CHAPTER II

The Novels of Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay: The March of Times and Peasant-life

Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay is one of the greatest novelists of Bengali literature. Out of the 63 novels penned by him, in a good many we come across an accurate reflection of agrarian life. But for convenience, we have taken up only two of his novels for discussion. The two novels are – Ganadevata and Panchagram. In this chapter, we will make an effort to investigate into the social, economic and political backgrounds of the two novels.

Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay first made his appearance as a novelist in the year 1928. At that time, a rebellious group of poets and writers grew up around the magazine Kallol and this group tried to bring about a change in the literary scene through their revolt against contemporary literary modes and ideas. The Kallolians were successful in bringing about a massive change in Bengali literature:

Their ultra-modern, urban literary approach made the readers turn their back upon them. Though Tarashankar was one among the Kallolians of his day, he could not share the very characteristics of this generation. Tarashankar took up his pen in the second decade of the twentieth century and shed light on the time and society to which he belonged. He revolutioned Bengali fiction through his pictures of the ups and downs of this disintegrating, caste-based rural society. A critic has remarked about Tarashankar:

Tarashankar had a great reverence for tradition and this explains why despite being a part of the decay, skepticism and complexity so characteristic of the age, he refrained
from throwing light on the society in its aspects of disintegration only. He believed in life in its totality – a life which has nothing to do with nihilism. In this context, Tarashankar has remarked:

In the whole body of his literature, Tarashankar searched for this truth. Whatever he has written, he has written from his own experiences. Lavpur, his birth-place, had a role to play in the growth and formation of his mind. In his formative years, he moved from one village to another, stood by the common people afflicted with natural calamities, heard the distressful cries of the agonized, hungry souls, observed the people belonging to different occupations and their lives. Side by side with these experiences of rustic life in Radh Bengal that he gathered, he was also witness to various shifting changes that took place there. The economic breakdown in the post-war Bengal, the various changes that followed as a result in the rural society, Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, the aftermath of the Second World War, famine, – all these were stored in his mind as important experiences. His fictional writings are the thoughtful products of these experiences.

He set his fictions under the background of these restless times. In his novels, he 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 his fictions, we even come across the class of the marginalized outcasts of the Radh Bengal. In this connection, a critic has recorded:
Tarashankar has created all his characters and infused life into them under the greater background of the land, time and social life. A critic has rightly remarked:

By way of discussing his Ganadevata and Panchagram, we may find the suitability of the above remark.

II

Tarashankar has chosen a particular region for knitting the plots of his two novels – Ganadevata and Panchagram. Here Panchagram comprises the five villages such as Shibkalipur, Kankana, Kusumpur, Mahagram and Dekhuria. The subject-matter of the two novels is based on the accounts of the regional life of these five villages. The two novels may be regarded as a mirror of rural life in between the years 1922 and 1933. During the post-war period (after 1st World War), the farmers of Shibkalipur sold their lands to meet their wants and needs; some farmers worked in others’ fields; again some others cultivated Green Crops or cereals in the alluvial lands by the side of the Mayurakshi river. The increased price of commodities made them penniless; their condition was further aggravated by exploitation by zamindars and persecution by the machinery of law. In the novel, Ganadevata, the real picture of the post-war situation is reflected in the thought process of the old Dwaraka Choudhury:
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 smiths, carpenters, barbers, farmers and the men belonging to different occupations have been described in the novels *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram*.

The main plot of the novel *Ganadevata* is centred on Shibkalipur. Though the ancestors of Dwaraka Choudhury, once the zamindar of the village, set up the village, the transformations that occurred in the village life and society in Bengal with the passing of time, also changed the very condition of Dwaraka Choudhury himself. After the World War, the rural Bengal in that decadent time was witness to an emergence not only of feudalism but of neo-capitalism as well. In addition to that, owing to different policies adopted by the British Government, the distressed villages were bound to move to the towns and cities. The barbers, smiths and farmers had to turn factory-workers giving up their own occupations in an effort to earn a living. As a matter of fact, after the Permanent Settlement, the estates of Bengal passed to the hands of the mediators or arbitrates like jotdars, pattanidars, mahajans (money-lenders), gomastas (agents or revenue - collectors), gatidars, talukdars etc. In this connection, the comment made by the historian Binay Ghosh would be worth-noting. He has written:

Not only the Permanent Settlement, but the 1770 famine was also a great curse to the rural Bengal. Though the British Government permanently fixed the tax payable on the part of the aristocratic zamindars and so paved the way for a smooth operation of the estates concerned, it did not work in the practical field. The reasons of this were:
The condition of the Choudhuries of the novel *Ganadevata* is also extremely critical in the face of this transition. Shreehari or Chhiru Paul has emerged as the new zamindar of the village. Dwaraka Choudhury has turned a farmer from the state of a zamindar while Chhiru Paul, formerly a farmer, has risen to the level of the zamindar.

