Chapter Six: Conversion, Ethnicity and the Convert: Lal Behari Day’s

Govinda Samanta or The History of a Bengal Peasant

Lal Behari Day’s (1824-94) Govinda Samanta or The History of a Bengal Peasant (1874) is an anthropological/ethnographical novel that focuses on the peasant life in nineteenth century Bengal. Its detailed view of the social and domestic life of Bengal peasants makes it the first novel in Indian Writing in English to empathise with the condition of the rural poor. Indeed, this is the first full length Indian English novel, written ten years after Bankim Chandra’s Rajmohan’s Wife (1864) (which I discuss in the next chapter), commonly regarded as the first novel in Indian Writing in English.

Lal Behari’s explanatory, anthropological stance positions his text as an important socio-cultural document engaged in the act of cultural representation. Throughout Bengal Peasant Life may be found detailed descriptions of each and every aspect of the life of a Bengal peasant. The novel sketches a comprehensive picture of the rural Bengali society with its caste-system, rituals, superstitions, folk-beliefs, village pathshalas, guru-mahasayas, the astrologer, ghataks, marriages, social problems such as the Zamindari system, Sati, Indigo, taxes, epidemics and vividly sketches many other such domestic and social realities. Throughout the novel, it is evident that the author is clearly trying to explain the cultural “difference” or “otherness”, and thereby perhaps to demonstrate that the Bengali culture, albeit “different” from the culture of the coloniser, is a rich one.

In The Coloniser and the Colonised, Albert Memmi suggests that the coloniser’s sense of superiority over the colonised was based on “…three major ideological
components—the gulf between the culture of the colonialist and the colonised; the exploitation of these differences for the benefit of the colonialist; and finally the use of these supposed differences as standards of absolute facts” (71).

The African novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o develops the same idea when he says that the colonisers use the “cultural bomb” to “annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (Ngugi, Decolonising the Mind 2).

Postcolonial critics such as Ngugi and Memmi have persistently posited that the rationalization and legitimisation of colonialism was sought for in the civilising mission of the colonisers. The “cultural gulf” (Memmi) was used to justify the colonial conquest and the “cultural bomb” (Ngugi) was used to achieve it. Since pre-colonial India had a rich cultural heritage, the cultural colonization of the Indian subcontinent was not as absolute as its African counterpart.

Rather than a cultural conquest, what we find here is a cultural contest. Lal Behari was participating in such contestation when he delicately details the cultural nuances of the Bengal peasant, who is a doubly subaltern figure, first because he is the colonised subject, and again because he belongs to the lower strata of society. In explaining the “cultural differences” Lal Behari’s tone is nowhere apologetic. At the same time he does not blindly uphold or applaud everything in Bengali culture. His tone is sharply critical when it comes to the superstitious and fatalistic attitude of the peasants. Overall, however, what is significant is that he reveals an intuitive empathy, an
in-depth intellectual as well as emotional understanding of his characters, their motives, motivations and actions.

*Bengal Peasant Life* was first published in 1874 in two volumes under the title, “Govinda Samanta or The History of a Bengal Peasant”. In 1878 it was re-published under the title *Bengal Peasant Life*. In the *Preface* to the novel, the author, Lal Behari Day (1824-92), tells us that,

Early in the year 1871 Baboo Joy Kissen Mookerjea, of Uttarpara, a zamindar in Bengal, offered a prize of £50 for the best novel to be written in Bengali or in English, illustrating the “Social and Domestic Life of the Rural Population and Working Classes of Bengal”. The essays were sent to the adjudicators early in 1872; but, owing to the absence of two of the adjudicators in England, and to other causes, the award was not made till about the middle of 1874, when the following pages, written in English, obtained the prize.²

*Bengal Peasant Life* is a poignant story of a poor peasant, Govinda Samanta, and his family, which consists of Badan (Govinda’s father), Sundari (his mother), Alanga (his Grandmother), Kalamanik and Gayaram (Badan’s younger brothers), Aduri (Gayaram’s wife), and Malati (Govinda’s elder sister), who live in “Kanchanpur, a village about six miles to the north-east of the town of Vardhamana, or Burdwan.” The novel maps the story of Govinda’s life from his birth to death.

To situate the novel firmly in a “real” spatio-temporal location, the author refers to “real” events such as the abolition of *sati* in 1829 by William Bentinck, the passing of the various peasant laws and regulations, the Permanent Settlement, real institutions such
as the Kompany Bahadur (as the The East India Company was commonly called, it was also called John Company), the term bahadur signifying “honourable” and “valiant”. The reference to the abolition of Sati in 1829 (Govinda is said to be about six-seven years old at the time), and to the epidemic of 1873 (which claims Govinda’s life) dates the events of the novel as straddling the fifty year span from early 1820s to 1873.

On its publication, the novel was widely appreciated by its readers. Bengali Peasant Life was written twenty-eight years after Lal Behari had formally embraced Christianity in 1843. This fact is significant because the subject of conversion has always provoked heated disputes concerning motives, political leanings, nationalistic (patriotic) sentiments and trustworthiness of converts. Such disputes span both public (legal/political) and private (religious/familial) domains. In her book Outside the Fold, (1998) Gauri Viswanathan has argued that during the colonial period, converts were marked by a sense of exile from the Hindu community. Often, this could be due to a formal excommunication, as in the case of Krishna Mohan Banerjee. But even if there was no formal excommunication, the very act of conversion conferred expatriate status on the convert. A distressing issue was that whether the act of conversion implied the adoption of a new community, or was "merely" a change in belief. In fact, whether the Christian identity contests or incorporates the "Indian-ness" or "Hindu-ness" of the convert is a question that persists even to the present day, and it was a question that was certainly more urgent in the nineteenth century when these conversions had just started taking place.

In this context, Bengali Peasant Life, written by an author who was not only a convert but also a missionary and a church official, is an important text that participates...
in the discourse of conversion and national allegiance. My argument in this chapter is that the conversion of Lal Behari did not in any way distance him from his roots or from the concerns of his countrymen. *Bengal Peasant Life* corroborates the fact that act of conversion did not, in any way, or in any measure, take away Lal Behari’s love for his culture, his regard for his desh/nation and its people. On the contrary, it is a text that attests his great love, attachment and pride in his own culture and his own countrymen.

The peasant, rural population is an important part of India/Bengal, and has always been so. If Krishna Mohan’s *The Persecuted* is about Kolkata the metropolis, this text is about the village, an integral part of Bengal/India. In the following pages my attempt is to bear out *Bengal Peasant Life*’s nationalist/patriotic agenda, to evaluate its role in narrating the nation’s history, and thereby in the process of nation-building.

*Bengal Peasant Life* has no Christian motifs or distinctly Christian themes. Nor is it a “pro-Raj” text. Instead, we encounter a text that unapologetically details every aspect of Hindu domestic and social life, Hindu rituals and customs, critiquing those that are oppressive but certainly admiring those that bring joy to the poor peasants; a text where the Christian missionary is but a marginal figure; a text that is the first in the corpus of Indian literature in English to deal with a subaltern character—the peasant (when most of the Indian authors writing at the time and even later were preoccupied with representing the middle classes), and present a form of subaltern resistance; a text that critiques the British Government (indigo plantation and government laws harmful to the peasant); questions what it means to be “Christian”; participates in the discourse of Sati; and talks of the need for education among the peasants, and thereby serves as the foundation for later, more pronounced, nationalistic writing. *Bengal Peasant Life* forces
us to rethink the equation between conversion, national allegiance and traditional socio-cultural leanings and folk-beliefs.

In attempting to explain the “Hindu-ness” of Bengal Peasant Life, Lal Behari’s biographer MacPherson remarks that,

It [Bengal Peasant Life] was first and foremost a plain tale of peasant life, and, sincere Christian that he was, he had too tolerant and catholic a mind not to recognize that the Hindu religion, in some instances at least, had a humanizing effect, and helped to sweeten existence. The cheerful scene at the ingathering of the sugarcane, a scene in which he must have often mingled in childhood’s days, might have been penned by one who was still a Hindu. It is a pleasant little sketch, where nobody is any the worse for the peasant’s belief in Mother Lakshmi (MacPherson, Life of Lal Behari Day 123).

There is a certain awkward embarrassment in MacPherson’s explanation. He seems ill at ease with Lal Behari the convert, Lal Behari the Christian missionary’s fond indulgence in describing Hindu rituals, and realizes that this could be done by one who was “still a Hindu” (twenty-eight years after his conversion). These words sufficiently demonstrate the fact that conversion cannot alter one’s deepest sympathies. It can neither eradicate nor even modify the elemental instinct inherent in a person.

One cannot agree with MacPherson’s comment that “Nor was Govinda Samanta written for the express object of stirring up sympathy for a down-trodden race”. The following comment made by a daily newspaper in Calcutta, and quoted by MacPherson himself in Lal Behari’s biography elucidates the point:
It is an admirable book, and is doubly valuable as a source of information, because it is the work of a Bengali gentleman, who must have far better opportunities of knowing his own country people than are open to even the most experienced European. Europeans in India often ask themselves a question to which they are seldom able to give an answer, “what do all these crowds of men who throng the streets think about?” ... it shows merely that we do not know the details of subjects which take the place of “home” discussions on crops, wages, weather, and local grievances. The author of Govinda Samanta has put it out of our power to read his book, and remain ignorant of the interests of one considerable class of his countrymen (Italics mine) (113).7

Throughout the novel there is a certain empathy that warms it up, so that, the subject of the novel seems to be very close to the author’s heart. Moreover, there are many instances where Lal Behari openly criticizes the unjust Government laws and regulations that multiply the misery of a peasant. Quoted below are some instances from the text:

There were two Regulations in the Revenue Code, which were the dread of every raiyat in the country. These were the Haptam (or the seventh) and Pancham (or the fifth) ... The one was Regulation VII of 1799; and the other was Regulation V of 1812. the former Regulation empowered land-holders summarily to arrest and to imprison any tenant who was a defaulter, or was supposed to be a defaulter; and the latter empowered to distrain and sell off to the highest bidder the property of a raiyat who was
a defaulter, or who was supposed to be one. The object which Government had in giving such extraordinary powers to landholders was to enable them to realize their rents regularly and transmit them punctually to the public exchequer; but, in consulting its own interest, the Government virtually consigned the entire peasantry of Bengal to the tender mercies of a most cruel and rapacious aristocracy. Happily, a more enlightened and humane legislation has taken away from the code those iniquitous regulations; but it is worthy of note that, for half-a-century, those horrible engines of oppression were allowed, by a Government calling itself Christian, to grind to the dust many millions of probably the most peaceful people upon earth (Italics mine) (273).

But this was not all. The zamindar armed by law with extraordinary powers, which placed the raiyat entirely at his mercy. One act allowed him to let the rent accumulate till it became so heavy that the raiyat was unable to pay it and was consequently ruined. Another law allowed him to distrain merely on his own declaration that the raiyat intended to abscond. And a third law empowered him to compel the raiyat's attendance at his cutcherry and to flog him almost to death (276).

Before we progress further in our critical study of this text, it is necessary to chart the narrative in some detail because this would show how in chapter after chapter Lal Behari details out every aspect of the life of Bengal peasants. Every chapter
undertakes to highlight some new aspect of the life of these rural people who find their joys in simple things.

*Bengal Peasant Life* is a novel of fifty-one chapters. The first chapter is an address to the readers. The "story" of the novel actually begins from chapter II, "past midnight one morning in the sultry month of April" (4), with Manik Samanta (Kalamanik) going to fetch Rupa’s mother, later described as “the village midwife” (21), because his elder brother Badan’s wife, Sundari is about to give birth to a child (Chapter II, “Introduces An Old Woman To The Reader”). This child is none other than Govinda, whom Lal Behari calls “Our Hero” (13), that is, the “hero” of the novel.8

There follow detailed descriptions of the village (chapter III, “Sketches A Village in Bengal”, and chapter IV, “Describes A Rural Scene and Ushers Our Hero Into this World”), and of the Raiyat’s “cottage” (Chapter V, “Photographs a Raiyat’s Cottage And Those Who Live In It”).

The novel is set in a village called Kanchanpur. 9Chapter VI is aptly titled “Fixes The Fate And Name of Our Hero”, and describes the various rituals that take place in a Bengali household following the birth of a child, and chapter VII follows in the same vein, with the description of the rituals associated with the goddess *Shashti*, “The Protectress of Children”.

Chapter VIII introduces us to “The Village Astrologer”, Surya Kanta, nicknamed *Dhumketu* (*dhumketu* = meteor), who comes to meet Badan one evening and takes on the task of casting Govinda’s horoscope.

