CONCLUSION

India is an agricultural country. Right from the Vedic literature down to different Indian literature that emerged afterwards, agriculture and agrarian life occupied a significant place. In Bengali literature too, agriculture and agrarian life has been focussed with even the smaller details. We have found that in Vedic literature though there is the mention of agriculture but the economy of animal husbandry is dominant. Even the same be confirmed from different archaeological evidences. It was the Vedic age onwards, the symptom of a switch over from animal husbandry to agriculture became prominent. In the later vedic literature, we have more references to agriculture. In the Vedic age the subjects had to pay the revenue but it was not compulsive, but later paying revenues became compulsory. In this way the society got divided into two classes—the haves and the have-nots. This class-division is also present in Buddhist literature. In later period the agricultural economy became more and more expanded. The copper-inscriptions of the Gupta era also gives evidence of this. The seed of feudalism was sowed into the soil of Gupta era. This feudalism reached dangerous proportions during the Mughal era. In medieval Bengali literature too, there is an indication of the land-system quite at par with the land-system prevailing in the time of Shershah and then Akbar. In Mukunda Chakrabarty’s Chandimangal, there are hints in regard to contemporary land-system. It is in this time that the tenants and subjects had to face extreme oppression and in many cases they had to lose their own homesteads. In Manasamangal too, that the landless farmers had to turn to land-labourers is obvious.

The social equilibrium was destroyed owing to the exploitation of the tenants, neglect in land reformation and eviction of peasants from the land following the emergence of an opportunist class of zamindars under the patronage of the English rulers, during 18th century. When the Bengali literature stepped into the arena of modern age crossing over the medieval times, even then the references of agriculture or the tales
of the lives of the farmers were not at all missing from the pages of literature, rather the agrarian rural Bengal has already occupied a spacious place in the world of modern Bengali literature. But it is noteworthy that in the 19th century the pictures of the distress of the farmers of Bengal was not as much expressed in the fictional writings as in essays and articles published in the magazines and journals.

It was Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay of the post-Sarat age who broke a new ground in Bengali literature by introducing the agrarian novel. Tarashankar realized and identified the multifarious problems of the wretched peasants, the phenomenon of exploitation by the ruling authority. And that is why the picture of agrarian life has been revealed in his novel with down-to-earth realism.

Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay is one of the greatest novelists of Bengali literature. Out of the 63 novels penned by him, we have taken up only two of his novels for discussion. The two novels are – Ganadevata and Panchagram. In these two novels, Tarashankar has brilliantly captured the exploitation of the farmers in the hands of the feudal lords; on the other hand, he, having deeply realized the agonies of the farmers and labourers, gave voice to their dumb souls. In these two novels, we even come across the class of the marginalized outcasts of the Radh Bengal. In the novels, the writer has placed the farmers on the focal point and then showed the different actions and reactions of the freedom-struggle with the farmers at the centre. He has thrown light with minute details on how the land-holders and mahajans captured the centres of power using even the crookest means and how the farmers combatted them. He also showed the mass uprise of the farmer-class. In the frame of the disastrous post-war period of time, the issues and problems, tendency to move to the towns and cities, a decline in values and beliefs of the subjects of rural Bengal has been described in these two novels. The novel Panchagram is called the follow-up of Ganadevata. The novel depicts an extreme picture of the breakdown of the decayed social set-up which is also the subject-matter of Ganadevata. But it is noteworthy that the writer never exhibited the total extinction of feudalism. We find neither the picture of ruin of the police officials, nor that of zamindars have been depicted in these two novels. But the
writer has showed that as a result of Settlement every farmer has become conscious of their land-rights. The conflict between Gandhism and Communism are also evident in this two novels. It is mentionworthy here that, in the novel *Panchagram* the personal life of Debu, the central character of the novels is dominant. From community awareness, the novel *Panchagram* moves to individual awareness. The life-story of the agri-based communal man has gradually become narrowed-down. But it is undeniable that Tarashankar in his two novels *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram* has shed light on a total and faithful picture of the rural life of Bengal.

