Introduction

Debesh Roy is an important name in the Bengali prose fiction of the post-independence period. He excelled equally in novels, stories as well as in essays. The epical immensity as well as the textural novelty that has characterized his novels received wide attention of the critics. The appreciation of the establishment and translation in different languages shows the importance of the author. Of course, Debesh Roy has never been a populist author, a writer of best sellers; but that does not minimize his position as a novelist in Bengali literature. A very important region in Bengal and its residents, the Rajbanshi community had hitherto been unrepresented in the prose fictions, and it has been the task of Debesh Roy to place this community in the literature with minute details of their life. This has enriched the Bengali literature immensely.

Debesh Roy had spent more than three decades of his life in Jalpaiguri in North Bengal. As a political activist he had closely been associated with the life of the Rajbanshis in the rural areas. His fictions on the background of the life of the Rajbanshis are a sort of documentation based on field-study. These again, have a sound political basis with a deep political undertone.

The present scholar has been enamoured by the novels of Debesh Roy since his tender age particularly for being closely associated with the rural life of North Bengal. The early zealous reading of the works of the author during those days were had no other intention but simply for the love of the theme and style of the works, but the impact of that reading
indeed had a role behind the decision to undertake the same as the topic of research in the later days.

The number of works in book form on the life of the Rajbanshis is rather limited, and as such, we had to take recourse to the articles published in different periodicals at different times. Again, the works on Debesh Roy are also limited, and even though some reference to his texture, his aesthetics, linguistics or fictional design were available in some essays, yet there is hardly any writing available on the works of Debesh Roy based on the life of the Rajbanshi society living on the banks of Tista. We, however, have two institutional research works on Debesh Roy--one a Ph.D. thesis by Keshab Chandra Das in North Bengal University, and the other an M.Phil dissertation under Gauhati University by Pabitra Roy.

The objective of the present work is to provide an overview of the life of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal as has been reflected in the prose-fictions of Debesh Roy, who sought to present the society and culture on the geographical background of North Bengal. There are evidences of literary creations based on field-studies, a sort of Docu-fiction, wherein the author has drawn upon the life of a certain community and has framed his plot on it. The novel, *The Leopard Priestess* by Robert Southerland Rattray and *The Clan of the Cave Bear* by Jean M. Auel may be cited as examples of the kind. The works of Debesh Roy under the present study are, in fact, the product of his intense field study on the land and life of the Rajbanshi community. Ours is an attempt to have a glimpse of the social distinctiveness of the Rajbanshis by subjecting the fictions to an analytical and critical study, coupled with a parallel study of other non-fictional works on the history, society and culture of the community that has a relevance to our study in the present context.
In the First chapter of the thesis we had an overview of the North Bengal-experience of the author, and have provided a brief account of the novels and stories of Debesh Roy which were particularly cast on the locale of Jalpaiguri.

In the Second chapter we have taken an overview of the background that formed the fictional world of Debesh Roy. The geographical background of the Tista region under the backdrop of the Rajbanshi society settling there has also been sought to be projected along with a general overview of the demographic pattern of the land.

In the third chapter, an attempt has been made to study the general lifestyle of the Rajbanshis with all their food habit, food preparation system, their dresses and costumes, apparels, ornaments, and also their tools and appliances, house building materials, as well as their concept of vastu.

In the fourth chapter, the religious beliefs, rites and rituals have been studied. The rituals of the Rajbanshis related to birth-death-marriage cycle, social etiquettes, social norms, and the folk deities and religious festivities, are dealt with here.

In the fifth chapter the culture of the Rajbanshis on a broader perspective has been brought under study. A survey of the words and vocabularies, proper names and place names, proverbs, rhymes and riddles, folk tales, songs, folk beliefs and folk wisdom of the Rajbanshi community has formed the integral part of this portion.

In case of transliteration of Bengali words we have depended on the Bengali spelling system and these transliterated words are italicized.