PREFACE

Right from the Vedic literature to different Indian literature agriculture and agrarian life have found prominent expression. In Bengali literature also agrarian life has been an important subject-matter of representation. One can find reference to the Bengali life associated with the multifaceted influence of the agricultural system and zamindari system in the Bengali literature of both the ancient and middle ages. The foundation and growth of the economy of Bengal has been based on agriculture. Yet the agrarian section who earned their livelihood by tilling the land of the zamindars were constantly victimized and deprived by the powerful landed-gentry. After the introduction of the Permanent Settlement in 1793 by Lord Cornowallis, the pathetic condition of the peasants became a chronic phenomena. The peasants led a life of untold sufferings. But when the accumulated tyranny by the land-lords reached its extreme stage, the peasants rose into sporadic revolution against them. Within a short span of time there were many peasants revolution which came one after another.

The picture of helplessness and exploitations of the peasant of Bengal have attracted attention in Bengali literature. In 19th century, from essays and articles to the fictional literature attracted focus. But it can be seen that, in the earlier stage of Bengali novels, the pictures of agrarian Bengali life are found in a scattered and disconnected manner. But towards the ’40s, agrarian life has occupied a dominant and noteworthy space in Bengali fictional writings. Till now research works have basically centered around some specific novels or specific novelist, but I have not come across any informative research work which has provided a critical overview of Bengali agrarian novels in general. In order to understand and provide an authoritative work on the agrarian life as depicted in the Bengali novels, I have decided to undertake Bengali agrarian novel as the topic of my research work under the title Bengali Agrarian Novel : A Critical Study.

Keeping in mind the ambit of the subject, I have chosen two or three novels
each of Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, Mahitosh Biswas, Gunamay Manna, Mahashweta Devi and Debesh Ray, written in between 1940 to 2000 as my area of study. I have made the division of it into the following chapters:

Chapter I : Bengali Literature in the Backdrop of Indian Agrarian Civilization
Chapter II : The Novels of Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay : The March of Times and Peasant-life
Chapter III : Peasant-life in Mahitosh Biswas’s Novels : Pictures of Turbulence and Calm
Chapter IV : The Novels of Gunamay Manna : Peasants’ Unrest and Peasants’ Struggle
Chapter V : Mahashweta Devi’s Novels : Depiction of Peasant-life in the Light of Peasants’ Revolt
Chapter VI : Debesh Ray’s Novels : Reflection of Multidimensional Issues and Problems of Peasant-life
Chapter VII : Agrarian Culture in Bengali Novel
Chapter VIII : Other Novels of the Time : A Short Agrarian Sketch

In Chapter I, we have discussed the agricultural context of Bengali literature in the backdrop of Indian agrarian civilization. In Chapter II, we have discussed two novels of Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay namely *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram*. An accurate description of the peasant-life and rural society at the juncture of decaying feudalism and upcoming capitalism is found in these two novels. In Chapter III, we have discussed the two novels of Mahitosh Biswas namely *Mati Ek Maya Jane* and *Paye Paye Path*. An immaculate reflection of rural Bengal and the easy-going life of the farmers can be found in *Mati Ek Maya Jane*. In *Paye Paye Path*, Mahitosh has given a concrete picture of the bloody Tebhaga Movement in the undivided Bengal. In Chapter IV, we have discussed the two novels of Gunamay Manna namely *Lakhindar Digar* and *Shalbani*. Gunamay has spoken of those peasants in the novel *Lakhindar Digar* to whom existence appears to be meaningless sans land and agriculture. In *Shalbani*, the writer wants to arrest the billowy period that has swept over West Bengal in the ’70s. In Chapter V, we have discussed the two novels of Mahashweta Devi namely *Sidhu Kanur Dake* and *Operation? Basai Tudu*. Mahashweta Devi has brought out the reality of Santhal-Revolt in her novel *Sidhu Kanur Dake*. She virtually has portrayed the exploited and deprived life and struggle of the Adivasi peasants in this novel. Mahashweta has given expression to the peasant-movement of the ’70s in her
novel *Operation ? Basai Tudu*. The chief element of the novel is the agricultural-labourer movement. In Chapter VI, we have discussed the three novels of Debesh Ray namely *Mafaswali Brittanta, Tista Parer Brittanta* and *Tista Puran*. In these novels, the life story of the marginalized Rajbangshi farmers of post-independence Bengal has been truly reflected. In the novel *Mafaswali Brittanta*, the writer has spoken of the story of a starved family of a share-cropper. The subject-matter of the epic novel *Tista Parer Brittanta* is the construction of Tista-barrage and Bagharu’s resistance to the move. But through the novel agriculture, land-laws, system of production, party-politics and the life of the peasants are scattered. In the novel *Tista Puran*, Debesh has presented the pros and cons relating to land politics, production system and agricultural methodology from the source of the *Got* of Budima. The true picture of the Bengal peasantry are quite evident in their cultural activities. For this reason we have discussed the folk-culture of the life of the peasant Bengal in chapter VI. In chapter VII, we have discussed the works of those other writers in which the writers more or less have focused on agrarian life during these long periods. The number of these kind of novels is not that scanty. Some titles may remain undiscussed owing to our unintentional mistake.

In our backnotes we have mentioned the names of authors, the titles of the books and the concerned page numbers only. Details such as year of publication, place of publication etc. would be available in the bibliography. In the backnotes and bibliography we have used some abbreviations. There are certain words and idiomatic expression in Bengali which defies translation and if translated literally the suggestion and implication are lost. For this reason we have used the proverbs, riddles, rhymes, songs and certain regional words as they are. In our thesis, in transliterating the native Bengali words, we have kept in mind their pronunciation in Bengali. We have kept the title of books and articles, the names of Bengali months and the transliterated Bengali words in Italics and specific Bengali words within quotation mark. We have provided the page numbers in connection with rhymes, riddles, proverbs and folk-songs and games used in the Chapter VI within brackets within the text of the thesis and not at the
end of the chapter as endnotes. In the main part of our research work, the meaning of
the regional words have been kept within brackets as per as possible.

In Appendix I, the meaning and etymology of a good many words connected
with agriculture and land-system have been provided. We have resorted to *An
Etymological Dictionary of Bengali : 1000-1800 AD* by Dr. Sukumar Sen, *Bangla
Bangla Abhidhan*, Ed. by Bijit Kumar Dutta & Others for the etymology. In transliterating
certain words of foreign origin, I have used the letter ••• in order to reproduce the
original pronunciation. In Appendix II, we have provided a catalogue of various Peasants’
Revolts. In Appendix III, the photograph of Sidhu Murmu, is collected from the book
*Bharater Sashtra Bidroha Samakalin Samaj O Bangla Sahitya* by Ranajit Kumar
Samaddar and the maps of those part of undivided Bengal affected by the peasant’s
movement and Tebhaga Movement are collected from the book *Tebhaga Sangram*
by Suprakash Ray. We have already expressed our gratitude by mentioning their names
in the bibliography. The first bracket ( ) has been used in certain places in the body of
the thesis to provide the English equivalent of certain regional words, to clarify their
implication and in chapter VI, this bracket has been used to provide page number as
well as the title of the novels in connection with rhymes, riddles, proverbs and songs.
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