye of Sir Asutosh and humbly asked what might be the cause of his astonishment. Sir Asutosh jestingly replied that since he had taken the trouble of coming to him in person he stood the chance of being selected for the post, otherwise the job might have gone to some other individual. He then clarified the matter by saying that many people including some supposed to be friendly to Sen had complained to him that Sen had lost his wits, was unable to move and kept bed-ridden all the time ; so there was no point in appointing him to a job which required both physical mobility and mental agility. Sen's appearance before him in flesh and blood clinched the issue and gave the lie direct to the complainants' hearsay and hence there was now no bar to his recommending Sen's name for the post. Sen might as well take it that his appointment was now a forgone conclusion.

So Sen returned from Sir Asutosh's house fully assured. For one reason or another Asutosh had taken a great fancy for Sen. This might be either due to a genuine admiration he felt for his (Sen's) literary gifts or to an attachment which one felt for another for no explicable reason but which usually lay deeper within the psychological layers of the soul. It is quite possible that Asutosh's liking for Sen was of the latter variety. Be that as it may, the first meeting between Sir

Asutosh and Dineshchandra proved to be very crucial and was fated to be the beginning of a connection that bound Sen to the Calcutta University for a long period of time and turned the tides of his fortune towards a very bright future. The nexus established between Sen and the Calcutta University through the intermediacy of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee turned out to be highly propitious for Sen in terms of quite a good number of important books that he had written under the aegis of that University, some of them even published under its banner. This also paved the way for a closer link with the University in the shape of an official appointment first as a Ramtanu Lahiry Research Fellow in 1905, then as a Reader in 1909, then as a non-official Fellow of the Senate in 1910, next as a Reader again in 1913 and finally as the Professor and Head of the newly created Department of Bengali in 1919. He retired from this post in 1932.

During the various stages of this long career marking the rise from one phenomenal success to another Sir Asutosh was of course the guiding spirit behind Sen's uninterrupted progress through the years—virtually a smooth and plain-sailing affair by all showings till Sir Asutosh's death in 1925. Had the key-figure of Sir Asutosh not been there as the most decisive factor in resolving all the important issues of the University, one way or the other, perhaps Dineshchandra could not have risen to such great heights even with his outstanding abilities as a literary historian, researcher and writer.

With all his virtues and faults Sir Asutosh was a towering personality and so long as he ruled the roost in the affairs of the Calcutta University no ukase except that of his ran in the corridors of that University. For good or bad, his word was almost a law within the precincts of the University. So we can easily presume that for every inch of success Dineshchandra scored in the university he owed a deep debt to Sir Asutosh which was not repayable even with the best of intentions in the world. Of course Sen showed his gratitude to Asutosh in more than one way including the writing of a monograph on Asutosh (*Asutosh Smritikatha*, 1936) recounting the many reminiscences of his contacts with that great man and eulogising his personal qualities in very glowing terms, often bordering on undue effusiveness born out of an under-

standable fulness of heart. But that could only repay part of the debt to a man who was Sen's acknowledged mentor as well as best benefactor in the world.

That this was no mere hyperbole or a figment of imagination on the part of this writer was amply proved with the passing away of Sir Asutosh in 1925. After that melancholy event, conditions became gradually hot for Sen to work in his post with peace of mind undisturbed or with an even pace. As days passed he met with increasing opposition from a powerful rival group in the University, members of which tried their utmost to put obstacles in the path of his progress and humble him in the eyes of his students. Their constant heckling in the university meetings—Sen was a Fellow of the University Senate—and spate of anti-propaganda in the journals controlled by them made his life literally miserable. To what extent malice or envy can go may be illustrated from the fact that his opponents saw to it that at the time of his retirement several years thence—it took place in 1932—Sen was not given even a formal send-off by the university by way of an official recognition of his long service to the Calcutta University. Sen took leave of the university portals almost “unwept, unhonoured, unsung”.

But such was Dineshchandra's deep devotion to his duties that he did not allow himself to be ruffled even by the stoutest of opposition from his foes and tried to remain calm under all circumstances. The disinterested detachment with which he stuck to all his allotted tasks on all occasions—a trait almost a congenital characteristic of his being—saved him so many times from being carried away by emotion or anger even under the gravest of provocation from the opposite quarters. Come what may, he remained absorbed in his work like a Yogi or a *Tapaswi*. And indeed he was both a Yogi and a *Tapaswi* in the pursuit of his literary avocations.

Dineshchandra very often met Sir Asutosh in connection with university work. Among various topics discussed between the two, the question of giving a fit status to Bengali in the university curriculum of studies naturally figured in the course of those discussions. Sen on many an occasion took these opportunities of an open parleying with the V.C. to

impress upon the latter the imperative need of starting a Bengali Department in the post-graduate classes. At first Sir Asutosh did not pay much attention to his importunities and seemed not to respond to a proposal of this nature. As a matter of fact, every time Sen posed such a proposal to Mukherjee, the latter tried to parry it by one way or another. He pointed to the paucity of adequate number of dependable books fit to be treated as texts for the post-graduate Bengali department, if ever such a department actually came to be opened. In absence of quite a sizeable number of standard texts on the subject, such a department even if started was bound to come to grief sooner or later.

Sir Asutosh did not stop in his expostulation of the subject at this point, he proceeded further. He exhorted Sen with all the force at his command to take upon his own self the onerous responsibility of preparing text-books for the proposed Bengali M.A. class himself so as to fulfil the felt need in this respect sufficiently adequately enough. He stressed the importance of writing both in English and Bengali so as to enlarge the scope of the subject to non-Bengali and non-Indian students alike. Besides, English books on the subject of Bengali in the higher grades, text or non-text, might be of some permanent interest to Western scholars, especially Indologists among them.

Sir Asutosh did not rest content with merely offering Sen gratuitous advice to the above effect, he took some virtually concrete steps so that the advice tendered regarding the preparing of text-books for the contemplated post-graduate higher Bengali classes might be translated into an actuality at no distant date. He made Dineshchandra Sen a Ramtanu Lahiry Research Fellow of the Calcutta University in 1905, and a Reader in 1909 and ordered him—yes, it was an order and not a mild request—to set about engaging himself immediately in the task of writing a voluminous history of the Bengali language and literature in English. And he it noted, it was not enough that it be written in English but that it must be a wholly new book with a new approach, and *not* just an English version of the Bengali edition of *Bangabhasha O Sahitya*. And again, it should be written in such a manner that its contents proved to be of immense interest to the

Western readers for whose consumption it must be especially meant.

At first Dineshchandra quailed before the proposal but soon was able to overcome his initial diffidence. He started writing the book in right earnest soon enough and plunged headlong into the fray. Before he took up this work, Tagore had tendered him certain useful suggestions regarding the plan of work and mode of treatment to be adopted in the book and Dineshchandra accepted those suggestions of Tagore in a mood of sincere reverence and acted upto them in the preparation of the manuscript. Though Sen always wrote good English and on many an occasion before gave ample proof of his dexterity in such writing, he took special care this time to get his manuscript to be revised and corrected by no less an eminent personage than Sister Nivedita, besides a close friend of his named Kumudbandhu Basu who was very proficient in English.

It took full two years to complete the manuscript of *History of Bengali Language and Literature* and it was published in 1911. It contained more than one thousand pages. The book was acclaimed as a masterpiece of historical writing in both India and Europe.

Dineshchandra was again made a Reader of the Calcutta University in the year 1913 and appointed Professor and Head of the department of M.A. Bengali in 1919. In between the two years 1909 and 1919 both years inclusive, Sen had produced quite an impressive number of books in both English and Bengali, some of these at the express bidding of Sir Asutosh. The list included : (1) *History of Bengali Language and Literature*—1911; (2) *Typical Selections from the Earliest Times to the Middle of the Nineteenth Century*, 1st volume and 2nd volume-1914; (3) *Kashidasi Mahabharata* (edited 1912) and *Krittibasi Ramayana* (edited 1916); (4) *Sati*, 1916; (5) *The Vaishnava Literature of Medieval Bengal* (with preface by Prof. J. B. Anderson, 1917); (6) *Chaitanya and His Companions*, 1917; (7) *The Folk Literature of Bengal*, 1920; (8) *The Bengali Ramayana*, 1920 : etc.

