Novels can be distinguished into several classes on the basis of its plot and theme, such as the social, the historical, the political, the picturesque, the crime novel etc. In modern times some novels are, in this way, grouped as regional novels. But as in other branches of literature here also the groups cannot be separated into water-tight compartments, e.g., a social novel may contain incidents of crime in its plot. Similarly a historical or a political novel also exposes a social setting. So, also, a regional novel may naturally have a social background and plot or a political or a criminal incident.

These divisions may be to some extent loose or overlapping but these are useful inasmuch as they take cognisance of the extreme forms and help us to study them separately.

These distinct varieties of novel are the results of the differences in the attitude and view of the novelists towards the mysteries of human life.

We want to taste in the theme and plot of a novel the unending mysteries of human life - its struggle, success and failure and so on. But human life has got different patterns in different places and times. Man has got an eternal and universal identity so far as his basic feelings and sentiments are concerned. Again there are much differences from time to time and place to place in his mode of living and concept of life. A nation differs from another in its customs, ideals, ideas of right and wrong, language and dress, festivals and rituals etc.

So, we see, though Man has an eternal and universal identity, he has also a limited self conditioned by time and place. This truth is also asserted by the experts of Human Geography in such statements: - "Man can no more be scientifically studied apart from the ground which he tills, or the lands over which he travels, or the seas over which he travels, than polar bear or desert cactus can be understood apart from its habitat. Man's relation to his environment are infinitely more numerous and complex than those of the most highly organised plant or animal". 1.

We can now remember the opinion expressed by Shashi Bhushan Dasgupta pointing to environment as a secondary cause of variations in forms and matters of art and literature in different lands and ages.

* We ourselves partly form what we are, the rest is the gift of nature or the cosmic system. Here we cannot determine mathematically the proportions of influence of these two factors, but we cannot ignore any of them. What is it which I mention as gift of nature? That is on one hand combination of

many factors like climate, atmosphere, rivers, fields, mountains while on the other hand tribe, religion, society, civilisation, culture, state etc. All these things are more or less firmly embedded in our lives. 2.

The regional novelist is an artist of life confined to and influenced by a particular environment.

A fiction or a story must have a background - distinct or general. Sometimes the place may be actual one which can be pointed out in a map and sometimes the imaginary name and description make an impression on the reader of a place that doesn't have any geographical existence. Here is an example from Bankim Chandra's Visvriksha (First Chapter).

"Nagendranath is a very rich man, a landlord. He lives at Govindapur. We shall not disclose the name of the district where the village is situated but simply refer to it as Hariharpur." Similarly, Jhumjhumpur - where Kundanandini had her paternal home may or may not have its existence in Bengal but that does not in any way prevent us in enjoying the novel Visvriksha. Again Tamralipta Nagar, a mith-town of old days is insignificant in Bankim's Yugalanguriya. But the background of time and place is very important and indispensable in his historical novel "Rajsimha."

In a regional novel the place of incidents has a special importance. In it we are acquainted with a particular locality which is essentially dominant on the incidents and characters. But only a localized background of any kind doesn't necessarily produce an effect of taste and savour of a regional literature. When the plot is based on city life or a suburb composed of different classes of civilised population the fiction can not be called a regional one. Because, the regional characteristics of a place is absent in a cosmopolitan urban area. A novel may depict the life of elite society or any other class of people of a city like Delhi, Calcutta, London, but the story will probably be very little affected if we shift the background to any other big city.

In "A Tale of Two Cities" Dickens has narrated the Social condition of France and England at the time of French Revolution and the plot is connected with London and Paris. But it is not a regional novel. Because London and Paris are two well-known International cosmopolitan cities and can possibly be said to be the hearts of the British and the French respectively. These cities do not represent any specified regional life-pattern, culture and outlook in any restricted sense.

The aim of regional literature is to present in an enjoyable form the specialities of groups of people integrated

through generations to a place away from townlife. Therefore the locale in such a novel must be -

(a) a place that has some special features which distinguish it from the rest of the country.

(b) so pervasively related to events and characters that it will be totally inextricable and essential in the story. To elaborate this point we can take help of the following opinions by two critics of English novels.

"The regional novel is the national novel carried to one degree further of subdivision; it is a novel which, concentrating on a particular region or a nation, depicts the life of that region in such a way that the reader is conscious of the characteristics which are unique to that region and differentiate it from others in common motherland". 3.