The next chapter, titled “An Important Discussion”, is almost wholly devoted to a debate between Badan and his mother Alanga, over the topic of Govinda’s education.
Though abhorring the idea at first, Alanga has to finally give in to Badan’s earnest desire to teach Govinda *lekha-pada* (reading-writing).

In chapter X, “The Five-Faced”, we are taken backwards in time by the author to a “notable” incident that occurred in Govinda’s otherwise uneventful childhood. Govinda has a fit of epilepsy, which the women in his house regard as an attack of the “five-faced *Panchanana*”.

Chapter XI is devoted to illustration of the activities of the women in Badan’s house, and to how Alanga prepares a *dhuti* for Govinda, for “ever since his birth, Govinda had not had a stitch of clothing on his person; though more than five years old, he was allowed to revel in the unrestrained freedom of primaeval nudity” (52).

The next chapter, “The Village School Master”, draws an interesting portrait not only of the school master himself, but also of the state of education in rural Bengal in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Chapters XII (“The Match Maker”), XIV (“Malati’s Marriage”) and XV (“The Vasarghar”) are devoted to the marriage of Govinda’s elder sister Malati to Madhav, her nineteen year old groom from Durganagar.

Chapter XVI (“The Village Ghost”) has a different tone altogether, focusing entirely on Aduri, Gayaram’s wife, who becomes “possessed” by a “*bhuta*” (ghost), which is subsequently driven out after a severe trashing by an *ojha* (“ghost-doctor”).

In the next chapter Lal Behari takes us to site of young Govinda’s *lekha-pada*, the “pyol-school” of Rama Rupa Sarkar, the “pedagogue” of Kanchanpur, who has bizarre ways of disciplining his students. But Govinda was not meant to be too long under the tutelage of his teacher: “Govinda was successively going through these varied...”
processes of mental quickening, healthy discipline and excellent moral training, when his school career was suddenly brought to close by an accident...” (89).

This “accident”, is the death of his uncle, Gayaram, following a snake-bite, and is described in chapter XX, “The Hindu Widow”. But before that Lal Behari devotes a chapter to “The Sati” (chapter XVIII), which throws light on one of the greatest socio-religious evils of the day, the Hindu custom of *sati*, wherein the Hindu widow is mounted on her Husband’s funeral pyre. This chapter is important for another reason as well, as it dates the novel as belonging to the early decades of the nineteenth century:

This was the last time when the *sati* rite was performed at Kanchanpur, for in a few months after this event, Lord William Bentinck... had the moral courage to enact, on 4th December, 1829, that law which forever put a stop to that murderous practice (93).

Chapter XIX tells us of Govinda’s and his father and uncles’ “Evenings At Home”. We are also introduced to “Sambhu’s mother”, the great repository of folk tales, and thus the favourite haunt of Govinda and his friends. (Lal Behari carries forward the figure of “Sambhu’s mother” in his *Folk Tales of Bengal*.)

The death of Gayaram (chapter XX), is the first striking event in the novel, at least so far as Govinda and his family is concerned. The following chapter, “Odds and Ends”, is once more a detailed description of Hindu rites, this time the rites observed during *asoucha*, the period of ceremonial uncleanliness following a death in the family.

Gayaram’s death results in a change in Govinda’s fortunes, as he has to undertake the duties of Gayaram, and thus we find that “the music of the multiplication
tables he has exchanged for the warblers of the grove.” “Pastoral Scenes” (chapter XXII) is indeed a happy picture of Govinda’s initiation into the life of a “neat-herd”.

Chapter XXIII sketches an interesting portrait of Govinda’s friends, each of whom seems to personify certain personality traits of the Bengali people.

Chapter XXIV deals with a “Great Sensation in the Village”, which is the gruesome murder of a little girl of about six, Yadumani, the daughter of Badan’s neighbour, Padma Pal, by Beja Bagdi.

The next chapter, chapter XXV, takes us to “The Village Market”. This chapter is interesting not only for its meticulous picture of the village hat (market), but also because of the presence of the “Padre Sahib” (the church father).

Chapter XXVI is devoted to the “Ladies Parliament” that is held at the bathing ghat every day when the women “meet together and talk on so many different subjects... the cruelties of husbands, the quarrels of two wives of the same man, the atrocious conduct of step-mothers, the beauty of women of the village, and the like” (131-137).

Chapters XXVII (“The Nectar Mouthed Mother in Law”) and XXVIII (“Events at Durganagar”) take the reader to Durganagar, and we see Malati for the first time after her marriage. Malati’s mother in law is just the reverse of what her name, Sudhamukhi (sudha= nectar, mukhi= mouthed), suggests, and she makes Malati’s life miserable. However, in her trials, Malati is comforted by her loving husband, Madhav, which gives her some respite.

Chapter XXIX, where the author humorously remarks, “In Ireland Paddy makes riots, in Bengal raiyats make paddy”, punning on riot-raiyat, is really “All about Paddy”.

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The next two chapters, ("The Navanna" and "The Harvest") take the reader into greater details about the various rituals associated with paddy, particularly during harvest time. It indicates that for the peasants paddy is not just a matter of livelihood, but symbolical of a whole way of life.10

Chapter XXXII, "Matters Hymeneal", takes the story forward as it shows Govinda’s marriage to Dhanamani, Padma Pal’s elder daughter. The marriage is fixed by the parents of the bride and the groom:

Alanga... was anxious to see her grandson married before she left the world... Sundari... thought it the highest happiness of her life to have a daughter-in-law beside her and to dandle a grandchild on her knees... Badan... was anxious that his children should get settled... In casting about for a suitable wife for Govinda, their attention was naturally directed to the daughter of Padma Pal, who was by no means opposed to the alliance... though neither Govinda nor Dhanamani had any inkling of the matter... (163).

In Chapter XXXIII, "The Sugarcane", Lal Behari gives details of the sugarcane plantation, and the rituals associated with the harvest of sugarcane.

The next chapter, "Aduri Becomes a Vaishnavi", focuses on religion as "a prominent part of the social and domestic life of the Bengalis..." When Alanga and Aduri, her widowed daughter-in-law, set out on a pilgrimage and reach Agradwipa, one of the Vaishnavs, Prem Bhakta, sees them and claims that Gopinath had revealed to him that Aduri has to become a Vaishnavi. It is only a trick on the part of Prem Bhakta, but Alanga has to give in and thus "Aduri was entrusted to Prem Bhakta" as his "female
companion”, and, “Poor Alanga, though a sincere Vaishnavi, could not help shedding tears at the calamity which had befallen a member of her household. With a heavy heart she started next morning on her homeward journey.”

The following chapter, “Alanga Goes on Pilgrimage” shows an insistent Alanga going on yet another pilgrimage, this time to Puri. This pilgrimage has an even more dreadful end than the previous one. While returning from the pilgrimage, Alanga is infected with malignant cholera:

She was laid down under a tree all night. There was no doctor, no medicine. The six women resolved next morning to leave Alanga to the tender mercies of dogs and vultures. Early in the day, however, Prem Bhakta Vairagi and Aduri... accidentally came to the tree under which Alanga was lying... Alanga died the same afternoon, after an illness of less than twenty-four hours. No firewood could be procured for the purpose of cremation, and the rest may be imagined. Such was the end of Alanga, a woman estimable both for her intelligence, considering her station in life, and for her character (186).

Chapter XXXVII, “Bengal Fever and The Village Leech”, shows Badan succumbing to Bengal fever. His death is largely due to the absence of a doctor, let alone proper medical facilities in the village.

The next chapter is important for it shows the coming of age of Govinda and because it takes the story another step forward. While “Govinda had hitherto lived a life of ease and quietude... The colour and complexion of his life underwent a change immediately on the death of his father. How to support the family entrusted to his care
became now the problem of his life” (191-2). The novel begins to gather pace at this point as we learn that,

Govinda … commenced his life with one serious drawback. His father had bequeathed to him the legacy of a small debt, which had been considerably increased by Govinda having had to celebrate in succession the funeral ceremonies of his father and grandmother. What made the burden of the debt galling was that it was contracted at a heavy rate of interest (193).

Chapter XXXIX, “The Zamindar of Kanchanpur” opens with Govinda “sitting at the door of his house, smoking and engaged in thought”. He is suddenly “accosted” by Hanuman Singha, “one of the officers, or nagodis, of the zamindar of Kanchanpura …”, who asks Govinda to “put down your share of the mathot which is being levied from every raiyat on account of the approaching marriage of the son of the Zamindar in February next.” Govinda argues that he is not in a position to pay: “it is all very well for well to do persons to pay their cesses. But surely the jamidar ought not reasonably to expect me to pay anything of the sort, since I am now in great distress.” When Hanuman Singha insists him to pay up, Govinda asserts , that “I have no money in the house. If you make a diligent search through the house you will not find even five payasas. Go and tell the jamidar when I have means I’ll pay; at present I cant pay.” Hanuman Singha asks him to clarify his situation in person to the zamindar, and Govinda agrees to go. The house of the Zamindar of Kanchanpur, Jayachand Raya Chaudhuri, is a palatial one. But as a person he is the most “unscrupulous in character…” Lal Behari describes him as an “object of universal dread. His name was never pronounced by his raiyats
except with execrations; ... Such was the man in whose presence Govinda now stood with folded hands, and with his sheet round his neck." On hearing that Govinda has refused to pay mathot Jayachand becomes furious and asks him to pay in three days time, failing which he shall be brought “with hands tied”. Jayachand blames Govinda’s disobedience to his schooling: “I must forbid Rama Rupa to teach any peasants’ sons…” (198).

The next chapter, “Politics at the Smithy”, shows Govinda and his friends in a rebellious mood. They are all seething in anger, but not all of them think it wise to oppose the zamindar. While Nanda wants to go for a dharmaghat (strike), Bokaram (boka=the foolish one), echoes conventional wisdom, says that “It is his fate to be a jamidar, and it is our fate to be his raiyats; we must therefore submit to his exactions, whether just or unjust.” In this way while they are all mouthing their opinions, they are joined by Kalamanik, who argues “…because his son is going to get married, therefore we, poor people, must pay the expenses of the wedding! When the sons of poor raiyats get married, pray who pays the expenses? …” (199-206).

In the next chapter we find Govinda “debating in his mind whether he should pay the cess or not…” While Govinda’s mother and his father-in-law were of the opinion that he should pay up, Kalamanik thought “it would be great cowardice to submit to so iniquitous an exaction.” Finally, taking a middle path, Govinda “thought it wise and expedient to make up his mind to submit to the zamindar’s exaction, but at the same time he determined to tell the landlord to his face at the time of payment that the imposition was illegal and unjust.” But when he reaches the “zamindar’s cutcherry” he is in for a surprise because the zamindar is even more furious with him having come to
know of the discussions that Govinda had with his friends. On top of it when Govinda tells the zamindar that “I am paying the cess; but the imposition is an unjust one. It is contrary to the laws of the Kompani Bahadur”, the zamindar “could no longer restrain his anger but got up and, taking into his hands one of his own slippers, struck Govinda with it, abusing him at the same time...: “This is only the beginning of your misfortunes. Worse calamities are in store for you. I will ruin you till dogs and jackals weep and howl at your misery.” The zamindar then sends Hanuman Singha to summon Kalamanik which he refuses to obey.

Chapter XLII, “The Indignation Meeting”, shows Kalamanik seething in anger at the insult of Govinda: “...Kalamanik seemed to resolve some scheme in his mind. From the next day he seldom went to work in the field but was seen to go about much in the neighbouring villages...” Kalamanik was perhaps involved in some scheme with his neighbouring villages, but we never get to know what it really is.

The zamindar too was not one to remain silent. One night he sends his head club-man, Bhima Kotal, to set fire to Govinda’s huts (chapter XLIII, “Fire! Fire!”) However, the guilt is not proved, and the chapter ends with the remark that “The indignation of the Aguris was roused still more than ever, and Kalamanik, gnashing his teeth in anger, thirsted for vengeance.”

Chapter XLIV, “The Mahajan”, takes Govinda to the mahajan for more debt because Govinda has to mend his fire struck huts. With the money which the mahajan gives him but not without some hesitation, and with the aid of his willing friends, Govinda is able to repair the damages.
The next chapter takes us to “The Village Grog-Shop”, where we find Bhima Kotal and his friends enjoying their drink with the money given to them by Jayachand in return for setting fire to Govinda’s huts. This chapter also contains the narrator’s comments on the Akbari system of the government, which, the author says, has resulted in every village having a grog-shop.