Sen wrote all these books with a singular objective in view—that was to fulfil the need of supplying suitable text-books for M.A. Bengali. After assumption of office as the Professor

and Head of the Department of M.A. Bengali he wrote many more books of lasting value in the successive years. In fact, the period of his authorship continued unbroken till his death in 1939. He never passed a moment of his life idly except at times of illness which were so to say periods of enforced idleness against one's wish. All the time he was seen busy either in reading or writing, preparing press copies, or seeing proofs of books in the making. His industrious and pains-taking habits as an author did not leave him even in his old age. He produced the two volumes of *Brihatbanga*, each of a staggeringly bulky size in 1935, when he was almost seventy. Two of his hitherto unpublished manuscripts were published after his death. Judging all told it is well-nigh difficult to come across a like figure in the whole realm of Bengali letters with such indefatigable powers of endurance and inexhaustible fund of dynamic energies as he possessed.

When Dineshchandra had already to his credit authorship of quite a number of new books written at the instance of Sir Asutosh, the latter one day in a mood of self-satisfaction told Sen that now he must be seeing why he (Asutosh) had all the time insisted so persistently on the production of suitable text-books for Bengali. It was an essential prerequisite to the opening of M.A. classes in Bengali in the university. Now that sufficient number of text-books on the subject were available, Sen could proceed with the preparation for a formal opening of the post-graduate Bengali department in the university. He had earlier evaded such proposals everytime Sen made one simply because dearth of text-books stood in the way of the implementation of such a project. Since the chief impediment in this respect was removed, there was now no bar to the inauguration of the department concerned. It must be plain to Sen why his proposals in the earlier stages of their discussion were not heeded with as much enthusiasm as they deserved.

Ever since the establishment of the post-graduate Bengali Department in the Calcutta University as a result of the conjoint efforts of Sir Asutosh and Dineshchandra in that direction, the department made much headway and even within a brief span of twelve years (1920-32) Sen was at the helm of its affairs it recorded noticeable progress and earned the esteem

and admiration of the scholars both here and abroad. During the period of his stay in the university as the head of the Bengali department Dineshchandra did not confine himself to administrative work alone but wrote as before many more books of worth including such titles in Bengali as 1. *Saral Bangala Sahitya*, 1922; 2. *Gharer Katha O Jug Sahitya* (Autobiography, 1922); 3. *Baidik Bharat* (1922); 4. *Gopichandrer Gan* (edited along with Basantaranjan Roy, 1924); 5. Four volumes of *Purbabanga Geetika* and *Eastern Bengal Ballads* (1st part 1923, 2nd part 1926, 3rd part 1930, and 4th part 1932); 6. *Kavikankan Chandi* (edited jointly with Charuchandra Banerjee and Hrishkesh Basu, 1st part 1924, 2nd part 1926); 7. *Govinda Daser Karcha* (The Diaries of Govinda Das edited jointly with Prabhupad Banoarilal Goswami, 1926), etc., besides a number of novels and short story collections and books based on mythological tales and Vaishnava themes. His English titles published during this period included: 1. *Bengali Prose Style*, 1921; 2. *Chaitanya and His Age*, 1922; 3. *Eastern Bengal Ballads* (with Foreword by Lord Ronaldshay), Vol. I—1923, Vol. II—1926, Vol. III—1930 and Vol. IV—1932; 4. *Glimpses of Bengali Life*, 1925, etc.

The list must be deemed impressive enough even for a scholar of the standing of Dineshchandra with a prolific pen and a facile mode of writing.

Dineshchandra showed his skill in the editing of periodicals as well. For some time he assisted Rabindranath in the editing of his journal *Bangadarshan* (New Series) and for another term was associated with Sarala Devi's *Bharati* and rendered her useful editorial help in the compilation of issues of that journal. He also edited magazines in his own name. For instance, he edited the literary journal *Bangabani* during the first two years of its existence (March 1921 to February 1923) jointly with Bejoychandra Majumdar. It used to be published from the house of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee and its affairs were looked after by his eldest son, the late Ramaprasad Mukherjee (later a Justice of the Calcutta High Court). For a period (1924) he edited the journal *Vaidya-Hitaishini*, which was the mouthpiece of the Vaidya community of Bengal and voiced its needs and aspirations through its pages. Dineshchandra Sen was always an ardent supporter of the Vaidya cause.

In recognition of his meritorious service to the Bengali language and literature the Calcutta University conferred upon him the degree of the Doctor of Literature (*Honoris Causa*) in 1921. In 1931 he was awarded the "Jagattarini Medal" of the University. The Government of the day also did not lag behind in extending to him official recognition in appreciation of his service to the cause of Bengali culture and Sen was made a "Rai Bahadur" by the Government around the same year he was made a "D. Litt" of the Calcutta University.

Dineshchandra had by then shifted from his house in Viswakosh Lane (old Kantapukur Lane), Bagbazar to Behala in the south-eastern outskirts of the city and built a fairly big house there for a dwelling. The remaining years of his life were spent in this commodious two-storey suburban mansion (named "Rupeswar" after the names of his late mother and father) with a spacious garden around. Sen in his autobiography gratefully acknowledged his deep sense of gratitude to Gaganendranath Tagore of the Jorasanko Thakurbati who financed a considerable part of the expenses incurred over the construction of the house.

Many a distinguished person well known in public life and the domain of letters as well as inquiring students, paid regular visits to Behala and sought his advice, guidance and help in many matters. Professor Janardan Chakraborty, poet Jasimuddin, litterateur Premendra Mitra, Chandrakumar Dey, Prof. Jatindramohan Bhattacharyya, Dwareshchandra Sharma-charyya, Suren Dev and others were associated with Sen at one stage or another either as literary secretary or research assistant. Particularly in the latter category of work their role in the collection and compilation of ballads from East Bengal districts was of immense help to Sen in the preparation of the relevant books.

But his health was gradually failing. His wife predeceased him in 1936. This was a great blow to his already shattered body and mind. At last on the 20th of November 1939, this life-long votary of Bengali language and literature breathed his last. With his passing away great void was created in the field of Bengali letters—a void which still remains partly unfilled.

As a Literary Historian

DINESHCHANDRA has to his credit authorship of books in many genres of writing—history of literature, history of the culture of a race, mythological stories, tales based upon Vaishnava themes, novels, short story collections, poems, reminiscences partaking of the nature of both autobiography and biographies of other people, juvenile literature, etc. Besides, he compiled and edited quite a number of old classics, sometimes singly, sometimes in collaboration with others, and these included the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and a few well-known Vaishnava works. Last but not the least, his collection and compilation of the Eastern Bengal ballads and publishing them in book form, four volumes in Bengali, four in English, have also established his reputation beyond a shadow of doubt as a pioneer collector in that branch of Indology which has a direct bearing upon folk literature, especially balladry.

But of all these different forms of writings at which he had tried his hand at different stages of his life quite successfully, his contributions in the field of construction of the history of language and literature undeniably rank the best. He is first and foremost a literary historian of unique distinction, then follow his achievements in other fields. His *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* (1896) in Bengali and the *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (1911) in English may be regarded as the two basic books from his pen in this direction. The other books in this category of writing include : *Banga Sahitya Parichay* (1914), *Saral Bangla Sahitya* (1922), and *Prachin Bangla Sahitye Musalmaner Abadan* (Contributions of the Muslims to Old Bengali Literature, 1940) in Bengali ; and the *Vaishnava Literature of Medieval Bengal* (1917), *Chaitanya and His Companions* (1917), *The Folk Literature of Bengal* (1920), the *Bengali Ramayanas* (1920), *Bengali Prose Style* (1921),

Chaitanya and His Age (1922), *Glimpses of Bengali Life* (1925) in English. These may be considered as publications subsidiary to the basic two books mentioned above. The contents of these subsequent works comprise enlargement and elaboration of the source materials contained in the main two books.

In a sense *Brihatbanga* in two volumes (1935) also may be regarded as an extension of the books on the history of Bengali language and literature. Although in essence it is a history of the ethnological-social-cultural life of the Bengalee race, that history cannot be divorced from the origin, growth and development of the Bengali language because the development of a whole people and the development of their language and literature are inseparately bound up with each other. Ethnic characteristics of a race always go side by side with its linguistic characteristics. Social milieu of a given period is inextricably linked with its cultural milieu. And not only social, political events also have a relevance in the context of the history of development of language and literature of a race. The arts, architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dancing, various crafts of a local creative variety, particularly fine drawings on the scroll and the long rolling canvas known as *pat*, commendable artistries displayed alike in the outer architectural designs of a temple and its inner workmanships including ceiling work, murals, placement of columns and lastly, images of deities installed in the pit of the temple—all have a definite connection with the literary-linguistic-cultural ethos of a race.

