Chapter-IV

Influence of Rivers on the Story and Characters of the Bengali and the Assamese River-Centric Novels

Generally it is seen that subject matters using which novels are being written become the plots of those novels. If the plot is based on a specific theme such as partition of India, rivers etc, naturally it would leave a deep impression on the plot or characters. In the river-centric novels under our consideration, we can feel the strong and unavoidable presence of rivers in their plots and characters. In ‘Padmānadīr Mājhī’, written during the initial stages of growth of the Bengali river-centric novels, by Manik Bandyopadhyay, it is quite obvious that the river Padma is physically present with its great influence in the making of the plot and character. We find that the sight of the tameless Padma has an impact on the lives of boatmen (Mājhī). But at the same time the river like a benevolent mother bestows all comforts and happiness on her children. As for characters specially in the characters of Kuber, Kapila and Hossain Miya, we intensely observe the characteristic features of the river Padma. Particularly in the words of the novelist, Kapila is as mysterious as the river Padma.

The subject matter under our discussion:

The novel ‘Hānsulibānker Upakhāthā’ has for its setting the society of ‘Kāhār’s living on the bank of the river Kopai. Rabindranath too wrote a poem about the river Kopai 15 years before the publication of ‘Hansulibanker Upakhatha’. The river Kopai flows from the north to the south-eastern Bengal via Jharkhand. Crossing Khandagram, Jehanabad, Shantiniketan, this river got merged with the river Bakreswar near Mahishadal. The river Kopai has a turn near the ‘Kāhār’ village mentioned in the novel. The turn looks like ‘Hansuli’, an ornament worn by Kāhār women around the neck.

This explains why this turn is called ‘Hānsuli turn’. The novelist Tarashankar basically wanted to speak about communal life of a particular tribal society of the region called Rādh. Critic Srikumar Bandyopadhyay says,-
Hence there is little scope here to lay much importance on the river. But several times the writer has hinted at the intimate relationship existing between the river and the life of the ‘Kahars’—

"In a greater sense, on the plot and characters of a river-centric novel, the river has definitely a sway (an impact). This is obvious in ‘Hinsulibinker Upakatha’ also. The novelist himself has spoken about the on uniform natures of the Kopai and a ‘Kahar’ girl.

In this connection, the writer has said that the river in summer appears flowing fubly like a weak, little girl with little signs of life on her face after she had lost her mother; in monsoon, the same river turns a ‘Dakini’- out and out the fierce form of a real ‘Dakini’. However, this form of the river is not to be found always—"
Achintya Biswas, a critic, has told in his book ‘Samartha Pancham’ that river is not the driving force of this novel—but the river-washed ‘Kahar’ lands. But the river plays a multi-dimensional role in this novel. He has further shown that the simile of the river Kopai and the ‘Kahar’ girl is not merely confined to a simile.

‘বাৰৰৰ ফিৰে এসেছে ভাবপঞ্জকদানী। কামালীর বিষয়ে উত্তেজনা চলছে— জেনেছ বাজনাদারদের বোল কাঠা। কনওয়ারিতে ইচ্ছা আমোদিত। এমন সময় দেখা গেল কালোশষেক্ষ। ’গোলোগা চোখে’ মনে হল কনওয়ারিতে— ‘কালো বউরের চোখ রেন কোপাই নদীর দয়া।’ সেখানে সর্বকালই কিছু খোলা করে— ‘উপরে তার বিলিক দেখা যায়, কিন্তু তার মনের রহস্য রোখা যায় না সম্পূর্ণ।’ (২য় পৃষ্ঠা, দ্বিতীয় পরিচ্ছেদ)

গোপালীবালা মায়া বাবার পর নসুনালা শোক প্রকাশ করেছে। কোপাই নদীর কথা এইসময়ও ভোলে নি নসু গোপালীকারীর হাতে ছিল কোপাইয়ের ঠাবা পরশ, বুলিয়ে দিলে আঙ তুলিয়ে মেত।’ (৫ম পৃষ্ঠা, চত্তুর্থ পরিচ্ছেদ)