Chapter XLVI, “The Indigo-Planter of Durganagar”, takes us in a different direction. It takes us to Durganagar, to Malati and Madhav and their fates. We see here a different social-ill plaguing the peasants of Durganagar. This is the problem of Indigo-plantation:

Madhava’s father, Kesava, had in an evil hour taken dadan, as it is called, that is, advance money, from Mr. Murray, for cultivating indigo in his fields, and ever since, he had been supplying the factory with many cart-loads of the plant every year, till the day of his death. He often tried to get out of the muddle, but that was impossible. Whoever once touched the indigo-planter’s advance became a slave for evermore... For the debt of one year he was obliged to sow indigo the next year, and the sowing went on every year simply because the debt was never cleared. A raiyat’s debt to the planter descends from generation to generation.... Madhava... hated the name of indigo... He would have gladly paid off the debt in the shape of money... but the planter would not receive it. The debt... must be paid off by so many bundles of the indigo plant... which... never coming up to the prescribed measure and quality, his debt went on
increasing and increasing, till it became something considerable for so poor a peasant as he was (230-31).

Chapter XLVII shows the dreaded Mr. Murray threatening Madhava to take advances for indigo, though the latter pleads with Mr. Murray to be given the permission to repay the debt in silver. The next chapter, "The Zamindar of Durganagar", portrays a zamindar very different from Jayachand. Navakrisna (nava=new, Krishna= the Hindu god who delivers his people from all evil doers),

Had studied for some years in the Hindoo college of Calcutta and become animated with liberal and patriotic sentiments... [he was] one of those few zamindars who knew the duties attached to their station, who were actuated by public spirit, who were inspired by liberal and patriotic sentiments, who had sympathy with the down trodden raiyats, and who were honourable in all their actions... On his accession... Navakrishna made a general proclamation... that there was to be thenceforth an end of all injustice and oppression... he was determined... to promote the welfare of all his tenants (236-7).

When Navakrishna heard of the threats of Mr. Murray to Madhava and his ilk, he "thought it necessary to keep a number of men on the spot to prevent the outrage. At the same time he thought it proper to send to the Daroga... a representation to the effect that the planter of Nildanga had used threatening language towards the husbandsmen... and that a raid upon the raiyats was highly probable" (240).

The next few chapters chart the tragic story of Madhava and his futile attempt to fight against his fate. Chapter XLIX, is, as the title suggests "All About Indigo". The
story moves forward in the next chapter, “Bengali Heroism”, where we see Madhava engaged in a dialogue with the other husbandmen of his village, all of whom voice their own opinions on the issue of confronting Mr. Murray.13 They are rather agitated and they decide to oppose the indigo planter with all their might and with the support of their zamindar, Navakrishna. Chapter LI, “The Affray”, shows an affray between the lathials of Mr. Murray and the peasants of Durganagar. The latter did not prove an equal match to the lathials. But while several on both sides were wounded, it was only Madhava who received a fatal wound. While the rest were taken to the police station, Madhava was separated from the rest because of his fatal wound. The next chapters show how the daroga is bribed to toe the line of Mr. Murray. In chapter LIV, Madhava meets his tragic end, unable to bear the stress of being moved from one place to another in his wounded condition. In spite of his promises Navakrishna is not able to be of much help to Madhava.

Chapter LV takes the narrative back to Kanchanpur. Kalamanik is grounded by a dozen club-men sent by Jayachand, and even though he puts up a brave fight, he ultimately succumbs.

The next chapter, “The Pancham”, opens with Govinda receiving a message from Jayachand that he was in arrears to the zamindar to the amount of ninety rupees. This was an utter falsehood on the part of Jayachand who knew that all the papers of Govinda had been destroyed in the fire. Pancham refers to the Regulation V of 1812 of the Fiscal code, and it empowered the landlord to “distrain and sell off to the highest bidder the property of a raiyat who was a defaulter” (273). Thus Govinda’s property was to be sold off.
At last, the terrible day of the sale arrived. Govinda's crops of paddy and sugarcane, and other products, his store of paddy in the house, his cows, were all knocked down by the hammer of the ruthless *phodosh-amin*. All his personal property was also knocked down... all the brass vessels were taken possession of and put up to auction. The maw of law was now satisfied, and our hero was completely ruined (274).

The narrative had originally ended at this point. The last three chapters were added by Lal Behari "to bring the narrative to the present day", when the novel was to be published in the book form.

Chapter LIX, "The Raiyat's Magna Carta", takes the narrative to the year 1859, when Act X was passed. The narrator discusses the ills of the permanent settlement, and the peasant laws, and remarks that the peasants were delivered from their terrible oppression by the Act X of 1859. Govinda, however did not receive any benefit from this law because his property was auctioned just a few months before the passing of this Act.

Govinda... had to feed several mouths... The wants of his family... impelled him to adopt every means in his power for the support of his wife and children... It took Govinda, however, a long time to be restored to the state in which he had been before the Pancham and the Haptam were brought to bear upon him. The debt pressed upon him heavily; and it was not till nine or ten years had elapsed after the auction that he was able to pay off the debt. The history of those ten years, as it was a history of silent suffering and self-denial, I shall not here recount... (277-78).
The next chapter, "The Epidemic", tells of a "terrible epidemic... dreadful plague", that occurred in Kanchanpur in the year 1870. It was a "dreadful visitation", and soon, "The epidemic fever was upon Govinda, and he lay prostrate for weeks. Other members of the family also got it, but they soon recovered. It was now Sundari’s turn, and she fell a victim" (280).

Sundari’s death left Govinda completely shattered, emotionally and also financially, because of the expensive funeral ceremonies.

The last chapter, "The End", charts the end of Govinda’s life, and with that the end of his troubles. His last trial comes in the form of a famine that left him in great distress as his fields, “did not produce a fourth of the usual annual crop”. It left him with no option but to seek a job as a day labourer in Burdwan town, ...

...where Maharaja Mahtap Chand Bahadur—the greatest landholder in Bengal—was, with characteristic benevolence, creating work for about two thousand labourers every day, with a view only to giving them relief. It was with a heavy heart, and with tears in his eyes, that Govinda left his home and wended his way towards Burdwan. He had never in his life hired himself out as a day labourer. He had always tilled his paternal acres and lived upon their produce. But now, in mature life, he had to stoop to the degradation of becoming a coolie. This thought dried up his life’s blood... the thought of his degradation haunted him by day and by night... He wept day and night... his health visibly declined... His heart was broken. And one morning he was found dead in his miserable hovel,
far from his hovel and from those he loved ... Thus was Govinda
delivered from all his troubles (283-84).

Thus ends the narrative (a sort of inverted bildungsroman) of this Bengal
“peasant”, the “hero” of *Bengal Peasant Life*.

As may be seen from the above plot-summary, *Bengal Peasant Life* has a
chronological, linear structure, moving in a strict temporal sequence (except for a slight
variation in Chapter X, “The Five Faced”, which goes back in time a little), and is
divided into fifty-one chapters. The chapter division is based on episodes, each chapter
describing either a new incident, or character, or aspect of peasant life. The narrative
structure, though following closely the pattern of exposition-climax-denouement
structure, is essentially episodic. The absence of “thrilling incidents” partly accounts for
there being no real “climax” (rising action), and therefore no denouement (falling
action). The incident that comes close to the nature of a climax is Govinda’s resistance
to Jayachand, the treacherous Zamindar of Kanchanpur.

The episodic structure is accounted for by the fact that the author’s interest lies
more in the ethnographic depiction of the contemporary socio-cultural and socio-
economic realities, than in the development of plot or character. This is evident from the
title of most chapters, which contain words like “sketches”, “describes”, “photographs”,
“scenes” etc. Again, most of the titles begin with the definite article “The” (The Village
School Master, The Match Maker, The Village Market, The Nectar Mouthed Mother in
Pancham, The Epidemic, are some of the titles), implying that the author intends to
identify, define and generalise the activities of the whole group of people of whom Govinda and the other characters in the novel and their actions are but representative.

The novel seems to rush towards an “ending” in its last few chapters, with ten years of Govinda’s life expunged from the text. The author says that he does not wish to recount the ten years of Govinda’s life that were spent trying to repay the debts of the zamindar, because it was a period of “silent suffering and self-denial” (278). The real reason, however, seems to be different. Lai Behari himself has mentioned in the Preface that, “the original book, to which the prize was adjudged, wanted the last three chapters; these chapters have now been added to bring the narrative to the present day”.

Thus, while the original narrative ended with the death of Kalamaniik, Govinda’s uncle, the later version, in a kind of fast forward action, ends with Govinda “found dead in his miserable hovel, far from his home and those he loved” 14

Like the narrator in W.M. Thackeray’s Vanity Fair, or Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones, the narrator in Bengal Peasant Life directly addresses the reader at many points in the narrative and often identifies himself with the reader. In fact, the novel begins with a direct address to the reader: “Gentle Reader, in case you have come with great expectations to the perusal of this humble performance, I deem it proper to undecieve you at the very outset…” (1).

Throughout the text there are many occasions where the reader is addressed and indeed, often invited, into the text:

“I... propose taking a stroll through the village, and trust my reader will give me the pleasure of his company” (7).

“I need scarcely tell the reader...” (17)
“The reader will remember that, in the middle of the village…” (53)

“Our hero has bidden adieu…” (106)

“If the reader wishes to listen to a conversation carried on by a number of women, let him accompany me about the middle of the day… to the women’s ghat of the Raya’s tank. It is, however, an expedition attended with some peril, for if we are seen standing near the ghat… we are sure to be called all sorts of names… we must therefore get to the ghat some one or two hours before…” (132)

The boundaries of fiction and reality overlap as the narrator invites the reader into the text. This strategy helps in building an intimacy with the reader, and it also makes the reader more ready to trust the narrator. The target reader of the novel would be either the English educated native, or the Englishman himself. Both of them would have little first hand knowledge of the peasants. The trust in the narrator therefore becomes absolutely necessary to realise the purpose of the novel, that is, to provide an “authentic history”. That he takes the reader’s expectations and responses into account, is clear from the first chapter of the novel: “Premises What The Reader Is To Expect And What He Is Not To Expect In This Authentic History”.

Lal Behari assigns his narrative not as fiction but as “authentic history”, thereby anticipating the twentieth century concepts of “history from below”, and “new labour history”. “History from below” is a level of historical narrative which focuses on the perspectives of ordinary individuals within society as well as individuals and regions that were not previously considered historically important. This includes women and the working class, and the non-west. Bengal Peasant Life is essentially history from below.
because it focusses on what happens among the masses at the base levels of society, and includes women's gossip and trivia as part of the narrative. New labor history' is a branch of social history which focuses on the experiences of workers, women, and minorities in the study of history.

To make the story appear "authentic", the author employs certain strategies. The first is the strategy of writing in the tradition of the all-knowing third person omniscient point of view narration, which is written

...in accord with the convention that the narrator knows everything that needs to be known about the agents, actions and events, and also has privileged access to the character's thoughts, feelings and motives; and that the narrator is free to move at will in time and place, to shift from character to character, and to report (or conceal) their speech, doings and states of consciousness."(Abrams, Glossary 166).

In Bengal Peasant Life we find the narrator functioning precisely in this fashion, with free access to every character and incident. In adopting the third person point of view Lal Behari was following in the tradition of novelists such as Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy etc.

The narrator in Bengal Peasant Life not only reports, but also comments on events and evaluates the actions and motives of the characters. Sometimes he also comments on the government laws and policies and their impact on society, both praising (abolition of sati in 1829 by William Bentinck is highly lauded by the narrator, and so is the passing of Act X in the year 1859, which he calls "that celebrated piece of
legislation”), and condemning (“There were two Regulations in the Revenue Code, which were the dread of every Raiyat in the country”) freely.

In the chapter titled “Ladies Parliament”, the narrator invites the reader to accompany him to the bathing ghat, “conceal ourselves among the thick foliage of a sacred sriphal tree”, “to listen to a conversation carried on by a number of women”. This conversation is centered mainly on trivia and gossip. The novel allocates the oral tradition as distinctly female, yet the male narrator finds it hard to ignore this typically feminine source of history. Narration, in other words, takes a detour, crosses over continually from a main path or strand, into concoction, digression, interwoven meshes. If the structure of the main plot is unidirectional, the “story” of the village, has a structure like gossip: it has corollary, disseminates, and rambles, since like a skein it takes up the whole collective life and folklore of the villagers. The women’s talk in this chapter has a striking similarity with some passages in Fakir Mohan Senapati’s Oriya novel, Chha Mana Atha Guntha, translated as Six Acres and a Third by S. P. Mohanty.

