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Kalpabigyan: Sketching the Astonishing World of Bengali Speculative Fiction

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Abstract:

Science fiction, science fiction fantasy, or Speculative Fiction; the nomenclature of this genre has been controversial since the publication of the first text in this genre, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). However, it did not gain popularity until the publication of popular works of French author Jules Verne and English Author H.G. Wells. It captured the readers across the continents of Europe, America, and Asia. India, with its long-standing tradition of literature, also started producing science fiction literature with the publication of Hemlal Dutt's "Rahasya" (1882) in Bengal. Mr. Adrish Bardhan, the celebrated author, editor, and translator of Science Fiction, coined the term Kalpabigyan to generalize the humongous variety of literary works in the Bengali Language. Kalpabigyan, which encompasses both fantasy, science fiction, and science-based writings, gained popularity through publications in various magazines, including *Ramdhanu*, *Rangmashal*, *Aschorjo*, *Sandesh*, *Fantastic*, *Vismoy*, and *Kalpabiswa*, among others, over the course of eighty years. This paper aims to provide a thorough overview of the intriguing and complex world of Bangla science fiction, or Kalpabigyan. The study explores the wide range

of works created by various authors, following their development from their inception until the year 2016 AD. It seeks to draw attention to significant turning points, thematic investigations, and creative advancements that have influenced the genre over time. To give readers a comprehensive grasp of how Bangla science fiction has shaped a unique and vibrant literary tradition within both regional and international science fiction landscapes, the paper will analyse key contributions, recurrent themes, and the sociocultural contexts in which these narratives emerged.

Keywords: Kalpabigyan, Bengali Science Fiction, Indian Science Fiction, Kalpabiswa, Indian Speculative Fiction, Aschorjo.

Kalpabigyan: The Birth of Speculative Fiction in Bengal

Bangla Science Fiction or Kalpabigyan might be defined as the fiction which is equivalent to kalpana or kolpona in Bengali, meaning imagination, whereas the translated counterpart of science in Bangla is known as Bigyan. Adrish Bardhan, a commended science fiction author, translator, and editor, coined the term Kalpabigyan in 1962 when he launched the science fiction magazine *Ashchorjo (Wonder)* as the chief editor. The well-known names in the field of Bangla Science Fiction are Jagadish Chandra Bose, Jagadananda Ray, Hemlal Dutta, Rokeya Begum Hussain, Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, Sukumar Ray, Hemendra Kumar Ray, Premendra Mitra, Adrish Bardhan, Satyajit Ray, Siddhartha Ghosh, Rebanta Goswami, Dilip Roy Chowdhury, Ranen Ghosh, and the list goes on.

Science Fiction in Bengal rose to fame through the work of celebrated Indian Scientist Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose. His Science Fiction text entitled “Niruddeshar Kahini,” also

known as “The Story of The Missing One” (published in 1896), dealt with the aspect of weather control (still a type of speculation in contemporary science). This was a short story that was later metamorphosed into a full-grown text and became a part of the discourse known as *Abyakta* (Unexplainable) in the year 1921 and rechristened as “Palatak Tufan” (“The Runaway Cyclone”). Mr. Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay (a Kultran Fellow at the University of Oslo, a die-hard science fiction scholar) has been credited with the translated version of the above-mentioned text. However, a contradiction exists regarding the first work of science fiction in Bengali. The text entitled “Shukra Bhraman”(“Journey to Venus”) by Jagadananda Ray, which was published in 1879, has also been credited as the first work in the realm of Bangla as well as Indian science fiction. The text dealt with various sci-fi themes like an encounter with aliens and a travelogue to another planet.