কালোশষী আর গোপালীবালা কোপাইয়ের দুটি বৈশিষ্ট্য স্পর্শ করে। প্রথম, রহস্য— কোপাইয়ের দয়া নিতা রহস্যময়, চিরহস্য আবৃত। দ্বিতীয়, মনোরম তৃপ্তি— কোপাইয়ের জল ছিল পুণ্যতৰী। কালো নদীর তেমনি ভাবে। তৃতীয় উপাদানটি অপশন সুন্দরতেই উদ্দেশ্য— কোপাই কাহার কনেদের মতো খেয়ালি। তার সম্পর্কে পূর্বসূচনা করা অত্যন্ত। পাথরি ব্যবহার এই শোককে (উপন্যাসে প্রথমেই উপস্থাপিত) বিষয়টি লক্ষ্য করি। পাথরি আরম্ভকের পর নসুনালার কথা— পাথরির চোখ জলছে/জলছে কিছু কি। কাহার মেঝে ক্ষেপে উঠেছিল যে। এ বে তখন দুঃখ ভাবে কোপাইয়ের মত ভাবেছি।’ (পঞ্চম পৃষ্ঠা)

Kaloshashi and Gopaliibala share two characteristics of Kopai—First mystery; the eddy of Kopai is ever-mysterious, covered with a never-ending mystery. Secondly, fascinating satisfaction—the waters of Kopai is transparent and holy, so thinks the ‘Kahars’. The third element is however mentioned in the very beginning—Kopai is eccentric as the kahar girl. It is impossible to anticipate any thing about her.

The river Kopai plays a notable role in the life-story of the community described in this novel. The ‘Kahar’ way of life underwent a change as a result of the
devastating flood caused by the river. The ownership of the ‘Kāhārs’ also changed hand. The indigo planters of ‘Neelkuthi’ who brought the kahars were all eliminated by flood of the wrathful Kopai-- The Chowdhuries became their new owners. By way of the description of flood at Hansuli bank begins the novel-- The novel in which the ‘Kāhārs’ faced a changeover in respect of their occupation. Having left their occupation of bearing palanquins on their shoulders, the ‘Kāhārs’ turned into farmers.

“কোপাইরের সে ‘মন্ত্রনার’ বাবে ডুবে দেশ ‘শোষণ’ হয়ে গেল। কুঁটি গেল। সাহেব মসাহিরা গেলেন।”

Therefore in the life of the ‘Kāhārs’, the great impact of the flood caused by Kopai is beyond any dispute. We see that when their houses or huts are damaged by flood, they build new ones to their choice. This too, they think, is a boon of Kopai.

“মা কোপাইরের দয়াতে এ একরকম ভালোই হয়েছে।”

The ‘Kāhārs’ take this onslaught of the river against life to be a very natural and inborn phenomenon. The relation between the river and man here is undoubtedly very intimate. To them, even the flood caused by a devastating river is nothing but God’s signal. Before things come to naught, god gives hints in the form of flood. Such is the view of Banawari.

In the folk beliefs anchored in his mind, the idea of Hansuli bank’s ruin is implanted as a seed—

“কণা বলেছেন, কালকড়ের মেহা, হরির বিধান, বাৎ না এলে শেষ হবে না হংসুলীবাঁকের উপকথা।” (শেষ পর্ব)

Therefore, we have no difficulty to conjecture that, in the tale of Hansuli bank, Kopai has played an important part in the construction of plot.