All the topics listed above have been discussed in the two volumes of *Brihatbanga* (totalling 1215 pages) in a detailed manner within of course the limitations of the state of the facts and data available at the time Sen set about writing a book of this nature, along with the insertion of suitable illustrations, art plates, inscriptions, etc. (304 in all), where necessary. The plan of the entire work has gained added significance due to the fact that the whole thing has been executed against the background of Greater Bengal, that is, Bengal extended to her farthest peripheries and not restricted to the usual geographical limits or boundaries within whose confines the territory of Bengal is generally placed. The area covered extended upto the extreme Western limits of North India and to Assam, Manipur and Burma on the north-east and the east ;

Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet in the north; and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the south. As for her outer regions and outer spheres of influence, it embraced such distant territories as Malay, Siam (Thailand), Kambodia (Kampuchia), Java, Bali and other islands of South-east Asia now known as Indonesia, to justify the title *Brihatbanga* given to the book.

So this twin book may in all fitness be regarded as a natural logical follow-up of the two basic books on history in point of content. Besides, Sen wanted to unfold in the pages of *Brihatbanga* a picture of future Bengal which was to be modelled on the heritage of Bengal with a glorious past. The idea was to hold before the reverential gaze of the readers the ideal of a solidified Bengali entity and Bengali culture so as to instil in their mind a kind of racial consciousness which might be stamped "Bengali" in all respects. This racial consciousness, according to Gustav Yung, disciple of Sigmund Freud, the great psychologist, is believed to be found latent in each and every worthy race and can be perceived through its vast lore of poetry, nonsense rhymes, doggerels, aphorisms, folk tales and folk songs, ballads and all that sort of things. Dineshchandra has tried through the instrumentality of his two major books *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* and *Brihatbanga* to project just this image of the racial consciousness of the Bengalis from the remote Bauddha-Jaina period upto the present times, working its way through the tangle of webs of the Maurya, Kusan and Gupta dynasties, the period of Sasanka and Harshabardhan, the Pala Kings of Bengal, the period of transition before the Muslim conquest, the Pathan and the Mughal periods, the age of stagnation leading to the resultant effect of the domination of Bengal by the Britishers around the middle of the 18th century. As for the exploits of the ancient Bengalees in the regions of outer India such as those mentioned earlier, these have been touched upon in the book as far as practicable, within a brief compass but sufficiently widely so as to give an idea of the nature of those exploits. The roles of the Bengali in ancient and mediaeval periods have been specially highlighted.

Now for *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* and its English counterpart *History of Bengali Language and Literature*. Of course, the latter book is not an English translation or version of the

Bengali edition, as is sometimes erroneously thought. In approach, mode of treatment, chapter divisions, etc., it was wholly a new book. It was also a fuller volume, running as it did into more than one thousand pages. When the Bengali book was first written, materials were sparse, data collection was in the process of being augmented day by day with discovery of ever new facts and documents culled from newly found hand-written manuscripts (*punthis*), *pattas*, inscriptions, etc. So the Bengali book in its initial edition was not even half the size of the English publication. But when a second edition of the volume was published in 1902, it was much more enlarged and expanded, with the addition of more and more materials collected during the six years that lay between the publication of the first and the second edition.

As for the contents of the first edition Sen tried to trace in it the genesis of the Bengali language more than one thousand years from hence and follow the course of its growth and development through the years. The *dohas* (couplets) of the Bauddha *Siddhacharyas* known as the *Charyapadas* or the *Charyagectis* had not as yet been discovered. They were found in a manuscript preserved in the Durbar Library of Nepal by Pandit Haraprasad Shastri in 1907 and he published them in book form in 1916. He claimed these *padas* or *geetis* written in a more or less mystical dialect (*sandhya bhasa*) to be the specimens of the first sproutings of the Bengali language as a natural offshoot of the *Apabhramsa* dialect of the *Prakrita* form of Sanskrit. But notwithstanding the absence of these first proofs, Sen had no difficulty in constructing a fairly dependable chronological history of the origin and development of the Bengali language from roughly the beginning of the 11th century onwards. The first two significant books of verse of this period were *Sunya Puran* composed by one Ramai Pandit in glorification of some form of Dharma Thakur and *Mainamtir Gan* or *Gopichander Gan* composed by Manik-chandra Raja to extol the cult of renunciation preached by Buddhism. *Goraksha-Vijay* was another book belonging to the *Natha Sahitya* of this period. The next important work supposed to belong to the 14th century was *Shri Krishna Kirtan* written by Badu Chandidas who modelled his Krishna-Radha tale on *Geeta-Govinda*, the famous Sanskrit poem composed by

Jaydeva. Then another landmark was reached by the lyrical genius of Chandidas, he too a pre-Chaitanya poet like his predecessor Badu Chandidas, whose verses about Radha-Krishna love were filled with such intense emotion and sincerity of feeling and yet couched in such simple and sonorous diction that it is said Chaitanyadeva was deeply absorbed in those compositions and often recited and sung them in tears.*

Since the period of advent of these two notable poets of the pre-Chaitanya era the chronicling of the accounts of the Bengali language and literature did not present much difficulty as the story thereafter was more or less an unbroken one with Vaishnava poems flourishing on the one side and *Shakta* and *Mangal Kavyas* flourishing on the other. The *Shakta* poetry veered round the cult of the Mother worship, while the *Mangal Kavyas* were written with the express intention of deifying the local goddesses like Chandi, Bishahari (Manasa), Sitala, etc., and elevating them into the pantheon of the Brahmanical deities. Vaishnava and *Shakta* poetry was mainly lyrical in character, while *Mangal Kavyas* were by and large narrative in their tone and content.

In giving a date-wise and author-wise account of these poetical works, some of them of outstanding creative merit like the compositions of Chandidas, Vidyapati, Govinda Das, Jnan Das and other distinguished Vaishnava poets; the *Shakta* songs of Ramprasad, Kamalakanta, Dewan Raghunath Roy and others; and the *Mangal Kavyas* bearing the imprint of *Kavikankan Chandi* of Mukundaram Chakravarty, *Annada Mangal* of Raigunakar Bharat Chandra Roy, *Manasa Mangal* of Vijay Gupta, Kanahari Datta, Bipradas Pipilai and others, *Dharma Mangal* of Ghanaram Chakravorty, Manik Ganguly and others: and so on and so forth. Besides these poetical works with a pronounced religious slant towards either Vaishnavism or *Shakta* beliefs or the cults of the local gods and goddesses, there was a vast tome of translations from the

*It should be noted here that Dineshchandra through paucity of data in his time mistook these two poets as one and the same person, but it was not the case. The separate identity of Badu Chandidas was established by Basanta Ranjan Roy Biddwatballabh in his edition of *Shri Krishna Kiran* beyond a shadow of doubt.—N.C.

Shrimad Bhagvat, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, *Harivansam* and other Puranas. And all these literatures, original and otherwise, that is, translations, adaptations, etc., taken together, constitute even by the standards of a medieval age a huge bulk of writings which indisputably go to show how prolific and profuse were our Bengali poets of the middle periods displaying their literary wares in a continuous dazzling array right up to the threshold of the British arrival in this country.

Now the chief virtue of Dineshchandra's literary history was that although as a pioneer in the field he could not avoid certain mistakes inevitable in the case of a new path-finder, his failure to establish the identities of more than one Chandidas in their proper perspective in an unimpeachable manner was an instance in point (please see the Introduction), he did not confine himself to merely supplying a literary narrative regarding everything that is to be known about old and medieval Bengali literature; but took special care to indicate to his readers an idea of the religious feuds between different sects like the Saivas, Vaishnavas, Shaktas and the votaries of the local deities like Bishahari Manasa (serpent goddess), Sitala (goddess of small pox), Dharma Thakur (an aboriginal god worshipped by the rural folks of the districts of Birbhum, Burdwan and Bankura), Dakshin Roy (the tiger god), and so on, that lay hidden under the apparent exterior of predominantly literary yarns. The way Sen described these works pointing out the characteristic qualities of their respective authors invariably always hid underneath an inevitable suggestion of many religious wars that went on almost unabated between different sects covered by those descriptions.

And Rabindranath Tagore in his detailed appraisal of the second edition of *Bangabhasha O Sahitya*, a masterpiece of literary criticism in point of penetrative analysis and deep insight, rightly stressed the religious background of these books by the old and medieval Bengali authors. Tagore in his inimitable way showed in that essay how the aboriginal god Siva or Maheswara gained ascendancy over the pantheon of the Brahmanical gods (as exemplified in the story of *Dakshayajna*) and again how Siva was gradually submerged by the preponderant hierarchy of local gods and goddesses, how

at one time the Mother cult, that is, the cult of the worship of Shakti, ruled supreme in the domain of divine affairs and how again, this Shakti concept yielded place to the beautiful love principle of the Vaishnava lyrics. According to Rabindranath the most salutary as well as benign influence felt in the sphere of medieval Bengali literature was that of Vaishnava poetry with its emphasis always on the *Madhurya rasa* (the sweet sentiment) preponderating over everything else.

