

Patriotism and Anti-colonialism in Girish Chandra Ghosh: A Study on His Selected Works

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Abstract: Acclaimed as the most prolific playwright in Bengali literature for having to his credit four score dramas and farces, Girish Chandra Ghosh does not confine himself to 'Art for Art's Sake' but transcends to 'Art for Life's Sake'. His versatility encompasses social responsibility, zeal for reformation, patriotism and anti-colonialism in combination with his extra-ordinary dramaturgy. There is an immense appreciation of the multiple aspects of the vast multitude of his dramatis personae that people his plays along with his literary excellence and invention of a verse form by himself entitled 'Gairish Verse'. Stray thoughts and comments in isolation can be found on one or other aspects of Ghosh's efforts at reformation of the Bengali stage and of Bengali drama as well as his desire to serve the interest of the country. But dedicated attempts are, however, conspicuous by their absence at evaluating his genius as a reformist, patriot and anti-colonialist. This paper is a humble attempt at studying his active efforts for the reclamation of the stage and the dramatic literature of the day as well as his genuine love for indigenous culture and heritage, keen desire for social reformation, firm nonconformism, profound patriotism and strong aversion to colonialism.

Keywords: Father of the Bengali Stage, Social Consciousness, Bengali Heritage and Culture, Non-conformism, Patriotism and Anti colonialism.

This postcolonial study places its emphasis on the interdisciplinary analysis in the cultural presentation of Girish Chandra Ghosh. The researcher analyses and evaluates some of Ghosh's dramas in order to find out the elements generative of patriotism and anti-colonialism. This paper excavates the state of Bengali cultures, creed, customs, values, beliefs, traditions and the like phenomena in which Ghosh had to sustain his existence with the obstacles standing in his way of furthering the national interest in its multiple aspects. The study understands how Ghosh waged struggles against conformism and subservience, on the one hand, to the out-moded conventional dramatic culture and practices, and on the other, to the colonial intervention and superimposition on different arenas of the national life. The study underscores not only how Ghosh put up his resistance against

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a sizable section of the intelligentsia who sang the master's (colonizer's) voice but also accelerated the trend of breaking the shackles of colonialism emboldened by his profound sense of patriotism.

Numerous as were the dramatic creations of Girish Chandra Ghosh, the roles he played concerning the performance of the dramas were equally various. The multiplicity of his genius not only crowned him with the glory of a prominent actor, skillful producer and successful stage manager but also added to his cap the feather of the authorship of as many as eighty dramas. Thus, belonged to him the enviable attributes of all the roles that are of indispensable necessity in the dramatic performance beginning from composition and ending in presentation. On his canvas are depicted the variegated patterns of life — familial, social, religious, political and even economic. All these combined to earn for him the prestigious position of the greatest and most influential dramatist among his contemporaries.

Father of Bengali Stage

Of all the dramatists in the whole range of Bengali literature, Girish Chandra Ghosh is, perhaps, the most famous not only because of his prolific contribution to the dramatic literature but also it is during his time that the dramatic movement found its culmination (Ghosh, 1999, P.156). It was he who pioneered the establishment of the theatre for the common people on December 7, 1872 as a positive response to his patriotic feeling springing from the realization of the genuine urge that pulsed the heart of the board masses of his country for the satisfaction of their demand for amusement. Mukherjee (1933) writes:

A virtual famine had gripped the theatre world of Bengal before the appearance of Girish Chandra on the scene. Just as during the famine people could not choose the quality of food and have inebriated indiscriminately, so under the pressure of performance of trivial and 'rubbish' dramas the theatre gradually began to be lifeless. Girish Chandra, the favorite child of the Muse of dramatic literature, infused life into that almost dead body of the theatre..... He supplied food to keep its body and soul together, provided healthful dishes for its nutrition and growth, infused juice into its marrows to make them vivacious, and this is why, he is the 'Father of the Native Stage'—there was none else as its younger or older uncle..... In fact, it was Girish Chandra who brought the pitchers containing the nectar that the theatre drank and enabled itself to prolong its life during those fifty years, and as such, Girish Chandra alone can claim and enjoy the dignified status of fatherhood of the Bengali stage. (P.43 translation mine)

