



## River in Bengali Novels in the Context of Recent Geographical Study

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### ABSTRACT

The history of geography is to search whether there is any relation between physical environment and human activities exist or not. But the relation between man and nature is very simple to hear, very little in size, but at all very big and complex to analyze. It is not very easy to categories human movement, intention and means of interaction with nature and other members in a community or society in a specific pattern in perspective of time and space. Precision, perception and prediction of man-nature interaction are the sole objective of every geographical study. Therefore, to reach the target Geographers must have to depend on other disciplines of knowledge. In this respect, the present paper deals with the various aspects of river-based and river-centric Bengali novels and its applicability in geographical research.

### KEYWORDS

environment, man, novel, river, subaltern

### Introduction

The human life is always vibrated amidst the conflict between these two entities-rest and motion. The flow and pattern of life is captured under the grasp of the river. Life gets its fullness by the combination of river current and riverside. Ancient human civilizations and earliest settlements grew around the river. Therefore, the river becomes the container and carrier of profession and life of people. The essence of value based life and a better balanced society as a whole are centering round the river centric literature. Poetics and fundamental truth of life are found together in the river and in the literature centering the river.

### Objective

The objectives of the present paper are as follows:

- To enquire, how the novelists as per their vision interrelate and interpret the relation between river and the man from the geographical point of view.
- To revisit the inter-relation among the river, man and society by studying river-based and river-centric Bengali novels written in the twentieth century.

### Database and Methods

The present paper is based on primary as well as secondary sources of information all of which are available in the published form. Actually, the primary sources of information are based on the written text of river-based and river-centric Bengali novels. On the other hand, the secondary sources of information are gathered from the works of earlier researchers belonging to different disciplines of knowledge.

This study is completely interdisciplinary in nature. Not only geographical yardsticks, but also the different methods used in the Social Sciences and Literatures have been adopted to prepare this paper. The man –environment relationship in Bengali written texts centering the river has been analyzed in Radical Geographical perspectives.

### A brief history

So many novels in the world literature have written concerning the river. It is noteworthy to mentions some of them like, 'Life on the Mississippi' by Mark Twain(1883), 'Rider to The Sea' of J. M. Synge(1904), 'Fishermen of Santa Barbara' by Anna Seghers (1928), 'And Quiet Flows The Don' of Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokov (1928), 'The Son of Fisherman' of Vilietz Latzish (1934), 'The Oldman and The Sea' of Ernest Hemingway(1952). Many river centric novels have been seen

the light of the day by the writers of different languages in India. Among them, *Chingri* (*Chemmeen* in Malayalam) of Thakazhi Shibshankar Pillai (1956) is worth mentioning.

The tale of the river spread throughout many works such as *Charyapada*, *Shrikrishnakirtan*, *Vaishnav Padabali*, *Manashamongal* and *Chandimongal* (Chattopadhyay, 2008). The novelists such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Bibhuti-bhusan Bandopadhyay have referred to in their works, the descriptions and importance of the river in their own style.

Even a great scientist, Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose (1894) is confused by the mystery of the river. It is observed through the article entitled "Bhagirathir Utsha Sandhane" (In Search of the Source of the Bhagirathi):

'The Ganga flows nearby to our house... it seemed that these infinite torrents were flowing on day by day without turning back. But from where was this endless current issuing? Is there no end to it?'

River-based novels have found its place in the modern Bengali literature following the path of Shailajananda Mukhopadhyay, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay and Achintya Kumar Sengupta. The aforementioned novelists have not only used the rivers of their stories but it ultimately determined the character, ideas and destinies of their great novels.

### Discussion

Novel is the art of life or more specifically it can be said that the art reflects the life as a whole. The human face is reflected in the mirror as per the writer's vision of life, society and country through time. It emphasizes on and documents the physical geographical environment of a place; life, livelihood, customs and speech of its people in a serious explanatory way rather than giving mere background information. A novel is not just the descriptions of various ways of society; it is not the history of society. It is the reflection of joy and woe of social human beings in perspective of time and space. Therefore, novel never remains neutral to society (Bhattacharya, 1987). It may be local, regional, or universal; or it may be river-based or river-centric depending on its theme and objective. In a river-based novel, a river is essential in the theme but it may not be essential one in people's livelihood. A river leaves her impact in extended life of people which is graceful, spiritual and pious to sustain lifeline in hereditary way. This life line is a universal one. But it may be a community life or not (Chattopadhyay, 2013).