Shibkalipur is a *Shudra* (the lowest order of the Hindu caste system)-dominated village. Though the village is *Shudra* dominated, the zamindar is a Brahmin. In this rural social set-up, on one side, there are the Brahmins and the zamindar while on the other side, there are people of different professions, such as, the smiths (goldsmiths & blacksmiths), carpenters, farmers etc. The village consists of different quarters or localities viz *Bamunpada, Kamarpada, Kumorpada, Bagdipada, Bauri* and *Muchipada* etc. The Harijans live in the border of the village. The social structure of the rural Bengal broke up in the post-war period and this rendered many to leave their profession while others are without their own work. The Brahmins of the villages lost the status they enjoyed and went down even below the status of the *Shudras*. In the new social situation, the plight of the Brahmins was referred to even in the magazine *Tatwabodhini* of the time.\(^{13}\) In the novel *Ganadevata*, we find that Ramendra Chatterjee of the village Kankana forgets his social position and for want of money offers to work for the occupation of a dunghill or waste together with Rahamat Sheikh.

The zamindar and the subjects are the foundation of rural economy. Among the subjects, the peasants earn their living by cultivation. For a farmer, the main asset, that supplies his bread— the bestower of his fulfilment of hopes and desires— is his land.
They look upon land as their mother. His only desire is to produce a good harvest there. But this land, the asset so dear to his soul, is not his own. In reality, it is the zamindar who enjoys the ownership of the land. In the rural society, the land included in the zamindar’s estate may be divided into a few categories. From the discussion offered by a certain critic, the categories are listed below:

With the passing of time, when the ownership of these land undergo a change of hands, the farmers have to confront a variety of problems relating to land. In addition to these, the exploitation on the part of the zamindars and money-lenders make their life unbearable. Prolonged oppression leads them voice their protests unitedly at one time. As a result, peasants’ revolts take place one after another. In this connection it may be mentioned that as a result of various peasants’ uprise, Landed-Property Right Act (1953) came into existence, the chief objective of which was—

so, that the uncultivated lands may not turn fallow resulting in an increased production. But as a matter of fact, this Act brought little benefits to the farmers. However, the enforcement of this Act has not been referred to in Tarashankar’s novels Ganadevata and Panchagram. In reality, these two novels have shed picturesque light on the tussle between the zaminders and the subjects and the resulting resentment. Though the farmers of Shibkalipur are of different occupations, they have arable lands of their own. Each and every farmer of the village cultivates their
lands. Some plough their lands themselves while others get the work done by ‘•• ••
labours’. These people produce paddy of different species such as Aush, Aman,
Navina and the like; side by side, they also produce cereal crops like barley, mustard,
sesame etc. Some others again go for sugar-cane cultivation. During the season of
cultivation, the farmers have to remain busy at work in the fields from sunrise to sunset.
For a good harvest, they themselves prepare the manure. No chemical fertilizer reached
their hands so far. The cultivators dig large holes in their house and put waste-materials
or garbages theirin. During the Bengali month of Chaitra, the rotten garbage lying at
the bottom are dragged out with the help of a spade. In this way, the farmers prepare
their manures. Again sometimes, the roots of the reaped paddy-plants are upturned
and are allowed to rot inside the soil. The females of the house-holds of the farmers also
take equal parts in the work of sowing the paddy. Besides in the harvesting season
these females collect the ears of corn to be used as fuel. After the reaping of paddy is
over, heaps of paddy is brought to house of the farmer in a bullock-cart. The people of
Shibkalipur or Panchagram do not yet know the use of tractors. After the paddy season,
rabi-crops are cultivated in the same land. In Ganadevata, in describing the cultivation
activities, Tarashankar has written:

The farmers also equally participate social functions and festivities. In order to make
progress in their agricultural activity, they resort to different ritualistic practices and
worships of some deity or god. In ChapterVII, we have broadly discussed the cultural
aspects associated with the joys, festivities, worships etc.

The agri-based rustic society function under the Panchayat system. While Tarashankar was writing *Ganadevata*, the panchayat was in peril. The Union Boards were formed in every village. The burden of taxes imposed on the subjects was hiked. The upper class people occupied the chairs of the Union Boards and imposed taxes on the illiterate subjects. In the novel *Ganadevata*, we find:

It was not that the subjects suffered only because of the imposition of taxes; the subjects were virtually pauperized as a result of the exploitation of Shreehari alias Chhiru Paul, the representative of the rural bourgeoisie. Chhiru Paul bears witness to the dynamics of change that came with the passing of time. The complaints made by Aniruddha, Girish and other villagers at the outset of the novel *Ganadevata* are an expression of this very socio-economic transition. Aniruddha and Girish, the blacksmith and carpenter respectively of the village lose their faith in the custom of and go to the town in search of a livelihood and start business there and as a result of this, the villagers have to confront a lot of problems in connection with agricultural activity. For want of a beffiling ploughshare they could not cultivate the land. They can neither uproot the *Patpati* grass from the land. Besides, when the harvesting season comes, they get into trouble because of the lack of a sharpened scythe. This leads to the creation of a great distance between Girish and Aniruddha on one hand and the villagers at large on the other. The villagers ask for help and protection from the Chandimandap authorities (panchayat) of the village. In the panchayat meeting of Chandimandap, instead of solution, the authoritarian pride of wealthy Chhiru leads to the breaking out of a clash. This clash depicted in the very first chapter of the novel achieves greater dimension afterwards. This chapter has hints of the breakdown of the values of the ancient social set-up and the beginning of the modern era.

