CHAPTER FOUR

In a conversation with a renowned writer Tarasankar once told :-
"To speak of my literary creation or anything else my source of inspiration is this land of Radh. All my experiences are gathered from this Radh. I have written about these people and the tenets of their life. I have nothing more in mind." 1.

Narrating his acquaintance with the real settings and different characters of his novels and stories Tarasankar says, -
"Fortunately, I developed a close relation with these people. *** So I write about them and I count it as my special right. I am very intimate with them and know them thoroughly." 2.

Now, in his efforts to transmute his experienced world into literary works he used up the entire ingredients of the society.

Here, we should take note of the facts mentioned by the scholars on the population structure of Radh and mainly Birbhum, Tarasankar's field of experiences.

The main point is that the land of Radh is composed of mainly the aborigines.

Communities like various classes of fishermen, Dhibars, Bauris, Doms, Hadis and such others largely inhabit West Bengal and especially Radh area.

"In Radh alone live Eight lakhs Dhibars out of Nine Lakh in the whole of West Bengal. Now a days not all of the Dhibars are fishermen or fish-dealers. Many are cultivators. All of them are classed as Byagrakshatriya in general." 3.

"The total number of Doms in West Bengal is a little more than one Lakh and two-third of them live in the districts of Burdwan, Birbhum and Bankura." 4.

"In fact, the structure of the rural society of this region is quite different. There are, as usual, the upper class Hindus; the Muslims are also there. And there

4. ibid.
are the Hadis, the Bagdis, the Bauris, the Doms and the Santals, who form the major part of the population." 5.

The prominent among the groups of people occupying place in Tarasankar's novels are the Santals, the Sadgops, the Bauris and the Bayens.

Simultaneously we find the go of life of different occupational and professional classes like, the local Zamindars, Cultivators, Artisans, Bedes and Sapudes (Gipsies and snake-charmers), Patuas and others.

So also there are different religious sects with their own local customs, e.g. the Vaisnavs, Bauls, Saktas, Tantrik Sanyasis etc.

Through many of his novels Tarasankar presents a full view of Radh with its political, economic, social and cultural conditions. May not be, there, a speciality in each step but the sumtotal of these bring out the picture of the particular region very clearly. Whatever peculiarities there are of this region, obviously, can not be picked up very loosely or separately. Therefore these should be studied as a complete whole or as an integral part of the life-flow of the area.

In this chapter we are going to draw an outline of the life mainly of Birbhum and broadly of Radh in its different aspects, as reflected in Tarasankar's novels.

In his attempt to draw the regional life Tarasankar has shown his sense of propriety in giving due share to the huge population of lower castes and tribes. Before passing over to discuss how the novelist has drawn these people, we, here, in short, take note of the social trends of Birbhum.

Since the Permanent Settlement of 1793 the Landlords exerted their powerful authority in the villages of Bengal. In reality, for many years the rural life of Bengal centered round the ideals and aspirations, pomp and grandeur, whims and fancies, oppressions and benevolence, taste and appreciations of the all-powerful zamindars. In this respect the role of the zamindars was almost the same everywhere in Bengal but still certain characteristics of the landlords of Birbhum is stressed in the writings of Tarasankar.

"One speciality of the landlords of Birbhum was that, the size of their estates and their income were very small. Even those who had an yearly income of only Rupees Ten thousand or so were looked upon as Lords." 6.

This statement of Tarasankar is quite in keeping with the facts narrated by Gourihar Mitra in his 'Birbhum Itihas'.

There it is stated that, Birbhum was declared a district in 1787. In 1790, under a contract with the East India Company, the entire district was owned only by one landlord but soon it was distrained for non-payment of revenue and allotted by the Company to some other. "Then (during Permanent Settlement of 1793) the Estate of Birbhum was sold in auction in lots and, as a result, the number of zamindars increased abruptly in place of only one." 7.

"Consequently, within a period of six or seven years Birbhum was divided in 222 Estates under ownership of 233 landlords." 8.

The same author informs - "at present * the total number of zamindari estates in Birbhum is 4410." 9.

Accordingly, the novelist has shown in 'Kalindi' that the Estate of the Ray's of Raihata have one hundred and five owners and very few of them have a steady annual income of Rupees five hundred. Among them annual income of Indra Ray is estimated to be nearly Rupees One thousand and half to Two thousand. But though his earning is low yet Indra Ray has a strong influence in that locality.

As Tarasankar belonged to this class he had the opportunity to know and study the landlords very closely and, therefore, has shown their conditions, feelings and attitude towards the new era of industrialism, capitalism and individualism.

Tarasankar noticed in big and small zamindars an ardent effort to maintain their bygone luxury and grandeur. Irrespective of their amount of income they were proud and out and out.

8. ibid. P.69.
* i.e. 1345 B.E. -the year of publication of the book.
"They used to say - 'Land is owned from forefathers but must be preserved with strength. The might of a Zamindar does not originate necessarily from the amount of rent earned but from the high-spirit.' They often boasted with these words - 'Remember, I am a Zamindar!'" 10.

It has been rightly pointed out by Binay Ghosh that -
"A prominent reason for the lordly influence of these big and even small 'Social masters' of the Middle Age is the typical structure and nature of the population of this region." 11.

Pisima (D.D.), Imdra Ray (Kalindi) represent such zamindars - proudy and indomitable. Banbihari Sarkar of the story 'Sade Sat Gambar Jammar' is a typical small zamindar of Birbhum who notwithstanding his very small estate and earning makes tragic efforts to keep up his status and vanity.

Tarasankar has shown in his novels the conflicts between the landlords and newly flourished industrialists and businessmen in their struggle to achieve and retain their prestige and importance in the society. In other parts of Bengal, during these days, the industries were mainly owned and run by the Joint Stock Companies and the foreigners as their Managing Agents. Only in this part of Bengal, in Birbhum and Burdwan, considerable number of Iron and Steel and Coalmine industries were largely at the hands of some semi-organised opulent Bengalees. *

Srikumar Bandapatihray, who had his maternal uncle's home very near to Labhpur, also confirms this matter of conflict at Labhpur between the 'decaying aristrocrats and feudal representatives on one side and the upstamt affluent industrialists on the other.' 12.

Tarasankar had, therefore, the chances to see these conflicts around him of which he has also mentioned in his autobiographies. **

He has shown in his stories (e.g. Raybadi, Jalsaghar) and novels (e.g. Dhatrdeba, Kalindi, Sandipan Pathsal) the

12. P.577. B.S.U.D.
agonising decadence and defeat of the zamindars in their strive for maintaining their splendour of yore.

At first they do not consider the businessman to be of their equal status. We find in Dhatredebata Ramkinker, the rich businessman proposed for his niece's marriage with Sibnath, the son of a zamindar just to earn a new honour, but Pisima out of her inherent vanity clearly expressed her hesitation and unwillingness. Indra Ray tried to hold on his influence even by compelling Bimal Mukherjee, the Sugar Mill owner, in some way or other, to work under him (Begarkhata).

But thus they could not win. Sibnath had to take loan from the Mahajans and even sale away his remaining property. Mazumdar, the Nayeb of the Chakraborty-zamindars, the faithful Santals and some other tenants and even some relations of Indra Ray accepted employment in the Sugar Mill. Srihari Ghosh (G.D.), the thriving businessman and mahajan, became the head of the village-panchayat. Thus the Capitalists asserted their influence on the society of Radh which was so long dominated by the zamindars.

Political condition :-

A particular area may have much specialities of its own, still then it is definitely associated with the national as well as international life-flow. It is mainly the political events that keep a region in close touch with the rest of the country. Considering this, we do not expect to see independent and original thinking and activities in the political-life of a place shown in different regional novels of any writer.

But even then, the present study will be incomplete if we do not observe the political life of Radh as shown in the novels of Tarasankar.

Tarasankar has confessed -

"Right from the beginning of my literary career with the publication of Caitali Ghurni through Dhatredebata, Kalinid, Ganadebata,- Panchagram and such other writings I have depicted the conditions and glory of our freedom struggle. " 13.

We can, here, note certain features regarding the political conditions of Radh.

Due to the presence of a huge number of aborigines among the inhabitants of this region spread of education was very slow during the early decades of this century.

Ed. Shyamal Chakraborty.
While education was popular in East Bengal, the Santals, Bauris, Bayens, Doms, Kaibartas and such other groups of people of Radh were very reluctant to go to school.

We know that education is related to self-consciousness. The caste Hindus, particularly the zamindars, were against establishing primary schools which would result in literacy among the low-class people. This we find in 'Sandipan Pathsala' where Sitaram had to struggle against many influential people including the zamindars just to run a primary school.

We have learnt in earlier pages that the feudal class was very strong and proud in this part of Bengal. It is a fact that, to uphold their rights the zamindars of Bengal played the role of passive supporters of the British administration. (N.B.) So, here in Radh, it was likely for them to detract the common people from the path of any political movement.

One reason for the absence of a strong political consciousness in this area in comparison with the other parts of Bengal, is the difference in the part played by the lower middle class people. About half a century ago this class was very insignificant in the districts of Burdwan, Birbhum or Bankura. But sociological study reveals that this lower-middle class people are most progressive.

With reference to newspaper reports on different happenings Suprakash Ray in his book 'Bharater Baiplabik Sangramer Itihas' has established that 1907 onwards the landlords of Bengal were indifferent to and aloof from our national movement. Moreover, two hundred important zamindars including those of Dwarbhanga, Burdwan, Dinajpur, Mymensingh, Hussimbazar and men like Pyari Mohan Mukherjee, Sir Gurudas Banerjee, in a letter to the Government expressed their gratitude and unhesitating submission to the British rule.

in respect of political ideals. They make others conscious of their rights and take lead in social movements. (N.B.). So, when in other parts, boys from lower-middle class Bengalee families put the British Government in much trouble with their revolutionary and other political activities, this part of Radh was not very turbulent.

In short, ignorance of one's legitimate rights amongst the illiterate mass and indifference to national political movements on the part of the feudal masters are the reasons for insignificant response from this area to the political activities in the country.

However, Tarasankar, in many of his novels has shown how the national political activities acted upon the folk life of Radh and to what extent these people were guided by any political ideals.

So far as Gandhiji's Non-Co-operation Movement is concerned, the common men here could not certainly accept it as a remedy of their age-old sufferings, though the enlightened men like Sibnath and Debu were much inspired by it. The political freedom or Swaraj was meaningless to the common men like cultivators, artisans, labourers etc. Their direct and prominent enemies were the zamindars, Mahajans, and other profiteers. So, Goatha, in Caitali Ghumri says - "We do not understand Swaraj or anything like that. Let Mahatma say how can we save ourselves from the clutches of the exploiters."

This was the feelings of the deprived and humiliated mass of this area and there were very few people, fit, experienced and bold enough to organise and lead them.

Only Debu Ghosh, Jagan Ghosh, Irshad Moulavi, Biswanath and detenu Jatin tried to inspire the people to protest against injustice and assert themselves.

(N.B.): "The revolutionary movements were started and strengthened by the middle class people of Bengal. For this reason the revolutionary organisations became strong, with the participation of a great number of workers, in those districts and areas where this middle class was considerably flourishing". P.239. Banglay Biplabbad. By Nalini Kishor Guha.

Debu became the leader of the village-folk. He was a Gandhian and had faith in non-violence. Debu, a disciple of old Nayaratna, had grown up in the traditional environment of Sibkalipur. The cultivators also trusted him.

But Bisvanath, Debu's friend read and learnt about international political movements, and took these ideals to his heart only because he had left the surroundings of Pancagram. Similar is the matter with Ahindra. Both of them were inspired by Communism. They were well aware of the role of the cultivators in Communist countries. So, Bisvanath wanted to infuse the revolutionary spirit among the cultivators of Pancagram. He suggested in the meeting of the Peasants that, the law regarding enhancement of land revenue would in due course be changed in favour of them if they refused to pay increased revenue. He further made a hint that, even efforts might be made to change the government if it did not protect the interest of the cultivators.

Though sporadic activities of revolutionaries like Nalini Bagchi, Dukhabala Debi were carried on in this area still the people at large of Radh was not ready in their hearts to accept such unconventional proposal. That is why hearing Bisvanath's words 'not only Debu, but the entire gathering trembled,' 15. Nayaratna and Debu could not tolerate even the sheer imagination of changing the government. As a Gandhian Debu could not also support Aniruddha when the later, as an act of vengeance, struck down the trees in Srihari's garden.

In Pancagram the novelist has referred to the new consciousness and sense of prestige that came into the mind of the village-folk with the advent of new Political outlook in the country - i.e., a strong urge for freedom from foreign rule and economic exploitation and all sorts of humiliations.

In 'Sandipan pathsala' Manilalbabu, of Zamindar family, attempts to trouble and belittle Sitaram and Dhirananda for their patriotic zeal. Sitaram feels one needs only courage to stand against the oppressors like these landlords who have only manpower behind them but no moral strength.* Raham Seikh in Pancagram compares the 'bootlicking flatterers of the rich class' with the obedient pet dogs and says that, 'neither God(Allah) helps them nor they can meet their ultimate ends'. **

The powerful heads of the village society like the Mukherjees of Kankana, who till then collected 'all sorts of unlawful taxes' felt very shaky to face the collective strength of the united tenants'.

In Pancagram we see, though the Hindus and the Muslims stood unitedly to preserve the interest of the cultivators, all their efforts ended in vain. The strike in protest against enhancement of land tax was frustrated by the shrewd efforts of vested interests and reactionary forces like the zamindars, the mahajans (viz. Srihari Ghosh) and their flattering middlemen like Daulat Seikh.

Again, we find in Kalinid and Ganadebata that, being exploited through ages, the poor people of Radh could not entirely trust in the leadership of the middle-class gentlemen. They had been cheated again and again through the trick of thumb-impression and deceptive calculation. Hence, in Kalinid the Santals suspect Sribas Pal as he asked them to put thumb-impression while receiving advance from him. Similarly in Ganadebata, men like Patu Bayen refused to give thumb-impression on the petition to the government requesting it to stop collection of revenue just before the Nabanna festival.

Thus disbelief among different sections of People and the clash of their interests stood in the way of any effective political movement worth-mentioning. The benefit of this situation was enjoyed by the intermediaries under the Permanent Settlement and, above all, by the rulers of the country.

Economic condition:-

"Environment influences the higher, mental life of a people chiefly through the medium of their economic and social life; hence its ultimate effects should be traced through the latter back to the underlying cause." 17.

New York.
Tarasankar in his novels (e.g. Dhatrdebata, Kalindi, Ganadebata, Pancagram, Hasuli Baker Upakatha etc.) has taken much interest to bring out the general economic structure of this region.

The rural life of Radh is mainly based on agriculture. Tarasankar says:

"People say that, the twentieth century is everywhere the age of industrialism. The world is crowded with factories and labourers. But even in this year 1906 people in this part of our country work only in agriculture though it is not much paying because rice is as cheap as one rupee four annas to two rupees per maund. ***** Even those who are not permanently engaged in cultivation work only as agricultural labour. And only once they do the work of thatching house-tops. But still then they don't do it as day-labourer outside their own villages unless compelled by local zamindars." 18.

The features regarding occupations of the place as mentioned by Tarasankar in his novels can be supported with the help of census reports. Here is the statistics of agricultural population (Krsijibi) of the three districts of Radh of different periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1951</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdwan</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>814</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>818</td>
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The table shows that the rate of Krsijibi was much higher, here, than that of West Bengal in general.

The novelist has elaborated the life-pattern of the region in his Ganadebata. In short -

"The village life has two sides - cultivation and living. Here all resources and energy are vested in two things - the field and the home." 20.

But we find in his novels that neither living nor cultivation was, here, very smooth and peaceful. The plight of a villager is well-expressed in the words of

a local folk-son -

'O Lord Gourango! It's better to work as a servant than to till the land'. Again, 'Alas! The dreadful cholera has broken out and people are dying!' 21. Here we find that, being disappointed with his output, the peasant prefers the job of a contract-labour and a common man becomes panicky at the appearance of an epidemic.

A realistic picture of the condition of agriculture of this area can be seen through Tarasankar's novels like Kalinid, Dhabrdebata, Ganadebata, Hasuli Baker Upakatha etc.

Tarasankar has said that, though flood was not very frequent, draught over a large area of this district was very common. Government records show that between 1901 and 1950 there occurred draught for seven times and flood for four times in Birbhum. 22.

Birbhum being one of the few non-deltaic districts of Bengal has its typical natural features which adversely affects on its soil, climate, irrigation and agricultural productivity. 23.

Scarcity of cultivable land in Birbhum as well as its inferiority in quality will be clear from the following statement by Hunter -

"Land is not only more fertile, but also cheaper, in the east than the west.* Meagre soil, requiring to be manured and artificially watered, and yielding only one crop in return, cannot be obtained in Birbhum at a less rent than nine Shilling an acre. Excellent land in the eastern districts, yielding two crops a year for the trouble of turning up the soil, could, until very recently, be had at seven or eight." 24.

In fact, shortage of water poses a problem for the agriculture in Birbhum. One of its causes is considered by observers to be the high level of land in many parts of the district. 25.

The condition of draught-striken Birbhum has been very much depicted in the following report:

"Lack of irrigation facilities has been the most crucial problem in Birbhum district where the people depend mostly on agriculture as the only means of livelihood. Extensive parts of the district are still now solely dependent on rain for cultivation of paddy and wheat." 26.