As an analyst, I should stay impartial, so I might want to introduce another view of Bangla science fiction. Hemlal Dutt has additionally been credited with being the originator of Science Fiction in Bengal. He published his work “Rahassya” (“The Mystery”) in 1882, practically at the start of the Bengal Renaissance. Souparno Banerjee, a Ph.D. scholar at Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, in his Ph.D. thesis entitled “Other Tomorrows: Postcoloniality, Sci-fi and India,” says that:

But the best examples can be seen in Jagadishchandra Bose (1857-1937) and Jagadananda Roy (1869-1933). Bose, who was a professor of physics in Presidency College (the former Hindu College) and one of the world’s leading scientists on electromagnetic waves, was also one of India’s earliest writers of science fiction. Similarly, Jagadananda Roy was highly interested in science and astronomy and taught science in school. His short story “Shukra Bhraman” (Travel to Venus, 1879) describes

an interstellar journey and alien creatures. His description of creatures on Uranus is strikingly similar to and consistent with the theory of evolution that Darwin proposed a couple of decades earlier in Europe. The first science fiction in India, dealing mostly with technology, was also written in Bengali—Hemlal Dutta’s “Rahasya” (The Mystery, 1882)—that centred on a completely automated house and included innovations such as automatic doorbells, burglar alarms, and self-functioning coat brushes.

One of India’s two most noted editors and critics of Speculative Fiction, Dip Ghosh and Santu Bag in their seminal book *Kalpabigyan Probandhosamagra (Kalpabigyan Essays, 2023)* published by Kalpabiswa Publication (Bengali Science Fiction and Fantasy publication in South Asia) justifies the claim and establishes the fact that Dutta’s “Rahasya” remains the first successful Science Fiction in Bengal as well as India.

However, the world of Bangla science fiction is divided into two broad regions. The science fiction is produced in West Bengal, India, and the counterpart is produced in Bangladesh. Both regions share the same language history and origin story.

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1995) edited by John Clute says that, notwithstanding the way that the term Kalpabigyan was coined on the Indian side in Paschim Banga (West Bengal) after the political decolonisation in 1947, there is almost zero scholarly or cultural contact regarding the composition of science fiction between West Bengal and Bangladesh. Though they share a common dialect and tradition, the two traditions are separate from each other at present.

For the sake of research, the researcher will discuss the authors from the Indian part of Bengal. To understand the history of science fiction in Bengal, we need to recognise the Bengal

Renaissance (1880 to 1920), which was a volatile period of acceptance of the Western (read Colonial) scientific and hi-tech advancements and preservation of the aboriginal myth and culture. During this time, there was an intermittent production of literary creations that ascertained science with Indian mythology, along with folklore and other indigenous legends.

During the Bongo Bhongo (Partition of Bengal) movement in 1905, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's writing gave birth to a new breed of science fiction, i.e., Feminist Science Fiction. Hossain was an important figure of Bengal's Renaissance; her two works, namely "Sultana's Dreams" and "Padmarag," are considered an epoch in the field of Feminist Science fiction. Her "Sultana's Dreams,"¹ published in 1905 in Indian Ladies Magazine, has been credited as the first work of Feminist Science fiction. It depicts a world run by women, with lots of gender reversal situations in a female utopia.

Since 1920, mainstream figures of Bangla literature like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore started contributing towards science fiction and science fantasy through scientific essays, fiction, and rhymes in magazines mainly aimed at adolescents and young adults. The writing style was charming, and it aspired to inculcate a scientific attitude and temperament among the young readers.

Rabindranath Tagore composed the play *Tasher Desh* ("Land of Cards"), published in 1898, which contained traits of science fiction, wherein a distant Utopian Land, all the Cards are seen ruling the province.

¹ The story was originally written in English.

The Rise of Kalpabigyan Magazines

This was just the beginning; it flourished in the twentieth century. The advent of famous magazines like *Sandesh*, *Mouchak*, *Ramdhanu*, and *Rangmashal* gave a boost to the Kalpabigyan genre.

Sandesh was started by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury in the year 1913. It was jointly edited by the father-son duo of Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury and Sukumar Ray. Sukumar Ray (an author of high caliber) published numerous essays and rhymes that contained strong doses of Kalpabigyan. Later on, some of these literary pieces became stories like “Shonir Deshe” (“In the Land of Saturn”) and “Heshoram Hushiyarir Diary” (“Diary of Heshoram Hushiyari”, 1922).

Sukumar Ray received a Western education on the continent; he was highly influenced by the English tradition of Science Fiction Literature. Therefore, his work contained the influences of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear. His famous work *HaJaBaRaLa*² (1921) contained intimations of Lewis Carroll’s popular work, *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). Even his popular story of “Heshoram Hushiyari” was a parodical take on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s work, *The Lost World* (1912). It is very noticeable that Sukumar Ray’s “Heshoram Hushiyari” inspired his celebrated son, Satyajit Ray, to pen down his character known as Professor Shonku. Doyle’s character, the temperamental Professor of Zoology, George Edward Challenger, known as Professor Challenger, remains the main source of inspiration for both Heshoram and Shonku³.