*Alaler Gharer Dulal* is recognized as the first river-based novel in Bengali literature (Mukhopadhyay, 2013), although proper river-based novels are found in the writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. Novels like *Chandrasekhar*, *Bisbrikha*, *Rajani*, *Indira*, *Debichoudhurani* and *Kapalkundala* fall in this category. Tagore did not write river-based novel, but river has come in various ways in the novels of *Gora* and *Noukadubi*. We find river as a living entity in his short stories like, *Chhuti*, *Shuva*, *Postmaster*, *Khokababur Protyabartan* and *Atithi*. He has mentioned thirty rivers in his poetry (Ghosh, 2013). Among them river Padma, Ganga, Dhaleswari and Kopai are noteworthy. River has come in various dimensions in such novels like *Bardidi* and *Srikanta* of Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay, an artist of village life. A list of major river based novels in Bengali literature is tabulated below (Table 1):

**Table 1**  
**Name of the river-based novels and novelists in Bengali Literature**

Sl.No.	River based Novel	Name of Novelist
1	Kalindi	Tarashankar Bandopadhyay
2	Hansuli Banker Upakatha	Tarashankar Bandopadhyay
3	Tarini Majhi	Tarashankar Bandopadhyay
4	Ichhamati	Bhibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay
5	Charkasem	Amarendra Ghosh
6	Kando Nadi Kando	Syed Waliullah
7	Tistaparer Britanta	Debesh Roy
8	Kusipranganer Chitti	Bhibhuti Bhushan Mukhopadhyay
9	Padma;Kopobati	Pramathanath Bishi
10	Dhalehwari	Prabodhbandhu Adhikari
11	Mahananda	Narayan Gangopadhyay
12	Mayurakshi	Saroj Kumar Roy Choudhury
13	Padma Pramatta Nadi	Subodh Basu
14	Panchatapa	Asutosh Mukhopadhyay
15	Tungabhadrar Tire	Sharadindu Bandopadhyay
16	Antarjoli Yatra	Kamal Kumar Majumdar
17	Uddharanpurer Ghat	Abadhut
18	Ekti Jaler Rekha	Atin Bandopadhyay
19	Garh Shrikhanda	Amiya Bhusan Majumdar
20	Trinabhumi	Syed Mustafa Siraj
21	Yamuna Ka Tir	Mahasweta Devi
22	Nadir Sange Dekha	Baren Gangopadhyay
23	Ganga Ekti Nadir Naam	Shyamal Gangopadhyay
24	Subarnarekha;Nadir Mato	Amar Mitra
25	Asti Bhagirathir Tire	Nihar Ranjan Mitra
26	Dhaleswari Naditire	Tarapada Roy
27	Nadi Mati Aranya	Tapan Bandopadhyay
28	Gangabataran	Lokenath Bhattacharya
29	Gahin Gang	Sadhan Chattopadhyay
30	Grihakatar	Narendranath Mitra
31	Sukh Dukkher Dheu	Narendranath Mitra
32	Banya	Narendranath Mitra
33	Paddar Poli Dip	Abu Ishak
34	Nadi O Nari	Humayun Kabir
35	Jol Jungler Kabya	Sunil Gangopadhyay
36	Samudrachar O Bidrohira	Bipradas Barua
37	Prabahini Ganga	Gunamoy Manna

Compiled from various sources by the author

The fascinating image of river has been represented in various dimensions in the above mentioned novels. In some writings river and life have been equalized, someone has represented river from historical point of view, someone has compared nature of river with the nature of human being and, in some

cases, river has become a companion of human happiness and sorrow, sometimes the river has become the symbol of beauty or shadowy in grief. The narratives of historical, social, secular and family life are found within these river-based novels.

The great novelists, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (1894–1950), Tarashankar Bandopadhyay (1898–1971) and Manik Bandopadhyay (1908–56), as well as Satinath Bhaduri (1906–65) and Adwaita Mallabarman (1914–51), all focus on the Bengal countryside, but their visions are not alike. Satinath Bhaduri's *Jagari* (The Vigil, 1945) and *Dhonrai Charit Manas* (The Story of Dhonrai, 1949–51) depict the inter relation between man and soil of rural North and East Bihar from socio-anthropological point of view (Bhattacharya, 1987). But these two novels are not considered as river-based novel. In the twentieth century, the influence of a new kind of social realism and modernist techniques of representation as well as the nakedness of frustration, perplexity and hopelessness of the rural poor and the urban unemployed, exerted its imprint in their creative writings. At the same time, the lyrical power of novelists like Bibhutibhushan and Adwaita express the beauty of the landscapes and the dignity of those inhabitants in their novels, whereas Manik Bandopadhyay and Samaresh Basu wanted to search in their river-centric novels, *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *Ganga* by placing man, more specifically the social man, in the centre on the background of the existing socio-economic condition, and asked why is life of the laborious subaltern people so hardy, so harsh, so poor, deprived and exploited?

