C H A P T E R VI

Debesh Ray’s Novels : Reflection of Multidimensional Issues and Problems of Peasant-life

The prolific pen who re-architecturing the indigenous form and opening out it to a wider dimension in the Bengali novel, injecting a dose of novelty in language pattern including in the orderly setting of sentences as well as creating an epical atmosphere in novel has turned out to be an incandescent lamp in the literary history as Bengali novel is none other than Debesh Ray. Born in 17th December, 1963 in the village Baghmara under the district of Pabna (now in Bangladesh), the little boy Debesh aged only seven accompanied his family while his father Khitish Chandra in connection with his service shifted of Jalpaigudi, West Bengal. Debesh who grew up in political atmosphere right from his childhood subsequently during his student life ramped his involvement with the Leftist movement. Chances favoured him out of Party work to closely observe the common men, particularly the peasantry living in adjoining areas of the river Tista that flows kissing the soil of North Bengal. He held the post of Secretary of Jalpaigudi district under the banner of Communist Party, and so he had an opportunity of building up connections with every nook and corner of North Bengal. The erstwhile Leftist movement virtually revolved around the interests of the farmers, and thus being a Leftist-worker he was able to accumulate experiences about the problems of the then peasants, movements, the role of the government in mitigating the problems. This accumulated catalogue of experiences ultimately gave birth of his novels, namely, \textit{Mafaswali Brittanta} \textsuperscript{1}, \textit{Tista Parer Brittanta} \textsuperscript{2} and \textit{Tista Puran}. \textsuperscript{3} In 50s Debesh began spinning stories in addition to his involvement in college-politics, but later he devoted himself in writing novels. He almost in each of his novels set the context of geography along with that of history. It is worthy to be mentioned here that his \textit{Tista Parer Brittanta} happens to be first novel in the Bengali literature containing topographical map. He repeatedly knocked down the forms of popular compositions. A story writer told about Debesh Ray:
The said comment appears to be genuine. On this ground the writings of Debes Ray singularly deserve to be appreciated. The life of the peasants delineated in his novels got a different dimension. We have taken up his *Mafaswali Brittanta*, *Tista Parer Brittanta* and *Tista Puran* in the chapter in question with a view to make an assessment of the life of peasants of Bengal belonging to post independence era.

II

*Mafaswali Brittanta* has been written from the perspective of socio-economic and political conditions of the lower class peasantry living in the rural sector. The pros and cons of the livelihood of Rajbangshi farmers living in the areas like Gaurihatta, Golandipada, Satkhamar, Haatkhola, Baromdanga, Dwarkamari, Gathiyapada etc. situated in the vicinity of the river Tista, North Bengal, yoked with the political scenario of West Bengal from 60s down to initial part of 80s have got a tangible revelation in this very novel. These areas are infested with different categories of farmers, such as *, including small and big tenure-holders in different divisions and sub-divisions. But the story of the present novel has developed centering mainly the haluwa-aadhiyar peasants named Khetkhetu and Charketu. Charketu, by relation is Khetkhetu’s brother’s son. The readers at the outset of the novel get acquainted with foodless Charketu. There stands Charketu pinched by endless hunger in the middle of a stretched out paddy-field bathed in moonlight. The descriptive ingenuity of the novelist stringed both hunger and moonlight into a single entity, moreover, moon and rice attained uniformity in the web of thoughts of Charketu: The word-picture of hunger of this foodless
family spreads over the first four chapters of this novel. Actually there exist different tricky twists of land-related laws that worked behind the family of Khetkhetu of keeping their appetite unappeased for there days and the unpredicted appetite lying in the womb of future. Khetkhetu and the likes are ignorant of laws and politics. They know only their paddy-fields, land, harvests, and titbits of cultivation. Debesh wrote:

This brunch of experiences of Khetketu is of no use for them in solving their problems rather the area measure of their land shortens without their knowledge, and even the ownership of land changes. Sometimes it is Padmanath Jotdar, sometimes ownership passes over to Muhuri Babu, again switching over to two sons of Ukil Babu, sometimes ownership of his land goes under the control of a certain widow. Now he does not know who actually is the owner of his plot of land. In this way the continuous process of transference of the ownership of land from one hand to another ultimately leads to the curtailment of the quantity of his land. But the paddy that Khetkhetu or Charketu gets from his existing plot of land helps them to maintain themselves somehow throughout the year. However, the severe scarcity of food hits them in the last week of Ashwin. The peasants whose lands are entitled of having a owner enjoy a very minimal quantity of harvests after giving the share out of it to their Giri. They manage themselves somehow for sometime on borrowing and selling their lock, stock and barrel and then they start foraging wild potatoes and esculent roots in drains and pools. Any way, they have the advantage of seeking help from the owners, but such door for Khetkhetu and the likes is closed. So Khetkhetu sent his plough-oxen for sale and went to the house of Ramani Panchayat to get his signature in the application for
free-ration. But even there he was denied. The novel *Mafaswali Brittanta* is an obvious pointer to the fact of multipronged problems faced by the peasants of free India. Here we may cite contextually that the Acts relating to abolition of Zamindari system and land-reformation were passed in 1951 in India and from the first day of July’ 1952, the Zamindari estates falling within the territorial jurisdiction of the state legally went under the authority of it. The Land Acquisition Act and the Land Reformation Act were passed in West Bengal Assembly in the years 1953 and 1955 respectively. Although the area measure of the land holdings of the zamindars was legally determined and demarcated, yet practically many zamindars held their control over huge quantity of land and even getting surplus land mutated in their favour through *benami* process as well as evicting the tenants, the zamindars transformed the agricultural land into a fishery or tea garden. It is, by the bys, to be mentioned here that though emphasis was given on the Land Reformation Act, imposition of ceiling and distribution of surplus land, but it is seen the laws were not practically implemented in their true spirit. The owners of land were able to retain their control over land holdings through the loopholes of laws. A critic in this respect said:

> Various exemptions and loopholes left by individual states allowed landlords to retain control over land holdings, mostly through *benami* transactions...The lack of accurate, updated records of rights in land was noted to be a major constraint on the effective implementation of land ceilings as also tenancy reforms.