And be it noted, Tagore wrote all this in the context of Dineshchandra's magnificent work *Bangabhasha O Sahitya*. He must have seen behind the plan of this book the play of a none too muted undercurrent of the religious history of Bengal side by side with the presentation of her literary history. Tagore summed up his essay thus : From this it is apparent that Bengal felt herself really splendidly in the Vaishnava era. In this period she attained a height of glory which was heavenly and uniquely peculiar to the genius of Bengal and spread from here to other regions in a spate of ebullient flow of emotion. The Shakta era could not remove her poverty of feeling, rather that poverty became more manifest in that age in more than one way. Bengal realised her self wonderfully enough in the Vaishnava period thanks to a legacy of unsolicited treasure bequeathed to her.

! When Dineshchandra set about writing the *History of Bengali Language and Literature* in English, he adopted quite a new plan and new approach in the treatment of its subject-matter in comparison to the method adopted in the Bengali book. In the employment of a new methodology for the English book Sen was clearly influenced by Tagore who advised him not to treat his subject-matters or manuscripts person-wise but against the background of an age or an epoch as done in the case of English histories of literature. The chapter-divisions in the latter category of books like the Elizabethan Period, the Age of Reformation, the Age of Reason, the Age of Romanticism, the Victorian Age, etc., stress more pointedly the character of the Age in question than the individual characteristics of the writers figuring in that given epoch.

Obviously Sen was very much benefited by the advice tendered by Tagore in this respect. His English book presented a much more coherent and sensible picture of Bengali

Literature than the picture we get in his Bengali book. The personalised approach has been consciously pushed into the background compared to the determination of epochal or period-wise characteristics in the English edition, as in his division of the various periods of the Bengali literature into Hindu-Bauddha Age, Age of Chaitanya, the Age of Mangal-Kavyas, etc. These period-divisions are more scientifically inspired than a personalised approach. The English book got a very warm reception from the pundits of both India and Europe. Particularly the plaudits it fetched for its author from England were of a very superior kind. For example, the *Times Literary Supplement* in its June 20, 1912, issue wrote : "He (Sen) tells more about the Hindu mind than we can gather from 50 volumes of impressions of travel by Europeans. Loti's picturesque account of Travancore temples, and even M. Chevrillon's synthesis of such browsing on Hindu scriptures seem faint records by the side of this unassuming tale of Hindu literature." The famous journal *Athenium* in its issue dated March 16, 1912, wrote : "In the middle age he has done more for the history of his national language and literature than any other writer of his own or indeed any time".

Professor J. B. Anderson, a one-time civilian posted in Chittagong and later a Professor of Bengali in the Cambridge University, was so eloquent about the merit of the book that he almost went into raptures over it. He was a great admirer of Sen not only in respect of this book but in that of his many subsequent publications both English and Bengali. Besides, Dr. E. B. Havell, Dr. Pargiter, artist William Rothenstein, historian Vincent Smith and H. Beveridge, Professor Tawny, Buddhist scholar Dr. Rhys-Davids, archaeologist Rapson, Professor Barnett, Professor Woodroff, S. K. Ratcliffe and others.

The encomia showered on this book by continental scholars were no less warm-hearted and unstinted than the paens of praise sung by the scholars of England. Enthusiastic applauses came from such reputed Indologists of the continent as Dr. Sylvain Levy, Dr. Emile Lenart and Dr. Jules Bloc of France, Dr. H. Kern of Holland, the celebrated Sanskritist pundit Professor Cldenberg of Germany, and so on. Some wrote reviews in the papers in high eulogy of the book,

some others sent congratulatory letters to the author himself. Among the latter class of epistolary appreciations the one sent by Dr. Sylvain Levy was remarkable for its candour and sense of laudation. He wrote : "I have begun this very week ; and I cannot leave it off, cannot give you praises enough. Your work is a Chintamani, a Ratnakar, full of science and of life. No book about India would compare with yours. It seems as if I were wandering through your beautiful country and through the heart of your people. Never did I find such a realistic sense of literature ; literary works with you are no dead writing, but living beings where the spirit of generations breathes freely, widely embodied for a time in their author, expanded afterwards in the multitude of readers and hearers".

In 1912 Professor Levy also wrote a long review of the book a part of which was as follows :

"One cannot praise too highly the work of Mr. Sen. A profound and original erudition has been associated with vivid imagination... The historian, though relying on his documents, has the temperament of an Epic poet. He has likewise inherited the lyrical genius of his race. His enthusiastic sympathy vibrates through all his pages. The appreciation of life so rare in our book. Knowledge runs throughout the work". (Translated from the French and published in the *Bengali* of April 18, 1912).

Apart from the testimonials of the man of learning, men of the highest authority belonging to the Government of India and Government of Bengal also did not lag behind in heaping praises on the book. Lord Hardinge, the then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, in the course of his Convocation Address of the Calcutta University in 1912 referred to the books written by Sen on various aspects of Bengali culture and spoke highly of them, particularly the book under reference. On the other hand, Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal, at the time of foundation-laying ceremony of Ramesh Bhavan, an adjunct of Bangiya Sahitya Parishat premises, paid tributes to Sen in glowing terms for his valuable contributions in the enrichment of Bengali language and literature. Mr. Gurle, Private Secretary to the Governor of Bengal, wrote the preface to Sen's book entitled *Folk Literature of Bengal*. Mr. Stapleton, an archaeologist, then associated with the

Dacca University, also sent many encouraging letters in praise of his books.

Such was the popularity of the *History of Bengali Language and Literature* that quotations from it were freely used and acknowledged in many books and essays of eminent authors. Among those authors who acknowledged their indebtedness to Sen in this way were : Ernest Rhys, Editor of Everyman's Literary Series Publications, Vincent Smith, Ananda Coomarswamy, Underwood, Farquhart and others.

Mr. J. B. Anderson, whom I have referred already, wrote a learned Preface to Sen's book named *The Vaishnava Literature of Medieval Bengal* published in 1917. He was so deeply moved by the pages of the manuscript that he offered to write the Preface to the book of his own accord. Among admiring Englishmen none was so enthusiastic about Sen's works as he.

As a Writer of Lyrical Prose

IN SPEAKING of the style of writing of Dineshchandra Professor Sylvain Lévi made one characteristic remark : "He (Sen) has inherited the lyrical genius of his race". The aptness of this remark is no where more conclusively evident than in the style of his major Bengali work *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* and in the mode of presentation of quite a number of smaller works like *Ramayani Katha* (1904), *Behula* (1907), *Sati* (1907), *Phul-lara* (1907), *Jada Bharat* (1908), *Dhara-drona O Kushadhwaja* (1913), *Nilmanik* (1918), *Sanjher Bhog* (1920), *Muktachuri* (1920), *Rakhaler Rajgi* (1920), *Subalsakhar Kanda* (1922), *Baisakhe* (1920), *Shyamal O Kajjal* (1938), etc. Of these, some are tales from Indian mythology, some others based on stories taken from the Vaishnava lore, some historical novels and some specimens of juvenile literature. In all these books and others of similar nature written by Sen, he employed a prose style which was intrinsic with a lyrical quality at every twist and turn of phrases used by him for expressing deep emotion of the heart or a sublime feeling. At places poetry is clearly writ large on the brow of prose, so much so that there cannot be any mistaking the patently lyrical qualities of Dineshchandra's penmanship a great bulk of which, though clothed in the outer garb of prose, breathes nevertheless in their inner core a latent sense of poetry and rhythm like the jingling flow of a fountain spring hidden beneath the rough earth with an unsuspecting dreary exterior.

Of course, prose with a lavish sprinkling of poetry in it is not generally looked upon with favour by the critics, specially those among them with a rationalistic bent of mind. They opine that prose to be worth the name must speak the language of reason above everything else and not deviate from that course under any circumstances. A prose style loses its dis-

inctive prose character the moment it gets mixed up with poetry, which is primarily a language of emotion and sentiment. The hallmark of rationality must be there to tell a genuine prose style from its other spurious variants.

Quite true. But it should not be forgotten that we are here dealing with a prose writer who is nothing if not a writer of poetical prose with a pronounced predilection for lyrical modes of expression. In this respect Dineshchandra is a class by himself and should be treated as such. He has a distinct prose style of his own quite unlike that of others. What should be regarded as a flaw in the case of other prose writers should in the context of his writings be deemed a definite merit; for Sen, let me repeat, is nothing if not an artist in prose, and a poetical artist at that. There are passages in *Bangabhasha O Sahitya* and *Ramayani Katha* which bear eloquent testimony to his forceful powers of expression in imaginative prose and an abiding capacity to give vent to the innermost feelings of the heart as well as outpourings of emotion by means of a diction generally heavily laden with Sanskritic words or rich with phonetic resonance.