Love for indigenous Bengali culture and heritage

Girish Chandra had a genuine love for the indigenous Bengali culture and that inculcated in him the devotion and acumen to find out the reasons and remedies for the deplorable condition that Yatra (Jatra) lapsed into consequent upon the emergence of the modern theatre. The British despised Yatra and so the babus with English education had hatred for this popular culture. Banerjee (1989) writes:

The emergence of distinct cultural forms that could be representative of the newly acquired economic status and educational position of the bhadralok [babu] could be possible only by eliminating the various forms of popular culture which used to be a part of the common literary and musical heritage of the Bengalis. The urge to demarcate themselves from the lower orders prompted the new bhadralok converts to Western education to dissociate themselves from the urban folk culture. (p. 153)

Even Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the celebrated Bengali novelist, could not resist from making indelicate comment on Yatra in one of his lectures in English on ‘A Popular Literature for Bengal:’

Street-poetry [Jatras] and love-songs are the only species of literary composition to which the nation confined itself for generations. And fit intellectual food they were for a race who had become incapable of comprehending any other class of conceptions (Dutt, 1992, p. 7).

Girish did not suffer from the myopia that Yatra was a high dramatic art but he made a clear and frank confession that the disappearance of the traditional dramatic art resulted in the loss of a valuable indigenous cultural asset:

Vulgar and obscene slangs disappeared with the disappearance of the Yatras, but along with it the sweet songs of Vadan Adhikary, and Govinda Adhikary were also gone for good. The sweet songs of deep emotion of the old Krishna Lila disappeared from the country. People then lost their originality and took to imitation. (ed. Roy, 1969, P.196 translation mine)

Bandopadhyay (1990) complements: “Girish Chandra rescued the Bengali stage and drama from its ignoble state and invested it with the strength of youth and maturity” (p. 89 translation mine).

Girish's multidimensional genius to remove the poverty of actable dramas

In Girish is combined, as has been told earlier, the genius of a playwright, an actor, a producer and stage manager. Before he took up his pen, the Bengali

theatre was producing the dramas of Madhusudan and Dinabandhu and dramatized versions of Bankim Chandra's novels, and their repetitions exhausted their charms for the audience who strongly craved for new dramas. Kumunbandhu writes, "Girish said that he began writing dramas 'out of sheer necessity' under compulsion when Michael and Bankim were exhausted to be 'dramatized' and no drama was available for stage performance." (Sen, 1936, P. 38 translation mine). Girish Chandra added, "The stage had no actable plays, I was forced to write plays." (ed.Roychowdhury, 1972, p.35 translation mine) The situation caused in Girish a great concern which finds expression in the *Calcutta Review* in 1875:

Were we to judge the Bengali dramatic literature of the present day by the number of books published, we should have to form a very high estimate of its richness and excellence indeed; but if we look into the contents of the books, we receive quite a different impression. We think we may safely assert that there is not a single dramatic work in Bengali that can be styled a first performance; while of the scores of plays published every month, nay almost every week, we could not name even half a dozen second-rate ones.

Thus people's desire for performance of new drama found echo in Girish's creative mind which went for composing new dramas (as many as eighty dramas and farces) for the audience and readers till the last day of his life arousing their thankful admiration. (Ghosh, 1999, p. 157)

A Prodigious Creator and Founder of National Theatre

The admiration of the audience owed to the satisfaction of the contemporary popular taste and their dramatic urge and intellectual demand by the numerous creations of Girish Chandra that contained within their fold a host of dramas, both original and translated, as well as transformation of a number of epics and novels enjoying wide popularity among the reading public. His list of creations could boast of inclusion of a few farces or comic pieces giving vent to the prevailing pressing problems bearing testimony to his awareness of the necessity for the reclamation of his fellow countrymen from the ills that were eating into the vitals of the society—an admirable attitude that sprang from the very fountain of patriotism acting as an anathema to colonialism.

The National Theatre that he established in association with actors of Ardhendu Mustafi's stature was a vigorous and concerted attempt to undo the colonial hegemony on the cultivation and nourishment of national dramatic art and culture. Ghosh (1999) comments:

Since the establishment of the National Theatre Girish Chandra reigned like the blazing sun with its unfading brilliance over the dramatic world of Bengal till the last day of his life. Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi, Amrita Lal Mitra, Amrita Lal Bose, Amrita Lal Mukherjee, Mahendra Lal Bose—all constituting a galaxy of talents surrounding him dominated the dramatic arena of Bengal. The leadership of Girish Chandra of those extra-ordinary geniuses led the dramatic movement of the country to its full maturity. Bengal has not seen his second in the establishment of the theatre for the common people, management of the stage, and teaching dramaturgy. True, he wrote a large number of dramas, he was one of the best actors, but what is most significant is that he is the greatest reformer and director of the Bengali stage. The Bengali stage was, indeed, in its infancy before his entrance into, and began dissipating to premature senility after his departure from it underscoring that the vibrant youth of Bengali stage-craft was exhibited solely during his time (p. 156 translation mine).

