changed to 'Ghum Ney' (Sleepless) and Biporit Tamasha for radio, made people sit up and take notice of this young man who was churning out intense dramas at the drop of a hat. Around this time he also wrote *Aniket Annyeshan* based on the life of Sultan Mahmud bin Tuglaq.

A series of plays followed; Al Deen wrote *Sharpa Bishawak Golpo* in 1973 (that eerily echoed the horrific events of 1975), *Jwandis O Bibidho Baloon*, Explosive *O Mul Mukh Dekha, Charkakrar Documentary* and they were all written in the western theatre tradition.

The late 70s, however, proved to be a transitional period for Al Deen when he began to become seriously interested in moving away from western influences and trying to discover an original form for Bangla theatre. He wrote a play based on Kalidas's *Shakuntala*. "He totally changed the myth," says Nasiruddin Yuosuff, director and founder of Dhaka Theatre. "What was so beautiful about it was that he did not highlight a single individual but encompassed a thousand years experience into the play."

At the same time Yuosuff and Al Deen were involved in the 'Rock the Street' movement that promoted street drama and brought the performances literally, to the people. "We wanted to establish the fact that theatre is not just something that provides entertainment or information, it is part of everyday life."

In 1974, Al Deen's marriage to Begumzadi Meherunnessa (Parul) provided him with an unexpected opportunity to seek and find the roots of Bangla theatre. A political scuffle led to Al Deen going to Korotia Sa' Dat University College where he met the shy, conservative daughter of the principle and decided that she was the one he wanted as a life partner. While visiting his parents-in-law in Taluknagar, Manikgonj, Al Deen came across the rich cultural traditions which was characteristic to that region. He went to the Azhar Boyati's mela to see bare-chested musicians from Assam singinging about Moulana Bhashani, he heard Pala Gaan, Kabir Gaan, Gazir Gaan and decided he would form a 'gram (village) theatre with his friends to see whether they could start a Bangla contemporary theatre using these rural traditions.

He was also moved by the natural beauty of the countryside -- the rich mustard fields, the birds and colours. Later when he joined Jahangirnagar University as a teacher in the Bangla Department, he met Afsar Ahmed, his student and later colleague, fellow researcher and friend. He would often accompany Ahmed to his village home in Jamsha Kaligong where he met Hakim Ali Gain and other artistes.

The 80s were a demoralising time for Al Deen, Yousuff and their contemporaries as they witnessed the disintegration of the spirit of Muktijuddho as the politicians compromised with army rule. "Selim used to say that unless we began a kind of cultural revolution we would lose our identities as Bangalis or adivasis," says Yousuff. He said, "It's no use being a weed on the tree of the west, we must find our own artistic expression. So he searched for all these art forms that existed over a thousand years and their evolution was clipped short by the advent of the British where we were forced to adopt a different civilisation and culture."

Shakuntala led the way to his most innovative and celebrated epic drama *Kitton Khola*. It proved to be one of his most original works in terms of narrative, style, language and completely defied the conventional grammar of western theatre. The backdrop of *Kitton Khola* is a village razed to the ground by the Pak Army in 71; a single tree in an open space becomes the central point around which a mela or fair and a mazaar (shrine) originates, creating the venue for people from different walks of life to congregate. "Through *Kitton Khola* he was trying to bring in the topography of

Accolades of a Literary Genius

Selim Al Deen has received numerous awards for his work including the Ekushey Padak (2007), Bnagla Academy Literature Award (1984), National Film Award, Kathak Literature Award and Award for Best Television Playwright. In 1995 Al Deen completed his PhD from Jahanginagar University on Medieval Bangla Theatre. He compiled Bangla Natyakosh, the only anthology of Bangla drama-related terms and forms of traditional theatre. Al Deen's plays have been included in the curriculula of University of Dhaka, Jahanginagar University and rabindra Bharati University in India. His play Chaka has been translated in English by Syed Jamil Ahmed (Professor of Theatre at DU) and performed in New York and Delhi and later adapted as a film by Morshedul Islam which won many awards in Europes. Al Deen's work has been appreciated in Kolkata theatre circles and many theatre troupes have staged his plays in Kolkata.

Almost all of Al Deen's works have been published. He has in addition, written innumerable television plays, several plays for radio and countless articles, stories and plays in various newspapers and magazines.



Begumzadi Meherunnessa (Parul)
Selim Al Deen's wife.