I could prove this point by quoting relevant passages from the above two books, but alas! it is very difficult to convey even a feeble idea of the beauty and uniqueness of the original passages through the medium of translation, however much I may try to do so with the sincerest of my intentions and the best of my efforts. Hence I refrain from this illustrative exercise as a futile attempt, the more so because of a sense of inadequacy on my part as a translator. It is no mere humble confession of a modest translator, but considered against the hardness of the task of translating an author like Dineshchandra with a fertile poetical imagination and a highly rich diction to embellish his prose style, it is a challenge thrown out to the other translators as well. If it is an admission of failure, it at the same time denotes an invitation to other fellow-writers of mine to transform my failure into a success, if they can.

Of all his smaller pieces of works, *Ramayani Katha* (The story of the Ramayana) is decidedly his best book. It has been acclaimed on all hands as a gem of Bengali literature in the genre of creative prose. It is an album of so many pen-

pictures of the principal characters of the Ramayana and their evaluations. Rabindranath writes a very illuminating Foreword to the book.

Of course, Dineshchandra in his assessment of the characters of the Ramayana has not at all followed the beaten track nor has he followed the traditional pattern of interpretation given to the characters. Rather, he has turned upside down the whole process of character appraisals.

Characters in his hands have not only received a fresh revaluation but also in most cases changed places. By such action he has almost revolutioned the entire concept of the Ramayana.

Therein lies the special distinction of the book. As regards reversal of role of characters in the apportionment of higher or lower attributes as the case may be to the characters concerned which he has done here, a parallel may be drawn with *Meghnadbadh Kavya* by Michael Madhusudan Dutt who deliberately undervalued Rama in comparison to Ravana and his son Indrajit. Here Sen approached the thing with almost identical motivation but with a different angle of vision. In the usual scheme of valuation pertaining to the characters of the Ramayana Rama is generally regarded as the hero of the epic and invariably accorded the foremost pride of place among the characters. But in *Ramayani Katha* Sen has given this special honour to Bharata and has advanced reasons why he has done so. According to him :

"If any character of the Ramayana is to be considered ideal, that is that of Bharata, and Bharata alone. The words of harsh reproach that Sita heaped on Lakshman (at the time of residing in the Panchavati forest prior to the episode of the Golden Deer—N.C.) are not pardonable. Quite a number of deeds of Rama like slaying of Bali cannot be supported. Words of Lakshman have often been rude and haughty. But there is no flaw in the character of Bharata. The portrait of this kingly sage attired in tree bark and hairs tied in dishevelled knots flowing across the shoulders, holding a golden umbrella on (Rama's) sandals—is shedding an extraordinary lustrous beauty on the Ramayana. Indeed, Dasaratha expresses exactly this feeling when he said :

"Ramadapi hitang manye dharmato balabatharam".

[It seems to me that (Bharata) is better than Rama in point of moral strength].

Ramayani Katha, Jijnasa Edition, P-87)

Tagore in his Preface recalls the great role played by the epic Ramayana in the moulding of characters of Indian men and women. He terms the two epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—the eternally flowing history of the Indian civilisation and in this connection highly eulogises Sen for his remarkable portraiture of Ramayana characters. He observes : “By reciting the poet’s compositions in the language of a true devotee he has brought to his own devotion a sense of real fulfilment. I think it is this type of interpretation—an interpretation endowed with an attitude of worship—which constituted the essence of real criticism. It is in this way that the devotion of one heart passes on to another.”

The smaller publications like *Behula*, *Jada Bharat*, *Sati*, *Phullara* and *Dharadron O Kushadhwaj* (five books later compiled under one cover bearing the title *Pauraniki* in 1934) are also replete with five specimens of lyrical prose. Here also difficulties of translation pose the same problem—the problem of getting at the source to have a true index of the beauty of the originals so far as their style of writing is concerned. Of these books some say *Phullara* is the best. At least, so seems the view of the author himself from internal evidence. The internal evidence spoken of refers to the testimony recorded in the pages of his autobiographical book *Gharer Katha O Jugsahitya* (Reminiscences of My Life and of the Literature of the Age, pp. 147-50, Jijnasa Edition, 1969, Calcutta). Let me recount the testimony in some detail so as to understand the mind of the author on the subject.

During earlier stages of his stay in Calcutta when Sen had been grievously ill and was down in bed, one day a gentleman named Jogendranath Sen came to see him. He was a Professor of a college and also a vakil of the Calcutta High Court. Probably he had a high opinion of himself, educated as he was in the polished English of his day. In the course of conversation he referred to Sen’s researches on old Bengali literature and sneeringly remarked that Sen should not have wasted his valuable time and energies on pursuing a subject

which could interest only the half-educated and the rustic gentry. He could not understand what joy Sen found in an endless search after supposed treasures in browsing through those moth-eaten punthis written in worn-out discoloured parchment paper or on palm-leaves.

This scoffing attitude of the gentleman towards old and medieval Bengali literature pained Dineshchandra and seemed to throw out to him a challenge to prove the utter hollowness of the visitor's assumptions. For the time being Dineshchandra forgot about his illness and instantaneously warmed up to show what priceless gems of poetry lay in the many creations of the medieval writers of Bengali. To illustrate his point he particularly singled out the example of Kavikankan Mukundaram Chakravarti's *Chandimangal* and went into penegyrics over its many virtues as a work of art. He focussed his attention on Kalketu and Phullara, the two principal characters of this kavya, and claimed that the outstanding moral and spiritual qualities which these two characters possessed were rare even in the whole range of medieval Bengali poetry. They were deemed the more striking because these two characters did not belong to the upper layers of the society but were of humble origin, a huntsmen couple. But notwithstanding their depressed social status they were remarkable for their integrity of being and purity of heart. Especially Phullara's qualities were of an ennobling kind. Her fortitude and patience in the midst of constant poverty, her love and devotion to her husband, her non-complaining nature even if privations and other forms of deprivations laid her low throughout the year embody in one person the highest ideals of Indian womanhood and evoke in us profoundest respect for her personality. On the other hand, Kalketu, though outwardly boorish and unaccustomed to the ways of the civil society—failings natural enough for one inured to a hunter's calling, was at heart innately simple and honest in disposition. Dineshchandra literally waxed eloquent over the many significant characteristics of these rustic couple so as to bring home to his listener's mind the uniqueness of these old treasures of Bengali poetry.

I narrate this incident a bit elaborately only to emphasize in what light Dineshchandra viewed the story of Phullara and Kalketu as told in *Chandimangal*. Though the book *Phullara*

was brief in compass like other books of similar category in the series, he wrote the book with the warmest of feeling and poured all his tenderness of heart in creating the character of Phullara after Mukundaram. *Behula* was another book of the series written with depth and perception.

Professor J. B. Anderson liked the book *Sati* immensely. Sati, as all know, was the spouse of Siva, who died during the observance of a sacrificial ceremony at her father's place, unable to bear the calumnies uttered against her husband. Mr. Anderson wrote to Sen recording his reaction to the perusal of the book in this vein : "What interests me most is the fact that you retell the story in exactly the same fashion as Jules Lematre tells the ancient legends of classical antiquity of the semitic East, with a pious delight and belief in their charm and beauty, and power to give solace to the poor puzzled mortals. Like J. Lematre your tale has the additional delight of humour. That is a very delightful passage in which your little goddesses show off their jewels and laugh at Sati's bark-dress and rudraksha-bracelet and do you know that in the Pacific Islands the pretty girls still wear the most lovely bark-dresses which are extremely becoming".

As for his book *Nilmanik*, a pen-picture of village-life, Prof. Anderson's comment was : "There is an element of self-portraiture in your (Sen's) picture of Nilmanik... As for poor little Rani, wilful, beautiful, erring, unhappy, that scene of the poor girl's death is one of the most touching and significant things I have read for many a long day".

As a Collector of Ballads

AMONG HIS MANY contributions to the enrichment of Bengali language and literature Dineshchandra Sen's indefatigable labours towards the rediscovery and resuscitation of what was known as Eastern Bengal Ballads will be considered of great value. These ballads were scattered over a large area of the East Bengal districts of Mymensingh, Dacca and Faridpur but chiefly concentrated in the district of Mymensingh lying on the northernmost portion of the Dacca Division and below the foot of the Garo Hills of Assam. This district is separated from the districts of Tipperah (now Comilla) and Sylhet on the east by the river Meghna and the districts of Pabna and Bagura on the west by the river Jamuna, a tributary of the Brahmaputra. It is a large district and known for its very rich lore of folk songs and ballads set to the traditional tunes of *Bhatiali*, *Sari*, *Bhaoia* and *Chatka* and such other folk melodies current in the East and North Bengal.