His social consciousness and preference for Yatra to Sanskrit tradition in response to Bengal psyche

Girish made his debut in the dramatic arena with the production of Michael Madhusudan's drama *Sharmista* transforming it into a Yatra presentation by incorporating and enriching it with dance and song in the form of an opera that was currently enjoying wide popularity with the Bengali audience of the day. It is in this way that he preferred to reflect the native taste in conformity with the popular ethos and sentiments and disregarding the ancient traditional Sanskrit drama. Never did he feel the necessity of subscribing to the Sanskrit dramatic ideals in

Bengali theatrical representation. The adaptation of *Sharmista* brought to focus the fact that Girish had a bent of mind that upheld the Yatra presentation in preference to Sanskrit dramas in consonance with the popular demand and folk-culture. Girish Ghosh stuck fast to this principle and trod this path to the end of his life (Bhattacharya, 2002, p.379). From the very inception of his career Girish Chandra was quite conscious of, and familiar with, the prevalent social norms, tendencies and fashions. This social consciousness became the driving force of his creation. That is why, he never considered it necessary to absorb the Sanskrit tradition of the ancient India in the Bengali drama. On the contrary, he pleaded for Yatra tradition that is more in keeping with the Bengali psyche as well as in the closest proximity with the expression of essential ethos of the broad masses of people in rural Bengal. This is how the Bengali rose in Girish remaining ever wakeful to his last breath unceasing and unrelenting holding high his pure Bengalicism. Absorbed in this awareness of the popular norms and

demands, his works emerged strong enough to earn for him the appellation of the greatest dramatist of his time. Girish is adjudged to be the best among the contemporary dramatists of Bengali literature (ibid p. 379) because “the great dramatist of every period when drama has flourished has always planned his plays for performance in the theatre of his own time, by the actors of his own time and before the spectators of his own time” (Mathews, 1908, pp. 213-214).

His non-conformist attitude and lifelong cultivation of indigenous literary trend

Before Girish took to dramatic composition, dramatists like Madhusudan and Dinabandhu had already started writing dramas after the European model, and therefore, established a new style of dramatic composition unknown to this part of the globe. During that period there existed another form of dramatic literature, indigenous in nature, known as lyrical drama or new Yatra or opera championed by playwrights like Manomohan Basu. The difference between the two has been very vividly pictured in the *Bandhab*, “The dramatists of the land are divided into two categories. One of them is named English scribes and another Bengali scribes” [*Bandhab*, Baishakh 1288 BS. as quoted in Gosh, 1999, p. 120 translation mine]. Prior to the introduction of the drama of the European model, Yatra which was primarily composed of mythological incidents and episodes was in vogue and though once very popular they gradually began losing their hold on the popular imagination because of their lack of variety (their subject matter being limited to the oft-used life and activities of Lord Krishna) and also because of change of taste resulting from the change of performing art as brought about by the introduction of European / English / Shakespearean drama together with the establishment of theatre houses. The western educated section of the people grew abhorrent for the low taste, coarse humour and obscene displays in the decadent Yatra. They could have their thirst quenched by the performance of the drama of the English model in the theatre houses established by the affluent gentry, but such satisfaction remained beyond the reach of the common folk because the entry into the play houses was beyond their right and means. To fill in the vacuum there came a sort of lyrical dramatic composition known as opera that was written in the form of drama but performed in the style of Yatra. Divested of crude humorous scenes, bawdy talks that crept in the Yatra of the time but overwhelmed with devoutness and pathos as existent in the Yatras and performed with more elaborate costumes than in Yatras with profusion of

songs, these operas or lyrical performances were of the nature of the English model dramas in terms of arrangement of scenes and acts as well as presentation of events and episodes. “*In an opera there is a variety of dress and costumes, elegant language and other imposing things*” (Dasgupta, 1938, p.133 translation mine). Bandopadhyay (1979) describes:

Consequent upon acquiring English education the gentry of the country developed a great disinclination for the Yatra and its hackneyed performances of Krishna-Gopinis, Vidyasundar stories, etc. and became all the more interested in the dramas, but it was not possible for all to set up play houses at the expense of enormous amount of money as did the Rajas of Paikpara and as such they went for opera performance (p. 88 translation mine).