So the cultivators had to depend largely on the local ponds and tanks for irrigation. But as a result of prolonged negligence on the part of the absentee landlords these would get silted up making them almost unusable during the acute summer of the districts. This problem has also been stated in the Land Survey Report of Birbhum-1914. Tarasankar has dealt with the point in Dhatrdebata and Ganadebata.

During the days of First World War a group of people became rich overnight in the business of coal, bamboos, paddy, rice, molasses, pulses, etc. The Mukherjees of Gandanpur, Maito Ghosh and the Sadgops of Jangal (H.B.U.K), the Mukherjees of Kankana (G.D.) are the examples of such upstart rich man.

Again, being attracted to the availability of raw materials and cheap labour, helpful for trades and industries, merchants and industrialists started coming here from outside, especially from Calcutta (as we find Bimal Mukherjee in Kalindi and Marwaris near the junction in G.D.).

To meet their business-requirements or only for a profitable investment the rich people like Bimal Mukherjee, Mukherjees of Kankana and Srihari Ghosh purchased land in large scale.

As a result the needy cultivators, particularly the share-croppers lost their lands. The writer says in Ganadebata - "Many of the peasants have become landless." 27.

To solve the problem of land-shortage some of the cultivators started farming on the sand-banks of Mayurakshi and other local rivers. And they could easily sell their products like potato and cereals to the nearby Mahajana(G.D.)

Thus, and mainly with the efforts of the Santals and other tribals a great part of barren and weedy sand-banks became cultivable.

One notable feature of agriculture of Radh is the important part played by the Santals. We have seen, earlier in this Chapter, that, the Santals inhabit the districts of Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura and Midnapur in a very large number. They are preferred as cheap and faithful agricultural labour as seen in Kalinid, Ganadebata, Hasuli Baker Upakatha. Other classes of peasants in Radh such as the Bauris, Sadgops, Bagdis etc. and Muslims are to face competition with the Santals but by no means can equal them. This will be evident from the following descriptions:

Bimalbabu, the Sugar-Mill owner (Kalindi) says to Mitra -
'A peculiar tribe they are! They work as good as a strong health they possess. They are not shirking like our local people.' 28.

So the landowners sometime bring the Santals even from Dumka in adjoining Santal Pargana for tilling their lands.* We see the babus in Pancagram do it to baffle the strike of the ryots. **

Actually, there have been influx of Santals in this region from Santal Pargana as there were scope for their occupation in the constructions of railways, roads, bridges, brick-fields, house building besides agriculture.

The census reports show that -
"In 1872 there were only 6954 Santals in Birbhum, the number rose to 47221 in 1901 and 64079 in 1931." 29.

Tarasankar has shown how these laborious and docile Santals oppressed, exploited and at last driven away from their lands on various pretexts by the landlords and mahajans (Kalindi, H.B.U.K.)

** Ref. PP.141-42. P.G.
This fact is revealed in Land Settlement reports and also in field study by eminent economists. "When jungles and wastelands are cleared and cultivated by the tribals and aborigines like the Santals, these are purchased by the landowners and mahajans and the formers are turned into serfs." 30.

At this place we should mention a point about the local labourers in general. The labourers of this area possess a very bad health, which tells upon the quality as well as quantity of products. The general deterioration of health may be ascribed to a dangerous ailment reigning in the whole of the region known as Burdwan fever or Malaria. For many years since 1864 Burdwan fever caused heavy toll of death in the central West Bengal, particularly in Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura and Nadia. The poor and ill-fed labourers had to bear its after-effects for a long time. This virulent disease did not spread in East Bengal in any great proportion. Economist Radhakamal Mukherjee has shown this fact of agricultural deterioration and population diminution with the help of a Spleen - Index - which shows highest figure in our concerned area. *

Tarasankar has said about this type of Malaria in their area in his book "Amar Sahitya Jiban(Part II)** He has drawn the condition of the villagers during a break out of Malaria and Cholera in his Bhatrebata (Ch. XIV & XV), Ganadebata (Ch.XXVI), Pancagram (Ch.XX), Hasuli Baker Upakatha (Part-V. Ch. VII).

We find references of two typical classes of agricultural labourers of Birbhum in the novels of Tarasankar.

Those who have neither land of their own or rented nor plough and bullocks, have to work as labourer in others' fields to earn their livelihood.

One such class is appointed not as a day labourer but on contract for a full year. * In Birbhum the middle-class farmers often appoint such a labourer or servant for their Agricultural work. All work for production of crops are entrusted on him. The owner only supervises. This type of labourers

** 31 & 35. A.S.J.(II)
are called Mahindar. "They generally receive an annual pay of Rs. 20 to 30, along with 4 Dhutis and 2 maklals besides their daily food. There are mentions of Mahindar in the novels Gomadebata, Pancagram, Hasuli Baker Upakatha."

"Another custom of Birbhum is known as Krasani. The land-owner appoints a labourer only for the season of cultivation, and with his own ploughs, bullocks, accessories and seeds, only gets the work done by this extra hand. The owner himself pays the rent of the land. The Krasans only produces the crop of which he is entitled to get one-third as the price of his labour." 32.

There are references to Krasans as well as some minor Krasan characters in these novels. Here is a description of the Krasans.

"The Krasans are going to fields. They are the Bauris, the Denas, the Mucha (Mebblers) and such others, the agricultural labour. They put on a short dhoti and tie a maklal on their head like a turban. ** Here majority of the farmers work themselves with their Krasans."

In Hasuli Baker Upakatha, it can be known through the words of Banwari that in their locality also the rate of wage was one-third of total crop. Banwari, a Krasan of a SadgopBabu, is worried for the excesses he has taken from his master as loan. 'Most of the krasans are thus involved in debt.' **

We have now seen that, agriculture was the main occupation of this area. It was very unfavourable for the cultivators in general. This situation helped different types of intermediaries like Pattaiddar (e.g. Srihari Ghose), Darpattanidar, Imaadar etc. to flourish.

When in average there were 5 intermediaries per samindari estate in East Bengal, there were (8.8= ) 9 such in West Bengal. The average valuation of such an intermediary in East Bengal and West Bengal could be calculated as Rs.40 and Rs. 82 respectively. ***

** Ref. - FP.175-76. H.B.U.K.
Furthermore, as the 'middle class' people were few in number and played a very insignificant role in Badh area, here the social and economic differences between the common mass and landlords, businessmen or mahajans became very much prominent. And the poor peasants, laboueurs and alike became easy and main victims of exploitation at the hands of landlords, landlords and rich cheats.

The main medium of exploiting the ryots in the hands of the landlords were the *Abwab*, which differed from place to place, from one estate to another. *Abwab* is the local word of *tax* which means 'head' or 'an item'. *Abwab* of different landlords varied and additional taxes were levied by the landlords on and when they required additional income.

We find a list of *bab* prevalent in some parts of Birbhum during the past first few years.

Conventional fees: possession, interest, price of the cheque, mandia (premium), Tahbar (process fee), Tahbar (Incidental expenses), administrative expenses and entertain-ment fee. **

In a Settlement Report of Birbhum, certain other *abwab* have been mentioned.

(a) 2 pice per rupee of total revenue for the annual Gratuity Receipt.

(b) 1 pice or 2 pice per rupee of revenue for annual festivities in the house of landlord.

(c) Every ryot had to pay a *Selenium* or make present on the occasion of any birth, death or marriage in landlord's house. **

Government reports bring to light that certain taxes were imposed for purposes which had little concern with the ryots, e.g. for maintaining a school, amusement of the Babus, 'expenses towards permanent Nayeb'. **

One such bab named *Isvarbrtti* is mentioned in Gamadebatiata which was paid for entertainment of the landlords at the rate of 1 pice per rupee on every transaction by both the parties the payee and the receiver.***

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34. P.34. Caitali Ghurali. (P. Mon Mati Manus.)


In many villages under Murari and Nalhati Police Stations, a bab styled 'Khos Kabula' was in practice, besides all other usual taxes. Its rate was as high as 6 to 12 pice per Rupee of Revenue, and the Landlords declared that the bab, as its name indicated, was willingly paid by the tenants and, therefore, not included in their receipt. But investigations disclosed that it was a forced and illegal tax and that is why it was not mentioned in writing.*

So, peasants of Radh felt like Gostha of Caitali Ghurni - 'Oh! Endless Bab! and no exemption of single farthing!' 35.

The repugnance against the condition of a cultivator of Birbhum is well expressed in the words of Karali - 'Do you know that, Nachal has got only five 'Ails' (a small measurement, say, bucket) of paddy (as his annual wage)! Damn your agricultural occupation!" 36.

The fate of the artisans was no better. Amiruddha, a blacksmith in Gamadebata, feels - "One can no more meet one's needs in the profession of a blacksmith. The only way is to work in any industry."37.

Due to defective land - system and unfavourable agriculture the poor cultivators of Radh fell easy prey to some cunning, cruel and wealthy men and ultimately lost their movable and immovable properties. These usurers, known as Mahajans, found this part of Bengal as their best hunting ground. Rasik Dutta (C.G.), Sribas Pal (Kalindi), Phjalaram Ghoudhury, Srihari Ghosh (G.D.), Akshay Ghesal (Kaleatar) are some of them. For their avarice and knavery they were nicknamed by the people as - Kabuli (an Afghan), Ajagar (a Python), Mahayam (the great Yama, the regent of death).

Around 1947 the money lenders of Birbhum (like Akshay Ghesal) became rich in a very short time. They used to lend money against gold, silver, utensils and even cattle. The rate of interest was even 75%. In the business of paddy it was 50% and unpaid interest would turn into principal.**

The influence of the mahajans in the rural areas of Birbhum in the second and third decade of this century will be clear from the following facts narrated in an article by Tarasankar. *

(a) In case of paddy compound interest @ 50% per annum was levied.

(b) The rate of interest on money advanced was at first 50% per month, which gradually rose to 100% p.m. and lately became as high as 200% p.m. In case of non-payment of loan and interest within a stipulated time, say, 5 or 7 years, the deed of contract (Kat Kabala) would be treated as a deed of sale.

(c) Moreover, there was a practice known as Khaikhalasi. Many a mahajan would use the land of the defaulter ryetes till he could repay the loan with interest. Some lender would return the land after cultivating it for five or ten years.

"In this process the farmers were being exploited for a long time and gradually becoming penniless when the First World War struck a heavy blow on them." **

Near 1930 it was clear that, the indebtedness of a Bengalee peasant amounted to more than the value of his immovable properties. Between 1914 and 1930 the land, house, and every thing of a peasant were hooked in the bait of mahajans, and they were over head and ears in debt." 38.

A field survey in Birbhum shows the following rates of interest operative during the Thirties. **

The rate of interest on 53.5% of total advance was

- " " " 16.5% " " Less than 12.5% 
- " " " 5.5% " " 37.5 & 75% 
- " " " 2% " " above 150%

A survey of 6 Birbhum - villages bring the following statistics regarding rural indebtedness during 1933-34. There, 234 (55%) out of 426 families were indebted. Their total debt amounted to Rs. 53799 (average Rs. 230 per family) and the following reasons were established with the

---

38. ibid.
concerned amount mentioned against each. 39.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heads</th>
<th>Amount in Rupees</th>
<th>Per cent.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For Payment of Rent</td>
<td>13007</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Capital improvement.</td>
<td>12736</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Social &amp; Religious purposes</td>
<td>12021</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Repayment of Old debts</td>
<td>4503</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Cultivation expenses</td>
<td>2423</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Litigation</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Miscellaneous purposes</td>
<td>8401</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The economic structure of Radh was not helpful for happy living for majority of the population - this reality is reflected in Tarasankar's novels in the incidents of the Santals' leaving the Gar of Kaliendi, giving up agricultural living by the Kahars of Basbadi (H.B.U.K.), searching for a new occupation on the part of different tradesmen like Patu cobbler, Amiruddha blacksmith, Girish carpenter etc.

The novelist has shown in his stories (e.g. Akhdaier Dighi), and novels (e.g. C.G., Kaliindi, G.D., P.G. etc.) that the poor economic condition of Radh was to some extent responsible for dragging the people, violent by nature but otherwise peaceful, to the path of heinous crimes. In Pancagram the writer says that -

"To speak of the Bhallas or Hadis or the criminal-Muslims such activities of them are as much due to their criminal nature were due to their extreme poverty." 40.

It appears from Tarasankar's novel that there was no effort from the side of the Government to improve the general economic condition of the area. He has mentioned the negligence as well as inability of the zamindars' in this matter. And in the name of assistance middlemen like pattamidr Srijari Ghosh met their selfish ends. Only a few lower-middle class people like Sibmath, Debmath, Biswanath, Jagan Ghosh and Kapildeb sincerely tried to help the


village - folk by forming co-operative societies or some other means. But these were very insufficient in number and resources. Moreover, as we see in his novels, vested interests worked strongly against mass-welfare.

Tarasenkar has shown in Caitali Ghurmi, Kalindi, Dhatrdeba, Hasuli Baker Upakatha, Ganadebata, Panjagram, and Padacinha that, being forced by their financial crisis the artisans and krasijibis like the Sants, the Bauris, the Hadis, the Doms, the Bagdis, and some Muslims lastly took resort to the profession of labourer in Sugar mill or other factories or in coalmines.

This picture is quite different from the condition described in Padacinha, here, quoted earlier. (P.IV-10) So, it seems that, Tarasenkar marked this change among the krasijibis sometime after 1906. He himself has held First World War responsible for such changes.

Now, it is argued that, this is not a correct picture of the districts of Radh. It is possible for landless peasants to find jobs in large number in factories only in case of Industrial Revolution, which has never taken place in Bengal. As such Bangalee peasants had little scope to work in industries, and therefore, they had to stick to the Land in the face of exploitation and eviction. *

Once again we can turn to the Census Reports to come to our conclusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Birbhum</th>
<th>Burdwan</th>
<th>Bankura</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Density of Population per square mile in villages (V) and Towns (T) in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum.</td>
<td>V-577</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>9.13%</td>
<td>681.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-4719</td>
<td>1450</td>
<td>604</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdwan</td>
<td>V-700</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>29.35%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-8328</td>
<td>3339</td>
<td>2230</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>V-467</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-3878</td>
<td>2756</td>
<td>2183</td>
<td>77.65%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taking 1901 and 1951 as two ends we find population density has increased (+) @ in 50 years.

It is true that, in the concerning period the rate of Kriajibis have increased in Birbhum & Bankuar but decreased in Burdwan. At the same time, the district of Birbhum tops in the matter of exodus of village population.

We can reasonably imagine from this picture that, a number of Kriajibis being thrown out of their jobs had to find out some other occupation elsewhere.

It will not be correct to say that Tarasankar's description is far from facts, as because till then industries did not grow in the Districts of Radh in any large scale. But Tarasankar noticed the ominous signs of collapse of agriculture and detrimental social impact of industrialism, not in its size but in its severity and farfetchedness.

Literature is not surely the photographic representation of facts. So, the industries referred to or shown in his novels need not necessarily be situated within the area of the said districts. The displaced agricultural labourers might have gone out of the districts, say, to Hoogly or 24 Parganas or Howrah etc. Lastly, though till today Birbhum has not developed industrially still during this period small industries like Rice Mills, Tanery were started at Ahmedpur, Saithia, and other places. There was a Divisional office of E.I.Railway at Rampurhat and Martin Company Light Railway had its Divisional Office at Burdwan, possibly with some small workshops at both the places. Hence, cultivators, though not in huge number, might have get work in these places.
As a matter of fact, the picture of the cultivators’; being compelled by their economic distress, giving up their traditional occupation and taking up new jobs is no matter of a short instant; it is a general process of prolonged period, a trend of post First World War years.

A Sociologist also suggests this point. He says — "The course of change shown in Caitali Ghurmi can be said to be the timely trend of the society. And Tarasankar is correct in his conception. In Caitali Ghurmi and his latter novels he has depicted in a realistic way the complex condition of the rural economy." 41.

Hence, one should not conclude from Tarasankar’s novels viz., Kaliadi, Ganadebata, Hasuli Baker Upakatha etc. that industries started plying an important role in the economic life of Radh region.

At the same time we must not lose sight of the fact, that the coal mines of Burdwan and Birbhum or Steel plant at Burnpur might have attracted a good number of labour from the adjoining areas and have its impact on the socio-economic impact set up of Radh.

Religious Life.

Scholars have pointed out certain notable features of the religious – life of the people of Radh. Many non-Aryan tribals inhabited Radh from a long time. The present indigenous people of Rajmahal in the west and Chotanagpur in the south-west once populated the whole of Radh. To this day a major portion of them live in the plains and still retains their original characteristics inspite of the latter Vaisnav influence.

Ashutosh Bhattacharya remarks that — "In Radh the influence of the folk-religion has never diminished while in East Bengal, as a result of Muslim impact, it has little existence except among some

41. Pradyumna Bhattacharyya — Art. Samaj Matra Eeem
small groups. But the Mohammedan religion did not influence so strongly in Radh and, therefore, minor religious sects could survive with their own specialities. "42.

He further adds -

"In Birbhum the saktas, the vaisnavs and the folk-religions flourished side by side with mutual influences, but none able to force any other to extinction. Even the Muslims have been influenced by the popular religions of the locality, which is Birbhum’s unique feature in entire Bengal. Because, in other parts of Bengal the all-embracing influence of Islam has engulfed and assimilated the different religious groups." 43.