These songs and ballads were for a long time unknown to the townspeople and though full of priceless treasures judged from the standpoint of pure poetry albeit couched in a rustic and hence unpolished language, lay unnoticed in the vast tracts of the countryside neglected and uncared for, beyond the ken of those who could measure and appreciate their real value. Such gems of purest serene were the ballads *Malua*, *Mahua*, *Chandravati* and a few others of the same genre which remained practically hidden from public view till Dineshchandra's attention fell on them and he was able to rescue them from being pushed into the limbo of gradual decay.

The chief credit of Sen was this that he brought all these precious metals, although of an unvarnished hue but nevertheless glittering in their lustre all the same, to the gaze of the city-bred sophisticated people and earned their gratitude for

being the principal instrument of their recovery. Of course, Sen had some helpers in this work, who rendered substantial service to him by way of undertaking long treks in the villages and collecting the ballads concerned. Among them the palm of praise must go to Chandrakumar De who took immense pains to roam the countryside for collecting the *palas* of the ballads and bringing them to the notice of his Master for purposes of editing and compilation. Dineshchandra had been attracted towards Chandrakumar after reading some articles of his on Mymensingh ballads in the pages of *Saurav*, a journal published from Mymensingh. The other two prime assistants in this regard were : poet Jasimuddin and one Asutosh Chaudhuri. They undertook hazardous journeys in the interior areas of the districts of Faridpur and Dacca to gather specimens of folk songs which later went into the formation of the body of the ballads.

Altogether eight books were compiled by Sen to constitute the corpus of the series. Of them four were in Bengali, four in English. The four Bengali books were published volumewise in 1923, 1926, 1930 and 1932 respectively ; while their English counterparts were published in 1923, 1926, 1930 and 1932 respectively, that is, years of publications of the Bengali and English volumes were almost simultaneous. The first volume of the Bengali series was issued under the title *Maimansingha Geetika*, while the other three were published under the general title of *Purbabanga Geetika*. The English volumes went by the name of *Eastern Bengal Ballads*. The Government of Bengal gave a subsidy of several thousands of rupees to the Calcutta University under whose banner the said books were published, to help cover the expenses of collection work and printing. Lord Ronaldshay, the then Governor of Bengal, and later on the Secretary of State for India (then known as Marquis of Zetland) wrote the Foreword to the English edition of the series.

Apart from their being received by the local press very enthusiastically, the collections were highly spoken of in the foreign press as well and some of the Western scholars and critics went into virtual raptures over the beauty of the compositions contained in those collections. A reputed French critic went so far as to say that these ballads were of excep-

tional beauty from the lyrical point of view. They were of such an unblemished character that even flaws in the plays of Macterlinck could be discerned but these compositions were absolutely flawless. Romain Rolland, the Nobel-Laureate and a great savant, was extremely moved by the beauty of these rural lyrics after going through some of them in French translation made by his sister Madeline Rolland from the original. Mademoiselle Rolland translated some of these ballads into French and published them in book form with a Foreword by Dineshchandra Sen himself.

The Czechoslovakian scholar, Dr. Dusan Zbavitel, a disciple of Prof. Lesny, the famous Czech Indologist, was so much attracted by these ballads that he came over to Bengal with the set purpose of studying them in the original East Bengal dialect in which those were composed and visited the places of their origin. This is what Dr. Asutosh Bhattacharya, a renowned folklorist pundit of Calcutta, has to say of Prof. Zbavitel's work in this direction. He wrote : "A Czechoslovakian scholar, Dusan Zbavitel, being attracted by the literary qualities of the English translation of the ballads came to Bengal, studied the local language and visited the rural areas from where they were collected in order to study their authenticity. Subsequently in the work entitled *Bengali Folk-Ballads from Mymensingh and the Problem of their Authenticity*, published by the Calcutta University in 1963, he expressed satisfaction at their genuineness and high poetic merit."

To these remarks Professor Bhattacharyya goes on to add : "From the references of the historical personages made in these ballads it is supposed that none of these originated prior to the 16th century when Muslim power both politically and socially was consolidated over the eastern region of Bengal." (*Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, p. 342. Sahitya Akademi, 1987).

The subject-matter of these ballads most often centred round mundane love, but the theme was generally treated with such tenderness of feeling and tense emotion that the reader of the written word as well as the listener of the song-version could not but be moved by their strong aesthetic appeal. The love between man and woman reached great heights of

ecstatic sensibility in these compositions and yet it was expressed so simply and so touchingly. In one of the couplets of the songs, the lover when urged by the woman he loves to throw himself in the river to drown his shame, replies to her remonstrance in the following words :

Kothai paibam kalsi, kanya, kothai paibam dari
Tumi hao gahin gang, ami dubya mari.

which means :

Where shall I get the pitcher; oh damsel ! where shall I
get the rope ?
 Be ye the deep river so that I can drown myself in its
waters.

Comment as to the literary excellence of this couplet is obviously superfluous.

In the Eastern Bengal ballads women generally figure more prominently than their male counterparts. Their generosity of heart, fortitude, courage, bravery and their readiness to sacrifice their all for the sake of love came into bold relief against the background of the stories some of which were historical, some based on social realities and some entirely imaginary. Dineshchandra selected five such women from among the stories of the ballads and wrote a full-fledged book named *Banglar Puranari* on the basis of those characters. But unfortunately he could not see the book published in his life time. The day he had read the last proofs of the manuscript for final printing, he fell grievously ill and died after some days (November 20, 1939). The book was posthumously published in December 1939.

As a Man

WHAT WAS THE most striking thing about the personality of Dineshchandra Sen ? If a question like this was put to an inquirer into the life and doings of the man, the answer would invariably and unhesitatingly be : steadfast devotion to literary pursuits. This was indeed very true. Intense love of literature marked his entire being and it would not be an exaggeration if it was said that he could not breathe freely except in an world of imagination denoting love of make-belief, love of poetry and all that sorts of things. But it was not mere infatuation for poetry in the abstract ; he did not remain content unless he was able to put the thoughts and ideas which were engendered in him by his close contact with the living specimens of literature, old and new, to paper and ink in the form of tangible writing. Penmanship was the be-all and the end-all of his life. In other words, he lived, moved and had his being only in an atmosphere of authorship and nowhere else. He felt his inner self satisfied only if he could write out his mind freely and ceaselessly enough. From morning till late hours of the evening he could write tirelessly without any break save that for bathing and eating and yet he did not feel worn-out or exhausted. As a matter of fact, it is writing which made him really kick and go and without this exercise he felt lifeless.

That these words are no figment of imagination but an indication of actual state of things will be evident from Dineshchandra's own observations on the subject. One day in his Behala residence some well meaning young relatives of his out of their concern for his health and his old age requested him to work less and take more rest. To this Sen replied by saying that without writing he would not find real rest ; he would feel alright only if he could engage himself in the act of writing all throughout the day. "If one gave me one crore

rupees and asked me to desist from writing even then I would not agree to forego my literary labours." (Quoted in the book *Dineshchandra* written by Shrimati Supriya Sen, a granddaughter of Dineshchandra). On another occasion Sen told his sons : "If the police for some reason confines me to the prison and inflicts on me thousand tortures, even then I would not forsake writing." (Quoted in the same book).

Of course, there was not the faintest chance of his being thrown behind prison bars, for if Sen abhorred anything, it was politics. He always tried to keep a safe distance from the arena of politics as far as practicable. Political emancipation of the country or problems of similar nature did not seem to bother him perceptibly enough. This was perhaps because excessive preoccupation with the literary job left him with little or no time to apply his mind to other subjects except that pertaining to his own chosen fields of activity. He was so deeply engrossed in his own work that he had very little leisure left with him to devote his attention and energy to other forms of work.

Judged by this standard he was a literary sannyasin, so to say. He had neither the time nor the appetite to dissipate his abilities in other forms of diversions, however important or valuable some of these diversionary activities might be from a nationalist point of view. In his scheme of values literature occupied the highest pride of place and he really believed he was rendering the greatest service possible to his country (within the limitation of his talents and capabilities) by throwing himself heart and soul into an ardent worship of the goddess of learning regardless of self. Service of the motherland took different shapes in the case of different men. In the case of Dineshchandra it took the shape of a disinterested devotion to the cause of literature, that is, the cause of the mother tongue. If serving the mother tongue was not the best form of serving the motherland, what else it was, pray ?