As for characters under the influence of the river, first we may recall the women of the ‘Kāhār’ village. Several times the novelist has referred to the oneness of the river Kopai and the ‘Kāhār’ girls. This becomes evident in the analysis of character also. Once Pakhi fell in love with Karali and eloped with him living behind
her own household. But when that same Karali fell a victim to enticement and started an illicit affair with Subasi, she tried to kill him. Having failed in her plans, she turned mad; she then came to her mother Basan and committed suicide. In her amorous days of love-making, she was reinless and never intended to submit to any restraint. She flowed freely and heartily. The 'kāhārs' do not know how to conceal one's feelings of love as it is contrary to their nature. In love, they are like 'Kopai' itself overflowing its banks in times of flood.

As regards Kaloshashi, wife of Param Kāhār, the relevance of the river Kopai may be referred to. Kaloshashi is in love with Banawari. The bank of Kopai is the location of their love—the place where they meet and make unhindered love to one another. Param suspects Banawari regarding his involvement in the matter and all on a sudden, assaults him. After a great many tussles, Banawari defeats Param and sends signals to Kaloshashi by pelting stones into her courtyard. Kaloshashi reaches the riverbank after decoding the signal and gives blood-stained Banawari a wash with the cool river-water. By this time Param reaches the spot. Catching sight of Param, Kaloshashi begs to flee away, calling Banawary by his name. Without giving any response to her call Banawari hides himself dipping under river-water. Kaloshasi dies by snake-bite. Kaloshashi seems as mysterious as the river Kopai, as she comes to Banawari's life time and again. She does not release and relieve him until he breathes his last on the bank of Kopai.

Banawari too loves the Kopai as a mother. To the society of 'Kāhārs', the Kopai is sacred as the Ganges. Thus the self-styled leader takes shelter in the lap of Kopai in his last hours we find that Karali also takes up the 'Gāiti'(spade) and gets involved in the construction of the 'turn' concerned. He is found to make efforts to merge the river of the story with history. Therefore, it is not that the Kopai has dispersely an influence over a character or two alone. But on a personal and collective level the whole 'Kāhār' life and society was under its impact.

In the novel 'Ichāmati', we can trace a wonderful unity of his love of nature, an intense affinity towards human life and his deep spirituality. His diary contains several records of his desire to write a novel about the beautiful panorama on either side of the river Ichamati and the current of human life. The novel ' Ichāmati' has for its setting parts of North 24 parganas, Nadia and Jessore—the territories through which
the river flows. The writer has made an effort to capture a particular time and used the river as witness. This dates from Indigo plantation and Indigo Revolt. In the pages of history, we can hear of the Indigo Revolt. The story of human woes and happiness as an aftermath of the Revolt remained out of history. This became incarnate in the novel 'Ichāmati'. He has recorded this history of the lives of ordinary men and women. Among many other things, this history is replete with Bhabani Banerjee’s domestic life and spirituality (feelings towards God), the reckless attitude of Nistarini, the oppression of the Englishmen, the fearless simplicity of the dauntless dacoits, the rise of Nalu Paul and the like.

In the novel 'Ichāmati', the story of the Indigo Revolt has been referred to. The Indigo planters came to this land and snatched away the agricultural lands of the commoners. They made attempts to build up an infrastructure of trade and commerce based on Indigo cultivation. The river ‘Ichamati’ was the silent witness to this historical event.

A major portion of lands on either side of the river was snatched away by the planters for the cultivation of Indigo. The Senior planter Mr. Shipton of the Mollahatti ‘Neelkuthi’ (the place or mansion housing the planters), the junior planter Mr. Devid, Dewān Rajaram, Prasanna Chakraborty the Āmin, are the characters representing the oppressive rulers. The river Ichhamati is the silent out looker of all these. Besides this, she is a witness also to the Indigo Revolt that followed as an aftereffect of such oppression.

Mr. Shipton and Mr. David were not the only ones—the river Ichamati was also a witness to the India-visit of Mr. Colesworthy Grant, an artist and liberal minded Englishman. He arrived in the Bengal of the Ichamati shores in search of that India which is hidden between Shakuntalā and Edwin Arnold. He was besides himself with joy looking at the free, spacious and shadowy sights on the bosom of the Ichamati in which he discovered his ‘India’. He is not an oppressive Indigo planter-rather in him we do find the mind and soul of an artist. He has chosen the quiet & solitary shores of Ichamati as the place for his art worship.