In fact, there developed a practice for opera performance of many a famous drama. Ram Narayan’s *Ratnavali*, Kaliprasanna’s *Sabitri Satyaban* and Michael’s *Padmabati* were staged in the style of opera. At such a juncture Girish volunteered to establish a combination between these two streams of dramatic creation and success adorned him in his venture marking it as his greatest achievement (Bhattacharya, 2002, p. 379). The achievement is, however, juiced with the triumph of the indigenous taste and fashion and mores but not to the discomfiture of the newly adopted model. Like his mentor Shakespeare, his dramatic career started with the unpaid job in a Yatra Company (in Shakespeare’s case it was a theatre company) catering to the native taste. His allegiance to the indigenous dramatic form is well borne out by his very maiden performance venture which was to stage Madhusudan’s *Sharmista* not in its original form but transformed in the shape of Yatra under the aegis of the Yatra group he himself made bold to establish. This demonstrates that his preference lies for the prevalent indigenous artistic form of the lyrical drama to the modern variety as composed by the playwright Michael Madhusudan Dutta in accordance with the European model learnt from the literature of the colonizers. “The inclination for Yatra performance was a lifelong one with Girish and he never escaped its spell resulting in the flowering of his dramatic genius through the cultivation and nourishment of the indigenous literary trend” (Bhattacharya, 2002, p.379 translation mine).

**Stimulating choice between culture of the colonizer and the colonized:
Role of national dramatist**

This individuality is, no doubt, indicative of his independent spirit, of his love for his own people and culture that, in turn, generate in the people a reciprocal bent of mind stimulating them with a sense of choice between the

cultures of the colonizers and of the colonized. That it captivated the popular imagination could be well ascertained by the wide acceptance of his plays as witnessed by the presence of the vast audience at their performance. The resultant reawakening in the people of a sense of culture having its root in the soil was potent enough to deepen their love for the country that in the long run proved to be a source of strength in the struggle against the colonizers. Though during his days, the newly English educated community grew to be increasingly craving for the performance of the plays modeled upon the European dramatics, there was a dearth of sufficient number of the category and their dramatization was also available only for the aristocrats' amusement; they were not meant for the common folk and remained virtually out of their reach. Though they added to the satisfaction of the upper-class gentry, they utterly lacked the capacity for the fulfillment of national perceptions and sensibilities. Girish stepped in to fill in the vacuity. His plays could provide for the taste and flavour for the satisfaction of the nation's demand for literary excellence characteristic of its own. Girish thus earned the glory of being the first playwright able to serve the desired food for the relish of the nation. His manipulation of the form and style of the drama, deviated though it from the English model, was no less adequate to cater to the literary need of the hour, to satisfy the popular demand for amusement. This nonconformist attitude is significant in confirming that in him resided a personality that colonial literature could not entirely subdue or that subscribed only partially to the colonial artifact. His adherence to the European values and ideals having been rendered willfully ineffectual, Girish took elaborate care to felicitate the indigenous tastes, modes and values and that worked wonder to gain recognition and admiration of the contemporary national psyche. The mind of Girish's drama was as lovely as its body—the former being infused and impregnated with the national sense and sensibilities and the latter embellished and adorned with the indigenous dramatic tradition of the Yatra so much so that his role was elevated to that of the national dramatist of Bengal (Bhattacharya, 2002, p. 380).

Germination of pride in national heritage contributing to Indian National Movement