But yet Dineshchandra did not escape the censure that was probably due to him for his alleged apathy to politics or for that matter, indifference to national questions. According to the testimony of Sen's autobiography, he himself confessed that Sister Nivedita often mocked at him for his lamentable lack of political sense and luke-warm interest in national pro-

blems. Sen was then working with Sister Nivedita in connection with the revision of his English manuscript *History of Bengali Language and Literature*. Nivedita was correcting here and there any possible errors in the use of idiomatic expressions or phrases that Sen was likely to commit, English being a foreign tongue with him although he was considerably proficient in that language too. She was oftentimes most unsparing and biting in her criticism of Sen on this score and her mockery at times hurt, by Sen's own admission. But Sen had no other alternative but to submit to her sarcastic remarks, seeing that what she said by way of a ruthless denunciation of his apolitical nature was true in essence.

Dineshchandra was man of a very unassuming disposition, simple in his ways of living and a kind-hearted person. He could mix with all classes of people, high and low, European or Indian, with equal ease. He was considerate to all those who worked under him either as literary subs or as collectors of *punthis* or ballads in the fields. Although he was more or less a hard task-master in the matter of performance of duties he was understanding enough to comprehend sympathetically the difficulties of his men and saw to their redress. Right from Professor Janardan Chakravorty, poet-litterateur Premendra Mitra, poet Jasimuddin, Dr. Jatindramohan Bhattacharyya, Prof. Tamonash Dasgupta (his son-in-law) to Dwadeshchandra Sharmacharya, Surendranath Dev and others who worked under him at one stage or another of his literary life have all testified to this aspect of his character and showed their respect to him for this in no uncertain terms.

He was most plain-looking in his dresses and manners and avoided ostentation when he went out. He was not showy even on ceremonial occasions. Such was his dislike of outward appearance that visitors to his Behala home who had not seen him before or known him by photographs often mistook him for a cook or a menial of the house. (vide Prof. Janardan Chakravorty's statement in the book *Dineshchandra* by Sm. Supriya Sen, pp. 90-91). But he had such a inner poise in him that he did not allow himself to be ruffled by such trifling cases of exhibition of supposed disrespect to his person due to a mistaken identity. He was too preoccupied with

thoughts of his own work to feel hurt by such insignificant incidents in his career.

In his early life Sen was a bit conservative in his outlook, particularly touchy about food habits. But in later life he outgrew all these minor idiosyncracies thanks to the benign influence of the metropolitan ways of living. The cosmopolitanism of Calcutta life did away with what little conservatism still remained with him as a hang-over of the past.

Conclusion

IN SUMMING UP the main points of the life and achievements of Dineshchandra Sen it is seen that they consist of an abiding love of literature, steadfast devotion to duty, ability to undertake infinite labours for a cause and powers of endurance of extreme hardships for it, a high seriousness of purpose in taking up research as the principal vocation of life and the career of writing as its necessary subsidiary calling, simple and unostentatious ways of living, capacity to mix with all sorts of people with equal facility, and lastly, a natural kindness of heart. The simplicity of his style of living flew from his innate simplicity of nature and he was nothing if he was not honest to the core of his being. Though fond of fame and renown, a weakness to be found in practically all human beings in a more or less marked degree, he was averse to the attainment of success through 'short cuts' and gave full value in terms of honesty of purpose, sincere love for the subject-matters on which he concentrated his studies and researches as the main concern of his life, indefatigable industry and inordinate painstaking habits, etc., for every inch of success he achieved in his life. In short, in the domain of learning and scholarship he paid the price for every bit of achievement he scored and never had anything by 'fluke' or 'made-easy methods'. He learnt the lessons of life the hard way.

It is true that he was comparatively apathetic to the social or political questions of the day, but that was because his whole energies and attention were devoted to a single-minded pursuit of literature leaving him with very little time for diverting his mind along other channels of activities. An eminent critic has remarked that if there was any Bengali litterateur worth the name after Rabindranath who was wholeheartedly as well as exclusively consecrated to the service of literature, it was none other than Dineshchandra Sen. An

earnest and all-consuming literary 'sadhak' like him who embraced literature as the sole mission of his life was not to be found in the whole range of Bengali letters before or after, save and except the illustrious example of Tagore.

As regards Dineshchandra's style of writing, all were unanimous in their opinion that such sonorous and poetic prose as his was rarely to be met with in other men's mode of writing. Professor Subodhchandra Sengupta in speaking of the uniqueness of Dineshchandra's style of writing made a very significant remark. He wrote: "Whatever Dineshchandra wrote in Bengali, whether a long piece or a small one, sweetness of language manifested itself therein in an unmitigated degree.... Very few writers could write such luscious prose as he." (Foreword to the book *Dineshchandra* by Sm. Supriya Sen.).

Samar Sen, the well known modern poet and a grand-son of Dineshchandra, paid high tributes to the prose-style of his grand-father and observed that had the Bengali writers of today followed the prose style of Dineshchandra, the literature of the day would have assumed a much brighter appearance. (Interview with Mihir Acharyya, editor of *Lekhak Samabesh*).

Dineshchandra Sen will be remembered by the future generations of readers for his many-sided contributions to the enrichment of literature, but he will be particularly adored for his contribution in a field in which he had virtually no peer—the prose style. It was his 'forte' and it will ever be considered so.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

In writing the monograph on Dineshchandra Sen the author is indebted to the following books for facts and data. Also articles noted below have provided him with valuable information throwing light on particular aspects of his character and doings. The first-named book is of special significance in the list, coming as it does from the pen of Dineshchandra himself by way of an autobiographical record of his life and career upto 1922.

1. *Gharer Katha O Jug Sahitya* (Reminiscences of My Life and the Literature of the Epoch) by Dineshchandra Sen. First published July 1922, Jijnasa edition, June 1969, Calcutta.
2. Biography contained in the 8th Edition of *Bangabhasa O Sahitya* (Bengali Language and Literature). Published in 1949 by Professor Benoychandra Sen.
3. *Dineshchandra Sen, Sakharan Ganesh Deuskar*, by Brajendranath Banerjee. Sahityasadhak Charitmala series, Book No. 90. A Bangiya Sahitya Parishat publication, 3rd Printing, 1985, Calcutta.
4. *Dineshchandra*, by Shrimati Supriya Sen. Jijnasa, April 1985, Calcutta.
5. *Dineshchandra O Itihas Charchar Pratham Yug* (Dineshchandra and the First Stages of Historical Writing) by Dr. Bhabatosh Datta. Published in *Visva-Bharati Patrika*, Kartik-Paus 1373 B.S., Calcutta.
6. *Acharyya Dineshchandra Sen*, by Narayan Chaudhuri. Printed in his book *Baraniya Lekhak, Smaraniya Srishti* (Venerable Writers, Memorable Creations). Ananya Prakashan, 1983, Calcutta.
7. *Samar Sener Sange Sakshatkar* (Interview with Samar Sen). Interview taken by Mihir Acharyya, Editor. *Lekhak Samabesh*, published in his journal, Issue No. 13, 1980 and reprinted in the second Fortnightly issue of August 1987. Calcutta.

WORKS BY DINESHCHANDRA SEN

List compiled on the basis of the bibliography provided by Brajendranath Banerjee in his biography and the one given by Sm. Supriya Sen in her book *Dineshchandra*.

Bengali

1. *Kumar Bhupendra Sinha* (Poem)—Published 10th April, 1890.
2. *Rekha* (A collection of three essays named "Janmantarbad", "Shakespeare Baro Ki Kalidas Baro?" and "Balmiki O Homer, Ramayan O Iliad"), published 20th January, 1895.
3. *Bangabhasha O Sahitya*, First Part (Till the advent of the Britishers in India)—2nd December, 1896.
4. *Tin Bandhii* (Three Friends, a novel)—15th July, 1904.
5. *Ramayani Katha* (Stories of the Ramayana, with a Foreword by Rabindranath Tagore)—16th July, 1904.
6. *Behula* (A folk legend)—27th February, 1907.
7. *Sati* (A mythological story)—2nd March, 1907.
8. *Phullara* (A folk legend)—9th March, 1907.
9. *Jada Bharat* (A mythological story)—1st May, 1908.
10. *Sukatha* (A collection of essays)—1st August, 1912.
11. *Dhara-drona O Kushadhwaaja* (A mythological story)—10th August, 1913.
12. *Grihashri* (Instructions given to the female members of the house as to how to make a happy home)—3rd March, 1916.
13. *Samrat O Samrat Mahishir Bharat-Paridarshan* (Illustrated—A brief translation of the book published by the Government of India on the visit of the royal couple to India in 1911)—22nd April, 1918.
14. *Nilmanik* (A village story)—20th August, 1918.
15. *Sanjher Bhog* (A collection of juvenile stories)—10th March, 1920.