Debesh Ray in his novel *Mafaswali Brittanta* through the discourses between Khetkhetu and Ramani Panchayat has repeatedly given rise to the reference of zamindari systems and Land Reformation Act. Khetkhetu in this regard reflected his mind in this way:

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The government laws have all the time safeguarded the interests of the exploiters. Although the zamindars and tenure-holders turned their coat according to the call of laws, so no change actually occurred in the case of Khetkhetu and the likes. Since a clause under Land Reformation Act provides a right to evict tenants from one’s own arable land, so at that time many owners of land returned to their own cultivation. We have even seen in the novel itself that Ramani wanted to go back to the tilling of his land. But subsequently after the coming of the United Front in power it was declared that the eviction of peasants from land would be stopped de jure, then many owners of land who supported the United Front opposed such declaration. Debesh Ray has presented a realistic picture of the fact in his novel. Opposing this law, Ramani Panchayat said:

While Ramani Panchayat was locked in a conversation with Khetkhetu, he tried to manage his ground in support of his argument. These tricky labyrinths of politics and laws do never satisfy the appetite of Khetkhetu. He only understands about such laws where there is ceiling per capita, the number of population of Panchayat is higher in that case, but where the ceiling is fixed per house there the number of houses of Ramani Panchayat are higher; that is, all the advantages and facilities go to the basket of Ramani Panchayat and the likes. He is unable to understand as under which force of law his fifty bighas of land got reduced to one haal (one haal means 12 bighas of land) only; and that is why a question crept up in his mind:

Virtually this specific question belongs to all the adhiyar farmers of the post-independence era. If everyone uses paid hands for cultivation, then naturally the adhiyars have to face
miserable conditions. So on this ground Ramani Panchayat said to Khetkhetu that today or tomorrow he too, would have to go away leaving behind his land and homestead:

If an *adhiyar* farmer having in the line for four-five generations is ejected from his land and homestead, his condition, according to the parlance of the novelist, is like that of *(figuratively, someone hit by untold miseries)*. Khetkhetu fails to assess his real condition. If he is an *adhiyar*, he is entitled to get paddy on loan, or if he is like he can enjoy free ration – but this simple equation does not agree with the given result. Ramani Panchayat does not give him anything but only confounds him with jugglery of words and threatens him of being evicted citing the reference of land-related laws. So Khetkhetu had to go back dejectedly with unappeared appetite of three days including stomachache from ulcer. The farmer who is able to identify from the very smell of the soil whether it is *(wet land)* or *(dry land)*, *(slanting downwards)* or of *(black soil)* and who has a field full of unripened paddy, has to forage for food. Every farmer like Khetkhetu knows:

Debesh was not only inseparably involved with the folk-life of North Bengal, rather he was equally versed in agricultural science and what is proved from the above quotation. We see in the novel the portraits of fear from being evicted from land, pressing pinches of hunger, the perplexed Khetkhetu from ulcer-pain lost his path imprinted over his familiar paddy-field and being obsessed with a miraculous related belief, he
cried out ••••••••• • •• • ••• •• • ••• •• • •• • • • •• •• •• • • •• • • ••• • •• • • •• • ••• • • ••• • • •• •• ••••

A critic said about this condition of Khetkhetu:

On the other hand, his two little sons Baishakhu and Bengu by name hanged around the paddy-field driven by merciless flogging of appetite. Baishakhu told such a story of a cow for Bengu whose milk never seems to have an end. And in that story there appear the descriptions like ••••• •• •• •• •••• • • •• •• •• •••• •• •• •••• •• ••••• •• •• •• ••• •••• •••• •••• •• ••

and so that calf has no scarcity of food. Debesh through this story hinted the cooperative farming system and the classless society prevailing in the then Soviet Russia. The two children wanted to get mingled in the paddy-field with unsatisfied hunger of three days emerged from the divisive rule of the society, and wished to remain as ••••••••••••••• in the paddy-field with the hope for paddy to be ripened. A critic said in course of discussing another novel of Debesh:

The sons of Khekhetu longed to find out that path. Again Tultuli, wife of Khetkhetu, wandered to search wild esculent roots, bulbous plant akin to arum or turnip, tuberous plant beside the river Talma and in the woods just to satisfy the appetite of her husband and children. In this way they survive fighting against Nature, times and social systems. The government did not take any remedial measure even observing this deplorable economic condition of the farmers of Bengal, rather the political parties of West Bengal were lost in infightings only. Though the story of the novel is not period-specific, but the sequence of events easily help to demarcate the period of the story. The Congress government of West Bengal suppressed the agitated Naxals with an iron hand in the initial part of the 80s. In consequence of it, the opposition parties became highly vocal against the
government, and the flame of discontents started billowing in every part of society. It is this very aggrieved moment arrested by Debasish artistically through web of words in his novel. Though the first four chapters of Mafaswali Brittanta revolve round the life of Khetkhetu and his family, but the state and political elements have directly entered into plot of the story form the sixth chapter onward. History bears the evidence that at that time strikes were staged throughout West Bengal against the astronomical price-hikes. The illiterate and politically ignorant farmers and labours were taken from the nook and corner of the villages for processions arranged in connection with ongoing strikes. The Left parties assembling themselves in Delhi on the fourth and fifth days of April, 1974, adopted a 17-Points charter of demands in order to intensify the force of the movement and in the wake of it, mass protest day was simultaneously observed in different states of India on third May and the civil disobedience was organized in West Bengal at the call of nine Left parties. The delineations pertaining to Civil Disobedience Movement and the story of the voiceless farmers stampeded by multipronged political onslaughts became prominent in term of narratology from sixth chapter onward in the novel. It is seen in the novel that the leaders were present at Bat Tali (grub street) to collect people for procession. The queer tricks of collecting people by these political leaders as well as the ideological differences and war of words amongst the different parties created a tangled skein at Bat Tali. The peasents of this area are quite familiar with procession-culture from their very birth, and they generally take part in procession of behalf of their Giri but Khetkhetu or Charaketu did not have any fascination for procession because of the absence of Giri. Charketu reached Bot Tali with cows to go to Gourihaat, but reaching Bot Tali, he all on a sudden became a part of procession. Nengu Pagal had been on the go for collecting people for procession on behalf of Bahe Babu’s party. But the farmers were confounded due to same and one political symbol of the Congress Party split into two groups. Then Nengu in order to solve the problem pushed up the cow of Charketu on the truck as a political symbol and began chanting slogans: ••••• • • ••• • • •••• •••••• • • ••••• •••••• • • •••••

The plaintive tone of Charketu perplexed at the suddenness of the incident did not reach the ears of the leaders, so Charketu was
bound to get in the truck. Charketu belongs neither to politics nor to procession. His political connection lies only in collecting the posters. He uses the party-posters just to repair the cracks and holes of his house. It does not matter to him whether the poster is of Sickle-Hammer-Star or Sickle-Ears of paddy or a Yoke of oxen. A critic wrote about such relation between farmer and politics:

Charketu knows it very well quite a good number of provisions-starved members of his family have been waiting for him eagerly, but the political leaders turn a deaf ear to the problems of Charketu rather they have been busy in satisfying their own interests. A shower of quibbling remark elicited from the voice of Debesh against the state statute:

Debesh has made the harsh reality of the appetite of three days naked in contrast to displaying the picture of health, contentment and repleteness. Actually in this way the innocent and illiterate peasants are being used for. The procession by the political parties reached near the Jalpaigudi Court crossing across Gourihaat. Problems stepped into for Charketu while he wanted to run away. He said in reply to the queries of the Police Officer relating to civil disobedience:

It is noticeable here, when Charketu has come to know that nobody is allowed to go behind the bars with one’s cows, he wanted to defy that law, and to him the significance
of civil disobedience is this. He knows that if someone goes to prison, he will get a
handful of rice to have. At last the police was bound to release him. Charketu with his
cow started to go fast but could not reach the appointed goal in time. He came to his
paddy-field in far-advanced night. The tired Charketu bereft of sprightliness started
walking. The passing of time of appetite seems to have no end.

As Debesh Ray drew the wordy picture of the selfishness of the political parties
along with the life of the marginalized farmers of North Bengal, so also did he bring the
mentality of the people of urban world to limelight in his novel *Mafaswali Brittanta*. A
critic said:

Actually the, the position of ‘other’ has been marked off in the novel. The noveliset
juxtaposing the members of the lower strata of the society with those of the upper class
shoulder to shoulder has made the demarcating line distinct existing between the exploiting
agency and the exploited lot. The people belonging to this lower strata of the society
only offer their work and labour and are constantly used for. This very phenomena
happens to be as true as other laws of Nature. The continuous process of changes
which a society experiences through the impacts of zamindari laws, land reformation,
Naxal Movement, different party-based politics invites no changes for this marginalized
peasantry. So the novel too, correspondingly comes to no end. Though Debesh had to
bring the curtain down on the development of his novel for the time being delineating the
journey of Charketu from appetite to more appetite, yet the novelist himself believes
that:
The novelist has also done the same duty in the novel in question. To speak the truth, the life represented by Charketu and Khetkhetu is something like a drawn match and Debesh, the novelist, has portrayed the sketch of that kind of life. The novelist marking off the vote-based politics, tug-of-war among different political parties, role played by both urban and rural leaders and influential persons as well as tenure-holders and with it joining the cycle of story of an *adhiyar* farmer’s family has actually drawn a stark naked picture of the thoughts and alertness of the political parties of West Bengal of free India relating to land, their development-centric mentality for the farmers and the tradition of using the farmers for fulfilling their own interests in this very novel. So the accounts seem to have no end. The novel comes to an end presenting the fact of waiting for by Charketu and the likes for a period extending from long to longer point.