A writer has usually to respond to the contemporary social milieu and the society that Girish Chandra was living in was one that had just absorbed the first shock of the colonial culture of the late nineteenth century that originated from the establishment of the theatre by the English in Kolkata followed by the Bengali elite setting up theatre of their own in imitation of the colonialists. The first encounter with the English culture caused some

upheavals in the Bengali mind which, however, could gather itself after absorbing the primary shock and poised to discover its identity. Girish could feel the pulse of the nation and came forward to delineate it in his plays, particularly in their mythological variety. He wielded his pen to focus on the prevalent vicious social customs and superstitions, portray the glorified mythological episodes of the Hindus, depict the admirable feats of the historically renowned personalities with the avowed object to create awareness in the masses as to their glorious past and hold the image of the nation up to the mirror so as to imbue them with a sense of pride in the nationhood. The perseverance, sincerity and undivided attention that Girish brought upon his tasks of exploring the rich heritage of the nation had far-reaching consequences in the emergence of the movement for breaking the shackles of colonial subjugation. His contribution is all the more important in the backdrop of the condition that was characterized by a sense of disregard of the emerging section of the civil society (the youth) for the legendary figures of the nation and their unfamiliarity and ignorance of the luminous historical personalities. He composed dozens of plays dealing with the relevant issues and he and his friends staged them one after another with a unique purpose. This, in association with the activities of the social leaders, could ultimately contribute to the germination of the Indian National Movement (Swadeshi Andolan) to despise all things foreign, to discard all goods coming from the homeland of the colonialists and even to boycott educational institution run in accordance with the colonial education system and reject all that was English. Ghosh (1999) notes:

The Bengalis came to realize that they were the downfallen generation of a noble and glorious nation. The desire for the revival of their lost glory came to be their strong mental urge and gradually literature, art and politics developed to reflect the hopes and aspiration of the nation seething with the heartache of foreign subjugation and this was how the birth of nationalism of the Bengalis occurred.... The illustrious portrayal of the heroic deeds of the legendary past initiated efforts for the restoration of the independence of the country (pp.130-31 translation mine).

Attachment to Bengali culture

Though the Swadeshi Andolan could not deal an instant death blow to the colonial rule, it ushered in factors and generated forces that could very successfully hasten the end of the British colonialism in India. As a dramatist Girish Chandra's role in this respect is singular and unparalleled; nevertheless he did not extend his ken beyond the purview of Bengali literature nor across the boundary of Bengal to search for fundamental ideas

of the nationhood. He picked his source materials not from Sanskrit literature of the distinguished authors like Valmiki and Vedavyas but from the Bengali poets like Krittibas, Kasiram Das, Mukundaram, Bharat Chandra, etc. The Bengali literature is bereft of any other example than Girish in so far as the intensity of attachment and affinity with national culture and tradition of Bengal is concerned. Before the appearance of Girish Chandra at the Bengali dramatic arena, Madhusudan Dutta and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee presented their own interpretation of the mythological figures in the light of the newly acquired modern European education and changed conditions of life. Michael depicted the characters of Rama, Lakshmana and Ravana in a manner not hitherto adopted while Bankim Chandra portrayed Krishna shedding a new light with his figure appearing with additional brilliance. Girish Chandra, though later born to these two towering literary giants of the day, followed the traditional method of presenting the mythological figures in his works (Bhattacharya, 2002, P. 381). This betrays that Girish could swim against the powerful currents of the day and follow what his mind dictated him to, emboldened enough by his own firm conviction, not prompted by the trendy craze for novelty or by the fervor for imitation his contemporaries were infected with and accustomed to. This is how he relentlessly maintains his unwavering allegiance to the age-old evaluation of the historic personalities holding aloft the long cherished conventional values, ideals and norms, thus imbuing the popular mind with an unalloyed reverence for legendary heroes of the nation on the one hand, and on the other, a sense of pride in the past heroic glory of the land that, in turn, encouraged the people to take strong stance against the foreign domination. He summoned courage enough to carve his own way by holding fast to the national ideals in the interpretation of the mythological characters in their essential features. This mental affinity with the indigenous tradition and culture keeping in touch with rural life and mind continued till the end of his life. Bhattacharya (2002) comments:

He could never escape from this predilection towards Yatra performance till the last days of his life and it is this mental propensity that absolutely insulated him from the induction of Sanskrit dramas. The Sanskrit dramas totally failed to make any impress on the dramatic trend that Girish Chandra captured in his works. The same national sense and sensibilities that stimulated him to emulate Krittibas and Kasiram Das as his models in abandonment of Valmiki and Vedavyas galvanized him to write dramas composed of the ingredients from the Bengali Mongalkabya, Panchali, Kabigan, etc. (pp. 385-86 translation mine).