Tarasankar, in his Panoagram, through a narrative brings out the traditional peaceful and tolerant co-existence of different religious communities and a good relation of mutual regard and attachment among them. *

He describes -

"The two communities (i.e. Hindu and Muslim) used to invite each other and offer formal gifts and presents in religious festivals, marriages and other ceremonies; particularly they had a close co-operation in matters of marriage functions." 44.

The novelist has also referred to the gradual waning of such intimacy and formalities. **

"The natives of Birbhum, in small or large groups, have retained the specialities of their religious life though outwardly they were a little influenced by Vaishnavism from time to time. For this reason certain social customs of these people greatly differ from those of general Bengalee society. The local lower-class vaisnavs are one of them." 45.

Tarasankar, in his many stories and novels like Rasakali, Raktamal, Swarga Marta, Radha has given a clear picture of the vaisnav environment with the customs and practices and the tenets of life of the Sahajiya Vaisnav community of Radh.


43. ibid.

* Ref. Chapter IV. Panoagram.
** Ref. Chapter IV. Panoagram.
45. A.B. - Art. Tarasankar 0 Radher Leksamakriti......
The entire area on the bank of Ajoy, from Jaydev Kenduli in Birbhum to Katoa in Burdwan is a very old seat of Vaishnavism.

Both the northern part of Radh along Mayurakshi and the bank of Ajoy on the south are equally sacred for a large number of holy places of the vaisnavaya. Even prior to Caitanyadev vaisnav saints like Jaydev and Candidas were born here and after revival of Bengal-vaishnavism many more great saints have appeared in succession. Mahaprabhu Nityananda was born at Ekcakra in the north of the Mayurakshi. Nearby Bircanadzapat is famous by the name "Gupta Bradabam". (Ref. Ch.2. S.M.)

The popularity and influence of vaisnavism even in modern times is well expressed in the following lines of Svarga Marta.

"Throughout this area the Brahmins, Tantriks and such others, who are present here, in considerable number, bear no ill-filling towards the vaisnavas. Rather, here every one craves for sanctifying their souls through the appealing songs of vaisnav padavali." 46.

In Raikamal and Svarga Marta we find that, the village population, mostly cultivators, with a majority of Sadgop as well as other upper class Hindus are largely under the influence of Vaisnavism. Here every five villages possess at least one Akhda.

Though the sincere devotion of old days has disappeared the people here follow the old dresses and practices. As an old formality they put on necklaces of Tulsi-stem and paint their foreheads with Sandal paste. Men keep tuft of hair and women make a crest of their hair - do, and they address each other as 'Pravul'. People sing vaisnav rhymes in local Akhdas and Gandimandaps. Even the Muslim Fakirs sing vaisnav songs as they play on their violines. (Ref. P.1-2. R.K.)

The religious practices of the Nyada-Nedi sect, a class of Sahajiya Vaisnavs are reflected in the novel Radha.

If we look back to the origin of the Sahajiya Vaisnavs we can realise the underlying reason for the numerous presence of the Sahajiya in this part of Bengal.


# Holy basil.
The Nyādā Nedi group of vaisnavas were originally a distracted and degraded class of Buddhists. They were looked down upon by the proper vaisnavas and other Hindu middle class gentle-folk. So, possibly, they found a homely abode here, in Radh, in the midst of the aborigines and lower castes and tribes. They might have been attracted by the sympathetic treatment of a few vaisnav 'Mahājans' of West Bengal.

However, these Nyada Nedis were largely converted into vaisnavism and were known as Sahajiyas for their simpler doctrines. In West Bengal since the last part of the Seventeenth century these Sahajiyas started practising their new religious rituals mainly based on the conception of love as their only dogma. They imposed this idea of divine love of Radha-Krishna on the earthly self of men and women. Their rituals were influenced by Tantra - cult and Tantric Buddhism. Naturally, Radh with its vaisnav sanctuaries was most suitable for them.

The Bauls of Radh.

The Bauls from a prominent and typical religious sect of Birbhum. Sudhiranjan Das has called the Bauls and their songs as an asset of Birbhum's village-life as well as Bengali Folk culture.

Despite their common characteristics the Bauls of different areas differ in their practices. Observing the peculiarities of religious practices of the Bauls of West Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, and Midnapur, Upendranath Bhattacharya has classed them as Radh-group of Bauls. They are particularly referred as 'Ksepa' (the mad) *** The Nyada Nedis, discussed earlier, joined in huge number with the Bauls.

Frequent infatuation, love and separation between men and women are very common among the Sahajiyā vaisnavas and the Bauls. With the loss of their youth and beauty many vaisnav-women like Rākuman (R.K.), and Brajadas alternatives (S.J.) pass a neglected life and seek peace in religious practices.


• Ref. Asit Bandopadhyay. P.524. Sahitya Itibṛttā Vol. III. ...
The Bauls are devotees, influenced by vaisnavism without any attachment to the social and family life. Indifferent to worldly affairs including common customs and etiquettes they roam from place to place, with an ardent desire to see the Almighty whom they call 'maner manus' (the divine man whom the soul cherishes). Rasikdas (R.K.) is a typical Baul of Birbhum who lives on begging and sings Baul songs with his ektara.

The Sākta and Tantra-cult.

In many places of his writings Tarasankar has mentioned of much popularity of Sākta and Tantra-cult in Radh and the presence of the Saktas and Tantriks in that area.*

We find good many Sākta sanyasis and Tantrik characters in Tarasankar's novel, e.g. Rajji Sadhu, Akhey Tantrik (D.D.), Tribhuban Bhattacharya (A.B.)

Tarapith, Bakreswar, Uddharanpur are famous spots of the practice of Saktism. Besides, there are many dieties of Kali in the villages of Birbhum, particularly in Kiranagar and Labhpur area. ** We find one Jayanti Mangala Kali in Gomadeba.(p.75)

In an article Panchanan Bandopadhyay calls our attention to the fact of presence of as many as five Mahā-Pithas and four other Upa-Pithas in Radh. ***

Nalhati is believed by the Saktas to be sanctified with the Nala (Throat) of Sati. Labhur itself is a Pitha with its goddess "Attahas" which also known as 'Pullara'.

In Dhatrdebata, on the occasion of Raksakali-puja at the cremation ground Sibnath says to Susil with a sense of pride -

'Ours is the place of the Tantriks. Once the practice of Tantra was much in vague here.'

In Aragya Niketan, though not a Tantrik proper Ranglal Daktar is very much like a 'Tantrik Sabsadhak'(one who practices religious rites, at the dead of night using a deadboby as his seat). There is a reference in Tamas Tapasya of the 'Sabsadhana' practised by the Tantrik's of Kotalghoea at 'Smasanesvari-asram' (Ref. P.173. Tamas Tapasya.)

**Ref. Binay Ghosh.P.49.P.B.S.
© Ref. P.113. Dhatrdebata.
In Svarga Marta Tarasankar has hinted at the influence of the local Tantrik Bagdi Buda on Dulal - son of a vaisnav woman. From his childhood Dulal used to play with human skulls in the company of Bagdi Buda in latter's Asrama of 'Ksepa Ma', resulting in Dulal's desperate and anti-vaisnav nature.

Thus in Radh flow the streams of Saktism, Vaisnavism and folk-religion among the people of various castes and tribes.

Before going in details of social, religious and cultural items of this area, selected from Tarasankar's novels, here, we like to have a glimpse of different important ethnic, professional and cultural groups of people of Radh who have a place in Tarasankar's writings.

Bhallas of Birbhum.

Bhallas are a group of the Bagdis - a caste of the Hindus.

"The Bhalla Bagdis are famous in Bengal for their physical strength. Once they were well-known for their skill in cudgelling and spearing. Even now they possess their traditional knack. There was a time when robbery was their boastful profession." *

But the British administration, with the help of social leaders, had taken to task and almost subdued these Bhallas along with other classes of indomitable rowdies of low origin.

"But till now they secretly practise their old profession. They dress like women and form a dancing party named Baibese. But sometimes in exchange of good rewards they show their expertise in strength and fighting." **

Tarasankar has shown in his novels that, generally the Bhallas are cultivators by profession and ordinarily very quiet-natured but take resort to their wild instinct in time of acute wants. In Kalindi, Rangal Mondal understands that, Nabin is a bagdi - the class depended upon or generations by the zamindars for the Normar's fighting zeal and therefore Nabin's help was indispensable for occupying a part of the Gar. Doms of Radh.

In his 'Bangla Mongal Kabyer Itihas', Ashutosh Bhattacharya has asserted the fact that, -

"From very old days a community named the Doms lived in the part of West Bengal known as Radh, with an well organised social life." 47.

He has narrated the history of the valour of the Doms and their organising a troop to protect Radh from outer invasion, their leaving the profession of a soldier during British rule and later total subjugation by the British administra- and their antisocial activities.*

Tarasankar has described in a nutshell the past and present of the local Doms.

"Nitali comes from a family of Dom, placed at the bottom of Hindu social structure. But they are different from the Doms living in towns. These Doms are well-known clubmen of Bengal and are notorious for their strength. Their surname is Birbamsa. The Birbamsas were once prominent in Nabab's forces for their gallantry. In the days of Company, being deprived of their job under the Nabab, these terrible fighters turned dacoits. Police records reveal the huge number of crimes committed by these Doms. Each member of the Dom families of Attahas village throws with the same impulse of their predecessors." 48.

Sadgops of Radh.

Sadgop is another typical caste of Radh. They are proud in considering themselves to be oldest Hindus of this region. Their old title was 'Gop' and they used to live in erstwhile Gophumi - situated in between Damodar and Ajoy rivers. A branch of them became defiled being intermixed with the 'Goelas' (milkmen) and the remaining people in course of time have classed themselves as Sadgop. Their general surname is Mandal. Tarasankar in his novels viz. Caitali Grhumi, Raikamal, Ganadebata, Hasuli Baker Upakatha, Sandipan Pathsala has shown that, these Sadgops live in large numbers in Birbhum and play an important part in the economy of Radh, particularly in agriculture.

Santals of Radh.

The Santals constitute a considerable bulk of population of Radh.

"The total number of Santals in West Bengal is about Eight Lakh Fifty thousand and among them about Three Lakh Fifty thousand live in the districts of Burdwan, Birbhum and Bankura and Two Lakh in Midnapur." 49.

According to the census of 1931 the Santals formed a 7.5% of the total population of Birbhum. *

Keen observers of Bengalee culture like Ashutosh Bhattacharya and Binay Ghosh have noticed a close affinity of Bengalee folk culture with those of the Santals. **

Tarasankar has also not failed to delineate the miserable conditions of the Santals in the pages of his novels, not only of his own time but also of their past.

Hunter has stated that influx of the Santals increased greatly to Birbhum and areas bordering Santal territories during the Eighteen fifties in connection with construction of embankments, bridges, roads and railway tracks. The better economic condition of those labourers made other santals envious of them as they now realised fully their serf-like condition under various exploiters. So they became restless to achieve a better standard of life. ***

In Aranya Banhi Tarasankar has depicted the utter distress of the poor santals exploited and oppressed by the Englishmen and the Indian businessmen and in consequence their violent outburst which is known in history as the Santal insurrection of 1854-55*.

Santals of Radh are mainly accustomed in agricultural and pastoral living. We can see in Pancagram and Hasuli Baker Upakatha that they are preferred as agricultural and industrial labour for their robust health and sincerity for work.

Sociologists have noted -
'The relative role of old occupations has changed and new occupations have been introduced. Growing indebtedness, loss of land and the increase in the number of landless have created acute economic problems .........(Santals)". 50.
In Kalindi the novelist has shown how the doolie, simple and illiterate people are cheated by the cunning businessmen and at last compelled to lose the land developed by their hard labour.

We can substantiate this picture with the help of facts disclosed by Ashok Mitra in his book 'AMAR DES' *

Tarasankar has shown in Aranya Banhi and Kalindi that the Santals are mainly Hindus and worship the Hindu gods like - Durga, Kali.

They consider the natural calamities like a thunder-bolt or a hurricane to be the symbolic indication of their Bonga (god).

Liquor is an indispensable article of their daily life, which is consumed, by both of young and old, in large quantities on festive occasions.

Bijay Dasami (the closing day of Durga-Puja, in autumn) is the day of their great festival. They drink Hadia (country liquor prepared by themselves) and gorgeously dress themselves, put feathers of peacock on their heads and dance in mock-fight. **

Their own festivals of 'Batuli Parab' (which is also known in other names) and 'Rowa Parab' are described in details in Kalindi. ***

The Patuas of Birbhum:

In his reminiscences Tarasankar has referred to his acquaintance with Dvijapada Patua and said 'The Patuas used to come to our village twice or thrice every week.' 51.

The critics of art and crafts sometime named a group of artists after the name of the locality where they belong to, considering the common characteristics of their work. The Patuas of Birbhum are classed in the same way. So are the Patuas of Kalighat.

The Patuas of Birbhum used to paid not only on earthen plates but also on canvas covered with clay or paper of sizes upto forty feet in length and proportionate breadth.

*** Ref. Chapter XVIII & Chapter XXI. Kalindi.
Their favourite subjects were the stories centering Ram, Kali, Durga, Krsna and Yama. Some of them occasionally used to historical or contemporary great events, as we find in Aranya Banhi.

In modern times as their demand has sunk and at the face of their economic crisis many of them have abandoned their ancestral profession. Still some Patua families are found at villages Panur, Itagadia around Suri.

The Patuas of Radh were mostly lower class Hindus and though some of them embraced Islam and since then they practise the customs and rituals of both the groups.

Tarasankar in his novels has not failed to make mentions of the Patuas and draw a few minor characters from them e.g. Mayan Paul in Aranya Banhi, Nalin Bairagi and other patuas of Mahagram in Ganadebata.

The Bedes of Radh.

Next to the vaisnav Sahajiyas, among the oborigines of Bengal the oft mentioned class in Tarasankar’s writings is that of the Bedes. It appears that Tarasankar had a soft corner at his heart for them, particularly a bede-girl whom he has called Bedeni or Nagini Kanya. Many of his writings are devoted on them, viz. the short stories Bedeni, Beder Meye, and the novel Nagini Kanyar Kahini.

Ashutoosh Bhattacharyya opines that Bedes (of course he means Sapudijias – the snake charmers) have a very close connection with the district of Birbhum where Snake-worship (Manasa puja) is much popular from very old days.

Tarasankar says in Amar Kaler Katha:-

"Bediyas used to come to our area. Indigenous bediyas – the Sapudes. Generally they used to come in rainy season.” They caught snakes and earned money by showing those to people. They went upto Midnapur to sell the venoms of the cobras to the kabirajs (Ayurvedic Medical Practitioners) who were there in Midnapur in large number. They prepared medicines from it.

© Ref. P.73. Amar Kaler Katha.
Tarasankar gives the following descriptions in a short story,

"The Bedes appear to be a very strange class. If asked about their caste they say they are the Bedes, but they are Muslim by religion. They observe the customs and practices of the Hindus. They also worship goddess Manasa and perform the Brataas like that of Mangal-candi. They can recite the Hindu mythological stories quite fluently." 52.

Tarasankar has pointed out that Patuas and Bajikars of Radh are in fact subdivisions of the Bedes.*

In the novel Nagini Kanyar Kahini Tarasankar has mainly meant the Sapudiyas, a sub-class of the Bedes by the term Bede. He is correct because the Sapudiyas are really so. **

In this novel he has described four classes of Sapudiyas - Metel Bede, Mal Bede, Majhi Bede and Bis Bede.

Metel Bedes are an ordinary group of Bedes. They travel on surface and not by rivers. They mainly sell snakes as a profession but also cultivate lands.

Tarasankar's descriptions about the Bedes can be substantiated with a statement of an anthropologist:

"Bediyas are a migratory nomad class of people of West Bengal. Their total number is ten to twelve thousand. They live in largest number in the district of Midnapur. They are Muslims but sign hymns of Hindu gods composed by themselves." 53.

The novel Nagini Kanyar Kahini is developed on the life of the Bisbedes.

"Bisbedes are easily recognised by the peculiar smell they emit." With the help of various herbs and creepers the Bisbedes can cure and save the life of a patient almost dying from snake-bite. No other group of Bede can do it. Bisbedes catches snakes and also extract venom of snakes to sell.

More or less all classes of Bedes practice magic and tricks, show monkey dance and also try to befool the simple minded people and wander from place to place.

* Ref. T.S.B. - P.73-75. A.K.K.
The Bajikars of Radh:

Ethnically, the Bajikars are a sub-class of the Bediyas. Tarasankar says in *Amar Kaler Katha* -

"There is another group of indigenous nomads in our area. They are known as the Bajikars in our locality." 54.

In the novel *Agun* Tarasankar says about them -

"I have always wondered about this tribe. This migratory people will leave their poorly-built houses for visiting other parts of the country. The houses will crumble down in the rainy season but they will come back and again construct these." 55.

"According to history Bhavadev Bhatta, a Ruler (Raja) of Siddhal (an area in Birbhum) of Radh organised a class of skilled spy with the children of prostitutes and the like. In course of time they have turned into a peculiar class of men known as Bajikars who live in and around Sithal village of Birbhum. They are Hindus but cannot be traced from any previous geneology." 56.

Tarasankar's short story *Yadukari* is written about these Bajikars. The living of them, the tricks and flirtations of their girls are drawn in it.