MacPherson tells us that Lal Behari really knew a man by the name of Govinda Samanta: “Among the names Mr. Day noted down in his ‘Journals’ appears that of an old man, Govinda Samanta, whom he describes as an interesting person...” (MacPherson 68). 15

The Govinda of Lal Behari’s novel does not at all resemble the Govinda he personally knew. The Govinda of Bengal Peasant Life is a rather devout Hindu, and there is no hint of any Christian sentiments in him. In fact, though Lal Behari, in his capacity as a missionary, went about from village to village preaching Christianity, the novel has no such preaching. Indeed, the missionary in the novel, the Padre Sahib, is a
solitary, marginal figure, distributing copies of *The Bible*, but receiving little attention from the villagers. No resident of Kanchanpur, including Govinda, pays much attention to the *padre*.

The claim of authenticity therefore has little to do with the correctness of historical “facts”. Lal Behari’s story is authentic in spirit. It is authentic because with its anthropological stance it captures the essence of the life of a Bengal peasant in the nineteenth century. The first title, *Govinda Samanta or The History of a Bengal Peasant*, was replaced with the later *Bengal Peasant Life* perhaps because the latter title is more apt, since the character of Govinda is not in any way a singular one but rather generic of the archetypal Bengal peasant or *raiyat*. The novel is indeed more the story of every Bengal peasant rather than of an individual called Govinda Samanta.

Lal Behari functions as the native informant who is a kind of mediator between the peasants whose story he tells and the readers. He has an intimate knowledge of the peasants and is also well equipped epistemologically to tell the tale in the coloniser’s language. Yet, the very fact the story is not told in first person problematizes the telling: to what extent and in what way does the presence of the narrator modify the “telling”?

In the first chapter, the narrator, using the metaphor of the tradesman who “wishes to earn an honest penny” by selling his ware, tells the reader about what he may and what he may not expect to find in the “following pages”. He calls his novel a “hall of refreshment”, and wants to acquaint the reader with “the bill of fare” (the phrase recalls Fielding’s famous “bill of fare” passage at the beginning of *Tom Jones*) in advance in order to prevent any disappointments later on. Lal Behari thus adopts the form of the bildungsroman novel popular in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, but inscribes/underlines the element of cultural difference. He makes it clear at the outset that his narrative is about a culture that has its share of equivalences and differences with the European/British culture. The equivalence is underlined by means of the allusions and analogies (which I take up in detail later), while the difference is spelt out in clear words in the Preface itself.

The narrator's "first point" in his "bill of fare" deals with what the reader is not to expect in his narrative. Firstly, he says, the reader is not to expect anything "marvellous or wonderful". Very interestingly, the narrator traces his ancestry (perhaps indeed the tradition of all Indian Writing in English) to "my great Indian predecessors … Valmiki, Vyas, and compilers of the Puranas" on the one hand, and "my European predecessors like Swift17 and Rabelais",18 on the other. He is conscious of the modes of writing of both, his Sanskrit tradition, as well as his European lineage. Lal Behari is thus aware that by writing of an Indian subject in the English language, and by virtue of the fact that his own education was partly European and partly Indian,19 he and his novel had a hybrid ancestry, having behind him the literary tradition of India as well as that of Europe.20

Lal Behari however says that he shall not be writing in the tradition of the literary ancestors he names, because:

Such marvels, my reader, you are not to expect in this unpretending volume. The age of marvels has gone by; giants do not pay nowadays; scepticism is the order of the day; and the veriest stripling, whose throat is still full of his mother's milk, says to his father, when a story is told him: "Papa, is it true?"(2)
Rejecting the “marvellous” in favour of the “true”, he chooses to write an “authentic history”, in the “realist” mode. Throughout the novel there are detailed realistic descriptions of every aspect of village life (domestic, social, religious, economic) in nineteenth century Bengal and of the rituals that form such an essential part of the life of every Bengali Hindu peasant. The realist mode of writing was extensively used by the nineteenth century British English novelists such as Fielding, Thackeray, Dickens, Hardy, etc. as well as by the French novelists such as Balzac. Realism represents life and the social world as it “really” is, evoking the sense that the characters described “really” exist, and the events narrated might “really” happen. It is this kind of an effect that Lai Behari wanted to achieve because the very purpose of writing his novel, as noted earlier, was to illustrate the “Social and Domestic Life of the Rural Population and Working Classes of Bengal”.

The narrator’s next point in his “bill of fare” is that,

Secondly, you are not to expect in this authentic history any thrilling incidents. Romantic adventures, intricate evolutions of the plot, striking occurrences, remarkable surprises, hair-breadth escapes, scenes of horror... have no place here. Thrilling incidents occur but seldom in the life-history of ninety-nine persons out of a hundred, and in that of most Bengal raiyats never (2).

The narrator here distances his narrative from certain types of the novel, particularly the gothic novel, which was characterised by “romantic adventures, intricate evolutions of the plot, striking occurrences, remarkable surprises, hair-breadth escapes, scenes of horror” etc. and was quite popular in the eighteenth century European
literature. The reason cited by the narrator for not writing in the gothic tradition is once more the question of authenticity. The narrator says that thrilling incidents do not ever occur in the life of a Bengali peasant and thus there are no such elements in the narrative.

"Thirdly", the narrator says that

... you are not to expect any love-scenes. The English reader will be surprised to hear this... but in Bengal—and for that matter in all India—they do not make love in the English and honourable sense of that word... the Bengali does not court at all. Marriage is an affair managed entirely by the parents and guardians of bachelors and spinsters... (3)

This passage is important for its explanatory stance, its attempt to explain the self to the other. Lal Behari here underlines the difference in the man-woman relationship that India has with the west. He says that for Bengalis, and indeed for all Indians, marriage is a matter arranged by the parents/guardians and that there is no courtship before marriage. What he does not state so explicitly, but expresses subtly, is that the husband-wife relationship in nineteenth century India was a very private affair, so private that they did not even speak to each other, indeed avoid being present together, in the presence of elders. We hardly see a couple talking to each other, privately or publicly, in Bengal Peasant Life. There is no scene showing Badan speak with his wife Sundari. When he wants counsel, we see Badan seeking the advice of his mother, Alanga. Gayaram and Aduri have a brief scene together where Gayaram assaul
t Aduri for "daring" to look in the face of a mendicant. Aduri, of course, seems a rather rebellious woman very unlike the perfectly timid Sundari. She seems to be "punished"
first by the death of her husband, and second by being forced to become a “Vaishnavi”. Alternately however, her Becoming a Vaishnavi could also be read as a liberation for her from a environment which she found stifling.

Govinda, the “hero” of the novel is never shown to exchange a single word with his wife, let alone a romantic one, after she becomes his wife, though earlier she was his play-mate:

There was one bright little girl there with whom Govinda talked oftener than with the rest; and she was the eldest daughter of Padma Lochan Pal, Dhanamani... He gave her quantities of the mudi and mudki tied in his gamcha... and he often filled her little gleaning basket... with paddy-stalks from the bundles... (159)

In the next chapter the author is quick to clarify that,

The reader has already come to know... that there has been from some time past some talk about our hero getting married to the daughter of Padma Pal, and he may therefore not unnaturally have come to the conclusion that we purposely put Dhanamani in the way of Govinda at the harvest field in order to make up something like a courtship between the two. We solemnly declare that we had no such purpose. The fact is, neither the boy nor the girl knew anything of the affair. They had not the remotest idea that their parents were contemplating their union for life. Indeed, if Govinda had known it, he neither would have been seen in company of the girl, nor would he have spoken to her; and if Dhanamani had known it, she would have always kept herself at a respectable
distance from Govinda—such is the reserve maintained by Bengalis in matrimonial matters. This may appear odd to the English reader, but it is the simple fact. Not only is there no courtship in Bengal, but if a boy and a girl, whom Prajapati and their parents had determined to unite together, were found to be walking together or speaking to each other, their conduct would be universally deemed unbecoming and indecent (162).

The only couple whom we see in a conjugal situation is Malati-Madhav, when Madhav comforts Malati for her sufferings because of a cruel mother-in-law. By choosing to remain silent on the conjugal relationships, Lal Behari was perhaps making the point that Bengalis (and Indians) are reticent about this relationship and choose not to bring it out in the domain of public discourse. The narrator thus situates the differences in cultural practices of the Bengalis and the English.

"Fourthly", the narrator says that,

...you are not to expect here “grandiloquent phraseology and gorgeous metaphors”. Some of my educated countrymen are in love with sonorous language. The use of English words two or three feet long is now the reigning fashion in Calcutta. Young Bengal is a literary Bombastes Furioso; and Young Bengalese is Johnsonese run mad. “Big thinkers may require,” as old Sam Johnson said, “big words”; but we, plain country-folk, talking of fields, of paddy, of the plough and the harrow, have no sublime thoughts and do not, therefore, require sublime words ... (3)

In a later Chapter Lal Behari says,
Gentle reader, allow me here to make one remark. You perceive that Badan and Alanga speak better English than most uneducated English peasants; they speak almost like educated ladies and gentlemen, without any provincialisms. But how could I have avoided this defect in my history? If I had translated their talk into the Somersetshire or the Yorkshire dialect, I should have turned them into English, and not Bengali, peasants. You will, therefore, please overlook this grave though unavoidable fault in this authentic narrative (46).

One of the most significant consequences of British colonization was the appropriation of the English language by the colonised. The earliest conceptualizations of indigenization of language go back to the 1870s. And later reformulations, and more specific characterizations, began after the 1930's. We see characterizations of African Englishes in Nigeria's Chinua Achebe, T.M. Aluko, Buchi Emecheta, Amos Tutuola, and, of course, Wole Soyinka; in Kenya's Ngugi wa Thiong'o; in Somali's Nurudin Farah; in India's Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, and R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Amit Chaudhuri, Arundhati Roy and a host of others; and in a long list of writers from Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Sri Lanka.

The shift from the norms of the Centre has been slow and gradual. And the approaches for establishing linguistic and literary identities adopted by each writer, in each region, and each linguistic group are not identical. One sees several major approaches for establishing local literary and linguistic identities for English.

In India, the first well-articulated conceptualization of such crossover—linguistic and contextual—was presented in 1937 [published in 1938] by Raja Rao, in his novel
Kanthapura. In his often cited "Author's Foreword," of just 461 words, Rao did not sing the song of linguistic liberation for his innovative and nativized style or his Kannadization and Sanskritization of English. He argued on the basis of convergence, cohesion, and assimilation of the language, and thus brought English within the mainstream of India's linguistic and cultural traditions—parampara.22.

Rao's was, however, not the first attempt to bring the Indian voice to English. Long before that, in Bengal Peasant Life, Lal Behari Day almost apologetically presented the dilemma in contextualizing English in Bengal. Mohanty, in his introduction to F. M. Senapati’s Oriya novel Cha Mana Atha Guntha (Six Acres and A Third), says that Day's transcription of peasant speech resembles that of an anthropologist imposing an Orientalist and ahistorical universality on village life (23).23

Over the years, postcolonial authors writing in English have found a way out for negotiating what Lal Behari has called a “grave though unavoidable fault”. So far as Lal Behari's approach to the problem is concerned, he does not attempt abrogation or appropriation of language. While sticking to the “standard” English syntactically (not only in the dialogues but in the narratorial passages as well), he uses a large number of Bengali words, a glossary of which he provides at the end of the novel, under the heading, “Glossary of Indian Terms”. If we study these terms we shall find that these terms are utterly untranslatable: they are not just words, but cultural concepts and codes. And by refusing to decode these codes in the body of the text, Lal Behari not only adds a local colour to his text, but he also makes a subtle statement (that these codes are untranslatable), the point of which has probably been missed by critics because it is not spelt out explicitly (as is done by Raja Rao for example), but only implied.
However, in his approach, there is no Caliban's sting. The coloniser's language is being used, not to curse, but to illustrate the social situation, to explain cultural otherness, to narrate national history, to participate in the political, social and literary discourses of the day, and to voice the condition of the colonised and make it heard.

Other than the remark on the love of "grandiloquent phraseology and gorgeous metaphors" of his "educated countrymen", which signposts the literary inclinations of the "Young Bengal", what is significant is that the narrator identifies himself with the "plain country-folk, talking of fields, of paddy, of the plough". He seems to imply that though he is "educated" (he seems to be a learned man from his language, his style of narration and from his wide-ranging knowledge)\(^2\), yet, essentially, he is a plain country folk talking of country matters. This claim of being a plain country folk authenticates his tale, but, and more importantly, it also situates this peasant (hi)story as "coming from within" as well as "coming from below". Indeed, he seems to have quite an intimate knowledge of the village and the villagers.