### III

The picture of topographical extent and the life of the marginalized peasants that has been portrayed in the novel *Mafaswali Brittanta*, has got a vivid exposition in a more extended form in Debesh Ray’s another epic-like novel entitled *Tista Parer Brittanta*. The narrative relating to way of life of the people living in the area adjoining the river Tista has come to light through the presentation of bitty incidents and pictures. The river Tista has been used as a titanic back-screen to the novel *Tista Parer Brittanta*. The course of Tista crossing over the mountainous region and then kissing the plains and later leaving behind Kalingpong Police Station entered into the district of Jalpaigudi and there the area which exists after Apalchand forest, happens to be the watching point for Debesh. The novelist Debesh in this novel has come out from inside the stereotyped method of fabricating stories containing beginning – middle – end. We have already pointed out earlier that Debesh believes as why a novel is to begin and why to have an end? According to him, it is neither the question of beginning nor of an end, but an orbit for movement needs to be set up. The path for progression created in this novel begins with the measurement of land by Settlement-*Khanapuri-Bujharat*
and ends with the opening of the incomplete Tista barrage. The narrative spreading all over the body of novel speaks of the instability of Rajbangshi farmers and Adivasi agricultural labourers of tea gardens, eviction from their own land, encroachment of land by tenure-holders, contemporary bureaucracy of both government and non-government types, political whirlpool, hypocrisy in the name of development, flood in North Bengal and many multiple matters. Barring the appendix, the novel consists of six chapters, namely-Adi Parba, Bon Parba, Char Parba, Briksha Parba, Michhil Parba and Antya Parba. The appendix that follows after the last chapter contains logic behind writing this Brittanta and the reason of ending the account. This narrative covers the story of lower class people like Bagharu, Kadakhowa, Madari and Madari’s mother whom the blowing winds of politics, social development, measurement of land, Operation Burga, procession, meeting—do never touch. The chief character of this novel is Bagharu. He lives in the lap of Nature like an animal. He knows the natural river Tista and Apalchand forest with all of his soulful entity. So, when Nature is restricted, he misses his Tista, his entity. That’s why he ignores the Tista barrage, the development. Debesh Ray in course of narrating the plight of Bagharu and the likes virtually has brought the problems of all the marginalized people of India into sharp focus. The novelist has presented a detailed description, besides that of Bagharu and the likes, regarding the position of farmers, land-politics, production-system, and agricultural works set on a specific historical background of West Bengal. The Muslim and Rajbangshi tenure-holders of Doars of Jalpaigudi render their cultivation works engaging adhiyar or share-croppers. This section of people operates as owners of the plots of land situated close to the bank of Tista and forest-land. A critic wrote about the history of the land and people of the soil of North Bengal:

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But the tenure-holder did not have any role in the expansion of agriculture over the alluvial land of Tista as because the Namshudras of East Bengal had the control over the alluvial land. The tenure-holders got their littoral land of Tista and forest-land cultivated by the illiterate, simple but robust people like Bagharu. The novelist in an interview let us know that agricultural works were done in the Doars region depending on the slaves like Bagharu. Its proof is found in the novel through the self-proclamation of Bagharu before the Settlement officer. Bagharu said:

This statement from Bagharu virtually represent the statement of the tenure-holders like Gayanath. Gayanath Jotdar is an influential person and to whom all the rules except that of cultivation appear to be unnecessary. He knows it well that the government maintains a soulful relationship with the matters of cultivation, and that's why he does not like to go against the government. The plots of land settled in the name of Bagharu was easily recorded in the name of Gayanath Jotdar due to his tricks. Since he would not claim any share of his own on the produce of adhiyar Bagharu, therefore, he did not consider it necessary to put the land on record in favour of Bagharu. The novelist has presented a detailed description of Halka Camp and Operation Burga of Settlement at the very outset of the novel. Actually an ordinance was brought into force in 5th July, 1978 by the Revenue Board to include burga (condition of leasing a plot of land)into records at an
electric speed through the programme of work of Operation Burga. The burgadars practically almost did not have any existence of their own on the Settlement records upto the years 1964-65 because of the ground that share-cultivation or burgadari did not fall under any section of law. As result of that the tenure-holders evicted the farmers on the pretext of claiming that land as their own by their self cultivation. But the burgadars whose names would be included into the records need not to depend upon the tenure-holders, because they would able to enjoy establishment agricultural loan, seeds of high outrun, chemical manure and moreover, they can also avail modern agricultural technology like supply of water from government irrigation system. For this reason the tenure-holders like Gayanath in the novel in question have been busy in keeping the cultivation under their control. The programme of Khanapuri-Bujharat starts in the seminal phase of Operation Burga. The flood of ’68 created by Tista being in spate overtopped a large area of Gajaldoba Tea Garden and Apalchand forest, and that’s why it has now become a problem to draw a map pertaining to ascertaining the course of Tista and the existence of the alluvial land. Gayanath Jotder seized that opportunity and wanted with a chain of irrefutable arguments to pass land lying beaneath the water surface of the river into the ledger for the present year. It is in his opinion:

Gayanath is not worried about forest-land. The novelist has kept us informed that before fifty years at the time of Settlement the forest-land was included into Gayanath’s khas land under a single dag number. Gayanath had been intensely eager to have his control over the riverbed–land, and so as an evidence inducing Bagharu to go into water started to detail the boundary of land in a dramatic way. He even wants to exercise his control over that plot of land which he will never be able to enjoy. He hopes for lawful acknowledgement to his own right. Observing such queer Gayanathean system, it was not difficult for Settlement officer to understand whether it Operation Burga or land-measurement everything was nothing but a big hoax. Because:
After the completion of the construction of Tista-barrage which started in 1968, the new dag number would be in use in place of the old one. So, the land which has already been lost in the bosom of river would never come into count, and if the alluvial land heads up, then that very land will be a payosti. Under such situation anybody can take possession of it. But if the old mouza (a block of villages regarded as an administrative unit) map is inforce, Gayanath is entitled to hold his authority over that land even after many years. And so for the reason Gayanath had been active in keeping the old mouza map in practice. This resulted in breaking out a conflict of Gayanath with Leftist peasants leader Radhaballav Basu of East Bengal. They ignored the right of possession by the tenure-holders; and the leader threatened to launch a movement with the help of Krishak Samiti. In this way the Krishak Samiti had got a mention in the novel in question of the rights over land, tenure and crops. People from tea gardens, M.L.A, manager of the gardens also joined and through various phases of blows and counter blows the nature of the problem started to identified. We come to know from the speech of peasants leader Radhaballav that the owners of tea gardens got the tea-land cultivated for paddy and vice versa. But these peasants and labourers did not get their due wages. Other Leftist peasants leaders like Radhaballav made the leaders of Mazdoor Union understand that farmers could not be evicted from khas land moreover, land under tea companies is actually a vest land, and against which the farmers were allotted no Patta so far. Hence there is no question of measuring that land. The said statement by Radhaballav erupted dissension. However, Biren Babu, leader of Mazdoor Union, tried to come to a negotiation with the government. The tea company in order to expand the boundary of the tea garden wanted to get the vest part out of Anandapur jot-land from the government on lease. In this way vest land gets converted into industrial land and ultimately goes to the control of the tenure-holders. A critic said in this regard:
There always blew a wind of displeasure amongst the agricultural labourers in term of the possession of land by tea gardens, and when Operation Burga came into force, that flame of displeasure soared up to an extreme point. To prevent the measurement of vest land of garden the local women and children squatted on the land. Sensing the gravity of problem, the local M.L.A. was present but he went back on the pretext of his party. Gayanath’s slave Bagharu carrying the M.L.A. on his shoulder, helped him cross over the river Tista. Bagharu’s land and his production system has no connection with the hurly-burly of the Tista-barrage. He does all his duties after the choice and instruction of Gayanath. However, the political leaders achieve the target of their own interests depending on the class represented by Bagharu; and he in passing said to M.L.A. Sahib the accounts of his birth and name. We even come to know that, Gayanath Jotdar kept his name Foresto Chandra Barman during election time. It is indeed a remarkable point to note here that such naming of Bagharu was just for garnering a vote. The picture of terrible expansionist attitude of Gayanath has been revealed through the words of Bagharu:

In this way the rapacious attitude towards enjoys all rights by Gayanath and the like got ingrained in the conscious tendrils of Bagharu and the likes. A comment from a critic is worthy to be mentioned here:


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So, Gayanath with an intense desire of enjoying this right does not agree even to a littlest flaw, and thus he got infuriated at the proposal of M.L.A. Sahib of giving adhiyari right to Bagharu, resulting in the expulsion of Bagharu and this way he was evicted. Debesh narrated in the *Arthanitir Kichhu Prakshipta* and *Krishi Bijnaner Kichhu Prakshipta* (some interpolated parts of economy and agricultural science) parts under *Ban Parba* the methods relating to cultivation in the forest area as well as various problems of tilling the forest land. A group of people who cultivates are allowed to stay in the forest land as forest villagers. The novelist even, by the by, did not miss the chance to collect the information that the adhiyari system of the tenure-holders is also prevalent in the forest area. The *Char Parba* portays the way of life of the peasants living on sand-banks. The *Bhatiyas* of East Bengal exercise their possessory rights over the strip of sandy land and which extends from Mauyamari to Kasiyabari. We have seen in the novel that, there exists no tenure-holder in the char area, but there have been mahajans but upon whom the farmers do not depend, and these farmers get no government aids, rather they produce crops out of their own enterprising zeal and labour. Virtually, the refugees who came out to Jalpaigudi area in the wake of the partition of the country in the post-independence period were most of them Namasudra peasants. They not only expanded the limits of cultivation, but also brought about changes in the methods and behaviour of cultivation. The novelist in this novel *Tista Parer Brittanta* has spotlighted social customs and language of the farmer living on the strip of sandy land. Flood is a biggest curse to the life of the peasants living in sandy land. As the heart-rending description of the deplorable plight of their life caused by over-flowed Tista has a place in the novel, so equally there come the references of game of politics by the government, Indo-Bangladesh arbitration, discussion, discontent and what not centering the flood in the novel. It is portrayed in *Briksha Parba* that Bagharu at the
asking of Gayanath Jotdar drifted away with the tree to save it. Bagharu does not have any significance to Gayanath, but

That’s why Bagharu had to take the responsibility of protecting the tree. Bagharu floating away with the tree at last reached over the corrugated iron roof of the house of Ashwini Ray situated in the alluvial land where people like Nitai lived. Rescuing Bagharu from there, Ashwini Ray’s Manshi (man) Kadakhowa reached him on the embankment of Rangdhamali, and where Bagharu repeatedly uttered the name of Gayanath in course of his replies to the queries by the government officer. Then the Madhya Parba contains the narratives like demand for separate statehood for Uttarakhand, discontent, opposition against Tista-barrage and in this way the novel through the fabrication of both long and short episodes present in different chapters has met with it’s end. In course of such presentation, the novelist did not miss to mention the proposal of a separate state forwarded by Madari’s mother. Both Madari and his mother have been such a part of India whose life happens to be an obvious examples of humiliation and neglect. While people gathered at Jalpesh temple to register their protest and opposition against the Tista-barrage, then Madari met Bagharu there. Madari’s mother came there in search of Madari. The struggle for the development of barrage has no significance to either Bagharu and Madari or to his mother. When Tista, a gift of Nature, turns out to be humane for the interest of the state, Bagharu rejects her. It is for the first that Bagharu has shouldered a responsibity in his helpless and penniless life. He has started his journey with the pathless child Madari for some other river or prairie.