A complete reflection of rural Bengal can be found in the novels of Mahitosh Biswas. It was his birth connection that opened the door of opportunity for him to observe rural Bengal very closely. Analyzing his two novels namely *Mati Ek Maya Jane* and *Paye Paye Path*, it is found that subject-matter of the two novels are quite heterogeneous. Two different portraits of the lives of farmers have been displayed in these two different novels. The backgrounds of both the novels are the remote rural areas of the district of Jessore (now in Bangladesh). He is quite aware of the festivals, rituals, customs, beliefs - relating to the lives of the farmers of Jessore. That is why the cultural profiles pertaining to the lives of the subjects delineated in these two novels are identical. That the success and failure of the farmers of Kathukhalir Beel depend upon the crops has been drawn in the novel *Mati Ek Maya Jane*. In this novel we find that the crops and plots of land are like a fascinating woman to the protagonist Balaram which he cannot bypass. So his love for Padma appears to be furnished before the charm of land. A flavour of earth drenched with rain abounds in the novel. It is noteworthy that the novelist does not horripilate the lives of the poor farmers by any problem in the novel *Mati Ek Maya Jane*. He has only given an easy expression to their love towards their lands and paddy-fields. Every character created by the writer, though springs up out of rural atmosphere, yet bears a tinge of eternal humanism. In the novel *Paye Paye Path*, Mahitosh has given a concrete picture of the bloody Tebhaga Movement in the undivided Bengal. In this novel the *Paye Paye Path* the writer has presented skilfully the stories of commitment, organization, resistance, success and failure of the struggle
of the farmers of the village Beelbhasan and its adjoining villages. Satyaprasad, the central character of the novel, is the son of a zamindar. Through his eyes the writer has made us to see the Nature, human-relationship, festivals, merriment and the peasants’ movements. The diary of Satyaprasad has played an important role in this novel. Mahitosh has delineated the ins and outs of the Tebhaga Movement very consciously in this novel. Satyaprasad has kept all the facts and figures of the movement in his diary. So, at times it seemed to have been imposed upon the readers forcefully. But we may say that the novel is not weighed down with this facts. The writer has very deftly portrayed the tales of the movement of the farmers. It is worthy to note that the role of the women of rural Bengal in the Tebhaga Movement has not been skipped over in the novel. Though the picture of the failure of Tebhaga Movement has been factfully projected in the novel, the writer has not put a fullstop there. The story ends with the touches of mobility of man coming down over the ages. The author virtually wants to show that the stories like that of the village Beelbhasan never ends. So, in the story, there is no joviality of victory or pangs of defeat, the only things that keeps going is this — man on move and on move only age after age, lending approval to endless struggle.

Gunamay Manna is one of the noteworthy novelist of Bengali fictional literature. He has drawn the true picture of the peasant-revolt in his two novels Lakhindar Digar and Shalbani. He has spoken of those peasants in the novel Lakhindar Digar to whom existence appears to be meaningless without lands and agriculture. A remote village of the district of Midnapur of West Bengal is the main setting of the novel. The farmers and labours of this region are habituated with the exploitative reigns and the feudal customs and practices imposed upon them by the zamindars. It is clear enough that though the area is slightly influenced by the urban civilization, it is entirely free from the impact of urban economy. Lakhindar, the central character of the novel Lakhindar Digar is an aged farmer. The author has thrown light on the changed value-system of a village through this character. Lakhindar realized that the young men of the society have undergone a change of values in the post-war period. Lakhindar becomes upset at the self-centredness and degradation of humanity in the next generation. We find in the
novel that the farmers of this region are not only aware of political parties, time and society, they are aware of their situation as well. That peasant-life is undergoing a change is very much evident in this novel. The farmers with a transformed awareness are no longer ready to bear with oppression. They declare rebellion. With the direct assistance of the Krishak Samiti. Lakhindar, the ordinary farmer slowly becomes a peasant-leader. It is because of the suppression of the zamindar, revenue-collector and the state-machinery, a pure Lakhindar is born at the end of the novel. Though in the long run Lakhindar is arrest but it is hinted in the novel that with Lakhindar’s arrest the revolt will not come to an end. The departure of one Lakhindar will be followed by another. In Gunamay Manna’s another novel Shalbani, we find that the flow of the fangs of injustice and oppression continued. Though the reference to the period of the story remained unmentioned, it does not seem to be difficult to understand that the writer wants to arrest the billowy period that has swept over West Bengal in the ’70s. There is no direct description of Naxalbari Movement in the novel. Gunamay just picking up a chunk out of it has shown its right influence over the human society. It is noteworthy here that the brilliant students of Kolkata used to hide in the villages during the Naxalite Movement and would organized the farmers for struggle. Mohan alias Amalesh Chatterjee is one such student who is witness to this. Despite all this Mohan dies in a military-encounter. But the farmers could no more be resisted. We have seen in the novel that even after the death of Mohan, the author kept the natural course of life going. The revolt may be over, but dreams of Giribala, Shamli, Pachai and the like are deathless indeed. The novelist indicated symbolically the existence of never-to-be-ended revolt through the birth of the son of Mohan to the womb of Shamli.