With a reference to Miss Edgeworth's novels Walter Allen says:

"She invented, in other words, the regional novel, in which the very nature of the novelist's characters is conditioned, receives its bias and expressions, from the fact that they live in a countryside differentiated by a traditional way of life from other countryside." 4.

We know that influences of surroundings including atmosphere, topography, heredity etc. on the living world are studied in Ecology, a branch of Biology, while such influences on Man are observed in Human Geography. But in a regional writing the local life with all its specialities influenced by geographical environment do not appear as mere facts but appeal to the reader for its literary flavour. Here the events as well as the inner feelings of the characters, their hopes and disappointments, pains and pleasures, livelihood and life-style, struggles and achievements will be included and influenced by this geographical contour. As it is nature that distinguishes the region so the writer hints at the connection between nature and his characters. Often in such a novel Man becomes a part of nature amidst its fields, rivers, hills, jungles, corns and many other things. Somewhere he is pleased with the pleasant and resourceful nature and elsewhere he is vexed and troubled by nature's adversities. We can note such close relation between nature and man in Thomas Hardy's "The Return of the Native", "Tess Of the D'urbervilles", Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man And the Sea", Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay's "Aranyak".

Of course a writing doesn't become regional literature just because its background has a specific name and it contains stray descriptions of nature. Let us here examine this view of Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay:

"We can taste regionality to some extent in Ravindranath's stories in the first volume of "Galpa-Guccha", *** The Young Heroes and heroines of these stories cannot be seperated from

the geographical setting of these stories. This can be established from Ravindranath's statements in "Chinnapatra" about the origin of the stories. Ratna of "Post Master", Fatik of "Chuti", Mrunmayi of "Samāpti", Tarapada of "Atithi", Subha of "Subha" cannot be imagined apart from their environments. In these stories the nature with its dazzles and darknesses caresses the smiles and tears of the characters. 5.

Lastly the critic concludes "But we don't confine the stories to the small boundary of any region as they finally reveal a world of perfect beauty". 6.

Here we agree to the assessment but not to the analysis. True that, we get mentions and descriptions of different places in the above-named stories but most of them are fictitious and we find no speciality in them regarding their geographical location. Rivers, vegetation, grassy fields and soft soils which we get in the background here, are so common in different parts of Bengal that they don't convey any regional distinction. These characters also are not localized in any sense. This much we can say that topography of undivided Bengal is the scene of these stories. But such a vast and general background cannot be called a region for any practical purpose. Regionality has an implied sense of geographical limitation. A regional literature will draw the locality in a more specific, clear and vivid manner.

In the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey - the Lake Poets - are minutely reflected the hills, lakes, streams, valleys and the rural life of Lake District. But these are not localized literatures as these do not reflect any regional outlook. For similar reasons Jivananda Das's poems cannot be called regional though the nature of Bengal have lent it's images in them. In this matter we need not know where, how and why the writer gets the impetus of writing a particular work.

A fiction cannot be branded as regional simply for the local colour that it may have. Local colour will include some description of the locale, dress, customs, music etc. It is for the most part decorative. "When it becomes an essential and intrinsic part of the work then it is more properly called Regionalism". 7.

For example, Saratchandra's novels though reflect social picture of rural Bengal still cannot be classed as regional as the villages Kuapur, Tal-Sonapur and others have no geographical identity and these may be placed in any part of West Bengal without affecting the stories concerned. Even his "Biraj Bou" with Saptagram, Magragnaj and Tarakeswar in its background is not a regional novel as it is a story of a common middle-class Bengali family without any deep influence of any local trend.

6. ibid.
The realistic descriptions of Calcutta, Patna, Bengum and Agra do not make Saratchandra's 'Srikanta', 'Patheer Dabi', and 'Ses Prasna' regional novels for the following reasons:

(a) These places are cities without any sharp and distinctive regional characteristics.

(b) These places are not indispensable for the plots and themes.

(c) The main characters are not originated in and dominated by the environments.

Similarly, the coalmine areas of Burdwan do not make Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay's 'Kaila Kutir Des' a regional fiction; because, Ranjan and Mala - the principal characters are from urban Bengalee families and their love with its problems is not a local thing. It could develop anywhere with same consequences. Rather his stories in the series 'Kaila Kutir' based on the life of Santal coalmine labourers are more regional in character.