Coming to the "second point of this preliminary discourse which is what the reader is to expect in this book", the narrator simply says that, "The reader is to expect here a plain and unvarnished tale of a plain peasant, living in this plain country of Bengal... told in a plain manner" (4).

If we look at the premises set in the preface by Lal Behari, what strikes as a common point in all of them is that the author wants to present an authentic, real picture of society. In the next segment I would like to explore what is this picture and what are the strategies adopted by the author for the purpose.
Bengal Peasant Life is indeed a graphic picture of the social and domestic life of the peasants of nineteenth century Bengal. Lal Behari anticipates Social Realism, which was an art movement representing socialist ideologies, and represented social and political contemporary life in the nineteen-thirties, from a left-wing standpoint (it dominated Soviet culture and artistic expression for over 60 years in the middle of the twentieth century). Social Realism depicted subjects of social concern; the proletariat struggle - hardships of every day life that the working class had to put up with.

Lal Behari portrays the varied aspects of social and domestic life. He depicts moments of grief as well as moments of joy. Given below are two passages that sketch the sad moments in the life of Govinda’s family:

Next to Badan, Alanga had the largest share of the care and anxiety in the management of the family; indeed it is no exaggeration to say that Badan did nothing without consulting his mother... But now all this underwent a change. There has been no change in the homestead... It is unnecessary to remark that death has made havoc in the family. Gayaram had been bitten to death by a serpent; and Alanga had died in the “holy-field” of Orissa. Malati was in her husband’s house at Durganagar, and Aduri, having become a mendicant, was wondering about the country in the company of her pious lover, Prem Bhakta. There remained now our hero, his mother, and his uncle Kalamanik, who was still living in single blessedness (192).

... Her [Aduri’s] married life was now at an end. Though young she must remain a widow all her life. Association with a husband is regarded as
the *summum bonum* of womanly existence. Is life worth living now that happiness has become impossible? What made her saddest was the horrible prospect of perpetual widowhood. Her sun had gone down while it was noon. Hope that comes to all never visited her. The rest of her life—if life it could be called was to be one continued midnight, without the remotest prospect of a dawn. It is impossible not to sympathise with a Hindu widow. It is not that she is persecuted and tormented by her relations and friends— that is a fiction of foreign writers of people unacquainted with Hindu life in its actual manifestation—but the peculiar wretchedness of her condition lies in this, that the fountain of her heart with its affections and desires is for ever dried up. She becomes a soulless thing, and her life a blank. Aduri did not fill the house and neighbourhood with her cries, nor did she expatiate on every good quality of her amiable husband. Such a thing would have been deemed indecent in a widow. Her grief was a silent grief. She sobbed day and night. She broke her ornaments, whether of conch-shell, or sealing-wax, or silver; she broke the iron ring on her wrist, the symbol of wifehood; she no longer braided her hair; she gave up daubing the top of her forehead with vermilion which distinguishes a Hindu wife from a Hindu widow; she gave up putting on *sadis* with coloured borders. Her share in the pleasures of life had been exhausted; her part on the theatre of life had been played out; henceforth though in the world, she was not to be of the world. English people have, somehow or other, got the idea that a Hindu widow receives
harsh and cruel treatment from the relatives of her husband. This is not 
true. There are no doubt exceptional cases, but, as a general rule, Hindu 
widows are not only not ill treated, but they meet with a vast deal of 
sympathy. Old widows in a Bengali family are often the guides and 
counsellors of those who style themselves the lords of creation (100-101).

This kind of meticulous, comprehensive ethnographic detail is the chief feature 
of Lal Behari’s text. However, in portraying the graphic domestic picture in Bengal 
Peasant Life Lal Behari’s emphasis is on the little joys of life, the small moments of 
celebration that come along as life progresses. These celebrations could be on the 
occasions of birth, birth related ceremonies, marriages, harvest festivals etc. Lal Behari 
seems to show how the poor peasant snatches his moments of joy from his otherwise 
rather dreary existence. The little Govinda is seen to find happiness in the small wonders 
of life:

The paddy-harvest field is, as we have seen, a scene of rural joy. It is 
visited every day by every little boy and girl in the village, each of whom 
receives one sweet cane as a present from the kind-hearted peasants. 
Every day loads of sugar-cane are given away to children and Brahmins; 
but the peasants give them away with cheerful hearts, believing that 
Mother Lakshmi will bless them the coming year with a more abundant 
crop; and the name of the niggardly and impious husbandman who sends 
away children and Brahmins empty-handed from the sugar-cane house, is 
held in execration by the whole of the village community. Not only is the 
cane given away, but quantities of the juice while boiling are dealt out to
children, who come provided with vessels for the purpose; and not unfrequently brinjals (egg fruit) and other vegetables are thrown into the boilers, and then taken out and eaten with infinite relish by the children, multitudes of whom are seen, at all hours of the day, loitering about in the precincts of the sugar-cane house, to the great detriment of the village school, which during those days has a thin attendance (171).

... The shades of evening had descended all over the plain, when the bridegroom's party resumed there festal procession. Madhava (the bridegroom) sat in the chaturdola, the torches were lit, the musicians began to play, and the jackals of the neighbouring thickets, frightened by so unusual a noise and so bright a light at such a time, set up an unearthly yell as an accompaniment to the marital music. The party assembled at Badan's house (the house of the bride's father), all on tiptoe of expectation, heard with delight the sound of the nuptial music. Badan's heart, and especially Alanga's (the bride's grandmother) leaped with joy. As the sound of the music became louder, the pulse of Badan and Alanga beat faster and faster. As for Malati (the bride) she had scarcely any feelings, one way or the other as she understood little of the matter; on the whole, I think she was sadder than usual, as she knew that she would have to leave a loving father, a dear mother, and a still dearer grandmother, and go to a strange place with a man whom she had never seen. As the procession was approaching the village, men, women and
children ran out into the street exclaiming "the bridegroom is coming! the bridegroom is coming!"... The eager expectancy of the older members of the bride's family, contrasted with her own apathy and even sadness, at once lifts the scene from the level of a mere vulgar show, which is probably all the average European spectator thinks of when witnessing a native marriage procession in Bengal... (Italics mine) (68-70).25

In its theme, Bengal Peasant Life is remarkably close to Kamala Markandeya's Nectar in a Sieve (1954), which describes the experiences of a woman named Rukmani who lived in India during a period of intense urban development.26

Bengal Peasant Life too speaks of the little hopes and fears of Govinda and his family. It is hope that keeps them going, and with that hope are also present the many rituals of daily life that gives life a momentum to keep moving ahead. These rituals form an integral part of his life, and he has to perform them even if he has to incur a debt for the purpose. These rituals are not only a socio-religious necessity but a psychological one. Towards the end of the novel, when his mother dies,

Govinda, like all orthodox Hindus and dutiful Hindu sons, performed the ceremony with suitable pomp. He gave to every Brahman of the village of the village a priestly sum of four annas. He gave a feast to all his caste-men living at Kanchanpur and in the surrounding villages. And lastly he had to give both rice and pice to hundreds of poor men, beggars and religious mendicants, who on such occasions crowd to the houses of all classes of Hindus. All this entailed considerable expense; and as Govinda's exchequer was seldom solvent, he had again to consign
himself to the tender mercies of the eternal blood-sucker, Golak Poddar. The English reader may exclaim, "Govinda must have been a fool to spend money on such an occasion, especially as he had no money". Fool or no fool he had to spend it. Whether he had money or not is beside the point. Spend he must whether he had it or not. The customs of the country, the laws of Hindu society, the Hindu religion, all demand it. If Govinda had not made the usual presents and given the customary feasts, he would have lowered himself in the estimation of his caste-men. He would have been black-balled. There was therefore no help for it (281) (Italics mine).

The reason that Lal Behari gives as to why Govinda has to perform the funeral ceremonies even though he has to borrow money for the purpose is that otherwise he would have "lowered himself in the estimation of his caste-men." These words shed light on the importance of the caste system in India. At the beginning of Bengal Peasant Life Lal Behari gives an elaborate description of the various castes in Kanchanpur:

There is a considerable Brahmana population, the great majority of whom are of the srotriya order often called radhi, from the fact of their living in Radh, the name by which the country lying on the western side of the Bhagirathi river is usually designated. The Kayasthas... are comparatively fewer in number. Ugrakshatriyas or Aguris, as they are called in common parlance, who are all engaged in agricultural pursuits, though less numerous than the sadgapas, are an influential class in the village; while there is the usual component of the medical caste, of black-
smiths, barbers, weavers, spice-sellers, oilmen, bagdis, doms, hadis, and the rest (8).

Govinda belongs to the aguri caste. Lal Behari characterizes the aguris as brave and independent:

Amongst the peasantry of Western Bengal there is not a braver nor a more independent class than the Ugra-Kshatriyas or Aguris, the caste of which our hero was a member... better built and more muscular in their corporeal forms, they are known to be a bold and somewhat fierce race, and less patient of any injustice or oppression than the ordinary Bengali raiyat, who is content quietly to submit, even without a protest to any kind of kicking. The phrase Agurir gonar or the “Aguri bully”, which has passed into a proverb, indicates that the Aguris are, in the estimation of their countrymen, a hot-blooded class, that they are fearless and determined in their character and that they resent the slightest insult that is offered them... (211)

Lal Behari says that it is this inherent boldness that makes Govinda unable to bear the Zamindar’s insults. Yet, is Govinda able to prove himself a hero? In this context it would be relevant to look to another chapter in the novel which discourses on the subject of “Bengali Heroism”.

In the chapter titled “Bengali Heroism”, we see Madhava, Govinda’s brother in law (his sister Malati’s husband), conversing with the peasants of his village on the issue of dealing with the atrocious Indigo-planter of Durganagar, Mr. Murray. The peasants are rather agitated and they decide to oppose the indigo planter with all their might and
with the support of their zamindar, Navakrishna. The next chapter, "The Affray", shows an affray between the lathials of Mr. Murray and the peasants of Durganagar, in which the latter prove an unequal match. The title of the chapter "Bengali Heroism", seem to be ironical, for the Bengalis do not make a heroic showing. In fact when the peasants are agitatedly shouting slogans "Mari salake maro (strike the scoundrel Murray)", an old peasant exclaims,

We shall see, friends, how you beat Mari Saheb. I have seen enough of the heroism of my countrymen. You are like mountains in words, but in action you [are like] the mustard seed. You have big mouths but little chests. You talk big but when you see the face of a Saheb you shrink into nothing. When Mari Saheb comes with his bands, you will all run away like dogs, putting their tails between their hind legs (247-8).

The experienced old peasant can see beyond the immediate excitement it seems, and he expresses an opinion that is a stereotypical one. The title of the chapter, in context of its contents, appears ironical, but, Lal Behari was not making a simple statement. His response is problematized by certain factors.

Firstly, it is interesting that Lal Behari names his "hero" Govinda, which is another name for the Hindu deity, Krishna. Govinda is certainly heroic, not as a conventional "hero", but in his tribulations and silent sufferings and his generally passive acceptance of his "fate". We also see in him a spark of protest that distinguishes him from the other peasants. When he is summoned by the zamindar, he garners courage to speak up against the injustice he is being subjected to. This protest may seem a minor one apparently, but its implication becomes clear when we see that the zamindar
Jayachand feels threatened enough by Govinda’s protest to order his men to burn Govinda’s huts.

Bengalis were stereotyped by the British, and even by themselves, as being effete. As far back as the late eighteenth century authors like Robert Orme and Alexander Dow had argued that the extreme climate of India, its heat and humidity, coupled with the natural abundance of its soil, had profoundly shaped the physical and moral condition of its people. In 1770 Dow avowed that the “languor occasioned by the hot climate of India” naturally inclined “the native to indolence and ease; and he thinks the evils of despotism less severe than the labour of being free” (“A dissertation” iii, vii). The “seeds of despotism”, sown among the Hindus by “the nature of the climate and the fertility of the soil”, had been “reared to perfect growth by the Mahomedans faith”. The amalgamation of nature and habit, Dow believed, reduced Hindus to a state of abject slavery, and habituated “an indolent and ignorant race of men” to the “simplicity of despotism” (Dow xx-xxi). All this “slavery” and “languor” subsisted in supposed distinction to the spur of the more unproductive soils and more temperate climate which had stimulated civilization and nourished thoughts of freedom in the Europeans.