In the novel *Tamas Tapasya* he has described the life of a low class of nomads commonly seen in Radh area who very much resemble these Bajikars. Their facial appearance is ferocious and barbarous. They are dark and very dirty and lousy and emit foul smell. They eat almost everything from cow to fox and snakes - that too half-roasted and salted. Young and old alike they drink wine and can stand it from their hereditary capacity. Killing of reptiles and other small games and selling of herbal medicines are their main professions. They also earn by various corrupt ways including stealing, snatching and cheating the innocent people, particularly girls and house-wives.

Their wants and aspirations are very limited. Bows and arrows, axes, spears, sticks, few utensils, coloured nets and tents and pet animals and snakes are all their assets. These are the things they run after and occasionally offer as presents to their dear one's. They want to create awe and dismay among the people with the spell of their mantras, herbs and such other things.

54.T.S.B-P.75. A.K.K.
55.T.S.B.- P.57. (Agun) Tarasankar Racanabali Vol.V.
Tarasankar has stressed upon their contribution in folk religion and culture through their performances of Gajan, Botan songs etc. (N.B.)

The Kāhārs of Birbhum:

The novel Hasuli Baker Upakatha has been developed around the lives of the Kāhārs in Birbhum. They live on the bank of the river Kopai, where the river flows round a curve.

In his autobiographical writing, the author Tarasankar says: "No particular caste in Bengal is known as the Kāhārs. But of those who are called the 'Harijans' and of them who carry Planquins are the Kāhārs in Bengal. This stands to reason, for among the Bagdi-Kāhārs and who do not are the simple Bagdees". 57. (N.B.1)

In the above novel, the typical brand of existence of Kāhārs has been mirrored; their customs and manners have been bodied forth. The trees – Silk – Cotton, Wood-apple and Shaoda, the snake Chandraboda and a good many other adjuncts of nature are looked upon as something divine by them.

Also, they believe in such distressful events as natural calamity, unnatural death and the like as expressions of god's positive wrath on them for their sins. Acts like burning the Chandraboda - snake, a symbolic medium of their god, climbing the wood-apple tree by the desperado – Karatees are great sins for the community as a whole. As a result, on a moon-lit night, Kaloshastri touches a cobra mistaking it for the root of a tree and dies of the bite of that snake. The old wood-apple tree soared to Babathakur overturns itself and falls down to the ground. The young boy of pana is stung to death by the snake.

N.B. : "This Siv and Gajan are the indigenous items of those Bajikars". Ref. P.57.(Agun)Tarasankar Rasanebali. Vol.V.

57. P.57. B.S.B. Art. Amar Katha P.87-88

N.B.1 : There is really an ethnia group named 'Kahar' living in Bihar and adjacent districts of West Bengal. Their Professions are cultivation, carrying loads on yoke, and service. Ref. P.142. Vol.4. N.Basu.Bisvakos.Vol.V.
When such sins are committed the Sahara worship their greatest deity Kalarudra and beg his pardon. They also know that Kartababa, another deity, keeps a sympathetic watch upon them, his abode being the wood-apple tree-crown (or top). Spreading fields of corn are seen when he is pleased with them. Floods, diseases, high-winds even fends among the Kahars are there when he is angry.

The novelist has presented, in course of the story, the past history of the Kahars.

The Kahars of the Basbadi village near Hasuli Bak remember their days of affluence during the British rule when they were favoured by the Indigo planters. In those days they had worked as clubmen under the planters and oppressed the native tenants. In return they received tips, lands, and the whole of the booties. They did not have the agricultural know-how of cultivation so well. Their hereditary occupation was to carry palanquin.

When, in course of time, the planters had to wind up their business from India, the zamindars like the choudhuries purchased their lands. The Kahars lost all their residential plots. Then they took to cultivation as their occupation and became agricultural labourers. But they did not find an easy employment for their ill-repute and complicity with the planters. So they were driven to adopt unfair means for their livelihood like burglary and dacoity.

But in due course, the Kahars have come to agriculture for an honest living. Still, their problem is that their present employers do not protect them in their hard days like those of their predecessors. In this changed situation, around Second World War, a few reckless young among the Kahars disobeying their social restrictions go in for work in industry and in railways.

It is worthmentioning, that the social customs of the Kahars are full of taboos.

A Kahar must not construct a brick built house. They are also forbidden to work in an industry. If they go there, then Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, leaves them. They think that 'goddess of agriculture cannot just tolerate that smell of a factory. 58.

There are two separate groups of Kahars - The Behara-Kahara (Bearer) and the Atpaure Kahars (wholetimer)

The Behara Kahars carry the litters for generations. They belong to Aswa (Horse) Class.

The Atpaures don't shoulder a litter. They are from Bahan family. Earlier they used to work as Orderlies and guards in the indigo-houses. They are so named as they were then engaged for twentyfour hours. The Atpaures consider themselves superior to the Beharas and try to establish it by used refined language.

These two classes of Kahars have, for generations, a feeling of jeolou sy and competition towards each other.

Each section has a headman like Banwari and Paran in the present novel. He looks after the welfare of his own community and tries to protect the people from the anger of God. He is vigilant so that none can disregard or break their customs and traditio nal practices. But if any one does violate he is the authority to inflict punishment.

The Bauris and the Bayens –

We find a number of Bauris and Bayens in Tarasankar’s novels. To name a few characters we can recollect Satis Bauri, Patu Bayen (G.D. – P.G.) Ani Bayen (Kalantar). From Ganadebata, Pancagram, Padachinha, Kalantar it is evident that these groups of people lived in large number even in developed villages of Pancagram and Nabagram and they had their own localities in the villages.

An observer mentions of the Bauris as ‘the aborigines of Bankurah and Purulia.’

An Ethnological note reveals that –

'The Bauris are so called depressed caste of the district of Bankura and Burdwan. They are outside the pale of Hindu Society, though they call themselves as Hindus. Being hopelessly poor and uncultivated people, they speak a corrupt form of Bengali. Their features and status betray them to be Hinduised aboriginals.'

Tarasankar has narrated that the dark complexioned Bauris came in Badh from outside. By their labour they developed the entire area. Once they were very influential and even the Lord of Labhpur area. There are many proverbs regarding their public works and glorious acts at Labhpur.*

Bayens are Hindus by religion and cobblers by professions. They also procure and sell hides and skins. They have a secondary earning by playing on musical instruments on different occasions. Tarasankar has shown through Patu Bayen (G.D.) that in modern times the Bayens find it difficult, in the face of competition to carry on their hereditary occupation.

After discussions of all these numerous local groups of people we can now look into some trends of local life in Badh.

Love and passion:

We can understand from certain parts of Tarasankar's Amar Sahitya Jivan that he noticed an existence of strong passion in the people on the nook and corner of Badh. **

In his effort to show the regional influence on the high-born characters in Tarasankar's novels, a critic has drawn our attention to the primitive life-flow and physical passion in them. He refers to the following incident as an appropriate instance in support of his view.

"Sibnath, then, is perplexed. He says to Ramratan, his teacher, - 'Sir, I seek to find the way out.' His mental as well as physical restlessness is very much pronounced in his tireless and continued riding and swimming on one particular day. The idea of sharing the same bed with Gouri comes to his mind when he is absorbed in high-ideals and all his blood cells are about to burst in excitement like Kumkum! Here the novelist has shown that inspite of his noble-living the primitive passion finds its way in Sibnath and instantly brings him close to the age-old soil of Birbhum. The most important thing to be noted is that, no contradiction arises between the two selves of Sibnath - his lofty idealism and his physical desire. This absence of any conflict in him indicates his primitiveness and implicity. Here I like to assert 'regionality' in Sibnath." 60.

* PP. 1-3. Padacinha.

** Ref. A.S.J. (I).

60. Nirmalendu Bhoumik - P. 225-6 T.D.K.S.
Though the critic has presented his view very clearly yet this is to be taken with some reservation. It goes without saying that even a refined, sophisticated and dignified man is subject to his sex-urge. So it is not unusual for a young man with high-ideals and finer feelings to long for his lovely wife's company even if she has selfish and inferior nature. 'The primitiveness and simplicity of mind' of an idealist young man can, in no way, be stamped as a regional matter. Similar experience may be had elsewhere also.

But Tarasankar has shown the dominance of a primitive life force in the amatory life of lower classes of common people like Kahara, Bayens, Doms. He marked the signs of passion also among different religions sets like Sahajiya Vaishnavs and Bauls or Tantrik (e.g. Naga Thakur in Nagini Kanyar Kahini).

We can learn from different sources that sex occupies an important part in the peculiar religious practices among certain classes of Tantriks, Sahajiya Vaishnavs and Bauls who were quite numerous in Radh.

The debased condition of the Sahajiya Vaishnavs of Radh, their lusts and voluptuousness in the name of religious practices have been shown in the behaviours of Ranjan (R.K.) Radharaman and Kresdasi (Radha).

Even Rasikdas Baul, an aged devotee here, easily submits to his passion.

In Kabi Tarasankar has shown that Nital Dom, though discards the bad practices of his predecessors submits to a primitive impulse in company of Basan, who being a shameless jhumur girl can also accept him.

In the typical social surroundings of Radh, as we find in Tarasankar's novel, the looseness of sexual morality was very common among the lower class and aboriginal people.

Durga, a harijan girl in Ganadebata is very fair complexioned. This is very uncommon among them. People

of their locality and even Patu Bayen, her elder brother consider her beauty as a glaring proof of her mother's illicit connection with the people belonging to the higher rungs of the society. Now Durga leads a licentious life and takes pride in her connections with men of high positions like the Police Inspector, the zamindar and the Babus. Similarly Kahar wives and daughters are often involved in illegitimate physical relations with the Babus of nearby villages. The writer has also pointed out that sometimes these women fall preys to the lust and intrigue of the upper class people and then willy nilly take up such shameless practices.

But their society takes it very liberally. They do not bother much about chastity and don't want to punish them or try to stop it. We see even Patu's mother welcome Haren Ghosal to Durga's room. Even the husbands do not question their wives' activities in such cases, particularly when a rich, influential or upper-class man is involved. Rather they sincerely try so that the name of the person is not disclosed. That is why Patu Bayen does not take offence for the loose character of his wife when his son closely resembles Haren Ghosal in appearance. The writer has hinted that knowing the child to be illegitimate son of Haren Ghosal, Patu sometimes approaches him for small occasional tips.

For a long time Kalosai, the wife of Param had been in life with Bhup sing, the gate-keeper of a Babu. But the Kahars don't raise any question on it; their society takes it very liberally only displeasure is that, 'Bhup Sing is a Brahmin and it's a sin on the part of a Kahar to touch him.' And some of them are convinced that for this very Sin Kalosai meets an unnatural death.

Possibly for their common suffering there exists a social harmony amongst the different classes, particularly the poorer, people of Radh. As a result a village-folk, high and low freely mix with one another. Which is why Durga a cobbler-girl takes part in some religious rites arranged by Bilu, wife of Debub Ghosh, and Debub also gladly accepts food prepared and offered by Durga.

This spirit of free-mixing influences their private and sexual life. Thus Durga flirts with Srihari Ghosh becomes a bed-mate of Aniruddha, Padma, wife of Aniruddha offers herself firstly to Debub and being refused by him goes to Srihari.

The writer has alluded to such local influence even on an outsider Jatin, the detenu, in his meeting Durga, per chance, on one morning, and feeling a charm for her. The novelist describes—

"Jatin stared at the lascivious girl with a strange look. Today, for the first time, he marked in her whole appearance a charming beauty with her style of walking, softness of face and eyes and her dry hair." 62.

The novel Nagini Kanyar Kahini contains many strange facts regarding the love-life of the snake-charmers who roam through the jungles and fields of Radh. These are revealed in the conversations between Sivram Kabiraj and Sabatā, a bede-girl.

Sabatā is a nagini kanya. The episode of nagini kanya as stated by the novelist can be recalled in a nutshell here.

The bedes believe that sometimes goddess Manasa is born among them as their daughter. The Sirbede, the leader of a class of them recognises her by a supernatural sign—a circle mark on her forehead. Then through a holy ritual she is installed as the nagini Kanya. She remains subordinate only to the Sirbede. The Kanya performs the usual pujas of Manasa and sometimes falls into a swoon when possessed by the goddess. At that time none but the Sirbede and the nagini kanya is supposed to be as sacred as between a father and a daughter.

The bedes think that, the nagini kanya is ill-fated as the result of a curse from Sati Behuls. She doesn't get a child and even loses her husband and home.

Sometimes, during night-time, she is influenced by some evil spirit and forgetting all social restrictions she goes out at the tune(call) of a flute and wonders about in a bewildered condition like a sheep-walker. Sometimes in doing so the Nagini Kanyā is lost or killed by a tiger or an alligator and even sometimes returns with the symptoms of pregnancy.

The fainting fit of the Nagini Kanyā may be caused by her suppressed sex-desire. An essential condition for a Nagini Kanyā is that, she becomes widow before she is five years old and her husband must die of snake bite.

A Nagini Kanya should never fall in love and attraction towards her on the part of a man of their tribe is strongly forbidden. But youthful Shabala cannot but respond to the love of a strong and bold young man. The dare-devil lover, with a chivalrous desire to show his courage commits an offence by catching a King Cobra (Raj Gokhura). The aged Sirbede Mahadeb who knows the affair and is jealous towards the young man takes vengeance by killing him (the lover) with the help of that snake. Shabala is clever enough to understand the quile of Mahadeb. She takes her chance to kill him with her 'Nagdanta' (a poisonous nail preserved by a nagini kanya with herself to be used as a weapon.)

Again, the next Sirbede Gangaram feels strong attachment towards Pingala, the new Nagini Kanya. But Pingala likes the strong built and manly Nagathakur since the first time she has seen him.

In the house of a zamindar Pingala drops her dresses and catches snakes just to save the prestige of the bedes. Nagathakur is deeply obsessed with the bare-beauty of Pingala and after some time comes to take her in the name of his Goddess.

At the same time, the shrewd Gangaram is also infatuated with the beauty of Pingala since he saw her naked that day. And with an intention to take her away he with the help of a perfume, tries to arouse in her mind that the scent of Champak, an indication of the passion of Nagini Kanya, is emitted from her body. As a result innocent Pingala meets her end by inviting the bites of a Sankhachud. This, according to their convention, is a test of the impeccability of a Nagini Kanya.

In this novel we find that, though beauty and youth of a Nagini Kanya may attract many persons she has no approved way of enjoying her life. She has to waste herself in repression which is difficult for many a Nagini Kanya. Shabala lets loose her feelings and Pingala becomes mentally unbalanced.

The Bedes believe that, if a Nagini Kanya becomes impure and be settled in family life by giving up her usual way of life the curse of Goddess Bisahari falls on her maternal life for which the nature of a female serpent develops in her and she eats up her own children.

But sex is no taboo for the Bedes in general. The life they lead in jungles or in their Santaloo village with snakes and narcotics is almost medieval.
"A Bede girl is unfaithful and a liar. She is deceitful and her character is immoral." So is a male among them. Even a leader like Gangaram is corrupted.

The Bedes consider that their lust has been thrust upon them by their Lord Siva who Himself was licentious and, therefore, the debauchery on the part of a Bede is overlooked in their community.

The wild, primitive Bede girl easily yields to the unrestrained passion around her. (Ref. Ch. VII. N.K.K.) We have no reason to doubt that a pretty, young and widow deprived of all worldly pleasures will fall a prey to the lust of Sirbede inspite of the great difference of their age. So Sabala, becomes charmed with the manly courage and vitality of Nagathakur and readily reciprocates his love.

A Bede girl attains her age of marriage just after her Annaprashan, and gets married between her sixth month and third year. Re-marriage of a widow is very common among them but it is not imposed on every widow.

Sometimes a Hindu girl of Bede Origin can take her husband from the Islam group.

If a nagini kanya ignores her social restrictions and enters into family life then she is to dedicate her first child to Ma Bisahari with a hope to get rid of Her awful curse.

Hence, the Islam Bede reminds Sabala, the nagini kanya - "Propitiate our Goddess. Remember, dear, the fate of a nagini kanya and promise to offer your first child (...... to Her). 63.

By its side we can see the open and impudent game of love in the Kahar village in Hasuli Baker Upakatha. Words of love and attachment between men and women at any stage are there spoken aloud. In the matter of love they don't feel hesitation of share or fear of criticism. In Hasuli Baka surrounded by its bamboo clusters and jungles the unrestrained lust does not seek any secret and crooked way for its fulfilment.

The main waves in the life of the Kahars centre around their 'game of love'. Kalosasi, the wife of Param Kahar, the leader of the Atpuers, takes her chance to meet privately and make conversations of love with Banwari, the head of the Behara group. She meets him under the secluded banyan tree and all of a sudden blow out the lamp in Banwari's hand to hold him with her impulse of passion.

Again, amidst heavy rains and flood, the third wife of the grand-father of Himtele Panu comes to an understanding of love with the grandpa of Param through their mutual looks of passion. Leaving her husband she jumps down from her shelter on a tree and swims to her new beloved.

So dominant is the passion in the life of the Kahars that the wife decides in no time to part with her husband and goes to her dearest one without caring for a scandal. Even the widow mother of Karali fled away with a man of Candenpur railway station leaving her son of five years. Again, Pakhi, wife of Nayan, who is an asthma patient, candidly declares her love for Karali before others and goes to live with him, and finally they get married.