Allegiance to Bengali literature in preference to Sanskrit

Girish Chandra fulfilled his firm commitment to following Bengali poets instead of Sanskrit doyens in letter and spirit in that he neither translated any Sanskrit play nor did he ever let in any sort of intervention of any Sanskrit work in his own creation. His allegiance is not to Valmiki and Vedavyas, Sanskrit writers respectively of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* but to the Bengali poets Krittibas and Kashiram Das whose seminal works were of the same titles of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* respectively signaling the dramatist's profound and preferential adoration to the Bengali language and the Bengali poets.

Girish Chandra, among his contemporary dramatists, was absolutely free from the pervasive influence of Sanskrit dramas. After Joytirindra Nath Thakur, not an iota of influence of Sanskrit drama is discernible in the Bengali dramatic literature. It is Girish Chandra who was first to put a dead halt to the Sanskrit current from flowing over to the Bengali dramatic field; Sanskrit drama is not conducive to the ideals of the Bengali national life (Bhattacharya, 2002, p. 385 translation mine), thus laying down a milestone in the history of the Bengali drama.

Portrayal of contemporary society

Girish has hardly gone beyond his familiar world to paint things unknown to him. He has unhesitatingly portrayed what he himself has seen and experienced. That is why, in spite of some shortcomings in his plays, they are conspicuously marked by the lack of sincerity of purpose. This is why, his dramas abound with the exuberance of religious devoutness because of his intimate contact with religious mentors; on the other hand, his companionship with the prostitutes finds fit expression in the delineation of their lives in his dramas. Elsewhere he writes: "I never deceive people in writing dramas. I have tried to disseminate what I feel or what I realize in practical life, what I believe as *Somum Bonum* of human life" (Sen, 1976, p.73 translation mine). Though he creates characters and contrives situations from what his experiences have enriched him with, Girish Chandra writes: Writing plays on the realistic topics is similar to digging into filthy sewers (Mukherjee, 1933, p. 77 translation mine). However, Bengali social drama has very faithfully mirrored the Bengali society so much so that Bhattacharya (1964) cannot but comment:

In the nineteenth century the way the social and family life of Bengal changed, after its direct contact with English education, has been given excellent expression by the contemporary Bengali theatre, but not by the

writers of history. These social plays have held up the mirror to the social life of Bengal. No social history has been written on nineteenth-century Bengal, but the portrayal of society in these [plays] has made it more living than history (pp. 37-38 translation mine).

The society was then undergoing a very “rapid, perplexing and not altogether comprehensible changes under colonial administration that was gradually re-writing its very existence” (Chatterjee, 2007, p. 151). This state of affairs was quite elaborately pictured in the great multitude of social dramas of the time ranging from Dinabandhu Mitra’s *Neeldarpan* (1860) to Girish Ghosh’s reluctant works *Prafulla* (1889) and *Balidan* (1905) (Girish did not spontaneously intend to write social drama), both being Box Office Hit and at the same time producing long-term effect on the Bengali theatre. Social situations also received interpretation in Ghosh’s mythological and historical dramas. Drawing from sources of different periods of history and mythology, they metaphorically interpreted the contemporary conditions.

Girish had a profound philosophic conception of life. His imagination was deeply immersed in high philosophy and ideals of life dissuading him from descending to the humdrum existence and writing farcical dramas. Girish made it clear to his friend Kumudbandhu Sen, “My dramas are not at all light stuff. You won’t understand them unless you think seriously in a serious mood. It won’t do if you read them superficially” (Sen, 1976, p. 73 translation mine).

Co-mingling didactic and entertaining elements: Politics of anti-colonialism

Girish was always at pains to impregnate his plays with as much meaning and significance as was possible on his part with ceaseless efforts at mingling didactic elements and entertaining materials. He made a stage version of Michael’s *Meghnad Bodh Kabya*. The epic was skillfully manipulated into a drama that holds up a parallel to the contemporary political situation. In the drama Ram sends his younger brother Lakshman to secretly assassinate Meghnad, Ravan’s eldest son and general. Meghnad welcomes him, “Enemy though you are of the *rakshas* (demon) and can only think of the evil design, “Kill the enemy by any guile necessary”. This unmistakably reminds the Bengali audience of Clive and his victory in the Battle of Plassey. This penetration of politics in his dramatic work became almost a lifelong passion with him. His *Shribatsa-Chinta* is a reflection of the need for a serious political upheaval. Shribatsa and Chinta- the king and queen—incurred the displeasure of Shani, God of destructive, who provoked

a mass revolution causing destruction of the city and ultimately compelling them to escape. But the same merchants whom the king and the queen tried to appease have treacherously settled to sell the throne to a foreign ruler. Like *Shribatsa-Chinta*, *Chanda* is also a play which demonstrates the uncommon ability of Ghosh to analyse regimes—an ability that he has acquired by the careful study of the situation of his own country. He is apt in drawing parallels between the situations prevailing in his country and the creative imagination sprouting in his mind and those are dealt with in his plays. The language used by the character in *Chanda* in many cases could have been considered as ‘seditious’ and ‘treasonous’ by the British Government. The following excerpt from the words of a patrician of Chitore shows how Ghosh’s work incites a revolution against the foreign rulers:

If your excellency would order it so, the citizens of Chitore
 Would all rise up in flames; young and old,
 Boys and women, all would take up arms to finish off
 The oppressive enemy of the land...

British wrath against Girish's love for independence and anti-colonialism

Chanda could, however, escape proscription by the British Government. But its successors belonging to the same subgenre of historical dramas—*Siraj-ud-Daula* (1905), *Mir-Qasim* (1906) and *Chhatrapati Sivaji* (1907)—were banned by the Dramatic Performance Act, 1876 which laid down the condition that all dramas must get police clearance in order to be publicly performed. *Siraj-ud-Daula* and *Mir-Qasim* show how Ghosh makes exemplary use of dramaturgy for making brilliant exposition of patriotism and anti-colonialism. Making use of the factual details and remaining historically faithful without distortion, Ghosh does not resort to metaphorising as he does in case of *Shribatsa-Chinta* or *Chanda*. They are the faithful dramatization of the historical records. Without any cloak or camouflage *Siraj-ud-Daula* shows overtly and directly how the last independent Nawab of Bengal lost the Battle of Plassey to Clive due to treachery and how the British occupied the throne of Bengal. *Mir-Qasim* dramatizes the helplessness of a titular head watching painfully how his land is being usurped. These two plays more than any other evince Ghosh’s categorical denunciation of the British colonial power and his extraordinary courage and love for the motherland giving more than sufficient cause for the British to proscribe them for public performance as well as to arrest ten

people including Upendranath Das (Director) and Amirtalal Bose (Manager) during a performance on 16 March, 1876. Composed in the context of the partition of Bengal, Girish has produced in *Siraj-ud-Daula* not only the best of his historical dramas but also one of the best in Bengali literature based on the motto of the Swadeshi Andolon expressed through the long dialogues conforming with the movement (Bhattacharya, 2002, p. 532).

Girish has, through his inimitable creation of *Siraj-ud-Daula*, unmasked the inhuman nature of capitalism and portrayed the actual picture of the plunderer and the so-called modern sense of values which is nothing but perverted. The greatest, the most skillful perpetrators of this world of kleptomania, robbery and treachery were the English colonizers. Seraj is majestic and generous infused with the pristine values of truthfulness, courtesy, mercy and kindness. He has set Wats free on the appeal of the latter's wife. Consequently, he courted defeat in the struggle with the fraudulent and thieving English in collusion with the treacherous generals, courtiers, and banians to whom he had already extended forgiveness and friendliness to rouse them to patriotic duties in the hour of the direst need of the motherland. Siraj's forgiveness came profusely into play, such as, in setting free the imprisoned English soldiers, Rayballav's son Krishnadas, whom his father was apprehending of execution relieving his anguish, "Raja Ray Ballav, remove your anxieties. Don't you perceive that the Nawab is full of forgiveness". The traitorous Umichand was not also deprived of forgiveness by Siraj who categorically pronounced, "Even my enemies will fail to utter that forgiveness was denied on appeal of mercy to any serious offenders or shelter was shut to anyone entreating for it". Seraj was patriot incarnate and his only solicitation was to patriotism. "The Hindu or Muslim who joins hands with the foreigners out of spite for the country is an inveterate black ship". But Siraj could not have an inkling of the Mamonish who could go to any length for the satisfaction of their avarice. And the result was their desertion to the English camp bringing down the ignominious defeat to Siraj and loss of independence of the country ushering in its colonization of long two hundred years with the legacies still persisting much after the end of the colonial rule.