Writing in the seventeen-sixties, Orme (Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire (1782)) likewise observed that “Breathing in the softest of climates; having so few real wants; and receiving even the luxuries of other nations with so little labour, from the fertility of their own soil; the Indian must become the most effeminate inhabitant of the globe; and this is the very point at which we now see him” (cited in Sen, Distant Sovereignty 85). This scornful view of Indians in general, and Bengalis in particular, continued to find expression well into the middle of the nineteenth century.28
These stereotypes may be easily challenged when one remembers that the peasants of Bengal were not always the silent sufferers that they are made out to be. The first uprisings against the British colonial power in India took place in Bengal, and they were peasant uprisings.29 In *Bengal Peasant Life* Lal Behari contests the stereotyped image of the timid Bengali through the characters of Govinda, Navakrishna, and Kalamanik.

Navakrishna (*nava*=new, *Krishna*= the Hindu god who delivers his people from all evil doers), 30 is the zamindar of Durganagar:

Had studied for some years in the Hindoo college of Calcutta and become animated with liberal and patriotic sentiments... [he was] one of those few zamindars who knew the duties attached to their station, who were actuated by public spirit, who were inspired by liberal and patriotic sentiments, who had sympathy with the down trodden raiyats, and who were honourable in all their actions... On his accession ... Navakrishna made a general proclamation ... that there was to be thenceforth an end of all injustice and oppression... he was determined... to promote the welfare of all his tenants (236-7).

When Navakrishna hears of the threats of the indigo-planter Mr. Murray to Madhava and his ilk, he

... thought it necessary to keep a number of men on the spot to prevent the outrage. At the same time he thought it proper to send to the Daroga... a representation to the effect that the planter of Nildanga had
used threatening language towards the husbandmen... and that a raid
upon the raiyats was highly probable (240).

Thus we see that Navakrishna is characterized as a strong and intelligent young
man, ready to come to the aid of his people.

Again, we meet a man of great strength and matched courage in Bengal Peasant
Life in Kalamanik, Govinda's "uncle". Kalamanik is actually the first person the reader
meets in the novel and the author describes him thus:

His complexion was much darker... it was deep ebony... and it was in
consequence of this circumstance that, although his name was Manik, or
the jewel, he was universally called Kalamanik, or the Black Jewel. He
was taller than the average run of his countrymen... a gigantic figure,
upwards of six feet height, of ebony complexion, wide-mouthed, hoe-
toothed, high-shouldered, long-armed and splay footed, was not "a thing
of beauty" and therefore not "a joy forever". He was an object of terror to
all the children in the village, who, when fractious, used invariably to be
quiet when they were told that Kalamanik was coming... Kalamanik was
more simple than most of his class... but this mental defect was amply
compensated by his great physical strength and courage. He was the
swiftest runner, the fastest swimmer, and the best wrestler in the village:
he could stop a huge Brahmini bull, when running in a fury, by catching
hold of its horns; he could carry on his head a whole stack of paddy
sheaves; and in every village fray he always stood in the fore-front, and
manipulated his club with the strength of Hercules, and the unerring
precision of *Yama* himself. Such was the Black Jewel of the Golden City, the uncle of our hero (18-19).

Kalamanik's heroism is not just a matter of words for we really see him heroically fighting Bhima Kotal and his men single-handedly, when the latter are sent by the Zamindar to murder him for garnering men for a protest. Though he succumbs, it is not before he has put up a heroic fight. Lai Behari thus contests the stereotype of Bengali effemineness through Kalamanik.31

In their study “Burdwan: Between Class and Caste”, in *Caste Class and the Raj*, Ranjit Sen and Snigdha Sen observe that,

What is important in Burdwan in the second half of the nineteenth century is not the caste-specific population changes... More important than this was the fact that about this time there was a kind of attitudinal revolution going on in Burdwan. Members of every caste had become sensitive to the fact that they must have education without which they missed some basic privilege of life (47).

*Bengal Peasant Life* reflects this change in attitude towards education. In the chapter “An Important Discussion”, Badan argues with his mother that Govinda should be sent to school.

He [Badan] had felt his own sad deficiency in this respect as he could neither read nor write... He thought that if his son were initiated into the mysteries of reading and writing he might be more prosperous in life than himself and prove a match for the wily *gomasta* and the oppressive zamindar (44).
Badan’s mother is superstitious that sending the child to school may prove disastrous, but Badan is insistent:

Alanga: ... our business is to till the ground, and if we become so ambitious as to learn reading and writing, the gods will certainly become angry towards us.

... 

Badan: The days in which our fathers lived were days of piety and virtue. That was the Satya-Yuga. There was no cheating, no oppression in those days. Writing and reading therefore were not essentially necessary. But in our days, men have become very deceitful—they fear neither gods nor men. It is necessary to learn to read and to write that we may not be cheated and oppressed (45).

Badan is not singular in wanting to educate his child. He cites examples of other men of his caste who know how to read and write. In his *Recollections of My School Days* Lal Behari mentioned the caste wise break up of students in the village *pathsala* thus: “The number in daily average attendance was about thirty, drawn from all castes. There were Brahman, Vaidya and Kayastha boys; the navasakas were also there; and the agricultural castes too had its representatives” (54).

Snigdha Sen has observed that,

This social awareness for the necessity of education among the low caste people of Burdwan was indeed a phenomenon... As early as 1830s we had four *Chandal* teachers in Burdwan suggesting that the lowest caste in the Hindu society was taking to the profession of the highest caste...but
this increase in lower caste participation in education was not enough to rule out the social distinction of higher castes. Thus the difference between a Brahman and a Chandal remained... The Brahman was still the main staff of the academic elite in the village... (50)

When Badan wanted to educate Govinda he certainly did not intend to break this rural elitism. The lure of the advantages of education was more predominant with him than any such consideration of disrupting the existing social order. But elitism was bound to collapse if the new tendencies in the village society could mature to their full development. As is mentioned by him in Recollections of My School Days, when Lal Behari himself attended the Pathsala in his village, he found that the Kayastha boys were made to be specially attentive in arithmetic so that in course of time they could be specialized in Zamindari accounts. Badan's disgust at the misery of being oppressed and cheated by upper caste and upper class men did not urge him to revolt against the system which descended too heavily upon them but instilled in him the desire to try to make Govinda escape the drudgery of the life of a downtrodden peasant. Badan's desire is representative of the urge on the part of the social have-nots to make themselves eligible for certain privileges, more economic than social. This is evident if we consider the following passage from Bengal Peasant Life:

Any day you might have seen in the school of the Brahman pedagogue between sixty and seventy boys, whereas in the other school you seldom saw more than twenty. And yet the Brahman was by no means a better teacher than the Kayastha. The former ... had read a part of the Sankshipta-Sara... the latter made no pretensions to Sanskrit scholarship,
but was universally acknowledged to be an arithmetician of the first water; and he was strong in zamindari accounts, a subject of which the Brahman *mahasaya* had no knowledge... the school of the Kayastha teacher was attended chiefly by the lower castes... Badan preferred the Kayastha to the Brahman teacher for two reasons: first, because the school of the latter was more aristocratic of the two, and he wished his son to be educated along with those who were his equals in social position, or at any rate, not very much higher, and secondly, because he wanted to learn zamindari accounts (54).

An important aspect of *Bengal Peasant Life* is the profusion of epigraphs, analogies and allusions. Lal Behari has to capture in the English language, the nuances of Bengal peasant life, for the “genteel” English reader, who is distanced from the subject on multiple levels, that is, in terms of religion, culture class and race. One of the strategies adopted by the author traversing this gap is the use of literary allusions, as a kind of epigraph to every chapter, and within the chapters as well.

Certain phenomena do not have or evoke the same associations in English as they have or do in Bengali culture. Every *signified* and *signifier*, in Saussurian terminology, mean different things across time and cultures. To convey in a foreign language the culture-bound and socio-religious items and nuances of another culture is not unproblematic. In *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy remarks that,

> Probably the uniqueness of Indian culture lies not so much in a unique ideology as in the society’s traditional ability to live with cultural ambiguities and to use them to build psychological and even...
metaphysical defences against cultural invasions. Probably, the culture itself demands that a certain permeability of boundaries be maintained in one's self image and that the self may not be defined too tightly or separated mechanically from the not-self (107).

Lai Behari's ample use of allusions creates the very permeability of boundaries which Nandy seems to be talking about. The text continually shifts in time and space, moving freely in and out of cultures and time frames.

Allusion is a stylistic device or trope, which, drawing upon the ready stock of ideas or emotion already associated with a topic, and implying a fund of knowledge that is shared by an author and his audience, refers to a literary text, an object or circumstance that has occurred or existed in an external context. The current term intertextuality, coined by poststructuralist Julia Kristeva is used to signify "the multiple ways in which any one literary text is inseparably inter-involved with other texts, whether by its open or covert citations and allusions, or by its formal and substantive features of an earlier text or texts or simply by its participation in the common stock of linguistic and literary conventions" (Abrams, Glossary 1993). Following Kristeva we may say that Lai Behari's text is implicated with all the texts that it alludes to. The process of allusion installs cultural distance itself as a subject of the text. The maintenance of the "gap" in the cross-cultural text is of profound importance to its ethnographic functions.

Lal Behari's extensive allusions to European literary texts not only reveals his intimate knowledge of European literature, but, and more importantly, is a signifier of his inevitable cultural syncreticity. The text becomes a platform on which the divergent
European and Bengali cultures stand face to face, a site juxtaposing the analogous as well as the disparate elements in the two cultures.

Given below are some passages from the novel where the cultural exchange (equations or inequations as the case may be), is carried on through analogies:

What, then, is a Bengal plough? The Bengal plough is very much the same as the Greek and the Roman one, though it has not the mechanical adjustments of its English namesake. For the ilex oak of the Theban bard, and the elm of the Mantuan, the Bengali husbandman substitutes the babul, or rather babla, as the Vardhamana peasant calls it... (13)\(^{32}\)

Let Government ... have a care that it does not tax that precious weed, which is the Bengal raiyat's balm of Gilead, his only solace amid the privations of his wretched life \(^{(16)}\)\(^{33}\).

In Bengal, unlike England, there is no fear of babies catching cold; all babies are therefore allowed to revel in unfettered nakedness besmeared with mustard oil... Sundari's baby used everyday to be laid on a piece of plank, called pinda, and exposed to the sun for some hours. European doctors will perhaps hold up their hands in astonishment and declare that such exposure is calculated to result in infanticide. But Bengali peasant women know better.... Thanks to this grilling during infancy, there are scarcely any cases of coup de solil among Bengali peasants, though they live in one of the hottest countries in the world and are incessantly exposed... (30-31)
May we not regard this amiable fiction of Shashti as an adumbration of the teaching of Scripture, that children are the especial objects of the ministrations of celestial spirits? (36)

But what is a ghatak? The English reader asks... to spinsters and bachelors the sound of his name is more musical than Apollo's lute. He is the professional matchmaker, and therefore an under servant of Kamdeva, the Indian Cupid... (61)

... there was seen a very beautiful girl of about sixteen years of age coming up to the bathing place... she walked slowly, like a young elephant [gajagamini], as the old Sanskrit poets would have said. [She] looked as proud as... Pharaoh's daughter might have looked when she went to make her ablution at the Nile (136).

The English reader need not fear that we are about to discuss the grievances of Paddy and the expediency or otherwise of "Home Rule" in Ireland... in Ireland Paddy makes riots, in Bengal raiyats make paddy; and in this lies the difference between the paddy of green Bengal and the Paddy of the Emerald Isle (150).
Prayers were offered chiefly to two divinities—Lakshmi, the Indian Demeter; and Agni, the god of fire... (170)

Through these analogies between Europe and Bengal, and through the allusions to Apollo, Cupid, Demeter, the Pharaoh, the Home Rule in Ireland, Lal Behari negotiates the cultural gap between his subject and his audience, and at the same time engages in a cultural exchange, corroborating the equities and inequities of the two cultures. Particularly significant are the expressions such as the Bengal raiyat’s balm of Gilead, Indian Demeter, etc. and the appropriation of Shashthi as the celestial spirits of the Scripture. In fact, every chapter in the text opens with an overt allusion to texts by authors such as Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare, Thomas Gray, Crabbe, James Thomson, Keble, Samuel Butler, Oliver Goldsmith, William Cowper, Robert Burns, Robert Southey, Byron, H.H. Wilson, Virgil, and The Bible, Griffith’s Ramayana, Theokritos, Dryden’s translation of Georgics, Homer’s Iliad (translated by Cowper), Longfellow, Campbell, Schiller, John Ford, Wordsworth, Kalimachos, Habakkuk, Micah.