The novel Tista Parer Brittanta is virtually a story of Bagharu who even being an adhiyar is a slave of Gayanath. He practically belongs to none of the addresses, say, Apalchand, Gajaldoba, Changmari, Krantir haat, and not even to Tista-barrage. He has been indeed a pauper lacking name, dress, adda, land, procession, development, Uttarakhand and state. A critic rightly said:

Of course the long name that he has, though exactly not a name at all, is an indicative
sign of his various actions and functions. It is remarkable to note that the presence of Bagharu is seen in every affair portrayed in the novel such as at the time of saving a tree, measuring land, the peasants being discontented, in the gatherings of workers at the meeting, helping the M.L.A. cross over the river and Bagharu became a part of the crowd assembled in connection with Uttarakhand procession, but though he was present, yet actually he was none of them. Bagharu is alone and shelterless where people gather and society develops. All the names like Kudaniyar Chhowa, Kudaliya Kata, Bagharu, Gachharu, Maishal, Pathariya including the name Foresto Chandra Bagharu Barman given by Gayanath Jotdar that appear in the nomenclature of the novel are nothing but the symbolic representation of the whole sequence of events. So, he appealed to the M.L.A. Sahib for a short name that befits a human being. In this way he has been on the run in quest of his existence throughout the novel. It is indeed a fact that all the marginalized souls like Bagharu remain as (small fry) in the society and in the arena of civilization for ever. And the mentality of slavery emerges from the sense of being (downtrodden and underdog). So, a sense of uncomfortableness erupts in Bagharu for his name being long, That’s why he desires to be with human endowment as well as prefers to remain (unimportant person) under the spell of his natural consciousness. A comment from a critic is worthy to be mentioned here:

Bagharu is a child of Nature and a complementary to her. So, when he sees that corrugated iron sheet, wood, building, Bhamni fencing, roofed house, factory pipe, map, chair, table etc. have defaced the original beauty of Nature, and when the winds of modernism in the name of development have been disfiguring Nature’s own cultural
There is no doubt that the construction of the Tista-barrage would bring about changes in the course of social life, but those changes will not alter the go of life of the marginalized people like Baghru, Kadakhowa, Madari and Madari’s mother et al. Actually Bagharu knows the Tista of Nature and Apalchand forest with his whole vibrant entity. So, when a barrage was built to restrict Tista, he has lost his entity and his well known Tista. New plots of land will come under cultivation or even a single plot of land may produce crops three times due to impact of the Tista barrage, but from which Bagharu can draw no benefit. The colonial culture has always tried to evict Bagharu and the likes from their roots. The modernism on which this culture banks has wanted to do two things in the name of development, firstly, modernism wanted that Nature should follow the route as guided and willed by Homo Sapiens themselves, and secondly, Nature’s own inner culture should be extincted and in consequence of it, the marginalized souls will be uprooted form the world of economic and political power and realism and for this reason Bagharu went away discarding it. A critic said in this regard:

Although the accounts of the life of Bagharu and that of the likes seem to be focal points of descriptions of the novel, nevertheless, there is no denying that other matters like production system, agricultural methodology and the socio-economic position have
secured a special berth in the novel. The present novelized work of Debesh also contains a detailed description regarding cultivation both in the sand-land and forest-land with the juxtaposition of another pictures depicting exploitations by the tenure-holders, land-politics etc. It is a fact that Bagharu is actually a part of production-system. Debesh Ray himself has let us know in an interview that he knows about nine Bagharus of Doars of Jalpaigudi depending upon whom there continues the agricultural production. So, in course of spinning the narrative of Bagharus, there comes up the reference of agriculture repeatedly in a natural way in the novel. The partial construction work of the Tista barrage was over during the time of writing the accounts. The novelist has given the hints of the possibility of development in agricultural sector and the rehabilitation of the farmers of sandy-land in the concluding chapter of the novel. So, it may be said without any hesitation that the narrative pertaining to the eviction of the people living by agriculture from their own land including their routinized culture of life have provided the novel a unique position in the gallery of the history of Bengali novels.

IV

The epic like novel entitled *Tista Puran* has flowed from the pen of Debesh Ray almost after a score of years from the birth of his earlier novel *Tista Parer Brittanta*. In this novel too, he through a larger spectrum delineated the wordy- picture of the river, hill, forest and folk-life of Jalpaigudi. Debesh spoke of the writing of this novel:

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Hence *Tista Puran* was born out of this urge of his heart. In this novel also like *Tista Parer Brittanta* there come up the mentions of a region, climate, history, *Puran*, politics and culture but not the repeatation of *Tista Parer Brittanta*. The very title of the novel,
that is Tista Puran is noticeable indeed, where we see that keeping the mythological concept before his eyes, he completed the narrative. The novel has been divided into seven cantos, namely •••••••••• and ••••••••• Every canto contains a good number of sections. It deserves to be mentioned here that in the novel from beginning to end there exists a mythical women Budima at the centre of main contents of the novel that has developed with a story or the personages centering whom the story gets fabricated. The novelist at the very outset has furnished a family tree to explain the relationship of Budima and the members of the Got of Budima and he himself wrote about this genealogical table at the beginning:

It is the Rajbangshi farmer’s family known as Budima’s Got belonging to a piece of land encircled by both small and big rivers like Tista, Bodabank, Angrabhasha, Nomai, Garati, Gulundi, Jaldhaka, Kuljuya, Duduya etc. happens to be the cardinal points of discussion of the novel along with it the political activities of West Bengal of the United Front and Left Front periods. Nobody knows the exact age of Budima. This woman of a ripe old age does not speak anything. Nobody seems to be even aware of the presence of Budima in the house. Yet Budima has identified herself with everything, say, house, roads, heart, forest paddy-field, kith and kin and survives still now. The Got of Budima is a solvent farmer family. They have been at the same time tenure-holder and adhiyar and who tilling their own land, cultivate the land of some other tenure-holder simultaneously on an adhi (50-50 shares) system. Apart from that, they themselves allow their own land to be cultivated by someone else on adhi. They even cultivate the forest khas land by means of a licence including other types of land also, such as, land which is got form tenure-holder Kachhua Mahammad paying off the settled price, land from forest department on the strength of licence, and their own
tenure land. There exists their land left and right covering a vast area that slopes down from the house of Budima. Their land is encircled by forest and river. The novelist wrote

Though the area where the Got of Budima has been living falls under Dhupgudi Block, but for its lying so close at a border hardly enjoys any influence or information from the urban world. The novelist has presented the pros and cons in his description in the novel relating to land-polities, production system and agricultural methodology from the source of the Got of Budima.

In the year 1965, the West Bengal state Government imposed Levi on food-grains produced by share-croppers, rich farmers and adhiyars. It is noteworthy that in the year 1967, the United Front Government came to power in West Bengal through the Forth General Election and withdrew the Levi. But during the Congress regime the land-holders, share-croppers etc. had to face a lot of troubles as a result of the imposition of Levi and this Debesh Ray depicted in great detail in the novel Tista Puran.

In the novel we find that besides Budima’s Got (clan) several jotdars, land-holders etc. viz. Kachhua Mohammad, Shashangi Jotdar, Chhotumian, Motashila Jotdar, Naudhia Jotdar, Gandharu Jotdar, unitedly tried to tackle the Levi imposed upon them. Debesh has portrayed the picture of the political parties serving their selfish ends by way of this Levi. As per government rule the jotdars, land-holders etc. had to fill up a return form in Block Office and furnish the account of their land and produce and they were able to sell the Levi fixed and imposed on them to food corporation agents. When one of the members of Budima’s, Chhotadada was compelled to take help from a clerk of the Block Office, we find that the clerks of Block Office utilised this opportunity to break the law in exchange of money. This has been accurately captured in the novel. As a result of the Levi the traditional relationship between the jotdars and adhiyars developed cracks because adhiyars who had to give three-fourths of their produce to the jotdars refused to pay the Levi. They wanted to oppose it unitedly. On the other hand, the opposition parties had a great opportunity to extend a helping hand to the adhiyars. The poor illiterate peasants failed to understand the relation of the political
parties with the Levi:

They only try to keep a safe distance from the Levi in question during drought. In the novel we have found that when during drought the prices of paddy go up, then the family members of Budima think of depositing Levi by saving up the paddy stored in their house. In the thought of Agun, an aged member of Budima’s Got, this is quite apparent:

As regards Levi Debshe has described the agenda of the political parties and their breaking up. Just as the context of Levi has occupied a large space in the novel, in the same way, the Budima’s Got got involved with various activities like, meetings, processions, Red Flag, Communist Party, Congress Party, eviction, occupation, Operation Burga, United Front, Left Front etc. with the progress of the novel. Yet this marginalized people do not understand that politics. They only understand that which paddy-crop grows well in which type of soil and in which type of soil the cultivation of tobacco yeilds well. Their lives are only concerned with various types of cultivations. The novel provides a detailed description of their life-styles. Throughout the novel we find the mention of various phenomena of cultivation, their methods and procedures, different types of seeds etc. The novelist has also described in the novel how the lives of the marginalized farmers like those of Budima’s Got has been changed with the technological change of the process of cultivation. We have mentioned in the very beginning that the novel has actually begun from where it ends. Hence in the chapter Ar Ek Shesh we
note that the method that elderly members of Budima’s Got like, Mutaru, Budharu, Adhbasa Kankatu, Mukhbasa Kankatu and the like follow in their cultivation is no longer followed by the present generation farmers like Bankuram, Chhotadada, Badachila, Chhotachila and the like. In this context the writer has made mention of a variety of paddy-crops which were produced earlier, such as Kashiapanja, Dhalkachchha, Baribangla, Bamanbhog, Maharaja, Kartik-shail, Amandhepi etc. But later Chhotadada and the like stopped cultivating those crops. They have accepted the change in agricultural production unhesitatingly. Noteworthy that the novel also has two chapters entitled Natun Chash and High Yield. In these two chapters there are descriptions of Badadada and Jhatu resorting to new ways of cultivation. The following description shows how much experienced the writer was in high yield cultivation:

In the novel we find Badadada and Jhatu at a loss to see the high speed of growth of the paddy plants as a result of high yield cultivation. But their joy and charm do not last long because the paddy plants which have grown rapidly do not yield crops. These two experienced farmers were upset as they did not know the right application of this new technology. Badadada and Jhatu can not make out why the plants have not yielded paddy crops. In this context Debesh has recorded:

Those who knows nothing except agriculture have to learn from the Block Office the reason behind this failure. It is to be noted here that in agricultural sector of India in general too, this high yield cultivation was not successful to a great extent in the beginning years. This method of cultivation was crowned with success in the case of wheat to a
certain extent. In this connection a critic informs us:

The coming of High Yielding varieties was a slow process. ... Among these five crops, namely wheat, paddy, bajra, maize and jower taken under the HYV programme the most striking success was achieved in wheat ... Paddy proved more difficult.