We can here quote the novelist-critic Narayan Gangopadhyay's remarks on regional literature:

"Regionality has an important role in literature. In some cases the local environment works as a framework of a picture which is merely ornamental, though sometimes a particular background helps to some extent in the development of a theme in a composition. A writer cannot be stamped as regional even for this feature. This epithet is applicable on a writer only when his characters become symbols of the vitality and existence of that particular surroundings and their actions and reactions, both physical and psychological, come out as an inevitable result of that particular base. And though regional in nature this type of writing transcends the limit of land and time in its literary appeal." 8.

Srikumar Bandopadhyay says -

"It is not easy to define a regional literature. In general the environment exerts its influence on everyone. Rhythm of human life bears even the subtle unnoticeable marks of its influence. Literature depicting this type of general influence of environment on people cannot be classed as regional. The novels based on Radh, Barendra and other parts of Bengal may contain some local specialities of custom and culture, still certain common characteristics in them are more prominent as these are parts of an integrated Bengali culture. Again, individuality is also very marked in the people of these areas. Modern equalising forces have greatly minimised the local peculiarities.

Regional literature can be acknowledged when written about only those small remote areas where individual is completely dominated by the community life, age-old deep-rooted prejudices and social ideals suppress individual's likings and aspirations and where the say of the society is more powerful in determining human character than one's personal ideals. We see glimpses of regional life in Saratchandra's 'Pather Dabi' and Narayan Gangopadhyay's 'Upanibes' but these two cannot be called pure regional novels as they contain characters foreign to that region who influence the story with their own ideals of life. 9.

But we feel that, the way of living in different parts of Bengal like Radh, Barendra etc. is akin to the general Bengali life and culture only in a broad sense and these regions have also their specialities in many respects which are well conspicuous and may also inspire a writer. If the combination of these distinctive features along with writer's skill of presentation can produce the regional atmosphere and tone then we find no reason to refute regionality of those.

Phyllis Bentley says:--

"If any nation, then, were completely homogeneous, not at all diverse, regional novels could not arise within her literature. But where within the limits of a national culture there is a considerable diversity, a considerable variety, corresponding to geographical divisions, of patterns of life in such a nation then exists considerable material for regional novels. **** writers will be stimulated, by the presence of that material, to handle it." 10.

Here is the hint that, heterogeneous elements of a nation or culture may lead to the composition of a regional fiction. But these elements need not necessarily, be so isolated as not to bear any connection with any greater or smaller race and culture.

It is also suggested in the following words of Arunkumar Mukhapadhyay:

"It is not correct to assume that the setting of a regional story or fiction must be a rural nature. A growing industrial area, town and port may also be its background. This limited area must work in a perceptible way upon the plot and characters of the story. The unique

9. PP. 763-64. B.S.U.D.
savour of life in it should have an uniform taste and aroma throughout."*11.

' Titās Akta Nadir Nām' by Advaita Malla Bardhan or 'Satakia' by Subodh Ghosh, or 'Dhojāi Carit Mānas' by Satinath Bhaduri or 'Purba Purba' by Prafulla Ray is brimming with such regional feeling and effect. But 'Sindhu-pārer Pākhi' by Prafulla Ray, in spite of its descriptions of topography and natural surroundings has failed to produce such a compact sensation. Again, we can partly feel regionality, of course not in a very strong and sharp manner, in 'Lakṣhindar Digār' of Gunamay Manna, 'Gaḍ Srikhanda' of Amiabhusan Mazumdar, though these also maintain many political, economic and cultural matters of Bengali life.

Srikumar Bandopadhyay gives a quite clear and precise definition in the following words -
"A piece of literary work can not be designed as regional simply for the impression of an area that it may bear. It can be attributed to a work only when the inner feelings of the human beings in it are so influenced by this surroundings as to produce an unique melody." 12.

We think, here Srikumar has possibly suggested by these words 'manabmaner mul surtīi ........ aninya raginite jhankrta' what is aptly phrased by Arunkumar as 'Jibansvader ananya ekmukhinata'.

For example, 'Wuthering Heights' by Emily Bronte or Hardy's 'The return of the Native', or 'Aranyak' by Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay fulfils these conditions and therefore is perfect regional novel.