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Tarashankar has closely witnessed the breaking up of the ancient rural set-up of the society. Thus, we find that Aniruddha and Girish throw away the cigarettes in their hands a little away from the Chandimandap and arrives at the meeting. Even in the dresses and make-up of Girish and Aniruddha, we notice the signs of change. Tarashankar has described:

In fact, the chief reason behind transformation that touched the economic foundation of the society on its way from feudalism to capitalism was the progress from homely workmanship and handicrafts to scientific, mechanical industrialization. Another reason for the same was the growth of a money-oriented mentality. In the self-depended rural society the rural artisans fulfilled their need through barter-system; but during the British period, the import of cheap foreign goods to the market led to the decrement of the demand for rural crafts. The result was that the foundation of the need-based economy of the rural society collapsed. In addition to this, the rural artisans too began to move towards the town as they were not getting appropriate quantity of paddy corn through the barter-system. The cheap glamorous culture of the town had its impact upon the indigenous culture of the rural society. The bustle of urban areas enters the life of the village. In the Chandimandap meeting, Aniruddha explains the reasons which prompted them to seek works in the town quite picturesquely:

In this changed scenario, the strength of the panchayat and its leadership was also on
the verge of breaking up. This explains why the panchayat which could not lend its support to Aniruddha and Girish could neither control the impudence of Chhiru Paul. In those days, the Chandimandap was the very heart of a village. Its present state of ruins bear witness to the destruction of the social set-up centred on the Chandimandap. A critics remark is worthnoting here:

For this reason, when Bishwanath, the grandson of Mahamahopadhyay Nyayaratna Mahashaya of Mahagram and friend of Debu Ghosh, the only educated farmer of the village and pundit of the free primary school, says that Chandimandap has meaning in this age and that a co-operative Bank set up instead would bring benefits to the farmers, Debu cannot accept this ultimate economic truth. Tarashankar himself did not believe in an economy which is nothing but a money-based one. He realised how in an economic system, individual, society and state could be controlled as he loitered from one village to another as the president of Union Board in his personal life. Debu did not either accept materialism of this sort but he was not unaware of social change. That is why in his thoughts the picture of the disintegration of social values has also found a place:

But when the influential persons of the village too preferred to remain as silent spectators
without lending support to this social transition, Debu endeavoured to the best of his power and ability to save the ancient heritage and social discipline of village life out of his love of village. For this reason, he did not support the impudence of Aniruddha and Girish. In such a complex situation, the plight of the burgadars, the korfa-tenants and daily wage-earners became topsy-turvyed. Their problems are not heeded to even after complaints are lodged. In addition to this, the clash between the zamindars and the subjects got more momentum. Shreehari gives a befitting reply to Aniruddha for the latter’s protest by reaping the half-matured paddy of his two bighas of land at Bakuri taking advantage of the darkness of the night.

Shreehari reprents the forces of the newly-emerged feudalism. He is uncivil, wrathful and characterless. The little help he does to the poor subjects is also well-calculated to serve his selfish interests. His newly acquired wealth and riches makes him arrogant enough to match respect from the villagers. Though in the Settlement papers, Chhiru Paul turns Chhiru Ghosh, to the exploited subjects he remains Chhiru Modal for ever. He is 25 Chhiru Paul is quite adept in cutting and stealing of bamboos from bamboo-groves belongings to others, he also throws his fishing nets over other people ponds in an effort to take fishes out. He is also second to none in occupying by force other people’s lands. Thus, when Aniruddha goes to seek police assistance losing his faith in the judgement of Chandimandap, Chhiru gets furious in mind. He derives great pleasure after having set fire to the houses of the locality of the cobblers. Loss of trust in the panchayats also signals the change that is coming up in the society. In the novel, we also get introduced to another form of Chhiru. When Chhiru gets involved in religious ceremonies or perform worships and rituals, he becomes a different man. Then he refrains from doing harm to anybody. Commenting on this nature of the religious Chhiru, Tarashankar has written:
After the incident of Chhiru’s conflict with Aniruddha, the discipline of rural life is utterly in its ruins. The villagers cherish the age-old belief that the zamindars never want to share the weal and woe of the subjects. Thus, the farmers-subjects of Shibkalipur never expect justice from the zamindar. In the village, chaos and disorder set in. Slowly and gradually, the silent and mute farmers of the village begin to voice their protest unitedly. In this context, the remark made by Girish in the novel is worthy of mention. Girish has said:

As a result of this non-cooperation and protest on the part of the subjects, the zamindar-subject conflict gets aggravated more and more. The Union Board notice seeking deposition of taxes adds fuel to the fire. Doctor Jagan of the locality incites the villagers out of his secret desire to become a member of the Union Board. Debu never liked the aristocratic vaunts and arrogance of Jagan but joins him in order to protest against the atrocities perpetrated on them by the zamindar. Besides sending a petition against the tax-notice, Debu and his companions arrange for the celebration of *Nabanna* festival in the Chandimandap in their antagonism to Chhiru. In the novel, the story of this zamindar-subject conflict continues in the same pace upto the work of the Settlement survey conducted as per the government survey act. In the novel *Ganadevata*, the context of the land-survey has occupied a very important place. In the novel, Tarashankar has provided detailed data and information:
The *Khanapuri* of Settlement adds a new dimension to the horrors of the farmers already afflicted with the different issues relating to agriculture and harvesting. A critic has labelled *Khanapuri* as *Khanapuri*. The farmers knew no sleep because of their fear of destruction of paddy to be reaped in the cold season (*Haimanti*) and also because of the tears of magistrate’s knowledge of the same and the whip-lashes. The feudal exploitation coupled with that of the state cripples the farmers. The farmers feel helpless for fears of a hike in the revenue. In this connection, the remark made by a critic seems appropriate:

Debu decides to appeal for postponement of *Khanapuri* till the reaping of the paddy is over. The villagers, however, become more terrified when the revenue-collector of the zamindar Dashji reads out to them from a newspaper how the revolutionary Jitendralal Bandyopadhyay was arrested when he went to protest against the *Khanapuri* of the Settlement. Like a demagogue Chhiru offers present to the government magistrate to temporarily postpone the application of *Khanapuri*. The impudence, greed and atrocities of the government servants engaged in the work of survey give rise to hostility in the minds of the subjects. Debu was imprisoned for beating the *Kamungo* (subordinate revenue-officer) engaged the work of survey. When Debu returns to his village after undergoing 15 months’ imprisonment, the whole scenario was transformed. Jatin, the
detainee under the Detainment Act of 1924, was provided a shelter in the village. The waves of active politics touched village life to the core. The village also witnessed the setting up of Praja Samity and Congress Committee. The novel up to the imprisonment of Debu was concerned with zamindar-subject conflict but afterwards the story of the novel took a different turn. A critic’s comment on this change is worthy of note:

Not only that the larger politics of India made its entry into the village; the headman enhire turned all in all in this village after assuming the office of the revenue-collector. Already a usurer, his becoming the revenue-collector added a dangerous dimension to the distress of the subjects. In the name of procuring revenue, he put to auction the lands of the ordinary subjects and thus procured due interests. In favour of the atrocities of this sort in the name of procuring revenue, the history of agriculture economics and land reform gives the following witness:

As regards the Haptam and Panjam laws it is said that by the Haptam law the zamindars were entrusted with the right to fix revenue upon the farmers and tenants, to arrest and imprison a person and the only objective behind it was to allow the zamindars to roll in luxury. The Panjam law, on the other hand, offered the right to the zamindars to increase revenue in the name of granting a lease, to seize the movable and immovable property of the subjects. As a matter of fact, the Panjam law was the reformed version of the Haptam law. But that did not lead to a resolution of the real issue. The Floud Commission remarked as regards these two laws:

The "Haptam" and "Panjam" the situation that developed
to the passing of the notorious "Haptam" (Regulation VII of (1799) by which the zamindars were vested with wide and arbitrary powers of distraint ..... but it is generally agreed that it was a mistake to arm the zamindars with such drastic powers without first enquiring into the root cause of the trouble, ...The "Panjam" (Regulation V of 1812) mitigated to some extent the harshness of "Haptam's" provisions for distraint, without remedying the real defects.33

In the novel Ganadevata, we have found a picture of all-round decay of life as a result of the implementation of this law. Such laws enacted by the British conferred profuse powers on the hands of the zamindars; it was as a result of those laws that Ganesh Paul’s farm in Ganadevata was put to auction and was purchased by Chhiru Paul. The hearth and home of the penniless Tarini was sold out, the endowed land given in lieu of pay to Patu cobbler was seized during Settlement and was registered in the name of the zamindar. The land owned by the blacksmith Aniruddha was also auctioned. In those hard times, Doctor Jagan announced in favour of the subjects that the lands owned by the farmer-subjects were all Mokarrari Jama – that is, lands the revenue of which is never enhanced. But Chhiru is not at all disturbed by such announcement as he knows well that though the farmers have acquired the right to file a suit, the government law-court will pass its judgement in favour of the zamindars.

From the 19-20 chapters of the novel, the conflict has further agravated and reached critical dimensions. The subjects have almost started treading the path of revolt against the zamindar. The feud became more and more marked and it began to surface in matters concerning fishing, right of the farmers to fell trees and also issues relating to unpaid workers. Debu opposes when the revenue-collector of the zamindar comes to cut-down his trees forcibly. Debu and Dwaraka Choudhury get injured in fighting with the zamindar’s club-men. This creates unrest throughout Shibakalipur. Though a police enquiry was launched into the incident, no disciplinary measures was taken against the revenue-collector. Under such circumstances, the zamindar leases out his estate to
Chhiru. Chhiru announces that the tenants will only enjoy the right to take the fruits on trees grown over revenue-paying lands and besides this, they have no other right. Under the background of this declaration, there was a meeting under the leadership of the detainee Jatin in which Jagan Doctor makes the peasants and land-labours aware of political history. In this context, it may be mentioned that the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 says:

In the novel, Doctor Jagan seeks to make the peasantry aware of the rectification of this law. In the hope of enactment of a new law, Jagan tells Gadai:

The farmer-subjects endeavour with a renewed enthusiasm to rise unitedly against injustice. Debu also stands by them and leads them. The incident of putting a strayed cow in a pound leads to such a dangerous clash that Aniruddha out of vengeance destroys Chhiru’s favourite garden taking advantage of the night. He was also jailed as a consequence of that. In the mean time, Cholera broke out in the village and took the form of epidemic. Many villagers including the wife and son of Debu died of Cholera. The whole village became almost depopulated because of the epidemic. This calamity also adversely affects the peasant movement, it begins to calm down. Still, the same people again rise in resistance. As men build their own houses afresh after they are destroyed by fire, in the same way, they do not take much time to forget their
bereavements. But Debu takes some more time to start normal life and activity. Bereaved of his wife and son, Debu feels disinterested to everything. The farmers too feel helpless at his indifferent posture. Because Shreehari wants a hike in revenue now as the price of corn has shown a rise. The five section camp of the Settlement start its sittings in the village. Not only the subjects of Shibkalipur, but the subjects of adjoining Panchagram as well gets ready to resist the atrocities of the zamindars. The Muslim tenants of Alepur too raise their voice forcefully in protest. Being encouraged by Doctor Jagan and Haren Ghoshal, the subjects want to record their protest by way of a strike. Debu too seeks to decide the next steps of the movement in sympathy with the subjects. In the revolt, Shreehari also joins hands. He gets Jatin, the detainee, removed from the village by sending a petition to the District Headquarters. Though detainee Jatin goes away, he still goes on inspiring and encouraging the farmers. It is under his inspiration that Debu rushes to Mahagram to take part in a meeting. While going away, Jatin recited:

It was this message of undaunted courage that incites Debu to join the movement fearlessly. The torch of the revolt was thus kindled. This time, the Hindu as well as the Muslim subjects organize their movement against the zamindar unitedly. The novelist Tarashankar has ended the novel *Ganadevata* with the sound of a far-away drum, thus hinting at the peasants’ revolt.

### III

The novel *Panchagram* is called the follow-up novel of *Ganadevata*. *Panchagram* begins exactly where the novel *Ganadevata* ends. The two novels *Chandimandap* and *Panchagram* were published in the magazine *Bharatbarsha* and Tarashankar wanted to publish them under a single title *Ganadevata*. But the novel *Chandimandap* only got published under the title *Ganadevata*; so Tarashankar’s wish remained unfulfilled. The novel *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram* share the same
background—the same social set-up, the same zamindar-subject relations and exploitation by the zamindars. In *Panchagram* too, the different government Acts, the system of zamindar’s estate, side by side the rights of the subjects etc. have been discussed.

Among the five villages of Panchagram, Kusumpur is totally inhabited by Muslim farmers and land-labours. The condition of the Miyan Sahibs, the zamindar of Kusumpur, is like that of Dwaraka Choudhury. The Hindus and Muslims of Kusumpur lived peacefully together. Both the communities joined one another’s festivities and ceremonies. But after the introduction of voting system, things do not remain the same. The little relation that still exists between the two communities has its roots in agriculture. The novel *Ganadevata* ends with the preparations being taken to organize a strike as a result of an unrest due to a hike in revenue. The novel *Panchagram* begins exactly there i.e. by way of the aforesaid unrest. But here, the panorama of protest is a little different. Not only the peasants of Shibkalipur, but those of Panchagram also revolted unitedly. In the meeting, both the Hindus and the Muslims decide that no community will go for a compromise with the zamindar separately or move the law-court. As for the hike in revenue, the zamindar’s view is that they have their right over parts of the agricultural produce as representatives of the government. Hence, the revenue rate will rise in keeping with the increase in the prices of crops. One of the reasons mentioned in the 8-law of 1885 A.D. for the hike in revenue was the following:

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Tarashankar also has referred to in the novel:

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But the peasants do not understand the intricacies of this law. The hike in the revenue would definitely bring disaster to their lives. In this connection, it is noteworthy that rise
in revenue is one of the chief issues of peasant life. The medieval Bengali literature also contain evidence of this. In Mukunda Chakrabarty’s Chandimangal, we have noticed that in comparison to heavy downpour drought or damage or destruction of crops, the revenue-hike was a matter of more serious concern to the farmers.\textsuperscript{40} That is why the ordinary farmers defied the law. Again the class of the so-called (middle-class) gentry kept aloof from the strikes. They sought a compromise. In Panchagram, we find that, in the midst of the increasing tension between the zamindar and the farmers, the latter, though in a topsy-turvyed condition, could not grasp the complex theory of democratic rights forwarded by the communist Bishwanath, the grandson of Nyayaratna. They trusted Debu who was thus bound to shoulder the whole responsibility of the peasants’ revolt. Tarashankar writes:

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Both the Hindu and Muslim tenants made up their mind and joined the strike. But the powerful organization of the Hindu-Muslim farmers too fell a victim to the shrewd political conspiracy hatched by the zamindar. In the ripe farming season, when the granaries of the farmers run short of the grains gathered in the month of Poush, the festival of Id-ul-fitre is celebrated in the Muslim society. The zamindars endeavoured to demoralize the Muslim farmers by making their religious faith an weapon and using it as a tool. The farmers, being deprived of Dadan (earnest money) for cultivation of paddy, turned workers of the factories situated at Siuri in order to earn their daily bread. The hungry villagers could not ignore the beckons of the upcoming businessmen as it offered them a source of earning in those hard times. Raham Seikh sold away his favourite Palm tree in order to save himself from starvation. He could not even understand that the tree actually belonged to the zamindar. When the zamindar’s peon served the summon-order to Raham on account of his crime of selling out the tree, he takes to beat him. The result was that Raham, already weak by the holy fast he was undergoing, was arrested by zamindar’s club-men. The farmers of Kusumpur and Mahagram have more
self-respect than those of Shibkalipur. Thus when Raham was asked to sit down on the floor in zamindar’s cutchery (court) he refused to obey. It is because of this awareness that about 50-60 excited farmers including Irshad Shah, the teacher at the Maktab (Muslim Primary School), goes to zamindar’s palace in a body. Tinkari Modal has already been deceived by the zamindar of Dekhuria in trying to erect the Shiva-temple. Hence, he too, out of vengeance, whole-heartedly joined the protest and appeared with Debu at zamindar’s court. Facing a united protest the zamindar is compelled to let Raham Seikh go scot free. In this connection a critic has remarked: 42 The zamindars being temporarily defeated try to crush the movement by hook or by crook; they are now out to destroy the communal harmony existing between the Hindus and the Muslims. This leads to communal crashes between the two communities. The farmers fail to put their trust on Debu’s activities. In this context the remark of Shreekumar Bandyopadhyay is worthy of note. He remarks:

43 The tenants find themselves in an utterly difficult situation as a result of the evil nexus formed among the Kankana’s Babu’s, Chhiru Paul and the rich leather merchant Daulat Seth. In this way the Zamindar entangles the ignorant, illiterate, poor farmers in communal riots. The land-holder classes and gomasthas (Revenue collector) take undue advantage of the situation by making huge profits. The movement that was launched against the enhancement of revenue was on the decline.

In the later parts of the novel there is the devastating flood, the outbreak of Malaria, the deaths of cows on large scale etc. These calamities devastate the lives of Panchagram farmers. In the novel there is the description of the formation of a committee for raising funds even with the help of the media. But the traditional rustics cannot
accept the man who was behind the formation of this rescue committee. Bishwanath is a Communist who firmly believes in his ideology and keeps away from religious practices. But his non-belief in religion is a mystery to the villager. As a result many villagers were even unwilling to accept any relief from the rescue committee. Bishwanath goes back to Kolkata because of his failure. Analyzing the causes of Bishwanath’s failure a critic has remarked:

The flood is a great curse in the life of the helpless farmers. The crops of the Panchagram farmers is almost completely destroyed by flood. The little crop that was saved was not in order either and in consuming condition. The novels throws light on the plight of the farmer. Tarashankar has written:

Shreehari is the only man who stands by the farmer in their distress. He is well aware that the villagers of a few villages regularly knocks his door for paddy-seeds etc. Chhiru is willing to provide them with paddy as loan. He expects that every one will sing his name and will be loyal to him forever if he gives them paddy, but this hope of Shreehari remains unfulfilled. The farmers are provided with paddy-seed on behalf of the rescue committee. Though the activity of sowing seed ends by the month of Ashwin, the farmers have to be busy with sowing activity even during Ashwin for fear of flood. But all the enterprise of the farmer ceases as a result of the outbreak of Malaria and large scale deaths of cows. On the other hand as Bishwanath leaves the scene, Debu takes
the charge of the committee. In course of time, the situation slowly becomes normal and so the need of the committee is no more. The farmers again get involved with their work in the paddy-fields in full-swing. In the mean time, the farmers reap the Aush paddy. They know that in the month of Agrahayan, they will harvest the Novina paddy and afterwards they will be blessed with Aman. In Debu’s view:  

and thus flows the life of the society of farmers.

The novel *Panchagram* depicts an extreme picture of the breakdown of the decayed social set-up which is also the subject-matter of *Ganadevata*. In both the novels we find the breakdown of the traditional values of rural life. Shibshekhar Nyayaratna was not acquainted with the time, the message of the advent of which brought by Bishwanath. At last he gets disillusioned and leaves the village. The customs, rituals and religious faith prevailing in the society everything was on its last legs. An acute poverty makes Dwaraka Choudhury sell the image of his clan-deity Lakshmi-Janardan to Shreehari. Tinkari Modal of Dekhuria enlists in the gang of robbers in the face of utter poverty. These unexpected incidents uphold the picture of the decaying heritage and culture of the village. The society of people living in a country without food, guardianless and afflicted with diseases, gets addicted to intoxicants. The farmers already suffering terribly for want of money and also under the wheels of oppression, become speechless when enhanced taxes and revenues were imposed upon them. After his release from jail Aniruddha goes to Kolkata and works there and earns a lot. When being an affluent person, he returns to his village home, the villagers, already in search of a normal life and livelihood, become eager to throng the city. As Aniruddha agrees to take Patu cobbler to the city, every one expresses their willingness to do the same and says:  

In the beginning of the novel *Ganadevata*, we have found Debu antagonising Aniruddha’s plan to move to the city the same Debu realizes at last:

...
As a matter of fact it was exactly the real picture of the rural society of the time. In this connection, referring to the view expressed by the magazine Somprakash, a critic has written:

Under such circumstances the imprisonment of Tinkadi Modal on the charge of dacoity and his widowed daughter Swarna’s been educated in the junction school crossing all barriers of orthodoxy are also indicative of a social transformation that was taking place. At this time Debu seeks to have peace of mind through pilgrimage. The indication of the peasant-tenant’s unrest against the combined exploitation carried on by mahajans, land-holders and zamindars of Panchagram, as given by Tarashankar in the novel is no more to be found under opposite circumstances. When Debu returns to his village after his pilgrimage he is astonished at the liveliness and enterprising attitude of the villagers. In every village there is a rampant use of Charka; the cobbler and Bauri have given up their habit of drinking. The waves of the Civil Disobedience Movement have hit the village, as a result of which the whole village life seems to have changed suddenly. Along with other tenants Debu also joined the movement and in the long run is jailed. But this stirr and excitement does not last long. As he comes back from jail he stands face to face with a dreadful situation. Shreehari alias Chhiru Paul has become all in all in the Chandimandap. Now he has a Tilak on his forehead, so he is now disguised as a pious man. Debu observes how, from behind his pious disguise, Shreehari wounds Pachagram by his strokes. No acquainted farmer is seen to work in the Panchagram
The Santhal farmer hailing from Dumka are now the farmers of Pachagram. Everybody’s land is under Chhiru’s occupation. But Debu does not lose his faith in the inner spiritual strength of man. He firmly believes that once again God will be awakened and that there will be a new lease of life in every farmer household of Panchagram. It may be mention here that as an active Congress worker the craving for political freedom that Tarashankar saw in the national life of the land was the source in which he found the long endeavours of man for liberation of life. By liberation of life he meant freedom from fear, freedom from littleness or smallness, freedom from poverty and all other atrocities. Debu also witnesses the same endeavours for liberation of life in the tenants. Towards the very end of the novel *Panchagram*, Tarashankar informs us about the passing of the Bengal Tenancy Act. A farmers committee has been formed at Kusumpur and efforts are on to form a farmers committee at Shibkalipur too in the hope of liberation. Debu starts cherishing the dream of setting-up of a school once again. The novel comes to its close with Debu’s imagination of building and shaping a new India — the India of his dream.

IV

As in the novels, *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram* the different aspects of the National Movement have been focussed, in the same way, Tarashankar 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 how the land-holders and mahajans captured the centres of power using even the crookest of means and how the farmers combatted them and also showed the mass-uprise of the farmer-class. In the two novels, the picture of an all-pervasive decay has been portrayed. The farmers of Shibkalipur once asked Debu ‘

Debu realized that the society was non-existent. The society is breaking down owing to economic reasons. The Praja Samity has been formed in the midst of the ruins of the Chandimandap. The tenant-farmer were repeatedly obstructed but
again they stood in opposition. Even natural calamities and epidemics could not break their morale, but they became penniless as a result of feudal and colonial oppression. The strike in which the Panchagram farmers enthusiastically joined, came to a sudden end.

Addiction and criminal tendency are the two great causes of the breakdown of rural-society. In Ganadevata, we have seen Aniruddha's addiction to wine. In Panchagram this addiction has assumed a greater dimension. On one side, the people irrespective of their gender-distinction are drinking wine and making a noise, on the other side, in the village, was seen. In the novel Panchagram, Tarashankar has also introduced a new zamindar-class. This class do not live in the village. Most of them lives in Kolkata. They do not save paddy; rather they sell them out. They are concerned with nothing but money. They do not even agree to give the peasant paddy-loan. We have seen in the novel that when Tinkadi and Raham seeks paddy-loan, the zamindar living in Kolkata replies: On the other hand the tenants used to get loan from the older zamindar through the custom of Dery. There is another set of zamindars in the novel who engaged the hungry and starved farmers to work without giving them any wages. Noteworthy that, these never-paid peasants work without pay and this is recorded in the Settlement book as revenue. Tarashankar has written:

It is in this way Tarashankar has classified the zamindar-class.

After discussing the two novels, we find on one hand, Tarashankar has referred to the active life of the peasants and on the other hand, he has also pointed to the factory-whistles in the junction town across the Mayurakshi river. As in the peasant life, agricultural work, harvesting work and different rituals and festivities are true, in the same way the urge to go to the factories as a result of economic change is also natural and true. In the two novels, we find feudalism on its last legs. At the same time the ever-increasing onrush of capitalism is also focussed. Tarashankar has never exhibited the
total extinction of feudalism. Thus, at the end of the novel *Panchagram* he has made the tenants submit to Chhiru. But that feudalism is on the decline is well-understood by him. The novel we find that Chhiru and Daulat Seth who have sided with injustice are gradually ascending the ladder of progress and the zamindars of Kankana have also accumulated riches from their leather-business. Neither the picture of ruin of the police officials, i.e Zamadar nor that of the zamindar of Dekhuria have been depicted in the two novels. But when the penniless farmers seek to join the factories as workers, Chhiru remarks: then no one carried out Chhiru's orders. Because as a result of Settlement every one has become conscious of their land-rights. In this way, the writer has focussed the decaying tendencies in the feudalistic-structure of society. The ideological conflict between the decaying feudalism and newly arriving capitalism on one hand, and on the other hand that between Gandhism and Communism made the artistic mind of Tarashankar divided. These conflicts and scruples are evident in Debu's character. We have to keep in mind that, Tarashankar has thrown this very Debu as the protagonist of the two novels in question. Debu used to be antagonistic to the zamindars because of certain bitter experiences since of his boyhood. Witnessing the atrocities of the zamindars perpetrated on the tenants Debu drew restless. But this very Debu sometimes thinks that the zamindars are not altogether bad. This explains why he could not put up a strong resistance to the oppressive zamindars. Even after witnessing the oppression unleashed by Chhiru on the farmer, he often remained silent and inactive instead of being combative. As a matter of fact he did not want the zamindars to be uprooted but he wanted to effect a transformation in the characters of zamindars in favour of the farmers through peaceful-means. He had no faith in revolutionary-idealism. He rejected the book containing Marxian philosophy as untouchables. Noteworthy that Tarashankar himself informed us that he did not go through the works of Marx; he merely read a few articles on Marxism. Debu's values of life are as heritage-friendly as his creator Tarashankar. Though Debu came of a peasant family, he was of the mentality and social status of the middle class. It is because of this mentality
that the peasant-movement which he himself led appears to him as