The description which Debesh has given of the farmers who inexperienced in cultivation is true to the contemporary time. In this novel Debesh has not only spoken of the methodical change in cultivation but of different types of paddy-seeds as well. The names of new types of seed that we have found are: Padma, IR 8, Taichun, Sita, Pankaj, 1094, Prakash 2254, Ratna, Rashi, IT 56, Chhappan-Mashuri, IR 36 etc. When Chhotadada goes away leaving Budima’s Got behind and travels throughout the length and breath of India, he notices then how change has come over West Bengal in the sphere of agriculture. We are acquainted with that by way of the ideas of Chhotadada:

When Chhotadada comes back to his Got things have changed to a great extent. When the members of Budima’s Got for the first time applies Urea, a few of her Got flees away to nearby jungles failing to bear with the bad odour. Again a few others would vomit because of the smell. The peasants of Bengal were habituated with the homely manure made from cowdung. They are little in touch with artificiality. That’s why they could not tolerate the chemical fertilizers produced artificially. In this connection Debesh has recorded:
But despite that change is inevitable in all respect. Even the Budima’s Got too accept that change. Because they know nothing except agriculture. No one can think of agriculture without excepting change. Not only agriculture but all aspects of life is influenced by these waves of change. The clothing habit and other practices which they could not even think of earlier became acceptable. In the part called Sheshantar towards the end of the novel Debesh has realistically portrayed these aspects of change. He has hinted at these change by way of entitling the sub-divisions of the chapter Sheshantar. For example, Hawa Badal, Awaj Badal, Rasta O Van, School O Signboard, Shari, Yatra etc. But this is also true that new order comes at the cost of the old. From even Budima’s Got the ancient inartificiality and the flavour of cowdung get lost.

In the novel Tista Puran the plot-story is not a well knit one. But throughout the novel we have descriptions of the activities of the Budima’s Got. It is noteworthy that in the novel Debesh has not spoken much of poor peasants and land-labours. He has offered the story of an well-to-do Rajbangshi farmers family through generations. In the novel side by side with the descriptions of agricultural activities of the Rajbangshi society concerned, we have accurate descriptions of their cultural activities too. Besides this, Debesh has thrown light on the national identity of the Rajbangshis in the novel. A critic has rightly remarked that the novel Tista Puran recounts as

Considering all this, the novel Tista Puran speaks of the life of the class of peasantry living in the border areas of West Bengal in totality.

V

In Debesh Rays three novels namely Mafaswali Brittanta, Tista Parer Brittanta, and Tista Puran, the life story of tye margiized Rajbangshi farmers of post
independence Bengal has been truly reflected. Side by side with that he has also focussed on the ins and outs of the political activities that had taken place during the period in between 60s to 90s. In the novel *Mafaswali Brittanta*, Debesh has spoken of the story of a starved family of a share-cropper. In the first part the story is not that coloured by politics. But in the later part Debesh has conducted a postmortem of the politics of West Bengal. Quite impartially he has thrown light on the naked picture of the parliamentary politics and also on the inner-party conflicts of different political parties. It is noteworthy that transending the political scene painted in the novel and also the different details of land-based politics scattered throughout the novel, he has brought out the barrenness of the prevailing politics. In this context, the comment made by a critic is well applied:

The subject-matter of the novel *Tista Parer Brittanta* is the construction of Tista barrage and Bagharu’s resistance to the move. But throughout the novel agriculture, system of production, party-politics, land-laws and the life of the peasants are scattered. The hero of the novel Bagharu is also a part of this production system. Debesh has shown in the novel that as a result of the construction of Tista barrage, new plots of land may come under the jurisdiction of agriculture. It may come to pass that in a plot of land there would be three harvest. But Bagharu, Madari’s mother, Kadakhowa and the like have no connection with this development activity. That’s why Bagharu rejects this development. In the novel *Tista Puran* we have the story of a mythical woman Budima. The novel focusses on the role and plight of the Rajbangshi farmers of West Bengal during the period from 60s to 90s. In the novel every chapter ends with *Puranic* association. The story has been woven the way a *Puran* is. From that angle the title of the novel is quite apt and appropriate. The change that came over post-war India in the field of agricultural-technology did not pass unnoticed in the eyes of the writer. He has
given an expression to every phase of that change. Side by side the writer has not failed to attract the attention of the reader to a particular thing. Because of these development, the life of the farmer is in a state of flux. Not only a change in agriculture, but the construction of new roads through the stretches of forest land hether to untrodden by human feet transformed peasant-life. As a result of such a big change the flavour of the land and that of cowdung, the ancient value—all have been lost from peasant life. Debesh Ray has thrown light on that aspect to the thoughts and ideas of Chhotadada, an important character of the novel. It is undeniable that in the novel Tista Puran a total picture of the life of peasantry is captured.
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10. This comment has made by Dr.Sunil Sen, Composed in Pashchimbanger Bhumi Sanskar O Bharater Krishi Arthaniti, p.51
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15. Ibid, p.111
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24. Ibid, p.190-191
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