Srikumar Bandopadhyay has also included, in general, fictions based on any trade or profession in the category of regional novel.** But a group of characters of a particular trade may be composed of people from different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, rural, urban or combined. Again class-distinction and localisation to not amount to the same thing. Such writings should not, therefore

* I find it very difficult to translate 'Cai Jiban-swader ananya ekmukhinata' - the Bengali expression which has been stressed upon by the writer and repeatedly used in the article referred to.
** Ref. - P.763. B.S.U.D.
be named as regional unless they fulfil other specific conditions producing a complete regional atmosphere with its plot, theme, tone, outlook and other elements.

Now comes up the question - whom should we consider a regional novelist? Should it strictly denote one who writes perfect regional novels?

An author can write a number of novels on different regions, some of which may, also, be completely regional. Pradulla Ray has taken different rural areas in his 'Purba Parbati', 'Keya Patar Nauka' and 'Nagmati'. So has been done by Narayam Gangopadhyay in his 'Upamites' and 'Lalmati', Manoj Basu in his 'Jal Jangal' and 'Bam Ketra Bsat'. Pearl S. Buck has written fictions on the background of countries in different continents as well.

But none of these writers have become a novelist of any particular region. They have not confined their subject matters to any specific part of the country. Hence they cannot be correctly styled as regional novelists.

But certain writers have almost marked out a territory of their own, as the regional setting of their fictions.

In English literature, Waverley (Scotland), Wessex (Dorsetshire), the north of Staffordshire and Yekasapatawpha Country (Mississippi with Jefferson) as its Centre are the favourite backgrounds selected respectively by Sir Walter Scott *, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, and William Faulkner for most of their work.

The latter writers can, more appropriately, be called regional novelists.

We can, here, quote notable remarks by eminent critics on this point -

*There is a controversy over regionality in Scott's novels for his strong romantic bias but we can accept his Waverley novels as regional, as these are very much 'geographical' and delight the readers by 'pictures of Highlanders and Highlands' of Scotland.

particular locale. In regional literature, this locale is conceived of as a subject of interest in itself and much attention is devoted to its description. It may, in fact, become so important as to play a role in the story and influence the lives of the characters. Regional literature is likely to concern itself with the life in rural areas or small towns rather than urban centres. The Five Towns Novels of Arnold Bennett are examples of regional literature as are those novels of Thomas Hardy, such as The Return of the Native and The Mayor of Casterbridge, which are set in the countryside he called Wessex. 13.

Another critic remarks -

"A regional writer is one who concentrates much attention on a particular area and uses it and the people who inhabit it as the basis of his or her stories. Such a locale is likely to be rural and/or provincial." 14

Haraprasad Mitra says -

"In the matter of selection of background in literature we can use the epithet 'Regional' only when an author repeatedly chooses a single background". 15.

After considerations of all these views, while marking a writer as regional we may, reasonably, take a rather lenient view. For this purpose we need not detail the success of each of his fictions as totally regional one, but study them jointly.

The writer's aims and motives and the achievements are our main considerations. He may not be very keen and alert in giving each of his work the shape of a true regional novel but for that we should not wrongly

estimate him. If he displays a strong urge to depict a particular region in toto through his different novels and attains remarkable success then we can safely assess him as a regional novelist.

In this case, each of his fictions will naturally bear to a great extent, if not totally, the characteristics of a regional literature. Hence the justification of the present foregoing discussion on regional novel.

Tarasankar is a regional novelist in this literal sense. He has shown unmistakable signs of his attachment to Radh centering his district - Birbhum as the favourite background of his writings. Though in his works of latter days he has shifted his background to areas outside, and has taken urban plot, theme and characters, still he has betrayed his hesitations and uneasiness with them. His stories and fictions concentrating on Birbhum, as well as Radh are not only numerous but also apparently very interesting as these bring in Bengali Literature a new region with its colourful human life. This fact, here, encourages us to study Tarasankar Bandopadhyay as a regional novelist.

In the next chapter we shall analyse and see how intimately his good many writings capture his selected region.
MAP OF THREE PROMINENT DISTRICTS OF ERSTWHILE RADH.

MAP OF BIRBHUM

Indications—

32. Bhandari Bhan.

Scale,

- 16. K.M. -
Appx.