There are few individuals whose exit from the world is as devastating. A pioneer in bringing traditional Bangla theatre to an urban audience as a writer of incredible depth and versatility, the compiler of the country's only Bangla anthology on theatre, an ardent researcher of indigenous performing art forms, an unconventional teacher, a philosopher, nature lover -- the list of titles for this remarkable man is endless. Thus his untimely death at the peak of his literary career is all the more shattering. Yet he has left behind him the richest and most unique legacy of epic drama that will be cherished and celebrated for eternity.

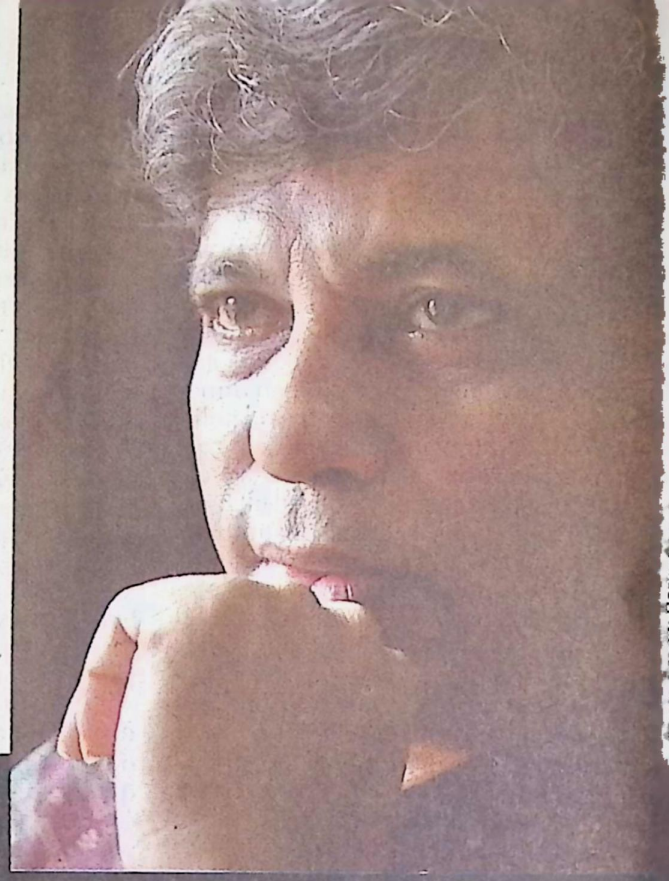


Photo Credit: Barin Ghosh.

An Uncompro

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

The journey towards his dream to establish a distinct Bangla narrative stream has been a long one and intricately parallels Selim Al Deen's sojourn of life, which has been anything but ordinary. It is a journey of a precocious young boy whose extraordinary intimacy with his roots and his relentless search for knowledge eventually collides in adulthood, to create this literary genius whose multi-dimensional intellectual prowess has been compared to that of Rabindranath.

SWM speaks to some of those closest to him to conjure the image of Selim Al Deen, the man and the uncompromising master of Bangla theatre.

Al Deen's brush with writing began early, when he was a schoolboy being shuttled from one place to another -- Chittagong, Sylhet, Rangpur and Comilla -- because of his father's postings as a customs officer. He also made frequent visits to his home village in Feni. His acquaintance with rural landscape and culture began while he was growing up and provided the basis of his writings later on. When he went to Sylhet with his father for instance, Selim, then in class one or two, saw the life of the Khasis; it was many years later that he wrote 'Ekti Marma Rupkatha' (A Marma Fairytale) about the Marma, setting the precedent of bringing elements from ethnic groups to the stage.

Born in Sonagaji, Feni on November 18, 1948 (this was his official date of birth, his age had been raised when he was admitted to school) to Mofizuddin Ahmed, a deputy superintendent of customs, and Feroza Khatun, a housewife, Selim had eight other siblings. His father was an honest man which meant that the family as large as it