When the Settlement Kanungo dishonours him by addressing him by way of, his middle class sense of honour is hurt. In the opinion of a critic Debu is thus who at the end of the novel Panchagram is nothing but Debu Pundit though his prison life changed his sense of values a little. He never become one of the lower class people.

In the novel Panchagram therefore the personal life of Debu Pundit is dominant. From community awareness the novel moves to individual awareness and this remains the last impression of the novel. The life-story of the agri-based communal man has gradually become narrowed down. But it is undeniable that Panchagram has shed light on a total and faithful picture of the rural rustic life of Bengal in the first half of the 20th century.
References and Notes:

1. 1st Pub. 1942
2. 1st Pub. 1944
3. The Kallol is a monthly literary magazine. The magazine Kallol first appeared in 1330 B.S. as a result of the endeavours of literary figures like Dinesh Ranjan Das, Gokul Chandra Nag, Premendra Mitra etc. It is generally thought that the waves of modernism hit the shores of Bengali literature through this magazine. The life-span of Kallol is almost 36 years (from 1330 B.S. to 1366 B.S.)
4. Jayanta Kumar Ghoshal: Bangla Upayuse Samaj Bastabata, p.213
5. Tapodhir Bhattacharya: Upanyaser Pratibedan, p.61
6. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay: Amar Sahityajiban, p.61
8. Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay: Kaler Pratima, p.17
9. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay: Ganadevata, p.26
10. In the year 1793, Lord Cornowallis enacted this law relating to land-system.
12. Ibid, p.19
13. The Magazin Tatwabodhini wrote:

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Quoted by Binay Ghosh in Banglar Samajik Itihaser Dhara, p.53
14. Dr. Subodh Dev Sen: Bangla Sahitye Bratya Samaj, p.214
16. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay: Ganadevata, p.241
17. Ibid, p.26
18. This is a social contract. A good tradition in the rural society involving division of labour. In this connection, Shantanu Raychoudhury has remarked that earlier for
the sake of the village society the blacksmiths and the carpenters were allowed to settle in the village and they were provided with cultivable land and instead of that they used to do all works associated with iron works and wood works. In exchange of this labour they also received a share from other farmers annual produce.

Shantanu Raychoudhury : *Ganadevata O Panchagram : Akhyan Bishleshan*, Composed in the *Arun*, p.54

19. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay : *Ganadevata*, p.3


22. Ibid, p.8-9

23. Jayanta Kumar Ghoshal : *Bangla Upanyase Samaj Bastabata*, p.244

24. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay : *Ganadevata*, p.79

25. Ibid, p.13

26. Ibid, p.85-86

27. Ibid, p.16-17

28. Ibid, p.128

29. Debesh Ray : *Tarashankar : Nirantar Desh*, p.41


31. Saroj Bandyopadhyay : *Bangla Upanyaser Kalantar*, p.302

32. Chittaranjan Das : *Pashchimbanger Bhumi Sanskar O Krishi Arthaniti*, p.48


34. Chittaranjan Das : *Pashchimbanger Bhumi Sanskar O Krishi Arthaniti*, p.48

35. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay : *Ganadevata*, p.263

36. Ibid, p.371

37. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay : *Amar Sahityajiban*, p.273


39. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay : *Panchagram*, p.6

40. Mukunda Chakrabarty wrote in *Chandimangal* :
The conference of dacoits at night with torches all around is called *Jamat Basti*. Tinkadi Modal joined a band of dacoits owing to poverty. Sometimes the farmers in order to take revenge against the rich land-holders plundered the granaries and took away paddy-crops.

Narahari Kabiraj has mentioned that at Bankuya of Nadiya, Birbhum and in Jessore (1905-09) in village after village there emerged robber-gangs comprising men, women and even minors. He further added that in the proceedings of the judiciary (1801-09) of the Bengal Government, there are full-length descriptions of mass-dacoity in the districts.

Quoted in Kaji Farhana Akhtar Lisa and Sadat Ullah Khan (Tr.): *Banglar Krishak (The peasantry of Bangal by Ramesh Chandra Dutta)*, Introduction, p. 6

53. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay: *Panchagram*, p.67
54. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay: *Panchagram*, p.31
55. Ibid, p.239
56. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay: *Amar Sahityajiban*, p.71
57. Ibid, p.231