The Kahar women are as zealous in maintaining the worth of their love as fearless they are in asserting it. In the presence of one's wife a Kahar husband marries another woman the first wife abuses the man and abandons him. 'A Kahar girl does not live with a co-wife'. But the consideration is different if the husband is a leader or rich or a very strongly man. Then she allows him to keep a concubine but does not tolerate him if he marries again. *

Art and culture of the People of the Radha:

To point at the significance of studying the cultural life of any community on the background of the natural environment, a scholar affirms:-

"The topography of the land - the hills, the rivers, the plains, the mountains, and the valleys, the fertility of the soil; the mineral sources, the climatic conditions, and many other aspects of geography are the moulding

influences upon the lives of the people of a given community. Geography provides the conditions under which people live, while their folklore reflects these conditions."

Nirmal Kumar Basu, an observer of Indian ethnology and culture, expresses similar opinion in the following words:

"In studying the cultural development of any country, the importance of its geographical factors can hardly be minimized."

For this reason even among the people of the same race and clan the cultural life varies with its regional specialities.

Therefore, it is natural that the geographical features of Radh region will mould the cultural life of the people living here. For example - We know that human life is very closely concerned with rivers. The Ajoy, the Rupnarayan, the Mayarakshi, the Damodar are different in their appearance and nature from the wide and turbulent rivers of East Bengal, such as the Padma, the Meghna, the Tista etc. Again in Radh boat is not so much in use as in East Bengal. And so Bhatiaali or Sari songs or the boatmen are hardly heard in this region as in the East.

Here, in respect of Radh we should remember the following ethnological points.

From ancient times Radh was the homeland of different non-Aryan tribes.

In the Western border of Bengal there lived two prominent aboriginal groups from a very long past - one, the Male (Sauria Palladia) of Dravid origin and the other, the Santals, an Austro tribe.

People of both these groups, who belonged to the territory of Bengal merged among the Bengalees. But surely they did not totally shake of their habits and customs, beliefs and rituals.

The district of Birbhum is the bed of the combination of three different cultures, viz.

(a) Bengalee's own racial culture.
(b) Culture of the Male, a dravidian hill-tribe, and
(c) Culture of the Santals, an agricultural Austro tribe.

64. Mildred Butcher. - The Influence of Geography on North American Folk-lore. .... as quoted in P.B.P.B.L.
"As a result of synthesis of these three cultures a distinct Bengali folk-culture has become apparent in Birbhum also. Its flourish can be marked in the sphere of literature, music, dance, art and crafts. This area has added an wonderful chapter in Bengal's folk-culture with its Manasa, Bhadu, Jhumur, Kirtan and Baul-songs, Raibese, Dhal, Bhajo and stick-dances, colour-paintings on earthen pots, (Pat) Frescos and designs on woven fabrics and needleworks." 66.

We shall now discuss the striking features of different items of the cultural life of the people of Radh., and examine to what extent Tarasankar has incorporated these regional elements in his novels.

Local Dieties and religious festivals.

Babathakur or Karta of the Kahars:

In Hasuli Baker Upakatha we get a description of god known as the Lord of wood-apple trees to the Kahars of Barabari village in Birbhum. The Kahars also call the deity as 'Karta' and 'Babathakur'. They believe that, their Karta (Lord) looks after their welfare. He is bald-headed and is clad in white with wooden sandals. He puts on a string of beads of Rudraksha round his necks and a white sacred thread hangs from his neck.

When the Kahars commit any breach of customs or do any wrong at the place of god they worship their Kartababa and sacrifice he-goats and ducks to him in order to get his pardon. They do not rejoice on such special pujas though they arrange it in a grand manner. Suchad says at the time of the puja seeking exoneration of fault committed by Karali by killing the Candrabora snake:

"No! Beware! - This is not the annual puja. We cannot arrange merriments on such occasions. This puja is just to atone for our fault." 67.

Another local deity is 'Baba Bado Sib' or 'Baba Kalaruddu' as known by the Sahara who consider him their chief god. They think Kartathakur to be the companion of superior god Kalrudra as Narad is to Lord Narayan. They believe that their activities are controlled by Kartathakur while their life and death are at the mercy of Kalrudra.

In 'Birbhum Bibaran' there is a description of one Kalrudra deity worshipped at the northern part of the village Bhadrapur two miles away from Lahapur, Railway Station.

The rituals performed in Kalrudra's worship by the people of lower castes like the Kahars as mentioned in different parts of 'Hasuli Baker Upakatha' are as follows:-

Kahars perform 'Gajan' on the eve of Kalrudra's worship. One is selected as the chief devotee, who must be a pious and low-caste-man. The Chief devotee lies on the bed of nails known as the 'Pata of Chadak' and showers sparks of fire with both hands on Baba's head. He alone dances on fire and also plays with skulls in his hands (M.B.).

The usual sacred utterance for Gajan is - 'Sivo he, Sivo he, Sivo he'.

Ban Gosai: There goes a legend in Radh like this:

In good old days there was a devotee of Bhola Mahesvar named Ban Gosai who came from a low origin. Siva was very pleased with him. No other king of the world could defeat Ban Gosai. Gosai had one hundred wives and only one child - a daughter named Rusa. The grand son of Narayan was charmed with the beauty of Rusa and entered her room. Ban Gosai came to know it and in his fit of rage wanted to kill him. Narayan could guess some evil omen and asked Narada, his companion, to find out the real cause. Narada gave Him a description of this incident. Narayan came down to Ban Gosai and they entered into a combat when various bad signs were visible in the nature. Narayan cut off the hands and legs of Ban Gosai with his wheel. At this time god Kalrudra intervened and Rusabati and Narayan's grand-son were engaged in wedlock.

As Narayan now wanted to bless Ban Gosai he begged a blessing so that people worship him along with Kalrudra and only Ban Gosai's relations and subjects could be the Bhaktas (devotees) in the Gajan of Kalrudra. Hari granted him this. Hence, the image of Ban Gosai doesn't have any

*** Ref. PP.158-59. H.B.U.K.
hand—or hand or leg and though a god of the Kāhārs he is still the devotee of Kālrudra.

For this reason the Kāhārs at first worship Ban Gossai and believe that only then Lord Siva accepts their puja.

Attahas or Fullara Devi —

The village Labhpur is the main scene of the central plots of the novels Dhatrdeba, Kabi, Padacinha, and Kalantar (in different names of Labhpur - Laghata in Dhatrdeba, Nabagram in Padacinha and Kalantar and Attahas in Kabi). In this connection Attahas, the village-diyety of Labhpur occupies a position in those novels.

'The diyety of the scored place Attahas is of Ma Gandika', says Tarasankar in Kalantar (P.147).

Attahas of Birbhum is one of the fifty-one 'Pithas'.

It has been sanctified with the lower lip of Sati. Hence the goddess of Attahas is also known as Fullara Devi.

Here is a description of the place of this diyety —

"One of the fifty-one Pithas is situated in the eastern side of the village and the temple is surrounded with weeds. And there is the live-diyety of Maha-Bhairab by the side of the passage at entrance." 68

As it is a Sākta Pitha, naturally Attahas attracts the Sākta-Sanyasis and Tantriks. Tarasankar describes —

"In old days the sacrificial fires of the Sanyasis were visible in the darkness of the Jungle around Attahas."**

"Pilgrims used to come here from far and near."

In this connection we should note that there is a controversy over the actual situation of the 'Pitha' Attahas. A writer says —

"There is a Pitha named Attahas at a place two miles away from Ketugrām in Burdwan. Some people say that this very Attahas is the Mahapitha." 69.

But the same author concludes —

The first Bhābadeb of Siddhalgrām under Labhpur

* Ref. PP.159-60. H.B.U.K.
** Ref. P.210-. Padacinha.
*** Ref. P.24.- Kālrantar.
Police Station (village number 378) had two brothers named Mahadeb and Attahas. "Attahas adopted renunciation (Sanyas) We think, being the place of his worship Pullarapith of Labhpur is known as Attahas." *

However, Attahas or Pullaradevi of Labhpur is more prominent and commonly known as a goddess of Mahapitha.

One peculiarity in the rituals of worship of this Pullara Debi is that, hens and pigs are also sacrificed to the deity. **

Manasa puja -

After analysis of the antiquities and historical clues and field survey Ashutosh Bhattacharya has established that -

"The worship of Manasa (the goddess of the snakes) is not only very old in Birbhum but, till today, it is most popular in Birbhum in the entire of Bengal. This folk culture of Birbhum is in vogue in an uninterrupted flow from a long past." 70.

He further says -

"There is no such village in Birbhum where there not at least one or more temples of Manasa." 71.

The story of Nagini Kanyar Kahini is based on this cult of snake worship or Bisahari (Manasa) puja and peculiar beliefs and practices connected with it.

In other novels Tarasankar has not stressed on the local popularity of the worship of Manasa but from short references we can gather that Manasa-episode is very popular here and possibly enjoyed during the days of Manasa puja. We can have an idea from Hasuli Baker Upakatha that Goddess Manasa is also worshipped by the Kahars, Bagdis and like classes.

Nag pancami (the fifth day of new moon in Asad) is the day for the worship of Bisahari. In Radh the housewives in rural area, in memory of the fate of Sati Behula at her in-law’s home, take leave of their in-laws and go to their own home. There they remain on fast and worship Manasa.

Around Nag pancami snake catchers from different places come to Campainagar in Radh. ***

70. A.B. -P.189. Bemla Mangal Kabyer Itihas.
71. P.214 ibid.
Dharmathakur Puja.

The most popular among the gods worshipped by the common people of Birbhum is Dharmathakur or Dharmaraj. Such influence and dominance of and devotion to Dharmathakur covering hundreds of square miles of Raph is not seen anywhere else in Bengal. This clearly indicates that Dharma-Puja originated in this area.

Ashutosh Bhattacharya says -

"Dharma-Puja is in fact the worship of the Sun - the supreme God of the Doms in their antiquated code of rituals. Latter this form of worship is influenced by the vaishnavism and the upper class Hindus."

Here is the observation of Bimay Ghosh -

"The worship is very common among the castes like Hadi, Dom, Bauri, Dibar. It is no less popular amongst the Tantubayas (weavers), Baniks(businessmen) and Karmakars (Blacksmiths). It is also clear that the Brahmins became the priests in much latter time. Even where there is a Brahmin priest there is also a non-brahmin Sabayet (helper), apart from a Deyasi." 73.

He says - "In Birbhum the priest of Dharma is called "Deyasi" which comes from 'Devamshi'." 74.

But according to Ashutosh Bhattacharya -

"In this region the caretakers of the Dharma shrines are called 'Deyasi' or 'Deyasi'" 75.

He has also mentioned such peculiarities of selecting the priests of Dharma in Birbhum.

"The priests of Dharma dieties are Dom by caste. Their surname is 'Pamit'. A poor brhim is appointed a priest in a village dominated by the Brahmins. But still the Dom-priests do not give up their right to look after the deity." 76.

Another observer narrates -

"In Midnapur, the priests of the Dharma worship centres visited were all Pandits (Dom) by caste. In Birbhum other castes like Kaibartta, Swarzakar and Barma Brahmas also have charge of Dharma Temples." 77.

  72. A.B. - P.606. - Bamlar Mangal Kabyer Itihas.
  73. B.G. - P.188. - Pascim Bangr Samkriti.
  74. B.G. - P.185. - Ibid.
  75. A.B. - P.85. - Bamlar Lekasruti.
  76. Ibid.
Tarasankar has presented the details of different aspects of the worship of Dharma Raj through his several novels.

In the novel Kalantar we find, at the Dharma-shrine of Jogipur there is a brahmin priest named Ramhari Chakrabarty. It is evident from the conversations between Ramhari and Rama that there are Devas, too, in that shrine. *

These brahmin priests of Dharma shrines were neglected in the brahmin society. In earlier days these chakrabarties were not allowed a smoke on a common huble-buble, not to speak of a dinner on the same table or any matrimonial alliances with them. For this reason Geurikanta at first hesitated to bow down to Ramhari in respect, but simply greeted him.

But with the passing of time rich Brahmia priests like the above Chakrabarties have got a social status among the brahmias. Still, in the changing society of Hadh the priests of Dharma are looked with contempt by the rising generation. Ramhari is aware that, as a priest of Dharma-rag, he is hated, once again, by the younger class.

From 'Kalantar' we can know —

"The entire class of the Pandas (guides to the devotees) of Dharma-god is a very peculiar one. The group of these pandas of Nabagram and Jogipada is known as Gesai in that locality. They are very few in number. They do the duties of a Panda at the shrines of Siva, Dhamaraj and Sitaladevi. The Pandas mainly depend upon this profession in these localities where these temples exist. They put on the sacred thread around their neck but also plough the lands by themselves." 78.

If there is a brahmin priest in the shrine of Dharma-raj the pandas then perform other works of the temple excluding the formal offerings (puja) to the deity.

Regarding Darmathakur Ashutosh Bhattacharya has pointed out:

"Unlike other Hindu gods, the Dharma dieties are not supposed to look after the general well-being of the people. In course of time though in the areas under Hindu influence they are now supposed to grant prosperity to the people, still, stress is given to some dominating attributes of these Dharma-gods. They are granting child

to the childless woman, preventing still-births, bringing rains during a drought, removing blindness and curing leprosy." 79.

In Gamadebata we find that, the Dharmaraj of Shivkalipur cures rheumatism. * The medicine revealed through dreams by the Dharma god of Jagipada, adjacent to Nabagram, is famous in that area as a cure for skin-diseases including Leprosy. And for this medicine, the efficacy of which is perhaps met exaggerated, people in large number assemble at Jegipada on Tuesday and Saturdays. **

Biney Ghosh has referred to some peculiar practices in connection with the Dharma-puja in Birbhum. They comprise of Ghadak (Revolving around a very high pole), Gajan (certain rituals performed for a considerable period and a procession in connection with the concluding festival of Siva and such other gods), Banphoda (the austerities of piercing the skin etc.) and Sam (taking the guise of a clown). The sudden influence of spirit on some devotees (Bharmara) is also a notable incident. Earthen models of horses are an item for sacrifice. ***

Tarasankar in his regional novels has mentioned all the specialities of Dharma festival of the area most appropriately.

There is the reference to earthen horses heaped under the Bakul tree at the place of Dharmaraj at Sibkalipur. These are offered as sacrifice to the deity.( P. G.D.).

In the past a fair was arranged on the occasion of Dharma worship at Jegipada. But after a storm and rain on the full-moon day - the day fixed for the Bhadal game, a devotee was possessed and through him the god forbade the fair there.

This Bhadal game is described by Ashutosh Bhattacharya in the following manner -

"An interesting rite named Bhadal Khela is noticed in the district of Birbhum. Each Devotee (Bhaktya) takes a pitcher on his head. The pitcher is decorated with flowers. At a fixed place beside a tank on the outskirts of the village the Sudis (local distillers) fill these pitchers with liquors diluted with water. "

79. A.B. - P.87. B.L.S.
** P.54. G.D.
*** P.194. Kalantar.
**** Ref. P.188. Pascim Bangar Samakrti.
As the devotees proceed towards the shrines with the pitchers on their heads, the relatives and sometimes the patients themselves and childless women fell prostrate on the ground before them and ask for their remedies of their maladies. Until they are answered they do not make way for the devotees. The 'bhaktyas' utter some remedy to each of them and they go to the temple and dance around it. Thereafter the pitchers are placed on the varanda of the temple and finally those are emptied at the root of some tree. Thus goes the rite of Bhadal which is not observed outside Birbhum, and so may be considered to be a local feature.

Bimoy Ghosh, in his description of Dharmapuja at Suri, however, has referred to a procession of 'Bhaktays' with pitchers filled with the water of the Ganga, milk or 'pituli' (emulsion of powdered rice) as a substitute of country liquor.

A. Mitra, another observer of the culture of Radh has described the different sides of Dharma-Bhadal. He remarks -

"Bhadal occupies a special importance in the Dharma worship of Radh. ** He also mentions the game of hadal, the dance and possession by a spirit. ***

Tarasankar describes in a nutshell in one of his articles about the influence of spirit during a hadal game of Dharma puja at his place, Labhpur.

"In our village during the puja of Dharmacpaj in Baisakh the devotees, while on fast, go around the village in a procession with the pitchers filled with liquors on their heads and lastly on reaching the shrines are often possessed by spirits. They then go on moving their heads in a frenzy and utter oracles."80.

In his novel 'Kalanatar' Tarasankar has touched upon these practices.

According to Ashutosh Bhattacharya -
"Animal sacrifice is an indispensable part of Dharma puja". 81.

But from Bimoy Ghosh we learn about deviations in this respect. He says -

"In some places both animal sacrifices and offerings of sweets to the deity are prevailing while at

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** Ref. B.G. P.183. P.B.S.
*** P.P.104-106. ibid.
81. Jamiya. iq SQ.
other places animal sacrifice has been totally discontinued."

In 'Kalantar' we see that when the Dharmaraj of Jogipur made his appearance at Nager Math, the followers of Paramananda Thakur and Chakraborties had a quarrel over the decision about following Sakta or Vaisnav methods of worship respectively. As a result, the same deity receives puja in these two different methods at two places.

Ashutosh Bhattacharya has noticed that -
"Almost in all parts of Birbhum paca or country liquor is liberally used on the occasion of Dharmapuja." 83.

Tarasankar has pointed out that -
"Being a part of offerings to god Dharma, the Chakraborties do not use the work 'Liquor' but call it 'Karan' (a sacred name of the country liquor preferred by the Saktas)." 84.