The allusions in Bengal Peasant Life may be grouped under three headings according to their function in the text. The first group includes those allusions which are explicatory in nature, summing up the premise of the particular chapter. Most of the allusions are of this type. The second group includes those allusions which are ironical, and which often betray the author’s tongue in cheek humour. The allusions of both groups help to determine the author’s attitude towards his subject. The third group is that of the problematic allusions. To this group belong those allusions that function on multiple levels; those allusions that are partly explicatory and partly ironic, or those, that are neither explicatory nor ironic.
The title page of the book contains the following famous lines from Thomas Gray's (1716-71) "Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard", a meditative poem which reflects on the obscure destinies of the villagers who lie buried in anonymity, and whose toil, though not ambitious, is useful:

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the Poor.

These lines set down the theme of the novel very clearly ('short and simple annals of the poor'), and also reveal the author's empathy with his subject. The same purpose is served by the allusion to the first stanza of George Crabbe's *The Village*, in the first chapter, where the author speaks of his wish to provide in the novel, "a real picture of the poor", and by the numerous allusions to the poems of James Thomson ("The Seasons"), William Cowper ("The Task"), George Crabbe ("The Parish Register").

An interesting allusion occurs at the beginning of chapter VIII, "The Village Astrologer", where a parallel is drawn between the village astrologer of Kanchanpur, and Sidrophel, the cunning astrologer satirized by Samuel Butler in *Hudibras*, Part II, Canto III, lines 104-24. Sidrophel is astonishingly like Dhumketu, the astrologer of Kanchanpur.

Another very interesting allusion occurs in the chapters "The Zamindar of Kanchanpur", and "Before the Zamindar". Both these chapters describe the ruthless cruelty of the zamindar of Kanchanpur, Jayachand, and they each begin with an allusion
to Robert Burns' "The Twa Dogs", a poem where Burns uses two dogs, one a "laird's" pet named Caesar, the other a working collie named Luath "to discuss the conditions under which their respective masters must live, and how their actions affect the people they associate with, and those that they have influence over". The following two stanzas are quoted by Lal Behari in the two chapters respectively:

"Our laird gets in his racked rents,
His coals, his kain, an' a' his stents:
He rises when he likes himself;
His flunkies answer at the bell;"

And

"I've notic'd, on our laird's court-day,
(An' monie a time my heart's been wae),
Poor tenant bodies, scant o' cash,
How they maun thole a factor's snash:
He'll stamp an' threaten, curse an' swear
He'll apprehend them, poind their gear,
While they maun staun', wi' aspect humble,
An' hear it a', an' fear an' tremble!
I see how folk live that hae riches;
But surely poor-folk maun be wretches!"

The poem is mainly in the form of a dialogue, where the two dogs speak of their masters. Both the above stanzas are spoken by Caesar, the rich man's dog. It is
interesting to look at Luath's answer to Caesar when the latter calls the poor folk men to be wretches:

They are not so wretched as one would think:

Though constantly on poverty's brink,
They are so accustomed with the sight,
The view of it gives them little fright.

Then chance and fortune are so guided,
They are always in less or more provided;
And though fatigued with close employment,
A snatch of rest is a sweet enjoyment.

The dearest comfort of their lives,
Their growing children and faithful wives;
The chattering children are just their pride,

That sweetens all their fireside.

Luath's answer is not quoted by Lal Behari, but it is important for us because his words strike the keynote of *Bengal Peasant Life*, and indeed of many novels which have dealt with subaltern figures—whether it is Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Six Acres And A Third*, or Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* and *Untouchable*, or Kamala Markandeya's *Nectar in a Sieve*; that poverty is not so insufferable after all, and each man has his greatest comfort in those things that cannot, after all, be bought with money.

Most of the allusions to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* are ironical. The first allusion to Chaucer occurs in the second chapter of the novel, "Introduces An Old Woman to the Reader":

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These are lines 467-8 of *The General Prologue* and refer to the character of the Wife of Bath, one of the two female characters in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer characterises The Wife of Bath as a very experienced woman who has travelled all over the world on pilgrimages. Not only has she seen many lands, she has lived with five husbands. She is worldly in both senses of the word: she has seen the world and has experience in the ways of the world, that is, in love and sex. Rich and tasteful, the Wife’s clothes veer a bit toward extravagance: her face is wreathed in heavy cloth, her stockings are a fine scarlet colour, and the leather on her shoes is soft, fresh, and brand new—all of which demonstrate how wealthy she has become. Although she is argumentative and enjoys talking, the Wife is intelligent in a commonsense, rather than intellectual, way. Through her experiences with her husbands, she has learned how to provide for herself in a world where women had little independence or power. The chief manner in which she has gained control over her husbands has been in her control over their use of her body, which she uses as a bargaining tool. The expression “gat-toothed” symbolizes her loose morality.

This Wife of Bath is in no way like Rupa’s mother, who is referred to as the “old woman” in the title of the second chapter. Rupa’s mother (the author says that he uses the circumlocutory phrase Rupa’s mother because, “we never heard her name mentioned by anybody in the village”, 6) is a poor midwife (“her whole wardrobe consisted of one long *sadi* and one short one”, 7), “between forty and fifty years of age”, of the *bagdi*.
caste. The only similarity in the situation of the two women is that Rupa’s mother “had very few tooth in her head”, and the Wife of Bath is “gat-tothed” (gap-toothed).

Another ironic allusion occurs in Chapter XII, “The Village School Master”. In describing the village school master, Day refers to the following lines from Hudibras, (Canto I, Part I, Lines 65-70):

He was in LOGIC a great critic,
    Profoundly skill'd in analytic;
He could distinguish, and divide
    A hair 'twixt south, and south-west side:
On either which he would dispute,
    Confute, change hands, and still confute...

This allusion is ironic because Samuel Butler’s portrait in the poem is a satire, while Day’s school master was really known for his “logical subtlety”, and the Christian missionary “had many a tough argument with him”(57).

Of all the problematic allusions, the Chaucerian allusions are the most interesting. Chapter VI, “Fixes the Name and Fate of Our Hero”, begins with an allusion to Chaucer’s The Knight’s Tale, which is known primarily for its concentration on courtly love of the chivalric age. It is characterised by a perfect amalgam of honour, love, chivalry and adventure.” The Knight’s tale emphasizes tournaments and duels, and they are both described in great detail. It also illuminates the ceremonious ways of the aristocracy. Also the most basic chivalric ideals of the knight are present: “There is an emphasis on honour and proper conduct throughout the tale, along with form, ritual, and a code of behaviour.” The most interesting aspect of The Knight’s Tale is that in a time
where the church (Catholic and Christian) was a strong force in all aspects of life, Chaucer chose to have his tale include several of the Greek Gods and Goddesses with no mention of his societies' contemporary God. The two knights pray to the Gods, and they play an intricate role in deciding their outcome, as they decide who will succeed in winning the hand of the maiden. Through these Gods he illustrates his belief that a knight is well subject to fate and fortune. In the end of the story, the knight who wins the battle does not win the hand of Emily; instead he dies as result of an accident and commends her to marry the knight he had just defeated.

This allusion is a complex one because while on the one hand it explicates the role of fate in one's life, and also implies that the peasants' life and their rituals and traditions are, in their own way, honourable, on the other hand the allusion is ironical because the Knight's tale is the tale of the aristocratic classes, and embodies chivalric principles of courtly love, something that is completely alien to a Bengal peasant.

Chapter X, *The Five Faced*, which describes an epileptic fit that came over young Govinda, begins with an allusion to Shakespeare's *Othello*:

...he foams at mouth and by and by

Breaks out to savage madness.

These lines are spoken by Iago in Act IV scene i of the play when Othello falls in a trance in a fit of rage when Iago tells him that Desdemona has betrayed him. This allusion is certainly problematic because it is neither ironic nor explicatory except in its imagery of an epileptic fit. There is little link between the two situations.

The extensive use of quotations/allusions from European texts has much to do with the reception of European literature by Western educated natives like Lal Behari.
We may take a look at D. L. Richardson’s “On the Education of the People of India through the Medium of the English Language”, which he wrote as a Preface to his *Literary Leaves; Or, Prose and Verse Chiefly Written in India* to see how and in what manner European, especially British, texts were valorised in the colonial period (since it is preferable to take a look at the entire essay, I have included the complete text in Appendix B). But Lai Behari uses these texts not to blindly adore European culture, but to his own purposes: to highlight cultural differences as well as similarities, to uphold his indigenous tradition, and to problematize racial difference.

In ‘The Problem of Cultural Self-representation’ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks that “What can the intellectual do toward the text of the oppressed?” She answers her question herself: “Represent them and analyze them, disclosing one’s own positionality for the other communities of power” (56). This is precisely how Lai Behari’s text functions. He represents and analyzes the condition of the Bengal peasants divulging his own location as the mediator between the oppressed and the oppressor. As noted by MacPherson,

Perhaps the most striking passages are those where Mr. Day, with nervous energy, assailed some abuse, such as his exposure of the harsh, overbearing, unjust dealings of the indigo-planter. Happily these evils have become modified, or even become a matter of past history. The peasant has been placed on a better footing to protect himself, and need not be bullied by either *zemindar* or indigo-planter into acts ruinous to himself … *For his improved condition the peasant owes something to this tale of peasant life* (Italics mine) (125).
It would be a pretension to suggest that all peasants' woes have been modified, or that there has been a drastic change in the condition of the peasant, yet Lal Behari fulfils his responsibility in representing the Bengal peasant's tale in as poignant a manner as could elicit much empathy for the peasant classes.
Notes and References


2 The topic signifies the deep interest of Joy Kissen towards the public and personal life of the working classes.

3 http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-47012/India

4 Lal Behari’s biographer, G. MacPherson, notes, “The reception accorded to the tale of Govinda Samanta on its first appearance must have been a source of much gratification to Mr. Day. The press in India almost without exception was loud in its praise, while not a few prominent newspapers in England favourably reviewed it, speaking of its author in eulogistic terms” (MacPherson 117). MacPherson further notes that, in a letter to Mr. Day, Sir Richard [Lieutenant General of Bengal] explained to him that his promotion was entirely due to his rare literary abilities, which had become prominent by the appearance of his book *Govinda Samanta*. … That his literary productions were highly appreciated by those best qualified to form an opinion of them, and commended themselves to men of widely different tastes and culture, Mr. Day had ample reason to believe. They had been extensively and favourably reviewed by newspapers and periodicals; from numerous quarters letters reached him, expressing the pleasure the senders had derived from the perusal of his writings… space cannot be found for complimentary letters, but we may make an exception of a brief note which, as being written by one whose name in the domain of science was universally known, must have been peculiarly gratifying to him. This note … ran as follows:—

“I see that the Reverend Lal Behari Day is Editor of the *Bengal Magazine* and I shall be glad if you would tell him with my compliments how much pleasure and instruction I derived from reading a few years ago, his novel, *Govinda Samanta*”.

Charles Darwin
13th April 1881,
Down, Beckenham, Kent.

(Macpherson: 1900: 132-34)
Lai Behari (1824-94) had his early education in his village pathsala and came to Calcutta in the year 1834. He converted to Christianity in 1843. A year before his baptism he published a tract The Falsity of the Hindu Religion in 1842, which won a prize for the best essay. From 1855 to 1867, Day was a Missionary and Minister of the Free Church of Scotland. He worked as professor of English in Government administered colleges at Berhampore and Hooghly from 1867 to 1889. After having served in several churches in the prime of his career, he joined the Berhampore Collegiate School as Principal in 1867. Later he became Professor of English and Mental and Moral Philosophy in Hooghly Mohsin College and stayed with it from 1872 to 1888. Though a devout Christian, he vehemently protested against any discrimination practised by the ruling class against the natives. Though Lai Behari’s writings were mostly in English, he edited a Bengali monthly magazine, Arunaday (1857) and penned a Bengali narrative, Chandramukhir Upakhyan. He was also the editor of three English magazines, Indian Reformer (1861), Friday Review (1866) and Bengal Magazine (1872). Apart from writing in these magazines, Lai Behari also contributed articles to Calcutta Review and Hindu Patriot.

Lal Behari’s biographer MacPherson particularly mentions that like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Peary Chand Mitra and Dinabandhu Mitra, Lai Behari also felt very passionately for the poor and oppressed peasantry of Bengal.

The novel gives ‘voice’ to the ‘dumb’ multitudes who cannot speak the coloniser’s language, and thus cannot make themselves heard.

I shall discuss later in what sense Govinda may be called the ‘hero’.