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay’s *Chander Pahar (Mountain of the Moon)*, published in 1937, is also an important landmark in Bangla literature, which contained traces of science

² Translated as *Gibberish*

³ Detailed analysis of the character development of Professor Shonku has been discussed in the research paper titled “Inspiration and Amalgamation in Character Development of Satyajit Ray’s Speculative Fiction Hero Professor Shonku” published in Lang Lit.

fiction, fantasy, adventure, and mystical narrative. The trend of Bangla youth (the main protagonist of the novel) setting out towards far-off places for the thrill of adventure inspired many of the Science Fiction texts in Bengal (Hemendra Kumar Ray used it as a recurring motif in his Science Fiction works)

Mr. Premendra Kumar Mitra also contributed hugely to the Kalpabigyan genre in Bengal. His iconic character, Ghanada, has been immensely popular with the readers. His science fiction short stories like “Mosha” (“Mosquito”), “Poka” (“Insect”), and “Nuri” (“Peeble”) have been hugely applauded by Bangla readers. Apart from the highly successful Ghanada (who is almost immortal and travels all around the globe through time and space to tackle all the baddies of the human race) series, Mitra has also been credited with the authorship of other texts like *Pipre Puran (When The Ants Came)* and *Pataler Puran (The Epic of the Underworld)*. He contributed regularly to magazines like *Ramdhanu* and *Rangmashal*.

The history of science fiction in Bangla Literature would be incomplete without the mention of Mr. Hemendra Kumar Ray. He has been credited with the authorship of some remarkable science fiction works like *Maynamatir Mayakanan (The Magical Forest of Maynamati)*, *Dragoner Dushwapno (Dragon’s Nightmare)*, and also the famous *Meghduter Mworde Agomon (The Martian Invasion)*. Mr. Hemendra Kumar Roy also dealt with the theme of parody extraordinarily in his novel *Amanushik Manush (Inhuman Human)*. It is an important aspect from a sociological point of view. In the pre-Independence era, all the texts used to neglect the drastic reality of the colonised Indian society; however, after the political decolonisation, the first decade of independence witnessed some bashing of the colonial hegemony. Roy’s *Amanushik Manush* shows such a hero with strong Aryan mythos, which was a constant trait of the Indian national movement against British imperialism. This novel was also a

champion of the subversion and parody genre of Kalpabigyan of Bangla Literature. Kalpabiswa Publications, the only Indian publication dedicated to Science Fiction and Fantasy, published two annotated volumes of all the Science fiction works written by Hemendra Kumar Ray in 2023, with notes and annotations by Professor Prodosh Bhattacharya, Dept of Bengali, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India. Ray's other Science Fiction works include *Nil Sayerer Achinpurey*(*Beyond the Blue Ocean*), *Himalayer Bhoyonkor*(*Terror in Himalaya*), *Oshombhober Deshe*(*The Land of Impossible*), and *Guhabashi Bibhishon* (*Cave Dweller Bibhishon*), among others.

Ramdhanu also published some of the Kalpabigyan short stories by Manoranjan Bhattacharya and Kshitindranarayan Bhattacharya. Some of the stories published by Bhattacharya included characters from the Indian epic *The Mahabharata* and some of the alien creatures from Mars. Thus, it shows both the modern features of technological advancements and the mythical tradition of the past, i.e., the best of both worlds. Colonialism produced a heavy influence on the literature of Bengal; thus, we can see the influence of colonial culture and literature over Bangla Science fiction Literature.

Premendra Mitra has been a household name through his creation of Ghanada. The fictional Ghanshyam Das is an urban dhoti-clad Bengali hero with an uncanny fetish for tall tales. Ghanada, as fondly called by his group of listeners, is the ultimate gulbaaz. i.e., one who likes to glorify oneself or an absurd aspect through tall tales.