Money assumed the all-powerful unifying force of all the cohorts—the English, the traitorous Bengalis, Umichad, Rayballav, Jagatseth, Mirzafor, etc. — against the Nawab and the independence of the motherland which was symbolized in the figure of Siraj. But no one, even according to the

traitor Krishnadas, is a match for the English in banianism, in the greed for money—the new-found god determining the fate of man, society and civilization. Siraj is thus alienated with his old cardinal values of patriotism, truthfulness, amiability and generosity—the adornment of his life and character succumbing to the conspiracy of the colonizers (Datta, 1983, p. 105).

Karim Chacha playing the role of Fool according to the universally acclaimed Shakespearean model does, however, see through the machinations of the Mamonish colonizers and their lackeys. Karim has been the mouthpiece of Girish as evident from his speech:

The foolish Nawab does not know how to conduct Nawabi. He does not order for the execution of anybody, he should first be dethroned. Enthroned someone who is easily prone to kick on the spur of the moment anybody who extorts money by imprisonment of people (as do the Englishmen)! He is all forgiveness for the embezzlers, for the enemies. Are all these befitting to a Nawab! Puh! (translation mine)

Girish's antagonism to Divide and Rule Policy and Communalism

Girish's patriotism—his strong opposition to colonization—bursts out into the decision of Siraj to wage struggle against the East India Company, for the Nawab has embarked upon it to safeguard the interest of his poor subjects. It is quite natural that such a ruler will fall victim to the insatiable greed of the British banians, the feudal lords and millionaire merchants all coalescing together. But Siraj does not hesitate to reassure the whole country with the unqualified declaration aiming at consolidating the unity, solidarity and dedication to the interest of the country along with the safety and security of its independence:

I am enemy of yours, not of Bengal. If my intention results in your termination, I'll commission the Bengalis in your vacancies... No foreigners will have any access to the royal offices. The Hindus and the Muslims are both obligated to a single interest and that interest will never suffer... But know it for certain that the Europeans are inveterate enemy of Bengal (translation mine).

The farsighted Girish could anticipate the serious communal turn that politics would succumb to in future by the collusion of the British colonizers and the selfish local politicians. He, therefore, made vigorous efforts at forging unity between the two communities—the Hindus and the Muslims— by urging them

to fight imperialism through his plays making them the vehicle of movement for the cessation of the colonial rule (ibid, p. 98).

The huge canvas of *Siraj-ud-Doula* deserves the appellation of a monumental creation in the whole range of dramatic literature of the world by the confluence of different streams of history, of different trends as well as by the conglomeration of diverse human characters. A very few playwrights in the world have commanded a comparable capability of depicting the process of social change in their works (ibid, p. 107). So unique is Girish's achievement.

His *Mir Qasim* has been a deeper analysis of the inscrutable process of degradation of the economy of the country as a result of concerted and systematic exploitation by the unholy alliance of the English colonizer and the Bengali bhadraloks comprising zamindars and merchants. The conflict between India and England ostensibly seeming to be a conflict of interests between the two civilizations is, indeed, the clash of economic interests between the two economies—the British one breaking the Indian one into pieces through shameless and reckless plunder. This stark truth revealing unabatedly all through the drama gains its status as a modern play. The drama dives deep down to discover the very foundation of the nature of exploitation of the economy—the arduous task of the historian and social scientist done by a playwright who had to be assailed sometime as a man with a very insignificant schooling. The play can very reasonably claim a unique place in the history of the dramatic literature of the country by dint of its unprecedented analysis and presentation of the economic history of the country way back in 1906 in the wake of the partition of Bengal which was designed to implement the cool calculated policy of Divide and Rule of the British—a presentation that makes it a vehicle not of any unambiguous expression of patriotism but one objectively and integrally related with economic devastation (Datta, 1983, p. 117).

The discussion above brings to light the literary genius in Girish penning down a good number of dramas that stand as a memorial to the workings of a mind worthy of remembrance and emulation for ages to come. He is widely acclaimed as the harbinger of the golden age of the Bengali theatre. His transcendental genius enfolds within itself not only the prolific dramatist, eminent actor, dexterous producer and efficient stage manager but also a reformist of the Bengali stage and the Bengali drama as well as a non-

conformist, a patriot and an anti-colonialist of the first order. The variety of his genius—the milk of human kindness towering over it—put him to actions, vigorous and rigorous, that continued unabated through thick and thin to the last day of his life of 68 years (1844-1912) without deterring him at any stage and at any work from rendering service of absolute dedication to the amelioration of the cultural, social, political and economic condition of his country and people.

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