Id Puja.

There are short descriptions of Id Puja, a typical festival of Radh, in Tarasankar's novels -viz. Hasuli Baker Upakatha and Capadangar Bangal Bou.

We find the following references of Id Puja in the writings of different observers.

Binay Ghosh says -
"Even today the marks of Indradhawaj Puja can be traced in Midnapur and Bismapur area in Radh. It is also called Id Puja and Id Parab." 85.

82. B.Ghosh - P.188. P.B.S.
85. B.G. - P.711. P.B.S.
Binay Ghosh adds -

"Besides Midnapur this festival is celebrated in the estate of Panchakot in Manbhum, at Kuchia, Bismapur, Jamkudi and Chatna in Bankura and at different places of Burdwan and Birbhim." 86.

We know from his description that, the Santals and other tribals also equally rejoice on this occasion.

Amalendu Mitra has pointed out that, in Korna village in Suri Police Station Indra-puja is celebrated collectively by the people beside the river Chandrabhaga. *

From Tarasankar's different novels we gathered that Id-puja is performed often in the same place where Siva is worshipped, but on a separate altar which they call -'The altar of god Indra'.

Id is actually the king-god Indra. The word Indra has changed into 'Id' through colloquial use.

While Tarasankar mentions the time of this Puja in the early part of Aswin, Binoy Ghosh fixes the time still earlier, on the twelfth day of the full moon in Bhadra.

The fifteen feet high wooden pole without any craving to show the nose, the ears or the eyes, doesn't give an idea of an image. Very often it is a tall branch of a tree without its bark. It is placed upright on the altar.

In some cases, even a he-goat is sacrificed.

It is the local zamindar on whom rests the responsibility of observing this Puja. But in fact, the village-panchayat (Pancamandal) makes necessary arrangements including meeting all expenses which is, however, recovered through remissions of zamindars' rents. **

86. B.G. - P.713. P.B.S.
Ghētu Pujā.

Tarasankar in Ganadebata has given a short description of the god Ghantakarna.

The word Ghētu is derived from Ghantakarna, a friend (Pisac) who is supposed to be an antagonist of Bishnu and ardent devotee of Siva. He is different from another Ghantakarna commonly known and also mentioned in almanacs as a deity for remedy of Pox. Present Ghantakarna through his prolonged prayer, devotion and perseverance succeeded in having the favour of both of the gods - Siva and Bishnu.

An author on village dieties of Bengal says about Ghantakarna -

"Ghantakarna is worshipped as a god of skin-diseases (Carma-debata). The village-women conduct its puja. At some places a Brahmin works as a priest, but doesn't accept the offering of eatables in worship. The Brahmins say that, originally Ghantakarna was a young god in heaven but takes birth among the Pisacos (fiends) due to curse by Bishnu. Then he became very inimical to Bishnu and hangs two bells by the side of his ears so that he cannot hear the name of Bishnu. Hence this deity is named Ghantakarna."

However, the people of lower caste in West Bengal particularly in the districts of Radh and parts of 24-Parganas worship this devotee-fiend Ghantakarna. It is believed that this deity cures skin diseases. The austerities observed during Ghētu-puja is a part of Gajan of Siva. During the entire month of Caitra the devotees or Ghantakarna beg rice, pulses etc. from door to door while singing Ghētu-songs. They go on fast for the day-time during this month. Lastly, they rejoice in Gajan.

As we find in Ganadebata and Hasuli Baker Upakatha, the Ghētu-songs are an important aspect of this festival, which the people enjoy all through the year. In Ganadebata we see the villagers sit together in the evenings of the month of Caitra to enjoy such songs. The upper class people, even the Brahmins also join such gatherings to relish such folk-songs.

These songs are composed by the local village-poets on varied subject-matters.

P. 170. Pasim Benger Lokasamkriti.
Govt. of West Bengal.
For example, here is one, in praise of Ghetu:

Ek Ghētu tār sāt beta
Sat beta tār sātānta
Ek beta tār mahānta.
Mahānta bhāi re
Ful tulte yāi re.
Yata ful pāi re
Āmār Ghētuke sājāi re!

There is one Ghetu with his seven sons.
His sons are of seven different natures.
One of them is a Mahānta (abbot)
Oh my dear Mahānta!
Let's go to pluck flowers
And adorn my loving Ghetu
With huge number of flowers.

But Ghetu sons also include contemporary important local events such as construction of Railway line, harassment caused to Debnath Ghosh by the Settlement-Kanango, killing the snake Candraboda by Karali and like. These reflect the pleasures and pains of their material life as in the following one:

Lālmukho sāyeb ela kāṭā kāṭā cokh
Dyāś-bidyāś theke ela dale dale lok
0 sāyeb āstā bādhālē - Kāhār kuler āna ghucālē
Pālki chede ryālē āṣā yata bābulok

Cha māser path kaler gāḍi dande cālālē!

The red-faced Englishmen with tawny eyes
Have come here from distant unknown places
Oh! the 'Sahebs' have spoilt the occupation of the Kehars
By laying down the railway path
The 'babus' now go by rail discarding the palanquin
Alas! the sahebs have run the railway train
Which covers in a minute the distance &
To be walked in six months.

Unlike bratakathas Ghetu songs are not necessarily concerned with gods or devotion, and these are very much changing from time to time and place to place.
Bhajo Parab : IV - 57

Bhanjo, one of the seven main festivals of the Kahars, is a peculiar Brata of Radh, observed by the lower-caste-people like the Bagdis etc. The following special features of this Brata can be noted briefly from Abanindranath Thakur's book 'Banglar Brata'.

(1) It is observed by the girls of Burdwan. It is also known as the Brata of Sas leaves.

(2) The Brata starts on the sixth day of the new-moon and ends on the twelfth day of full moon in the month of Bhadra.

(3) On the fifth day of new moon the girls take five varieties of corns on a new earthen plate and mix them with some collected clay thrown up by the rats. And then they sprinkle little water over it every day till the seeds germinate. Then the festival starts.

(4) The final ceremony and amusement is held on Indra-Dwadasa (twelfth day of full-moon in Bhadra) in the courtyard on that moonlit night.

We know from the Hasuli Baker Upakatha that this festival is observed as a religious function by the Kahars (Bagdis, Hadis etc.) of Birbhum. From the description of the festival in this novel it appears that the Kahars observe it with a little difference.

The Kahars collect soil from the place of Id Puja which is held at Babathakurtala a few days before Bhajo festival. With this clay they build an altar at the place of rejoicing at Kaharpara.

Goddess Bhajo is worshipped on the day of Jitastami. The altar of Bhajo-sundari is decorated with flowers and leaves and Kahars, irrespective of men and women, drink as much as they can and revel before the altar. On this day they do not work but themselves take the taste of leisure. Also they let loose the domestic animals. They do not sleep throughout the night but dance and sing. There is a touch of eroticism or even vulgarism in all these. Sometimes they call the merry-makers bad names, this, however, is free from malice. They believe that God of the Kahars wants them to have some merriment on this day. Any expression of love and passion, son and characteristic behaviour is free from criticism that day. Even they do not suspect the closeness between men and women. *

* Ref. Chapter V. Hasuli Baker Upakatha.
The girls go to the nearby river with the earthen plates full of five varieties of germinated corms and fill the pots with water and come back. Then they chant the following rhyme like 'holy utterings' (Mantra) before the goddess Bhajo:—

"Bhāje le sundari māṭi le sarā
Bhājer kapale aṅger aṅkūr pārā,
Āltar rāṅger chōp māṭite dibā,
O māṭi, temār kache maner kathā baliba
Panco akudi śmār dhara te dhārā." 90.

0 beautiful Bhajo! here are the earthen pots
Bhajo is coloured with vermilion on her forehead.
Let us paint the altar with Alta,
O land! we shall disclose our secrets to you
O earth! please accept our 'Panco akudi'(five varieties of germinated seeds).

In the next morning the girls immerse the beautiful Bhajo, decorated with Saluk flowers and spot of vermilion, in the river. They also have their bath there and return home. The Kahars keep up their festive-mood throughout that day. *

Bhādu:

Bhadu puja is a festival of the lower-classes of people of Radh such as the Bagdis, the Bayons, the Bauris etc.
A writer narrates:—

"The Bhadu originated with the Bauris, ******* It is celebrated on the two last days of the month of Bhadra, and is personified in an idol of a small size representing a young girl, seated on a lotus or sometimes on a small square table; like all Hindu idols, Bhadu wears a coronet on the head, and is decorated with garlands." 91.

Though Bhadu puja is more popular in Bankura, still it is also common in Birbhum. It is noticed that Thakurakar, in his works has not given any description of Bhadu festival nor cited its importance in his region, even in depicting the life of the Bauris. We come across only a few references here and there in his novels. **

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Itu brata -

In Ganadebata there is a description of Itu brata as it is celebrated in Radh villages.

"In other provinces, that is, in certain parts of Bengal Itu or Mitra Brata starts on the last day of Kartik and ends on the last day of Agrabayana. It has its origin in the worship of sun praying for the good of winter crops. In Devi's district (Birbhum) the Sun-god is not worshipped throughout the month. Here paddy is the main agricultural products, cultivation of winter-crops (cereals) are not much in practice." 92.

Itu festival is called here Itu-Lakshmi or Itu-Samkranti Parba. It is celebrated in the cultivators' own farm hamas. The surface in the centre of the farmstead is decorated by paintings with liquid rice-paste and Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped there and offered cooked rice. Then at that place paddy is husked with the help of cattle.

Even some fifteen years ago this festival was closely connected with the village Candimandap. After the Lakshmi Puja the village women used to come here to listen to scriptures read by some old lady. Now-a-days they don't assemble there, instead the girls from a few neighbouring families assemble at one of their houses for this purpose. But they all pay homage to the deity at Candimandap before placing the image at their farm-yards.

Sejuti brata -

There is a description of the performance of Sejuti brata in Kalantar.

"Looking at the setting Sun from an open field the little girls say - A plate ......... Then when a part sets they say - a pot..... when half off the Sun disappears (sets) they utter - a cup........ Thus they go on saying by turn - a Spade, a sickle, respectively. And at last they say - I catch your mind. Then the girls would return to their homes silently. They would break their silence after counting upto seven stars in the evening-sky. They would chant peculiar rhymes while counting the stars.

Then the girls would pray to god for a husband like Ram, a brother-in-law like Lakshman and wish to be as chaste as Sita of Ramayana and pray for a happy domestic life. 93.

92. P.85 Ganadebata.
Paus āglano Parba:

A ceremony is described in Ganadebata, which is performed with great eclat by the village women. It is Paus āglano Parba - An address to the Paus for a permanent stay. It is observed at the end of Paus Samkranti i.e. the early hours of the first day of Magh - supposing it to be the time of departure of Paus. We can know from Tarasankar's descriptions that the women draw 'alpana' on the floor of candimandap on the previous evening including pictures of a house and a barn.

At the dawn of first of Magh, long before Sunrise people rejoice with blowing conchshells and women, particularly of Krsijibi families, sing in chorus requesting the Paus to remain forever with them. *

Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay, a scholar from Birbhum says on this festival of Radh -

"Almost in every Hindu village of West Bengal in the night just before Paus Samkranti, the practice of requesting Paus not to leave is in vogue. Various short rhymes are sung on this subject which differ from place to place. Here is one such rhyme popular in our Birbhum.

Paus māse paus āgola, dhān kāpase ghar ālo
Esa paus yeo nā, janma janma cheō nā
Paus mās Lakshmi mās, nā yeo chādiye
Gāl bhare pān debo katorā purīye
Ādāre pādāre pauṣ baḍa ghar cepei bosa."

It is the month of Paus and the time to confine our dear Paus

Our barns are full of paddy and cotton
We welcome you Oh Paus!
Stay with us through generations
Dear Paus! you bring in wealth
We shall offer you bettle to your hearts content
Why do you stand at a corner.
Please be seated comfortably in our Central hall.

The lines of a rhyme chanted by women-folk at Candimandap in Ganadebata are very near to the above-mentioned rhyme.

* Ref. PP. 139, 141, 155-56. Ganadebata.
We can note that while Hare Krishna Mukhapadhyay mentions the function to be held on the night preceding Pous Samkranti, Tarasankar clearly describes it as the early hours of first day of Magh.

A writer on folk-life of Bengal says:

"Pous aglano of Radh is purely a commoners' ritual, mainly with agricultural people. It is a festival of prayer for crops."

The above writer has informed that the process of this function differs at different places and among different sections of people.

"Individualistic desire has little place in the brata of Pous aglano. The joint-spirit of an entire community is the most marked aspect of this festival."

Tarasankar has correctly shown these features in the description of celebration of Pous aglano in Ganadebata. When Aniruddha, in his revolutionary spirit, said to Padma, his wife, that, they would observe Pous aglano at their home Padma could not just accept that idea of doing it away from Gandimandap.

Bauni Bādhā:

A ritual known as Bauni Bādhā is performed in connection with the festival - Pous Samkranti in Radh and its adjacent localities. The practice goes like this -

On the day just before Pous samkranti the utensils, furniture and all other household articles, and even somewhere the domestic deities are tied up with a newly made rope of fresh straws collected on Kārtik Samkranti and known as 'Mūṭh Lakshmi'. Such holy ropes are named 'Āuri Bāuri.' **

This is done with a belief that all these will be blessed by goddess Lakshmi who will also abide with them. Silently they pray - let our present wealth remain as it is, and the lost one come back, and the old and the new properties grow up with savings. ***


96. " " P. 3. ibid.


While they do it they usually sing rhymes which go like the following one in certain places of Radha :-

Auni Bāumi tin rāt tin din
Kāthāo yeeni
Ghare bāne pithe bāth kheei.
(0 goddess lakshmi !) Please come and have a seat
Take full rest for three days
And eat cake and rice as you like
at our home.

In this connection, in certain areas lending or giving in charity is forbidden for next three days.

Jalṣayān :
It is a function held in the villages of Radha on the 1st of Baisakh, at the end of the Gajan of Siva. The stone-idol of Siva is left submerged in the nearby pond (as in the Kālidāha of Māauli Bāk). "The Lord Siva will remain there for the whole year and will rise at the end of the year, on the holy first day of next Chaitra, just one month ahead of the Gajan. Then he will utter - 'Oh Sun, Oh Moon! Here, I have woke up. Now, please, close the year.'"

The image is then taken in a procession from Kalarudratala in the jungle to the Kālidāha. In the front of the procession goes the musical party with drums, Kasi, bugle, and sam follow them.

Men of Hadi, Dom, Bauri, Kahar and such other communities take the make up of Nandi, Vringi, Tijat, Dantabakra and many other Ghosts.

The group of Bhaktas dancing and moving a stick over their heads proceed behind the sam. The next is the position Cadakpata. There, facing the sky, the Sirbhakta lies on the bed of nails. Behind Cadakpata remains Bangsai and Kalrudra goes after him in his covered litter.

From Tarasankar's description it appears that caste Hindus like the Sadgops, the Karmakars and men of reputation also take part in the procession.

We can know also from other sources that at some places in Birbhum the images of certain Gods are kept dipped in ponds after their worship. 'The Yugadya devi of Kshirgram remains immersed in a pond for the whole year.**** Only for a day she comes to light. She is taken up and placed in Her temple only on the last day of Baisakh.'

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97 * PP. 183 84. HYB.U.K.
The cultural life of the Kahars (Bagdis).

In Hasuli Baker Upakatha, Tarasankar has given a detailed account of the day to day life of the Kahars of Birbhum. The writer has repeatedly shown their fear from some super-natural power, particularly from ghosts. In their fear of ghosts in the evenings they burn a kerosine-lamp and sit together and repeat the name of Kattathakur. In such evenings the younger boys sing to the accompaniment of drum songs of Dharmaraj, Bhasan of Manasa, Bhadupujsa songs in Bhadra, Pucali in autumn, Ghetu songs in Caitra, Gajan and Bolan songs during the Gajan festivals.

Though they don't take part in or are not concerned with the festivals of the upper-class Hindus, yet, the Kahars pay visit to the former's places of worship and see the idols and rejoice on such occasions. Kahars have seven festivals of their own. These are :-

(a) Ambubaci (Amuchi) (e) Lakshmpuja in Paus
(b) Puja of Ma Bisahari, (Manasa) (f) Gajan
(c) Bhajo Parab in Bhadra (g) Dharmapuja.
(d) Nabanna in Agrahayan.

Nabanna is their greatest festival. Apart from this, the Kahar women perform the 'Bratas' of Saasthi, Mangalcandi and Lakshmi. *

The Kahars don't use a pickaxe. They believe that, this weapon, introduced by the English-men are as sharply pointed as a spear and therefore, they should not hurt Ma Basundhara (the goddess of the earth) with it. **

The cultivators of Radh such as the Kahars, the Bagdis observe a ritual before ploughing, as done by Banwari in Haululi Baker Upakatha.

They kneel down and pay pranam (a sign of reverence) to the virgin soil and then silently address the mother earth :-

"Mā, I am not going to wound you but scour your body and, thereby, serve you. You please be kind enough to give me crops and stay at my home in it (crops). Then they scattered the flowers with which Babathakur, their god has been worshipped." Then they pray to Babathakur so that any stone or beast does not come out and hinder their cultivation.