He is a travesty of the so-called Bangla youth with an intellectual tag. However, this person has an encyclopedic knowledge of history, political science, mythology, and geography. Thus, he places his fictional world of scientific inventions into the core of the real world. However, not only the teens but also the adults enjoyed the mature content of the adventures of

Ghanada. Premendra Mitra had consistently written various narrative forms like short stories, novellas, novels, plays, and poems around Ghanada between 1945 to 1988. It enjoyed wide popularity among readers and various publication houses like Deb Sahitya Kutir, Kishore Gyan Bigyan, and Ananda Publishers, which published it occasionally. Anwesha Maity, a research scholar from Jadavpur University, in her referred article, mentioned that: ... “the Ghanada series was published over four decades and has a diverse repertoire of sixty-two complete short stories, six novella-length novels, one full-length novel, one play and four proverb-like poems called “Ghanar Bochon,” literally, “Ghana’s Prophetic Utterances.” They were published in the pujabarshiki annuals⁵ from publication houses like Dev Sahitya Kutir and Sarat Sahitya Bhavan (from 1945-1969), and in the children-and-young-adult monthly periodicals Anandamela (Ananda Publishers, 1973-1980) and Kishor Gyan Bigyan (1980-88). (Anwesha, 48)

His adventures tackled pressing issues of the era, including the desire for nuclear power, racial prejudice, economic inequality, and the inevitable futility of wars. Some of the Ghanada stories are set during the Second World War. Premendra Kumar Mitra’s science fiction on Ghanada has been translated into English, like *Snake and Other Stories*.

Premendra Kumar Mitra has been a prolific genius. Not only did he create the successful series on Ghanada, but his next series was based on a character known as Mamababu, which was also part of the Kalpabigyan genre. Apart from the series of adventures, he produced science fiction novels like *Kuhaker Deshe (In the Land of Magic)* and *Surya Jekhane Neel (Where the Sun is Blue)*.

Kshitindranarayan Bhattacharya also composed his Kalpabigyan work *Dhumketu (Meteorite)*. Leela Majumder, the popular children’s author and translator, also published her Kalpabigyan text, *Batash Bari (Wind House)*

Parashuram (his real name was Rajsekhar Basu), one of the most admirable authors in Bangla Sahitya, tried his hand at the genre of Kalpabigyan. Basu's creations contained traces of alternate history, social satire, political mockery, alchemy, fable, and lastly science fiction fantasy. His science fiction works earned rave reviews and are considered among the best to date. The entry by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay in the *Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute, claims that Rajshekhar Basu, who composed under the nom de plume Parashuram, penned down a few critical short stories that might be considered among the best works of Bangla science fiction. He composed the "Ulatpuran" ("Upside Down", published in 1927) which dealt with the alternate history of colonialism, a science fiction tale entitled "Gamanush Jatir Katha" ("The Story of the Gamma-Men", 1945), and also "Mangalik" ("Martian", 1955) which was an interpretation about world politics from the viewpoint of a Martian.

One of the most imperative factors in the growth of Bangla Kalpabigyan is the growth of various science fiction magazines. They were *Ramdhanu and Rangmashal*, the researcher has already mentioned their contribution to this specific field. *Sandesh*, which was edited by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury and Sukumar Ray, was revived by the legendary filmmaker and writer Satyajit Ray. Leela Majumder used to contribute regularly to this magazine. Ray's famous scientist protagonist, Professor Shonku, appeared in various editions of *Sandesh*. Apart from the creation of the Speculative Fiction series around Professor Shonku, Satyajit Ray wrote noteworthy Science fiction stories like "Bonkubabur Bondhu" ("Bankubabu's Friend"), "Moyurkonthi Jelly" ("Rainbow Jelly"), and "Brihachanchu" ("Big Beak"). Adrish Bardhan's hero Natboltu Chakra also made its mark in the world of Bangla Kalpabigyan. Satyajit Ray created a series around Professor Shonku, Adrish Bardhan did it with Natboltu Chakra, and Syed Mustafa Siraj launched his scientist hero Chandrakanta through his science fiction novels like

Saharar Santras (The Terror of Sahara) and *Pakkhiraj (Winged Horse)*. Rebanta Goswami enthralled the audience with a series of Kalpabigyan centering around Professor Satyaki Som. Siddhartha Ghosh came up with a series of Kalpabigyan around the character of Jhontu Mama. Debraj Moulick, in his blog post, reviews Siddhartha Ghosh's *Kalpabigyan Rachana Samagra 1*, which reads as:

As a vigorous reader, you will come across science stories, scientific stories, and yes, science fiction, speculative fiction(?) among others. I have always enjoyed stories that revolve around a central character, like the adventures of Professor Shonku, Ghanshyam Das, and Natboltu Chakra, etc. Today, I have another endearing character – Jhontu Mama on my list. The most astonishing fact about these stories is the contextual relevance you can find in them. These were written and published almost forty years ago yet it feels so contemporary and yeah, millennial too. (“Siddhartha Ghosh Kalpa Bigyan Samagra”, an Easy Book Review)

The Bengali Kalpabigyan genre was boosted by the four periodicals *Ashchorjo*, *Kishor Gyan Bigyan*, *Fantastic*, and *Vismoy*. The four magazines mentioned were nurtured under the seasoned editorship of Adrish Bardhan, Ranen Ghosh, Amitananda Das, and Sujit Dhar. These four magazines, along with the reloaded *Sandesh*, brought more passion and energy into the tradition of Bangla Kalpabigyan. They used to publish science fiction stories, and short stories, along with the translated versions of British and American science fiction authors. They also reprinted some of the prominent old science fiction tales from Bengal. These magazines also enjoyed the penmanship of almost all the reputed authors of the time, like Syed Mustafa Siraj,

Adrish Bardhan, Satyajit Ray, Leela Majumder, Premendra Mitra, Ranen Ghosh, Amitananda Das, Manoranjan Dey, Dilip Raychaudhuri, Samarjit Kar, and Enakshi Chattopadhyay. The author list consisted of famed writers as well as new-age authors with altogether a different approach toward science fiction.

Later on, most of these science fiction tales became part of anthologies. Most of the stories of Syed Mustafa Siraj became part of *Kishore Kalpabigyan Samagra*. These prolific writers were not only limited to the print media, few of their stories were adapted to radio. Four prominent authors came together to create a radio novel, *Sabuj Manush (The Green Man)*. These episodes were written by Premendra Mitra, Adrish Bardhan, Dilip Roy Chowdhury, and Satyajit Ray chronologically. Later on, in 2000 AD, Radio Mirchi, a popular FM station in Kolkata, launched their radio story series Sunday Suspense, where they adapted a few science fiction thrillers.

In the short span between 1963 and 1966, distinguished science researcher and storyteller Dilip Roy Chowdhury developed a distinctive universe of science fiction narratives. In her article, “Ek Bigyan Gobeshoker Kalpabigyan Sadhona”(The Science Fiction Pursuit of a Science Researcher, 2024), Priyanka Mitra, a science fiction research scholar from Rabindra Bharati University, traces Dilip Roy Chowdhury's entire body of work and notes that eight stories and one novel of the Kalpabigyan genre were published in *Torun Tirtha* magazine. Together with Premendra Mitra and Adrish Bardhan, he wrote the Kalpabigyan tale, “Bangali Mohakashjatri” (“Bengali Space Traveller”), which was published in *Ascharya* and became extremely popular when Akashbani Kolkata adapted it for radio on March 3, 1965.

Adrish Bardhan has been a prolific author and editor. he published *Sabuj Manush* in the 1981 issue of *Fantastic*. Apart from coining the term Kalpabigyan, editing some of the

influential science fiction magazines, and establishing the hero Natbolu Chakra, he authored numerous science fiction texts. Bardhan also composed the text *Kalir Seshe* (“The End of Kaliyuga”). Adrish Bardhan has been an essential icon in Bengali Speculative Fiction with a huge body of work. This includes his edited magazines, collections, translations (Bengali translations of some Science Fiction works of H.P Lovecraft, Jules Verne, and Arthur Conan Doyle among others), and original works, establishing the first Science Fiction Cine club and publishing ventures like Alpha-Beta publishing, Dipti Printers and finally inspiring the new breed of Science Fiction aficionados across everywhere where the Bengali language exists. Mousumi Adak in her research article traces the holistic contribution of Adrish Bardhan in the development of Science Fiction and concludes her article about the influence of Bardhan being the most influential name in the nourishment of Kalpabigyan; Adrish Bardhan, a pioneer of science fiction in a regional Indian language, is known for creating fictional worlds that subtly convey serious messages. His science fiction encourages readers to become environmentally cognizant and socially responsible citizens. Bardhan’s work is characterized by its postmodernist nature, providing a futuristic portrayal of human predicaments.” (Mousumi,243). Kalpabiswa Publication has been celebrating the birthday of Adrish Bardhan as the Indian Science Fiction Day on December 01 since 2022, Dip Ghosh in his Facebook Post writes about the vital importance of Bardhan, stating; “Adrish Bardhan’s legacy as a champion of Indian SF remains unmatched, and his contributions laid the foundation for the SF culture we cherish today.”