If we find a pleasant beauty of rural nature in Bibhutibhushan's fiction, his contemporary Tarashankar Bandopadhyay writes down in a classic style of the gloomy social realities of the 1930s and 1940s in Bengal. His greatest novels deal with rural life at a time of transition, describing a decaying feudalism, the increasing impoverishment of the peasantry and a new profiteering middle class. Central to his vision is a sense of place. River, land and rural population dominate his writings, as in *Hansuli Banker Upakatha* (The Tale of the River's Bend, 1947), capturing the inexorable decline of a poor village community struggling against economic exploitation and the depredations of war. It is again the story of a community which tries to restrain its young men within traditional boundaries, and shows how it fails. This is a great document of how the railway work breaks up rural communities, put already to tearing strain by rural stagnation.

The first river-centric novel in Bengali literature was written by novelist Manik Bandopadhyay in 1936. In this novel, the river is the main stay to keep directly or indirectly peoples, life, livelihood, trade, economy and culture and which preserves the picture of those lives and livelihoods or the regional and spiritual emotions of human beings. Manik Bandopadhyay, as a communist and a radical social analyst had rejected Tagore's lyrical idealism. His early reading of Freud is evident in the psychological complexities of his novels and shorter fiction, but his mature work focuses not only on the individual psyche but also on what he called 'the tragedy of land-relations'. The realism he practices exposes the repressions and anxieties of the urban middle class, as well as the changes in rural society as a consequence of peasant upheavals, political insurgency and the famine of 1943. *Padma Nadir Majhi* (The Boatman of the River Padma) is an intense, complex depiction of rural societies, of existences under threat, of sexual and moral adjustments, exploitation and hypocrisy. In this novel, he deals with the life of downtrodden fishermen. How they catch fish, how the fishes are transported and marketed, how the middlemen reap the harvest at the cost of the fishermen, how the fishermen are deprived, how the fishermen live in the slums with poverty, torture, disease and death, yet how they wage struggle against nature-these are the things, Manik Bandopadhyay has realistically depicted in their regional character (Mukhopadhyay, 1973). This novel also depicts the advent of capitalist intervention in the small business enterprises of fishing.

If Padmanadir Majhi is the greatest example of the 'river-cen-

tric novel' in Bengali literature, in large part a deltaic plain defined more by water than by land, that genre is consolidated by Adwaita Mallabarman's classic novel of fishermen's lives, *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* (Titash is the Name of a River), lyrically capturing the speech, rhythms and rituals of the *Malo* fishing community while mentioning the inescapability of its decline. It is an extremely powerful and poignant evocation of the destitution of riparian community mainly the fisher folks and marginal peasants when a river dies, and simultaneous attack come against their cultural bond. A hint of social evolution of *Malo* people is glittered in this novel.

In reality, the people who are living attaching to the soil have the capability to observe the conditions of weather, colour of the clouds, water speed in the river, colour and nature of waves of river water, concentration of fishes in the river as they have been inhabited the region since time immemorial. They have been living in peace with their environment and leading lives of happiness, governed by an ancient and strong tie with the earth's resources: land and water. Their land and water are their history, unchallengeable receptacles of their collective memory, permanent sites of great spiritual and religious significance, the foundation of civilization and life, yet, their life and livelihood process run through uncertainties. We find this picture in the river-centric novel- *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam*. River is the only light to the rural people, whose life is encircled by social, economic and political darkness from the time immemorial.

Samaresh Basu is a versatile and popular novelist in the modern Bengali literature. His commitment in the novel was that, in the Capitalist society, the life of the subaltern people remains under privileged, uncertain and deprived from the basic necessities of life although they performed hard work and take life risks during their works. In his novel *Ganga*, he portrayed the miserable life of the fishing community under the twin pressure of middleman and local money lenders. Yet to earn for living, they take decision to go to sea for catching fishes besides river *Ganga* and dream expectation of new life.

Manik Bandopadhyay, Adwaita Mallabarman and Samaresh Basu, all three are underpinned Marxists in Bengal (Biswas, 2011) and their familiarity established as a radical analyzer, because their rebellion and radical analysis against the mechanistic artificiality, narrowness, selfishness, mask conceal cruelty of the human behaviour of the middle classes. They ushering themselves in their novels for those who are living in the lowest strata of the society, perceived their struggle for living through poverty, starvation and destitution and search way to escape from the clutches of exploitation by the then middle classes of Bengal, money lenders and nouveaux riches.

## Conclusion

After the thread-bare discussion of the central issues of the river-centric and river-based Bengali Novels, it can be mentioned that Manik is the first writer in Bengali literature who used his novels consciously for changing the society through the socialization of the means of production and distribution of goods as contrasted to capitalization which emphasizes private ownership and management. He did not think that the duty of a novelist is only to represent the destitution of poorest of the poor, but to eradicate poverty from the roots of the society. With a view to fulfill this aim, he had also participated actively in politics. And it is thought that he framed the character of Hossain Miya in river-centric novel- *Padma Nadir Majhi* for the establishment of new settlement in a river island which will be free from social deprivation and exploitation.

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