* Ref. PP.297 - 98 B.B.U.K.
** Ref. P. 147. ibid.
Cultural life of the Santals of Radh

The Santals have a notable part in the cultural life of Radh, which Tarassakar has not overlooked. We get a clear idea of the festivals and entertainment of the Santals of Birbhum through Kaliadi and Aranya Banki.

The Santals consider the day on which they pay rent to the Zamindar and get a receipt as a much desired holy day. On that day they offer puja to their god. They worship him with red hens and red geat. Then, after the bloody sacrifice, they drink liquor and make merriment to the sound of a 'Madal'.( Kaliadi)

There is a description of Batuli festival in Kaliadi. It is also known as Rewa or Kadalata or Bain festival. This is an agricultural festival. Before paddy-plantation, in particular, during early monsoon they celebrate this festival. They worship their god at Jahar Sarana (the abode of god) and sacrifice cocks. They chop one sacrificed cock into pieces and bury the pieces underneath into the earth. Country liquor and greens of two or three varieties are offered to the god. This is an important feature of this festival. Cooking is done at this place of worship. They rejoice after having their food. The occasion is celebrated in Birbhum with great eclat.

With the break of dawn on this day the Santal girls are out to sweep the village paths and cleanse the frontal space of every house with care. On the day of Rew festival the girls sing holy songs in choros.

A myth current among the Santals of Radh regarding the origin of the world is narrated in Kaliadi. In short it is the following -

God at first created waters, nothing else. Next, He created two birds - a drake and a duck. They put to God - "where shall we live and what shall we eat ?" God called upon the crocodile and asked him to raise earth. The Crocodile thereupon raised earth only to dissolve in water. God, then, made the same orders to the shatfish and the crab respectively. Both failed as the mud thus brought forth was dissolved. God asked the earthworm to try again. The earthworm wished he had a terteaise. The terteaise came, the earthworm chained the legs of the floating terteaise. Resting his tail-end on the back of the terteaise, the earthworm took a dip into the water and brought forth clay. The clay was deposited on the back of the terteaise and the earth was thus created. *(N.B.)*


N.B.: A similar legend has been narrated by W.W. Hunter in his book 'The Annals of Rural Bengal' (PP.450-51), which has been collected by him from Birbhum.
Jhumur of Radh:

In his novel Kobi Tarasankar has given a clear and minute sketch of Jhumur and Kabi-song, a speciality of the musical culture of Radh. Ashutosh Bhattacharya, a scholar of repute on Folk culture, has mentioned Jhumur particularly as a music originating in border areas of West Bengal and 'it is confined to those regions only.' * Obviously, he means Radh as the place of Jhumur.

Gourihar Mitra, the author of Birbhumer Itihas has stated in an article: —

"Jhumur is an old thing in our province. The low-class men and women of Mallarpur have jointly earned popularity in this branch of music by forming parties. Jhumur parties are also found in other Parts of Birbhum. Competition between these Jhumur parties and Kabi-songs is a popular brand of entertainment. Although Jhumur-song has degenerated much yet, true to its traditional feature, the Jhumur singers do not start their performance without chanting some hymns (Gourcandrika) in praise of Mahaprabhu." .

Renowned scholar Asit Bandopadhyay expresses his opinion that, in Radh Jhumur is a form of Dhamali (light song based on Adi Rasa). In Radh villages the Jhumur performances are mainly centered around songs composed of questions and answers between male and female characters. Kabi-songs are closely related to Jhumur in subject-matter and expressions. **

The following distinctive features of Jhumur can be gathered from Tarasankar's Kabi.

Jhumur is sung by a mobile party along with dances. Though this belongs to Radh, the groups in earlier days used to travel up to Maldah, Rajshahi and Dinajpur.

"In very old days Jhumur was a different thing. At present Jhumur party consists of low-class prostitutes skilled in music. They are assisted by a few players on musical instruments. They move from place to place and even if no one calls them, they sit in a party by the side of a road after the dusk. The girls sing vulgar songs as they go on dancing. People gather in large numbers to...

enjoy it like flies around food. Some tips are also collected. They make up for some amount. Under cover of the night, they make a come back to their old profession and sell out their bodies as prostitutes. But this is not all about them. They can, however, stage a narrative opera when they get an enthusiastic audience."

"They know how to sing padabali, kheud and even khemta, toppa of modern times.".

"Kheud is an inseparable part of Kabi-song, particularly when Jhumur forms a part of it. Therefore, he, who does not know how to sing Kheud, is not fit for becoming a member of a Kabi-party."

Tarasankar determines the contribution of Birbhum in this item of folk-culture in the following lines:

"There are Jhumur parties elsewhere (in West Bengal) also. But the Jhumur parties of Mallarpur of Birbhum are the oldest ones. The participants of these parties live here for generations."

A fine description of Jhumur performances figure in Kabi. We learn therefrom that it is modelled on 'Khemta'. The girls start signing first and the Dooars repeat. This is followed by dancing and singing by the girls again.

Kabi songs in Radh -

In his description of the kabiwalas of Birbhum the author of 'Birbhum Bibaran' has named some fifty of them. There we find that some of them came from a very humble origin, e.g. Chakar yugi, Charan Dom, Kalpa Dom, Jivan Ude and others. So famous were Madhu Garani of Surul and Madhab Hadi of Baruipada that "till today people say that Madho - Madhab are on competition when two people engage in extreme wrangle."

Tarasankar says in Amar Sahitya Jiban -

"There are many poets among the Baudis and the Doms of our village. I have placed one of them through my imagination, to the position of the hero in my novel Kabi."

It is evident from the novel Kabi that Kabi-songs were quite popular among the common people of Radh. Harekrishna Mukhopadhy has shown that Kabi songs in West Bengal have originated from Jhumur. *

103. P.98. Tarasankar Rasonabali. Vol.VI.
106. P.131. A Gopal.)
Asit Bandopadhyay also feels that, Kabi-songs from its origin, is related to Jhumur as well as Yatra-

Tarasankar has shown in Kabi the close connection of Jhumur with Kabi songs. In fact, a Kabi of any rank is essential for a Jhumur party for its success and popularity. That is why Kabi Sital Kabial was so much wanted by the Jhumur party for his power of composing lyrics.

Bhasan Songs.

Bhasan songs (Manasa episode) are very popular in Rada. A party for such songs are also known as Behalār Dal. The Bauris and the Buns have such musical parties of their own. ** The Muslims also sing Bhasan songs in a group of their own. *** Possibly as an impact of the popularity of Manasa-worship these songs are so popular among all groups. Besides the Manasa episode these singers compose songs on other varieties of subjects. Here is one such lyric composed on contemporary events, by Satis Bauri in Pancagram:

"Kalikal ghnola akāle
Dukher ghera sukh ye bāsā bándhale kapāle.
Khāru Bhās ke jal nā kāte
Māthar jal raiche máthe
(Pare) dey pare kāte āler gāmāle.
Bhulāla leke gālagāli
Bhai berater ghaṣāgāli
Aghatener ghasan khali
Kalite ko ghatale ?
Din Satis bale kāre jode Terane chattās sāle."

The English version:
The dreadful Age of Kali has ended untimely
Happiness has replaced miseries in our fate.
The water for agriculture is not stolen by others
People arrange it for others by making a

Drain on the ridges of lands.

People don't abuse any one and
Embrace each other with affection.

What has brought these greatly unusual changes?
Humble Satis says with folded hands
It is the act of the year 1336.

107 • P. 164. Pancagram.
Raibese dance of Birbhum.

Raibese is an old form of folk-dance. Hirendra Nath Mukhopadhyay describes it in the following manner:

"This dance is still prevalent in the Radh area of West Bengal. This dance is generally arranged on an auspicious ceremony like a marriage. Generally the Rajbamsi (Tior) and Birbamsi (Dom) youngmen form a party of Raibese dance. There are ten to twelve men in each party, accompanied by others with drum, bell and bugle. The Raibeses (participants in this dance are so named) are good clubmen. They fight with sticks and spears whilst dancing. They are called Raibese because they have a make-uu of Rai or Radha."

Tarasankar in his auto-biography has acknowledged the contribution of Raibese dance in the folk culture of Bengal but has criticised the over-enthusiasm shown by Gurusaday Dutta, the one time District Magistrate of Birbhum, to make the dance popular. Therefrom we know that Gurusaday Dutta, the introducer of Bratachari dance was very much attracted by the Raibese of Birbhum and popularised it. Once people of that district, irrespective of rank and status practised this dance.

In Hasuli Baker Upakatha, the Atpoure Kahars have a party of Raibese and they attend marriages in nearby areas. Nasuram, on the occasion of Karol's marriage sings the following rhyme:

Āmār Biye yaman tyaman
Dār biye Raibese
Āy dhakādhak mad khesa

This is a popular folk-rhyme of Birbhum District.

It is translated here below:

My marriage just a marriage
Not so my elder brother's,
Raibese folk dance, (come hither)
Let's gulp down wine
Till our heart be at rest.
In Kalantar it is seen that even the Brahmins and other upper class people also rejoiced with Raibese in their marriage ceremony. *

In Pancagram Tarasankar has said that -
"The Bhalla Bagdis organise a Raibese Party and dance with the garb of a woman - a skirt and a brassiere." .

**Alkap -
Alkap - a type of folk culture, is mentioned in different places in the novels viz. Gana Debata, Cape Dangar Bou. It is a short of folk entertainment in Radh area. Though it originated in the central part of Bengal, it is quite popular in the districts of Birbhum, Burdwan, Midnapur, parts of Murshidabad and Rajshahi.

A writer explains Alkap as 'Aol Kap' which means satire of loose structure. **

However, it comprises of extempore songs in the manner of Kabiwallas, full of comic and dramatic elements and even mimicry. It is a mixture of various items like acting, dances, music with references from scriptures and puranas. It sometimes includes vulgarity as Kabi songs and therefore such a party of Alkap is often termed as Chhaya Dal (which literally means Hotchpotch - here indicates or a company diverse elements. It is also named as Alkata Kap (C.D.B.) which perhaps means - free flowing laughter. Probably Mahatap in Cape Dangar Bou has wrongly used the words in his address to a village-boy & 'Ya beta Alkata Kap.' (P.45 C.D.B.) i.e. go to hell you a boy of Alkata Kap. or 'Yatrā daler Alkata Kap.' (p.47 C.D.B.).

We don't find any detailed description of Alkap in our novels. In the locality of five villages of Panc Gram 'the Muslims have their troop of Alkatar Kap', there is one in Kusumpur (P.36. Pancagram). 'It is a music party of the peasants and agricultural labourers. In West Bengal such groups are named Chyadar Dal.' .

Tarasankar has also mentioned of 'Chyācād Daler Chokra' in his novel (P.35. P.G.).

A writer on Alkap observes -
'Young handsome boys take guise of women and these boys are called chokra.'

Bolan Songs :-

Sukumar Sen is said to have stated that,
"The rhymes uttered by the Chief sanyasi of the Gajan of Siva during his walk through the villages is specially named as Bolan." *

The Bolan Party is a mobile one. While singing it crosses villages, rivers and even the boundary of its own district. Quoting some songs from the collection of SiVratan Mitra of Suri in Birbhum, which were sung at Kirnihar and other places in Birbhum, Amalendu Mitra has mentioned that, these Bolan songs were sung by the Chief sanyasi, on the occasion of Gajans of Siva or Dharmathakur. **

Another observer has described Bolan as an entertainment of Radh. He says -

"Particularly the Northern and Eastern part of Radh enjoy Bolan dance and songs." Gajan and Bolan are complementary to each other. Gajan is a religious ritual and Bolan its cultural expression." 112.

We find reference of Bolan in Hasuli Baker Upakatha, Ganadebata, Pancagram, Agum.

"In dark evening at Kahars' village "The young boys sing to the sound of their Dhols (Drums) sometime the Bolan songs of Dharmaraj, .........". (P.115.—H.B.U.K.)

"With the comming of the month of Gaitra the Kahars again sit together to sing Ghetu songs, towards the end of the month they sing Gajan and Bolan songs". (Ref. P.115. H.B.U.K.).

In Ganadebata Shrihari arranges two expert parties of Bolan song during Gajan and 'Satis Bauri goes to other villages with his Bolan party'. (Ref. P.278 & 280).

In Agum' we see the Bajikars rejoicing with Bolan songs during their Gajan festival.

* Ref: As quoted in the article Abasarer Gan by Sudhir Chakraborty. Des. 6 Sravan. 1385.
Tarasankar has incorporated many local myths in Kalantar, Nagini Kanyar Kakini, Hasul Bakar Upakatha, Gamanabata, etc. We can here sum-up a few of these.

Nager Math & its myths:— The Brakmasir Ban (missile), hurled at Pandc Pandab by Asvathama, stopped at the order of Srikantha and fell, in the form of a snake, on Amarkunda, a field in the south of Nagagram. In its poisonous breath small creatures like birds, butterflys burnt and the ponds dried up. The field is known as Nagermath and people believe that Brakmin Maha Nag live there as a symbol of eternal time since the age of Dvapar. Long afterwards, there grew a peepul tree to do away with the venom of Maha Nag. It is believed that, the seed from which it developed was a holy one as another said sanctified with tears and blood-drops of Srikantha reached Gaya and grew into a big tree under which Sidvartha attained supreme enlightenment (Buddhatva). Now, under the influence of this tree at Nagermath Jaydev, a vaisnav saint was born at Kenduli who composed hymn in praise of Buddha. Once, hearing the chant of this hymn from Paramananda Thakur, a disciple of Jaydev living at Thakurpara by the side of Nagagram, the Nag was inspired by the ideals of pity and non-violence and thus became free from the curse of Krsna. Afterwards, when the Nag died Paramananda Thakur arranged its funeral. That very night Dharmathakur appeared to Paramananda through a dream and expressed his desire to stay at Nager Math. Next morning Dharmathakur was seen under this Peepul tree at Nager Math and the idol at Yogipur disappeared. (Kalantar Ch. IX)

This Peepul tree is still there and is regarded as a Divine Tree. People don't wound it. They believe that their secret desires divulged here after burning an earthen lamp will be fulfilled. Thus one can also expiate one's sins.

Myth of the Bisbedes:—

Bisbaidyas used to live on Satali Hill on a revenue-free land received from Gad Sadagar who did not agree to worship Manasa. The Satali Village was protected with various poisonous plants by Manavantari who entrusted the Bisbedes, his disciples to look after the place. Now apprehending harm from Manasa to his son Lakkindar on his wedding night, Gad made all arrangements to prevent it, also with the help of the Bisbaidyas.

Now, Kalmagini sent by Manasa to bite Lakkindar beguilled Sirbede in the guise of his daughter, earlier died from snake bite. In his affection to the girl for her daughterly address, Sirbede saved her from the effect of the toxic plants and herbs and caressed her. But with the touch of pleasing breath of Kalmagini Sirbede fell into slumber. At that chance Nagini got into Lakkindar's room and bite him to death. Next morning Gad abused Sirbede suspecting his connivance in the matter. He with the help of the king bami shed the Bedes with a curse that they would be outcast and untouchable. But Kalmagini telled Sirbede that she would come again and again to him in real form of a Bede girl who from certain symptoms could be recognised only by the Sirbede. Such a Bede Girl, widow in her minor age with sign of Nagamarkaa on her fore-head is named 'Nagini Kanya' who is supposed to have some divine power and who brings good to the Bisbede community. **

KALANTAR PP.186-87. ** N.K.K. PP.82-93.
Lord Siva is said to have begged food from Annapurna at Kasi. Later on, one day he asked his associates to build a Capital for him. Before a 'Prahar' could pass by, there came up on the Plains of Tepantar the village Bhubanpur through the efforts of the ghosts. The village stood by the side of a newly dug-out tree-fringed lake brimming over with water. The trees such as wood-apple, Banian, Shyaoda were the haunted - place of the ghosts? But Nandi, one of Siva's symbolic followers held out the assurance that the spirits would do no harm to the villagers? Nor should they have any fear of them. They were not to be disturbed by them either. Soon a locality grew up at Bhubanpur. In absence of Annapurna, Gandhesvari installed her seat here in the market to look after the people.

Also, Siva held forth that, whatever would be brought to the market of Bhubanpur would be readily sold out, or else, Kuber, his associate, would buy up everything. Siva himself decided not to go to Kasi. He would stay back here and live with Gandhesvari.

One day Gandhesvari and Kuber told Siva that a damsel was trying to sell a basketful of miseries in exchange of a basketful of happiness. True to his promise, Siva told - "I grant you the boon. Your basket will be filled up with the happiness of your mind."

The girl was goddess Durga in disguise. She said that she had no happiness in her mind due to the absence of her husband. She wanted back her husband, Siva. Thus Siva had to yield. But Durga on being requested by Siva pronounced that a very small part of Siva would remain in the form of Bhubaneshwar at Bhubanpur. She herself, too, would stay here in the image of Gandhesvari. Thus the market where nothing would be left unsold would remain. Grief would be sold at the price of happiness and the price of happiness would equal that of grief.

But the devotees had to have faith. A disbeliever would have his grief greatly increased.

Then, Siva and Durga returned to Kasi.

There goes a proverb -

At Kasi Visvesvar(Siva) rides forth on a symbolic bull. Hence at Bhubanpur Bhubaneshwar rides a horse. The horse of Bhubaneshwar is lame or short-legged in the left leg and its right leg is shaky. The people, here, say that, Great Father goes to the market at night to meet Gandhesvari.