Even Anish Deb contributed regularly to the world of science fiction, and his stories, later on, became a part of the collected anthologies *Kishor Kalpabigyan Samagra* and *Shera Kalpabigyan*. *Kishor Kalpabigyan Samagra* is one of the indispensable books in the Bangla Kalpabigyan genre. Over the years, it has anthologized some of the most popular science fiction

stories of all time. It is a very well-received book among the young readers and the adults in Bengal. Anish Deb's Science Fiction works can be categorized into four categories, namely Science Fiction for teenagers, Science Fiction for Adults, Science Fiction in translation, and Research Work on the History of Science Fiction. He authored four Science Fiction novels and twenty-four Science Fiction stories for teenagers. Deb created memorable characters like Inspector Rony, Chotka, and Bishwakaku. His Science Fiction Horrors include "Tira Groher Bhoyonkor "(Horrors of Planet Tira). His adult Science Fiction novel includes *Teish Ghonta Shat Minute (Twenty-Three Hours Sixty Minutes)*. Santu Bag and Dip Ghosh⁴ Mention that this novel captures a death game in futuristic Calcutta. They highlight the crucial position of Anish Deb as the last standing soldier (referred to as the Last Mohican.⁵ by Bag and Ghosh) of the Bengali Speculative Fiction genre, enriched by the stalwarts who inspired, captivated, nurtured, and boosted it.

Bimal Kar, the Sahitya Academy Award winner and the author of the highly successful novel *Balika Badhu* (which got a popular movie adaptation), also tried his hand at the Kalpabigyan genre in Bengal. His science fiction work includes *Harano Jeeper Rahasya (The Mystery of the Missing Jeep)*, *Mandargader Rahasyamay Jyotsna (The Mysterious Moonlight of Mandargada)*, etc.

Not only Bimal Kar, but even Sunil Ganguly has also produced some work along the lines of the Kalpabigyan genre. He is one of the most critically acclaimed as well as a popular authors from Bengal. He won the Sahitya Academy Award for his work *Shei Somoy* (1985). His work has become the base of many cinematic jewels, including those of Satyajit Ray, Tapan

⁴ Bag Santu and Dip Ghosh, *Kalpabijnan Probandho Sangraha*. Kolkata: Kalpabiswa Publication, 2023. Print. Pg-46-56

⁵ Lee Manning's work *The Last Mohican*, a riveting saga of the final resistance of the Red Indians against the colonial army.

Sinha, and Goutam Ghosh. He is also credited with the creation of the popular character Kakababu. His science fiction protagonist is known as Nil Manush, and he was physiologically affected due to the contamination of alien technology.

Enakshi Chattopadhyay remains a significant author who has contributed to the growth of Kalpabigyan. Her science fiction works were regularly published in *Vismoy*, *Anandamela*, and *Kishor Gyan Bigyan*, among others. Her works have been collected in books like *Manush Jedin Hashbe Na*⁶ (1975), published by Blue Bell. It includes stories like “Manush Jedin Hashbe Na,” “Dhoa,” “Samudragupta,” and “Amaraboti,” among others. Her contribution to the field of Bengali science fiction received popularity from the 1970s to the 1990s. *Anandamela Magazine* regularly featured her works in their Annual Autumn (read Durga Puja) editions. *Enakshi Chattopadhyay Kalpabigyan Rachana Samagra* (2022), which consists of forty-three science fiction stories, was published by Kalpabiswa Publications.