Though the Indigo Revolt is a historic event, the flow of life on both sides of the Ichamati has not found any place in the history of the land. The Ichamati flows in
silence embodying stories of human existence—reminiscence, woes, happiness, affection, love, hopes and despairs are all a part of it. The words of the writer also echo this:

“The work, Chhoru'sir Kūrākṣaṇa, when the Kūrākṣaṇa flows, the narrator, the story of human existence—reminiscence, woes, happiness, affection, love, hopes and despairs are all a part of it. The writer also

A critic also says—

“ইছামতী তীরের অজন্তা মানুষের দৈনন্দিন জীবনের সাক্ষী এই নদী। এর জলে মিশে রয়েছে সমাজের অভাগিনী কুলিন কুমারীদের চোখের জল।”

The author explains—

“কতোন্নয় আগের সেই অভাগিনী কুলিন কুমারীর স্তূপ বহন করে ইছামতী তীরে সামনে দিয়ে বয়ে চলেছে, তাঁরা মা মেটা সাফী সাধকের পুণ্য চোখের জলে এর জল মিশে গিয়েছে।”

The impact of the river is seen not only in the story, but on the characters as well. Bhabani who wandered about the streets after he had renounced the world in search of god, will mately found God in the quiet, flowing waters of the Ichamati. Having married three ‘Kulin’ girls (women) as he entered the worldly life, he felt that God is not a remote entity in complete isolation with the world. His holy presence may be felt in the flow of water of the river Ichamati, in the incomparably beautiful scenes and sights on either side of the river and in the very centre (or core) of the mysteries of human life.
He can perceive the presence of God throughout nature: in the firmament, in air, in the splendid greeneries on both banks of the river, and in its deep solitude. This explains why he has chosen the shores of the Ichamati for his spiritual searching.

A critic has remarked—

"ইহসামতীর রহস্য জলাধার তাঁর মনের ওপরকার করত ময়লা ধূমে মুছে দিয়েছে। সংসারের রহস্য যারা প্রত্যক্ষ করতে ইচ্ছে করে, তারা চোখ খুলে ফেন বেড়ায় সবসময়। সংসার বর্জন করে নয়, সংসারে থেকেই সেই দৃষ্টি লাভ করতে পারে যেই ইহসামতী যেন তাকে দান করে। কলাছা অমৃত্যুরাধিকনী ইহসামতী।‖ ¹²

While travelling in Ichamati by boat with his little son, the surrounding beauty of nature charmed him that he kept gazing on God’s creation in utter amazement. Everything seemed merely a part of His vast, benevolent presence—

"ভগবানের আসল তত্ত্ব শুধু বর্ষা সীমাবদ্ধ নয়, বর্ষা ও লীলাবিলাস দুটো মিলিয়ে ভগবত্তুষ। কোনোটা ছেড়ে কোনোটা দুই নয়। এই শিশু, এই নদীটির সেই তত্ত্বেরই অনন্তত্ত্ব জিনিস। সে থেকে পৃথক নয়— সেই মহা একের অংশ মাত্র।‖ ¹⁴

Coming to the character of Nistarini, we find that she is not happy, in her conjugal life. She does not either have an unquestioning allegiance to her married life. In the month of Bhādṛśra, she can let herself to be carried away in the torrents of the river quite alone. In enjoying her reckless freedom she has neither any fear of death. Nistarini lets herself to be carried away in the torrential river. This seems to be an effort on her part to break all restrictions as she ventures out on her uncertain journey of life. This attitude enables her to meet her lover in secret and to ask Tilu for Bhabani’s whereabouts in the presence of many other married women. Bhabani
discovers in her the blazing character of a strong woman. It seems as if the Ichamati herself has forsaken her tranquility and calm and were present in her rebellious form in the character of Nistarini.