*Ref. P22,42-3 Bhubanpur: Kat.
--- There is a myth in Kalantar like the following:

There was a deity of goddess Kali at a distance of four miles away from Labhupur. Daily a human head was offered to the goddess there. Under arrangement among the people, one person was sent from one house by turn. When came the turn of a Brahmin, he decided to run away with his wife and son, crossing the boundary of Radh and the river Kirtimasa. At the dead of night a damsel appeared before them and asked their identity and destination. The Brahmin told without any hesitation that, he was leaving the place where the Mether (i.e. goddess) drinks the blood of her child. The girl replied in tearful eyes - "The Mether (goddess) does not drink blood. The Priest does not notice that her feet remain wet with her own tears." The Brahmin with awe and surprise wanted to know who she was. The girl replied with a smile - 'I am that Devi afraid of whom you try to flee away. In Radh people use these words when one accidentally meets somebody when one fears.'

This story seems to be well-known in Radh area as a similar myth has been narrated in an easy 'Radh Barama' by Panchanan Bandopadhyay. **

The legend of Kadamkhandi's Ghat.

The historic Kadamkhandi's Ghat, on the bank of Ajoy at Kendubilva, has its glory of holiness according to Scriptures. A holy dip at Kadamkhandi's ghat bring the same reward of piety as one gets from a plunge in the Ganga. One will often find a fair at this Kadamkhandi's ghat of Kendubilva. ***

A legend says that, to earn the religious merit Jaydev, the famous vaishnav Feet used to cover this long distance, daily, on feet, just to have his bath in the Ganga at Kalna. Being pleased with his sincerity and devotion the goddess Ganga revealed in a dream to him that on every Paus samkranti she would flew upstream of Ajoy and reach Kadamkhandi's ghat, giving the same sanctity of a dip in the Ganga. O

For this reason on Paus Samkranti, the day of festival of Jaydev's birth anniversary the devotees come at Kendubilva to have their holy dips. In the early morning of the last day of Paus thousands of men and women including Sanyasis perform their ablution and recite holy utterings in Ajoy at this ghat. Then they congregate at the temple of Radhabinaed to have a darshan of the deity and worship the god. The festivity continues for three days. Gô Tarasankar has described this festival in his Radha.

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** Ref. B.S.P. Patrika. Vol. XIV. 1314. No.3
*** Ref. P.41. Radhak.
mm Ref. P.266. Ibid.
The Legend of Pacer Jangal -

In Panoagram there is a legend about the flood preventive embankment on the sides of the field of Panoagram, popularly known as Pacer Jangal: the mound of five.

The story says -
during their living incognite the Panoapandavas came here with their mother Kumtee. Kumtee shed tears in sympathy at the sight of sufferings and loss of the people of Birbhum in flood of Mayurakshi and asked her sons to save the people by constructing a dam. And the present dam is one constructed by the Pandavas. Even in modern times, in obedience to the order of the Pandavas every villager repairs the embankment by depositing five baskets of earth on each of the three days of a year on which tilling is forbidden viz. Rathayatra, Ambubaci and Nagpamami.

Serina Bibi's Tomb - its myth:

There is a place at Hetampur known as Serina Bibi's Tomb. The writer has thrown light upon historical truth behind some of the proverbs popular amongst local people.

Amina and Usman had loved each other and got secretly married. Amina's cousin Shah Hussain who had wanted to marry her became hostile to the extent of taking revenge on them. This happened during the time of Alibardi Khan. Raghuji Bhole, after invading Burdwan, was proceeding towards Bihar through Birbhum. Hussain showed them the secret way leading to the fort of Hetampur. Usmani, who by this time changed his name into Hafeji was the Feujdar of Hetampur under the Nawab of Rajnagar in Birbhum. The invaders, the vargis with their number and strength captured the fort. Amina, Hafeji's wife, newly named as Serina, was at that time confined to her nursing home after her first issue.

Saying 'good-bye' to his wife Hafeji Khan went down to fight with the enemies. Serina witnessed from the staircase that as soon as Hafeji received a bullet-wound Hussain himself pierced him with his sword. Life without Hafeji seemed meaningless to Serina. Hussain proposed to marry her and that he would make her a Second Nurjahana. But to save her modesty Serina with her child jumped from the roof of the palace into the pool below.

The novelist says in Radha that local poets of past composed many ballads on Serina's love and constancy. Even now both Hindus and Muslims visit the tomb of Serina and light earthen lamps and bow down. Hindu girls put vermilion on it and wish to be as chaste as Serina. **

**Ref. P.204. Radha.
Various local customs and practices:

Even as late as the years 1880-81 there had been in practice a custom among the local people at Bhubanpur. This was introduced here by the Maithili Brahmin priests after the ceremonial pattern at Mithila fair on Siva-Ratri. Bhubanpur market (called a hat, the market-days being spaced out by a few days in between) had a boon of Lord Siva—here both joys and sorrows were on sell. These were of equal value and also were mutually exchanged. Similar rites were observed here too on Siva-Ratri. The local guardians were sustained by a belief that if the dates of marriage of their sons and daughters were fixed here on Siva Ratri before Siva then the marriage would be a happy one.

Although the custom had been felt dying out long time ago yet the practice of purchasing vermilion and a winnowing-fan on the occasion of such marriages still prevails. This results in a happy wedded life.

Near the temple of Bhubaneswar at Bhubanpur there stands an old Banyan tree with its hanging prop-roots and overgrowth of weeds. On Fridays devotees take a holy dip in the nearby lake called 'Bhuban Mighi' and then they convey their secret longings to Siva with their dresses still dripping. They, then, tie a piece of stone or brick to an aerial shoot or a branch of the tree and keep it hanging there. This, they believe, will fulfill all their wishes.

Unlike this, some persons even smear a tree, near the temple of Bhubaneswar, with lime with a view to causing harm to others.*

Dhelaicandi:

An old custom of Labhpur and nearby villages, the Dhelaicandi is still in vogue mainly among upper class Hindus. When a bridegroom comes to a village with his companions to marry, the boys of that village throw stones at their resting place. They stop only when the leader of the party accompanying the bridegroom gives them some money. Some thirty years ago, says Tarasankar, this tips would go to the zamindar. At that time the Nagdi, Gomasta of the local zamindar used to lead the stone-throwing group and claim money subject, however, to the capacity of the Bridegroom's party.**

(It is interesting to note that, Dhelaicandi' means something different in parts of 24-Parganas. It is a goddess and some particular tree(e.g. a date) is supposed to be her

* Ref. PP#-io.40, Bhubanpur Hāt.

** Ref. PP#-io.40, Bhubanpur Hāt.
seat and people throw stones at it to have her favour of stopping the cry of children.


Amutir Ladai:

In the village areas of Birbhum a wrestling competition is held among the cultivators on the day of Ambubaci which is named by the rural folk as 'Amutir Ladai'. We also know from 'Ganadebata' that Kusumpur and Alepur village participate in it in a different manner and both the Hindus and Muslims take part in it. In this style who wins over the competition held at 'Kaka Ardha' (the field) is adjudged champion of that locality. In Kaliatar it is mentioned that this custom has been rigid in practice even after the independence of India. But the style has changed. Earlier the competition used to take place between the cultivators of one village and another village, then, for some time between the Hindus and the Muslims. Now-a-days it is held between two contending groups irrespective of village or section.

The author of 'Birbhum Bibaran' has shown some light on this local practice.

People of Kaleswar and Belgram used to arrange a mock-fight every year on the day of Ambubaci in the month of Asad. It was known as Belgram's combat. But some of the participants were killed or injured and therefore the British Government stopped it.

In many parts of Birbhum a festival, similar to this skirmish was celebrated on the first or last day of Asad or on the day of Ambubaci. It was not of the type of fighting. The main part of the festival was that of fun in throwing mud at each other.

Tarasankar has described this practice as 'Amutir Ladai' or wrestling on the occasion of Ambubaci in his different novels. ** Probably the above mentioned custom later grew into an orderly, well-arranged competition in his time.


Cew-Race.

In some parts of Birbhum, as one at Labhpur, a race of the cows is arranged at some nearby car, on the day of Vijayadashmi (i.e. the day just after Durga Puja). The cow that reaches the destination first is selected as the best one. People of all classes and communities such as farmers, Mahajans, Nayabs, Zamindars, the Hindus and the Muslims take part in it. The owner of the best cow earns a distinction. *

Strange beliefs -

Mysterious deaths in the Mayurakshi :

People living by the side of the Mayurakshi have a strange belief that, there are some dangerous living creatures in this river and its tributaries like Dahuki, which are not any animal of flesh and bleed but have the forms of stones. These are believed to be moving about and suck the blood of any human being whom they can catch hold of. Some people say that, these are animals like Delphines in the shape of stones. Others say that these are really stones rolling down with the current and people are killed when hit by these. However, mysterious deaths occur in Dahuki which are taken to be caused by such stones. The writer says that, previously such deaths were quite frequent. **

Asurer Kāḍi -

The common, illiterate people of Birbhum believe that, the stones scattered here and there in the fields are gods and the bones of the devils. The pables which bears a white-line-mark like a sacred-thread is god to them and a stone resembling a trunk of a tree is believed to be fossilized bone of the devils killed by the gods. This is an old belief among them which they are now shaking off. ***

Jāgaraner Din -

The Bedes of Satali believe that at the first part of Caitra Gaghäkeri birds of the family of Gadur, the eternal enemy of the snakes, leave the area of Hijal and Satali with their strange grave meetings. If they do not come back within three days then the bedes consider the fourth one as the day of 'Jāgaran', i.e. wake of the snakes from their long sleep. In order to wake up the snakes, considering it.

To be their pious duty, the bedes set fire on the fields and in the jungles while the Nagini Kanya sit for the prayer to Mā Mahā مش. The Bedes observe the day with great festivity.

- The Bisbedes believe that, if a bede girl does not return home in the evening before the howling of the jackals then she is treated as degenerated and not accepted by the members of her family and ultimately loses her caste. They have a rhyme of their own on this belief:

Siāl dākili pare  Bedera mā libe ghara
Abhāgnirīr yābe Jātikul. **

The Arjun tree of Nabagram -

The people of Labhapur offer the placenta of new-born babies at the feet of a robust Arjuna tree situated near Dākshinpara. They pray to the tree, supposing it to be divine and alive -

O long lived tree! The new-born has offered it to you. Please bless him with a very long life and vigour like you so that he can keep his head high with pride. Let him be hardy and tolerant like you.

Again, when some-one dies his relations leave the utensils here with an utterance -

O tree! He is no mere one who paid his tribute to you on his arrival. In our grief we leave these at your feet. ***

**Ref. P.111 ibid.
The Banyan-Grove of Sudipur.

The Banyan-grove of Sudipur village under Labhpur Police Station had a bad repute at one time for its dreadfulness. There was a dense forest on both sides of the high-way extending over half a mile. About midway there was a big banyan tree with its wide shadow. It had numerous prop-roots with the holes of which Candraborba (Russell's Vipers) lived. In that darkness there was no grass on that sandy soil. Till recent times it was the haunting ground of the well-known murderous clubmen. There is a horrible pen-picture of this 'Sudipurer Battala' in the first Chapter of 'Kalantar'.

The place has been partly cleaned and has become safer in recent times.

With an awe for this perilous place the people of Labhpur used to say -

'If you want to cross Nala (a stream near the banyan grove) go and take farewell from your near and dear ones'.

Sivnathtala of Saogram.

There is a belief in and around Labhpur that being moved by the continuous cry of the bereaved mother the spirit of her departed son visits Sivnathtala every evening. The mother keeps a seat and food in a dark room and the spirit talks to the mother. During that opportunity people appeal to the spirit about their various troubles. The spirit tells them the remedies of their sufferings. It prescribes amulets, armlets and medicinal herbs and like.

even the village doctor like Jagan Ghosh (G.D. - P.G.) admits the effectiveness of such remedies and so advises Aniruddha as a last resort to go to Sivnathtala for the removal of his grief for childlessness.

Sayebdubir Daha.

It is a small lake near Basbadi village of Birbhum on the bank of Kopai. It is also known as 'Yakher Daha' while the Kabars call it 'Kattar Daha'. They think that 'Katta', their god takes his regular baths there. Their Great God Kalarudra lies there in Jalsayan (rest under the water) for the whole year, and that is also the place of 'Bari' of Mother Manasa, the daughter of Kalarudra.


* P. 126 Gaṇadebata.
The Khars go down into the water of the lake only four times a year. During Gaajan they lift up the stone idol of Kalarudra to worship it and then leave it again in Jalayyan. Similarly, once again they get into it to raise the Bari of Manasa and then to immerse it there. Apart from these occasions one goes there. The Kahars have a strong belief that, an old alligator guards the lake from any disturbance. Wherever he may remain, in case of a breach of tranquility of the lake, he will rush to fight out the evil.

Syamrupar Gad:

On the side of Ajoy, amidst the green of Sal, Mahua, and Bahuray trees there stands a fort called Syamrupar gad. And a little away in the east there is the temple of Debi Shyamrupa which is named after Ichai Ghosh, the prominent Sakta devotee of 'Dharma Mangal'.

People come over there in large number particularly on Madhukrishna Trayodashi, the day for ablution of Barani. Devotees go to Syamrupar gad, pay pranam to the goddess and also hang a piece of hard earth on some tree for the fulfilment of any particular desire of them.

Turukdanga:

It is a hillock about a mile away from Nager Math of Labhpur. At present it is the place of the Santals but it is believed that once the Turks set their tents firstly on that land when they came to conquer the local Bauri-king and so it is named after them.

Apart from the items discussed the novels of Tara-sankar are littered with various proper names, e.g. fields, paths, ponds, temples, gods, trees etc. Of course, these are not described at any considerable length but take the reader closure to the particular area of Radh. A list of such references is given at the end of our chapter-VI, as it is also reflect the writer's technic which is discussed in that chapter.

** Madhu.... The thirteenth day in the new moon in the month of Falgun.
@ Ref. P.2. Padacinha & P.188.- Kalantar.
Folk-culture, which mainly originates in villages, is largely reflected in rural fairs and festivals of a place. The fairs of West Bengal and particularly of Rada area give glimpses of the cultural life of West Bengal. No other novelist in Bengali literature has outlined these fairs so graphically and in such details as Tarasankar has done in many of his novels and short stories. Tarasankar from his personal experiences has described the fairs of Rada with the details of their place, occasion, duration and other specialities.

Here we can summarize, in short, a series of local fairs and festivals of Rada which are very clearly delineated in these novels of Tarasankar.

In Kabi we find the descriptions of two fairs - one at the village Attahas on the occasion of the worship of goddess Gamunda, the other at Alepur during the festival of Bas. At the fair at Alepur a huge number of audiences are entertained with cultural items like yatra, kabi songs, pacali, and jaumur. “The fair is held encircling a big pond. It is a fair on the occasion of Bas festival on Bas Purima. There is the temple of Radha-Gebinda on the east of the pond and by its side is situated the Akhada of Vaisnavbabaji, the priest of the temple.”

There are descriptions of two fairs in Gamadebata-Pamcagram - one on the occasion of Gadek festival at Sibkalipur (Ref. PP.279-80. G.D.), the other on Rathayatra at Makugram. (Ref. PP.1-2 P.G.)

Tarasankar points out the changes in modern times in the commodities sold in these fairs. He also describes the items of entertainments arranged there, which complements the picture of cultural-life of the local people.

Fair at Daidha Bairagitalsa (in Burdwan District):

Tarasankar has described in his autobiography - "A fair is held at Daidha Bairagitala, fifteen miles away from our village celebrating the occasion of the birth day of Gepaldas Babaji, a vaisnav devotee, on Sitalasasthi (the day just after Sripancami in the month of Magh)."

Ashok Mitra describes -

"The fair is quite a big one. About one Lakh people shopping daily and cooked rice is distributed free."

Ashok Mitra has mentioned of this fair in his book "Fascim Banga Puja Parba O Mela."

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117. ibid.
Tarasankar has mentioned of the fair at Daidha Bairagita and particularly of the huge congregation there, in his Kalantar. In his short but factual description of the fair Tarasankar points out its specialities. Many of the local vaisavs really go there to find their bride as has been narrated in Bhubanpurter Hat. (P. 10. B.P.H.) It is fact that people irrespective of religion and sect are very keen to share the 'Prasad' (cooked food) of that fair with a belief that it will cure their diseases.

The fair at Kendubilva:

We can gather from 'Radha' a clear picture of the fair at Kenduli on the occasion of 'Baruni aman parba' (the festival of the ablution of Baruni).

The fair is held on the sand-bank at Kadamkhandi's ghat by the side of the Ajey, at Kendubilva. The cremation-ground is situated at a short distance and there is a banyan tree-grove under which the Bauls congregate in large numbers. This fair is famous for largest gathering of the Bauls.

Thus, in this chapter, we can see that like his Gurukanta and Kapildeb, two characters in Kalantar, Tarasankar had a propensity of knowing his own district and its people - their present and past, their social, political, economic, religious and cultural aspects and the tenets they held on. And by incorporating these materials in his novels he has presented a faithful and total account of the people of Radha. For this Tarasankar must be appreciated, because critics feel that -

'the main attraction of literature written on regional life is its realism and factualness. (Tathyanirbhar Bastabata) The interest of the reader is much absorbed in the outer specialities of the people and society matching with the surroundings drawn in such writings.'

# Art. Bamlar Citrapat.- Jystirmay Bhattacharyya.

** ibid.

Sanibarer Githi. Asadh. 1379.