Another author who deserves mention over here is Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, a regularly featured author in the *Anandamela Magazine* (Durga Puja special edition). He never repeats himself; his uncanny writing style and simple plotting make his stories unique. His works have been included in *Kishor Upanyas Samagra*, published by Ananda Publishers. His contribution to the field of Kalpabigyan stretches from fantasy to thrillers and from scientific invention to alien contact with a tinge of supernatural activities. The only recurring element in his work is the evolution of comical elements. His works include *Gourer Koboch (Shield of Gour)*, *Patalghar (The Underground Chamber)*, which has been adapted into a national award-winning Bangla feature film by the same name, *Dudhsaheber Dwip (Island of Dudhsaheb)*, *Bhuture Ghor* (*The Ghostly Watch*), and much more. Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay successfully

⁶ Translated as When People Won't Laugh

engaged adult readers with his Kalpabigyan novel, *Banadebi O Pachtu Payra*, and *Kalpabigyan Samagra* (a collection of Kalpabigyan works).

Conclusion: Void in Kalpabigyan Readership, Paving Path for Kalpabiswa

A personal tragedy of Adrish Bardhan resulted in the shutting down of *Aschorjo*; until it was rebranded as *Fantastic*, though, this version also published fantasy and horror stories, shifting its core focus from Science Fiction. Nevertheless, it failed to maintain a steady growth of bibliophiles, owing to irregular publications and its dependence on reprints of earlier works. *Vismoy* also published Science Fiction, though it had a shorter run of just two years. Bengali magazines like *Anandamela*, *Shuktara*, *Kishorebharati* and *Joydhak Web* published a few Kalpabigyan special issues, yet, it led to the development of a fake tendency among the readers that Kalpabigyan/Science Fiction/ Speculative Fiction is written mainly only for children and teenagers, owing to the lack of consciousness about the existence of texts written for the mature audience in this particular genre until the emergence of *Kalpabiswa*, the first science fiction and fantasy-based magazine for the mature audience. A discernible drop in the production and consumption of speculative literature was the consequence of this abrupt gap in Bengali Speculative Fiction, which was brought on by the irregularity of publication between the late 1980s and the early 2000s, as well as the stalling of the development of a devoted Science Fiction readership in Bengal. There was a generational divide in readership and a lack of reliable platforms for authors to present their work as a result of the closure of many early SF publications or their irregular releases.

However, the establishment of *Kalpabiswa* Magazine in 2016 successfully filled this void. *Kalpabiswa* was established to revive and broaden the appeal of Bengali speculative

fiction. In addition to giving modern writers a stable platform, the publication also rekindled readers' interest in the genre. The magazine was crucial in bringing together new perspectives, republishing lost masterpieces, and fostering discussions about science fiction and fantasy. Through its devoted work, *Kalpabiswa* helped to restore Bengali speculative fiction as a vibrant and changing literary genre.

Kalpabiswa has covered numerous topics related to Kalpabigyan and global science fiction in its themed issues, including climate fiction, feminism in science fiction, the Golden Age of science fiction, punk subgenres, and science fiction in Japanese literature (such as manga and anime), science fiction in Russian literature, and Hindi Literature. In 2018, *Kalpabiswa* organized the inaugural Science Fiction Conference of Eastern India with assistance from Jadavpur University. Since then, it has been religiously publishing magazines(webzines), short story collections, anthologies, original literary works (paperback, hardcover), translated texts, and comics.

Note of Thanks

Rakesh Das (Translator & Editor, *Kalpabiswa* Magazine)

Santu Bag (Scholar and Editor, *Kalpabiswa* Magazine & Publications)

Dip Ghosh (Scholar, Translator, and Editor, *Kalpabiswa* Magazine & Publications)

Rwik Mukhopadhyay (Avid Science Fiction Reader)

Shubhadeep Jana, PhD Research Scholar, Presidency University, Kolkata.

Notes:

1. There have been claims of “Ascharya Vrittant” (a Hindi language science fiction story by Ambika Datta Vyasa) published in Peeyush Parvan magazine being the first Indian science fiction; however, no recorded text is available to confirm the claim.
2. Veteran Science Fiction author, Enakshi Chattopadhyay, translated Premendra Mitra’s work, *Pipre Puran*, in English as *When The Ants Came*.

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