Mahashweta Devi is one of the finest writer of Bengali literature. She has given an accurate expression to the lives of the sub-altern people in her novels. Mahashweta Devi has indicated the existence of the everlasting revolt of the oppressed farmers in her novels. The subject-matter of the two novels Sidhu Kanur Dake and Operation? Basai Tudu by Mahashweta Devi is a bloody peasant-revolt. It is noteworthy that Santhal-Insurrection of 1855 has been portrayed in a good number of
her novels. She has brought out the reality of Santhal Revolt in her novel *Sidhu Kanur Dake*. Sidhu and Kanu, the immortal leaders of the Santhal Revolt have been given the status of protagonists in the novel. Mahashweta has documented the history of the movement of the penniless and oppressed Adivasi peasants. But it is noteworthy that the novel does not contain the extensive description of the pros and cons of the life of the peasants. The writer virtually has portrayed the exploited and deprived life and struggle of the Adivasi peasants as well, and in addition to that she has unveiled the nature of the nauseating role of the then upper class people of the society as well as the print media itself. The tradition of exploitations and deprivations over the lives of the peasants of Bengal remains as before even in the post-independence era. Mahashweta has given expression to the peasant-movement of the 70s in her novel *Operation ? Basai Tudu*. The chief element of the novel *Operation ? Basai Tudu* is the agricultural-labourer movement. Mahashweta believes that revolt does never seem to have an end. We have seen in the novel how leaders of Kishan Sabha betrays the poor and destitute agricultural-labourers in the rural areas of Bengal for the protection of the interests of the tenure-holders. Basai Tudu, left the party taking note of the stand taken by Kishan Sabha and has given birth to an active peasant movement. Actually the history of deprivation and exploitation of the peasants is behind the protest and agitation led by Basai. In the novel Basai dies five times. A myth of rebirth is built up in the novel centering Basai. Though the novel ends with the death of Basai, Mahashweta did not stop right there. She has extracted out the truth that the movement does not come to an end even with the deaths of rebels like Basai. As the socio-economic development remains a far cry for the farmers, so also their agitation goes on endlessly.

Debesh Ray lent a deep, rich and multifaceted contribution to Bengali literature. In Debesh Ray’s three novels *Mafaswali Brittanta, Tista Parer Brittanta* and *Tista Puran*, the life story of the marginalized Rajbangshi farmers of post-independence Bengal has been truly reflected. Side by side with that Debesh has also focussed on the ins and outs of the political activities that had taken place during the period in between 60s to 70s. In the novel *Mafaswali Brittanta*, the writer has spoken
of the story of a starved family of a share-cropper. The novel is in two parts. 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. Debesh was personally involved with the Communist Party. But nowhere in the novel do we find his partiality for the party. 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, transcending the political scene painted in the novel *Mafaswali Brittanta* and also the different details of land-based politics scattered throughout the novel, he has brought the barrenness of the prevailing politics. That’s why, there is no end to Charketu’s and Khetkhetu’s waiting. The subject-matter of the epic novel *Tista Parer Brittanta* is the construction of Tista-barrage and Bagharu’s resistance to the move. But throughout the novel agriculture, land-laws, system of production, party-politics and the life of the peasants are scattered. The hero of this 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, Madarir Ma, Kadakhowa and the like who live in the lap of Nature have no connection with this development activity. Bagharu and the like rejected the process of development undertaken by the government as it would sever their intimate connections with nature which is being destroyed as a result of that very development. That is why Bagharu rejects this development. In the novel *Tista Puran* we have the story of a mythical woman Budima. It is noteworthy that an accurate picture of West Bengal politics from 60s to 90s is to be found here. The novel focusses on the role and plight of the Rajbangshi farmers of West Bengal in that political scene. In the novel *Tista Puran* 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 Debesh. He has given expression to every phase of that change. In the story of the novel, it is mention that the use of new
kind of seeds, new agricultural methods and new types of manure can bring about a gradual development in the sphere of agriculture. 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 large stretches of thick 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. The writer has thrown light on that aspect to the thoughts and ideas of Chhotadada, an important character of the novel. The novel is a store house of Rajbangshi culture also. It is undeniable that in the novel Tista Puran a total picture of the life of peasantry is captured.