16. *Muktachuri* (A Vaishnava legend)—14th April, 1920.
17. *Rakhaler Rajgi* (A Vaishnava legend)—20th May, 1920.
18. *Ragranga* (A mythological story)—24th May, 1920.
19. *Gaye Halud* (Book written for the newly wed brides)—1920.
20. *Baishakhi* (A collection of juvenile stories)—1920.
21. *Subal Sakhar Kanda* (A Vaishnava legend)—10th June, 1922.
22. *Saral Banglar Sahitya* (Simple Tale of Bengali Literature)—1922.
23. *Gharer Katha O Juga Sahitya* (Reminiscences of My Life and the Literature of the Epoch, an autobiography)—25th July, 1922.
24. *Baidik Bharat* (Vedic India)—October, 1923.
25. *Bhay Bhanga* (Fears Removed. A story)—1923.
26. *Deshamangal* (Good of the Country. A story)—6th December, 1924.
27. *Aloke-Andhare* (In Light and in Darkness. A novel)—26th August, 1925.
28. *Kanu Paribad O Shyamli Khonja* (A Vaishnava legend)—10th December, 1925.
29. *Chakurir Bidambana* (Travails of a Job. A novel)—12th January, 1926.
30. *Patimandir* (A didactic story written in the old fashion)—15th February, 1926.
31. *Oparer Alo* (Light from the Other Side. A novel)—1927.
32. *Mamuder Shivmandir* (A novel)—20th October, 1928.
33. *Pauraniki* (Collection of five mythological stories—*Behula*, *Jada Bharat*, *Sati*, *Phullara* and *Dhara-drona O Kushadh-waja* taken together)—August, 1934.
34. *Brihat Banga* (Greater Bengal)—1st Volume, 16th September, 1935, 2nd Volume, 16th September, 1935.
35. *Ashutosh Smritikatha* (Recollections about Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee)—1936.

36. *Padabali Madhuryya* (A treatise on Vaishnava lyrics)—1937.
37. *Shyamal O Kajjal* (A historical novel)—August, 1938.
38. *Puratani* (Pen-pictures of Muslim women of Bengal of two hundred years ago)—9th July, 1939.
39. *Banglar Puranari* (Pen-pictures of five brave women taken from the stories of the East Bengal ballads)—Posthumously published in December, 1939.
40. *Prachin Bangla Sahitye Musalmaner Abadan* (Contributions of the Muslims to the Old Bengali Literature. Collection of four lectures delivered in the Dacca University in November, 1937) Posthumously published in October, 1940.

Works Edited By Dineshchandra
Either Singly Or In Collaboration With Others

1. *Chhutikhaner Mahabharat* (Edited jointly by Binodebehari Kavyatirtha and Dineshchandra Sen)—1905.
2. *Shridharmamangal*—Manik Ganguly (Edited jointly by Haraprasad Shastri and Dineshchandra Sen)—1905.
3. *Kashidasi Mahabharat*—16th September, 1912.
4. *Banga-Sahitya Parichay* (Typical Selections from the Bengali Language from the earliest times to the Middle of the Nineteenth Century). 1st Part and 2nd Part.—1st September, 1914.
5. *Krittibasi Ramayan*—June, 1916.
6. *Gopichandrer Gan* (Songs collected in North Bengal by Vishweswar Bhattacharyya. Edited jointly by Dineshchandra Sen and Basantaranjan Roy). 1st Vol. published in 1922 and 2nd Vol. in 1924.
7. *Maimansingh Geetika* — Vol. I — 1923
(Published under the Vol. II — 1926
title of *Purbabanga* Vol. III — 1930
Geetika) Vol. IV — 1932
8. *Kavikankan Chandi* (Edited jointly by Dineshchandra Sen, Charuchandra Banerjee and Hrishikesh Basu)—1st Part 1924, 2nd Part 1926.
9. *Govinda Daser Karcha* (Edited jointly by Dineshchandra Sen and Prabhupad Banoarilal Goswami)—15th August, 1926.
10. *Harileela* (Edited jointly by Dineshchandra Sen and Basantaranjan Roy Bidwatballabh)—1st March, 1928.
11. *Krishnakamal Granthavali*—1928.
12. *Vaishnava Padabali* (Edited by Dineshchandra Sen and Khagendranath Mitra).

English Publications

1. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*—1911.
2. *Sati*—10th October, 1916.
3. *The Vaishnava Literature of Mediaeval Bengal* (With a Preface by Mr. J. B. Anderson)—1917.
4. *Chaitanya and His Companions*—28th November, 1917.
5. *The Folk Literature of Bengal*—24th March, 1920.
6. *The Bengali Ramayana*—1920.
7. *Bengali Prose Style 1800-1857*—1921.
8. *Chaitanya and His Age*—7th October, 1922.
9. *Eastern Bengal Ballads* (With a Foreword by Lord Ronaldshay) Vol. I—1923 ; Vol. II—1926 ; Vol. III—1928 ; Vol. IV—1932.
10. *Glimpses of Bengal Life*—15th August, 1925.

Some Important Dates and Events

- 1866 Born on 3rd November at Bagjuri in Dacca district.
- 1871-78 Had schooling in Suapur, Dhamrai and Manikganj.
- 1878 Married 7-year-old bride Binodini.
- 1879 Passed the Minor examination in the Third Division from the Manikganj Minor School.
- 1882 Passed the Entrance examination in the Third Division from the Jagannath School, Dacca.
- 1885 Passed the F.A. examination in the Third Division from the Dacca College.
- 1886 Father (Iswarchandra Sen) died on the 30th August.
- 1887 Mother (Roopalata Devi) died on the 2nd February.
- 1888 Joined Habiganj School (in the district of Sylhet) as an Assistant Teacher on a monthly salary of Rs. 40/-.
Passed the B.A. examination of the Calcutta University with Second Class Honours in English as a private student (Teacher).
- 1889 Left Habiganj to become the Headmaster of the Shambhunath Institute, Comilla, on a monthly salary of Rs. 50/-.
Became the Headmaster of the Victoria School, Comilla at the invitation of Anandachandra Roy, its Founder.
- 1890 Started collecting *punthis* with the set purpose of writing a connected history of Bengali language and literature.
- 1891 Was awarded a prize by the Peace Association of Calcutta for his essay on Bengali language and literature adjudged the best composition by a panel of judges.
- 1896 *Bangabhasa O Sahitya*, considered to be his *magnum opus*, was published on the 2nd December.
- 1904 Suffered from a grievous mental illness which debarred him more or less from pursuing literary work of a serious nature for a number of years.
- 1899 Received a monthly stipend of Rs. 25/- from the Government through the efforts of Grierson, Scrine and others.

- 1901 Met Rabindranath Tagore for the first time. Also met Sir Asutosh Mukherjee at about the same time. His meeting with Sir Asutosh turned out to be very fruitful in terms of worldly success.
- 1905 Was made a Ramtanu Lahiry Research scholar of the Calcutta University.
- 1909 Was made a Reader of the Calcutta University.
- 1911 His monumental English work *History of Bengali Language and Literature* comprising of more than thousand pages was published.
- 1913 Was reappointed a Reader of the Calcutta University.
- 1919 Was appointed Ramtanu Lahiry Professor and Head of the newly created Department of Bengali of the Calcutta University.
- 1921 Was awarded the D.Litt. degree of the Calcutta University.
- 1922 Was made a "Rai Bahadur" by the Government of the day. His autobiographical book *Gharer Katha O Jug Sahitya* was published in July.
- 1923 The first volume of *Purbabanga Geetika* (named *Maimansingha Geetika*) and the first volume of *Eastern Bengal Ballads* were published.
- 1929 Was selected by the Bangiya Sahitya Sammelani to be its chief President in its session held at Maju (Howrah) on the 30th and 31st March.
- 1931 Was awarded the "Jagattarini Medal" of the Calcutta University.
- 1932 Retired from university service.
- 1935 *Brihat Banga* (Greater Bengal) in two parts was published on the 16th September.
- 1936 Delivered Presidential address of the Ranchi session of Prabasi Banga Sahitya Sammelan in the last week of December. He also acted as the sectional president of the Sahitya Sabha in the same session.
At about this time his wife Binodini Devi died.
- 1939 Died on the 20th November at his Behala residence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Acknowledgements are due to Shri Chittaranjan Banerjee, formerly Deputy Librarian, National Library, Calcutta, the late Shrish Kumar Kunda, Proprietor, Jijnasa, a well known publishing firm of Calcutta, and Professor D. L. Nath, for supplying me with necessary books to enable me to write the present monograph. They also provided me with valuable suggestions where needed.