Kanchanpur (kanchan=gold, pur=place, city), which according to Tara Krishna Basu is the “pseudonym for Sona Palashi” (sona=golden), which, Tara Krishna says, is the birth place of Lai Behari himself. Lai Behari’s biographer, G. Macpherson, however assigns Talpur and not Sona Palashi as the birth place of Lai Behari. During 1931-34, Tara Krishna Basu, and his associates, ‘took great pains to discover the forgotten village, ‘Kanchanpur’, [i.e. Sona Palashi] [the results of this visit was the book ‘Kanchanpur Revisited’]... Again in 1958... the same researchers surveyed Kanchanpur’, to study ‘the changing role of human factor over time’, and they used the Kanchanpur of Day’s text as a point of departure for their study because they felt that Bengal Peasant Life is ‘probably the oldest intimate portrait of Bengal peasant life written in the English language and a mine of qualitative information.’ (Economic Development and...
The result of this second visit was the book *The Bengal Peasant From Time to Time*. In these books, Tara Krishna Basu locates Kanchanpur as a mid-sized village to the north east of Burdwan, full of natural beauty. Basu looks into every detail of the social and domestic life of Kanchanpur (Shona Palashi) as it has evolved over the years, and his book is a unique and interesting study. (Basu, Tara Krishna. “The Bengal Peasant From Time to Time”, *Indian Statistical Series*. No. 15. New York: Asia Pub. House, 1963)

In October and November of 1944 IPTA (Indian Peoples Theatre Association) staged *Nabanna* (Harvest Festival), a landmark in the history of Indian theatrical activity. It was the first truly peasant drama on the Bengali stage since Dinabandhu Mitra’s play *Nildarpan* was produced in the 1870s. It had a stunning impact on viewers because the traditional heroes of Indian drama were replaced with famine-, strife-ridden village folk. This four-act play by Bijon Bhattacharya, was written in reaction to the terrible Bengal famine of 1943. *Nabanna* tells about the life of Bengali peasants during this harrowing period. Ground down by poverty, the characters are also victims of the human greed around them. Getting its name from the final scene in which the harvest festival takes place, the play ends on a note of hope and belief in the collective strength of the peasantry. It was produced not only in the Bengali language but also in Hindi and was made into a film. Its success was overwhelming and its impact on Indian theater phenomenal.

The expression, “with folded hands, and with his sheet round his neck”, signifies a mark of respect, which Govinda, being a raiyat of the Zamindar, was expected to show.

In the character of Lai Behari’s Navakrishna, there could be a covert allusion to the historical figure of Nabakrishna Deb (better known as Raja Nabakrishna Deb) (1733-1797), who was the ‘founder of the Shovabazar Raj family, is famous for the Durga Puja he organised in the newly constructed Shovabazar Rajbari (king’s palace) in Kolkata (then Calcutta) in 1757, his patronisation of numerous performing artistes and his philanthropy’. Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabakrishna_Deb"

I will discuss the issue of ‘Bengali heroism’ a little later.

Not only Govinda’s death, but the agonizing manner of death of all the main characters in the novel—Badan, Alanga, Gayaram, Madhav, Kalamaniik and Govinda —seems rather forced. It is as though the author tries to arouse the reader's sympathy for these people through the narration of their shocking
particularly grisly is the death of Alanga (there was no doctor, no medicine. The six women resolved next morning to leave Alanga to the tender mercies of dogs and vultures...)

15 MacPherson says that this man 'had no faith in the Hindu Shastras, but had imbibed many Christian sentiments, and was consequently looked askance upon by his Brahmin neighbours. He was over sixty years of age, and so lame that he could with difficulty walk with a stick. He was well acquainted with L---, Mr. Day's companion on his tour, and came to visit the catechists on their arrival in his village, which lay some miles from Burdwan. They had long conversations, and had good reason to suppose that he would soon profess Christianity. But on returning to the village a year after, 'we were grieved,' he states, 'to see that instead of making progress in the knowledge of divine truth, he had evidently gone backwards... Though this old man bears little, or at most but a shadow of resemblance to the Govinda Samanta in the Tale of Bengal Peasant Life composed twenty years after, it does not seem improbable that Mr. Day had him in mind when he selected the title for that novel. At any rate, this old man strongly attracted his sympathy, for concerning no other Hindu did he jot down so much as he did of him' (MacPherson 68).

16 Raiyat is a nomenclature used customarily and legally for the peasantry of Bengal during the Mughal and British periods, but in its widest sense, also used for subjects of the state and of the ruling classes. The term raiyat originates from an Arabic word raiyat [from ra'a] meaning etymologically, 'a herd at pasture' and 'subjects' in collective sense. The term seems to have been used first in the Todar Mall settlement (1582) and since then it was in currency until the term expired legally and practically on the enactment of the East Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1950 under which the raiyats got a new legal nomenclature, malik. But the new term never received popular recognition.

17 The book presents itself as a simple traveller's narrative with the disingenuous title Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, its authorship assigned only to "Lemuel Gulliver, first a surgeon, then a captain of several ships". Different editions contain different versions of the prefatory material which are basically the same as forewords in modern books. On his first voyage, Gulliver is washed ashore after a shipwreck and awakes to find himself a prisoner of a race of 6 inch (15cm) tall people, inhabitants of the neighbouring and rival countries of Lilliput and Blefuscu. While exploring a new country, Gulliver is abandoned by his companions and found by a farmer who is 72 feet (22 meters) tall (the scale of Lilliput is approximately 12:1, of Brobdingnag 1:12) who treats him as a curiosity and exhibits him for money.
Starting from 1532, Rabelais wrote Gargantua and Pantagruel, a connected series of books. They tell the story of two giants—a father (Gargantua) and his son (Pantagruel) and their adventures—written in an amusing, extravagant, and satirical vein. Although the place (or date) of his birth are not reliably documented, it is probable that François Rabelais was born in 1494 near Chinon, Indre-et-Loire, where his father worked as a lawyer.

After his primary education in the village school, Lal Behari came to Calcutta with his father and was admitted to Reverend Alexander Duff's General Assembly Institution (now Scottish Church College) where he studied from 1834 to 1844, and where he imbibed the European literature, culture and religion.

Just about a century later, Salman Rushdie was symbolizing the same in Midnight's Children (1980), when he made Saleem Sinai, (born at the stroke of midnight on 15th August 1947, the moment of India’s independence, and thereby the symbol of postcolonial India), the child of multiple nations, religions, languages, and political parties. It would be difficult to over emphasize the impact or popularity of Midnight's Children, Salman Rushdie's second novel with critics and the general reader alike. From its publication in 1981, Midnight's Children has become a standard work on university syllabuses and has enjoyed an international readership that catapulted its author almost overnight to the very forefront of world authors. It was awarded the 1981 Booker Prize, the English Speaking Union Literary Award, and in 1993 it was awarded both the James Tait Prize and the Booker of Bookers Prize. Rushdie's novel presents an encyclopaedic exploration of an entire society through the story of a single person. It is able to do this, in part, by merging with the novel form a number of non-Western texts such as the Sanskrit epics, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata and, most consciously (and not unproblematically) The 1,001 Nights.

Hindu Shastras doctrine “Putrarthe kriyote bharaya”, meaning that marriage is only for giving birth to children (putra stands for 'children' and not 'son'). Hindus are largely motivated by this doctrine in marriage. Ramkrishna Deb says, ‘behave like brother and sister after begetting two-three children’.

Mohanty, S. P. ed. Six Acres and a Third by Fakir Mohan Senapati.
24 He even makes his peasants speak in the same register, the inconsistency of which he is aware of, and which he calls a 'grave though unavoidable fault in this authentic narrative'. (p. 46) but I will deal with the language issue separately.

25 The cultural explanation here orients the seeing/perceiving 'eye' of the English reader.

26 It begins with a brief description of her childhood and tells the story of a life filled with hardships. As the story continues through their life of struggles, Rukmani and Nathan must raise their children, sustain the farm that gives them life, and continue to hope for a better future. Rukmani battles poverty, hunger, her neighbours, industrialization, natural disasters, betrayal, and the harsh reality of death. The title of the novel Nectar in a Sieve is an allusion to the poem "Work Without Hope" by Samuel Coleridge. "Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, and hope without an object cannot live." (lines 13-14, "Work Without Hope"). There are no direct references in the book to nectar or sieves, but hope is a very important quality of the lives of the characters.

27 Go can refer to cows, land or one's senses. Vinda means "protector". When the two words are combined, Govinda means Krishna who is the protector of the cows, the land and/or one's senses. The story of how Krishna was given the name Govinda is described in detail in the Vishnu Purana. After lifting Govardhan hill to protect the villagers and cows of Vrindavan, Indra awarded him the title.

28 Macaulay's opinion about Bengalis has become infamous for its racial typecasting. Macaulay says that the physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds. Courage, independence, veracity, are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable. His mind bears a singular analogy to his body. It is weak even to helplessness for purposes of manly resistance. These racial stereotypes are studied in detail by John Rosselli in The Self-Image of Effeminess: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal (Past and Present, No. 86 (Feb., 1980), pp. 121-148), and by David Arnold in Race, Place and Bodily Difference in Early Nineteenth-Century India (Historical Research, vol. 77, no. 196, May 2004) and many other scholars.

29 The early years of British rule in India were marked by widespread peasant rebellions. Long before the Sepoy Rebellion -- often regarded as the first war of Indian independence -- hungry peasants of Bengal
and Bihar, victims of the terrible famine of 1770 rose in revolt against the East India Company, which had been exacting money and crops from them. This was the famous Sannyasi rebellion. A large number of sannyasis and fakirs who were being fleeced by the British rulers through various forms of exactions, played an important role in organizing the peasants and hence the name —Sannyasi Rebellion. Along with the peasants and the sannyasis and fakir, there were also village artisans — the famous silk weavers of Bengal, who had been made to slave for the British merchants — and the thousands of unemployed soldiers from the disbanded Mughal army. Led by Majnu Shah, Bhabani Pathak, Debi Chaudhurani and a host of heroic figures, the rebellion continued till the beginning of the 19th century and was marked by daring attacks on the East India Company's offices in different parts of Bihar and Bengal, killing of notorious Indian landlords and money-lenders as well as of oppressive British traders and army officers, and both guerilla and positional warfare against the British army.

30 In the character of Lai Behari's Navakrishna, there could be a covert allusion to the historical figure of Nabakrishna Deb (better known as Raja Nabakrishna Deb) (1733-1797), who was the 'founder of the Shovabazar Raj family, is famous for the Durga Puja he organised in the newly constructed Shovabazar Rajbari (king's palace) in Kolkata (then Calcutta) in 1757, his patronisation of numerous performing artistes and his philanthropy'. Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabakrishna_Deb"

31 Lal Behari himself was a fearless man. He did not shy away from voicing his opinion against Alexander Duff on the issue of equal treatment of Indian and European missionaries.

In her study, ‘Burdwan: Between Class and Caste’, Snigdha Sen remarks that from 1872 when the Census Report first came out till 1910 when J.C.K Peterson wrote his District Gazetteer the Ugrakshatriyas showed a tendency towards numerical expansion... The Ugrakshatriyas probably had more fighting stamina than the Sadgops. Their toughness had within it a kind of resistance not very much common with other Bengal ryots. This resistance had allowed them to survive the famous Burdwan fever which took a great toll of human life and depopulated the district.(Sen: 2000: 45-6) She further remarks that, What is important in Burdwan in the second half of the nineteenth century is not the caste-specific population changes... More important than this was the fact that about this time there was a kind of attitudinal revolution going on in Burdwan. Members of every caste had become sensitive to the fact that they must have education without

32 Theban Bard - Theban Bard or Eagle, refers to Pindar, born at Thebes. (BC 518-439)

Mantuan-Baptista Mantuan (1447-1516), poet, priest.

33 Balm of Gilead is a healing compound (a balm) made from the resinous gum of the North American tree species Populus candidans. It takes its name from the allusive phrase "balms in Gilead", referring to the balm or balsam carried from Gilead by the caravan of merchants to whom Joseph was sold by his brothers (Genesis Chapter 37). From the King James Version of the Bible: "Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many medicines; for thou shalt not be cured."

Jeremiah 46:11 "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? Jeremiah 8:22 In all likelihood, this ancient trade item was what is now known as balsam of Mecca, produced from the tree Commiphora gileadensis (syn. Commiphora opobalsamum), native to southern Arabia. Balm of Gilead is mentioned in Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven". The character believes that the balm of Gilead can heal his broken heart, because he is lamenting for the death of his love, Lenore.

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