In Chapter VI, we have discussed the agrarian folk-culture of the Bengali novels which have been discussed in the earlier chapters. We have come to know on the basis of the selected novels that narrated rituals, beliefs, festivals, rhymes, riddles, proverbs, songs, dances concerning the agrarian social life of Bengal, that both child and crop have become synonymous terms. Various Pujas, festivals etc. have come into practice centering the desire of attaining crops and child. The oral literature such as rhymes, riddles, proverbs, folk drama etc. not only became the medium of exposing the hopes and desires, weal and woe etc., rather simultaneously the very mediums became the exposing platforms of secret experiences about life. The novels themselves carry the ample evidences of the peasants relating to their agri-centric experiences and knowledge.

In Chapter VII, we have discussed the works of other writers of the period already mentioned in which agrarian life has been more or less reflected. Having gone through the novels penned by the writers, we have found that the peasants have always been exploited, no matter whether in pre-independence India or after independence. Once the peasants whom the feudalistic exploitations shattered are equally done so subsequently by the political parties. Despite the Acts passed in favour of the farmers, the farmers have not been able to reap their benifits. It is noteworthy that every
novelist has chosen the time in which agrarian life was passing through tumultuous phases. In this respects Sarojkumar is the only exception.

The picture of town-bound tendency of the peasants has been revealed in the novels of Manik Bandyopadhyay, Samaresh Basu, Jarasandha, Prabhat Dey Sarkar et al. On the other hand Subodh Ghosh and Prafulla Ray shows how the zamindari-system remains in vogue in the interior areas of Bihar even after its abolition. The life-story of the refugee peasants living in the alluvial-land has been portrayed in a good number of novels. But the common matter is available almost in every novel—the picture of oppressions. But the only difference that can be noted that the peasant have become more aware of their rights and liberty.

Having discussed the novels produced during the period falling in between Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay and Debesh Ray, we have come to the conclusion that in Bengali novel a true picture of agrarian life has been reflected. Just as Tarashankar has drawn a picture of the peasants-lives of the pre-independence India, in the same way Mahitosh Biswas and Gunamay Manna have shed light on the life of the peasants in the post-independence era. Mahashweta Devi in her novels has penned the painful existence of the Santhal peasants of pre-independence as well as post-independence time. After the British have left, the peasant had to fight for their rights and existence until the Zamindari-Abolition Act was enacted. But it was found that after the abolition of zamindars-estates the land-holders and money-lenders etc. continued to exploit the peasantry. Hence the legacy of exploitation continued generation after generation in the lives of the peasants. The only difference is that in the post-independence era the peasants became aware of their rights more behimently and if necessary they knocked on the doors of administration and law-courts. But afterwards, the peasant life of Bengal underwent a sea-change. In his novel Debesh Ray has recaptured every phase of that change. The farmers became more and more conscious of health and education but it is agriculture which has got totally transformed from the point of view of agricultural methods. Tractor has occupied the place of plough, water-pumps have been introduced as a means of irrigation. As a result of the application of different kinds of fertilizers and
seeds the production system has been immensely altered.

A selected numbers of novel written during the period from Tarashankar to Debesh have been in the perview of our discussion. In these fast-changing time, the agrarian life has been undergoing transition, ups and downs of various types. In the writings of creative writers, the agrarian life is being recurrently focussed in the light of multi-dimensional realism.