The novel ‘Ganga’ (1957) does not speak of any particular society or community. Here we find the picture of a special fishing season of the community of fishermen. These fishermen are not the inhabitants of any particular area on the shores of the Ganges. Fishermen from different areas of west Bengal—Tentulia, Sarapul, Dhaltita, Fatulopur, Faridkathi, Birpur, Taki, Shankhchura, Itinde, Dandirhat, Atude—come and gather on the bosom of the river. They do not catch fish at the same place. Some sail towards Kolkata while some others to Barahanagar or Barackpore. Some others again move towards Tribeni crossing the town called Halisahar. Wherever they may be it is the river Gangas which provides them with food & clothing. They catch fish in the Ganges. They have to struggle with the adversities that confront them while on the river; side by side with it, death-consciousness of some form engulfs them secretly.

The readers can easily feel the deep impact of the river Ganges on the plot and characters of the novel. The most important thing is that here it is the river Ganges which controls the fates of the fishermen— their woes and happiness. As long as the fishermen get fish in the river they donot have to bother much about their livelihood. But the fishermen have to move towards the sea in the dry season when the river is short of fish. They have spent the entire dry season in the sea. They are forced to move to the sea leaving the river behind as they are in debt. They are well-aware of the dangers of the sea but there is no other alternative.

Those who come to fish in the Ganges have to pay a particular tax. In the novel, we find that on their way to the sea, the boats are measured at khalgate near Kestapur. The government determines how much money the fishermen will have to pay. The life of a fisherman depends on the temperament of the water and the desires of the fish. The fishermen who come to the Ganges for fishing are not of the equal rank or position or status. For instance, Panchu and others are fishermen having smaller boats. They are always in wants. Again Rasik Malo & others of the western bank are attached to the town and a little well of. Having lost their original homes in
East Pakistan the refuges of the fishermen society took to fishing in the Ganges. The landless Rajbanshies are also found to catch fish in the same river. The sole purpose behind this is to earn a living. Mother Ganges goes on supplying their means out of sheer filial affection. But when the river is no longer benevolent to them, they become upset and are found to get entangled in riots.

The rainy season is the time for fishing in the Ganges. The fishermen go for fishing in the river in the Bengali months of Ashād, Shrāvan, Bhādra and Āshwin. Afterwards in the months of Agrahāyan, Paush, Māgh and Falgun, they go to the sea under the guidance of the sāidar. In the month of Chaitra, ‘Totā’ or famine of fish look deep in (Totā) their eyes.

The fishermen feel happy and prosperous as long as the Ganga provides them with fish. But at the time when fish is unavailable in the river they fall a victim to unbearable adversities of life. The ‘Totā’ of Chaitra or the ‘Totā’ of Shrāvan have already been discussed in the other chapter.

The relation between the river and the fishermen is of a strange nature. During the days of ‘Ambubachi’, these people refrain from catching fish. They donot throw their fishing nets into the river. The reason behind this is their belief that the mother earth becomes menstruates during the three days of ‘Ambubachi’. In the same way, they firmly believe the existence of fish-deities. In the novel, we find the ‘Mālos’ worshipping ‘Khokā Thakur’ the deity of the fish in an effort of please him. On the shore of the river, they make earthen images of the deity and offer him bananas, sugar-candies and ‘Ātāp’rice as ‘Naibedyā’ (or food). Again when they fail to catch fish (in the unproductive season) they form a kind of earthen altar and spend days and nights on the same spot until their prayers are heard. Again they are seen to worship the mother Ganges collectively in a bid to please her. The rural plays called Yātrā pāḷa are arranged to mark the occasion and the ‘Māloś’ also arrange for their community game called ‘Bāchhād’.

As regards characters, we find Himi and Bilash, the two main characters, bearing a tremendous influence of the river. Besides this, Panchu the narrator of the novel or Nibaran Snāidar etc. are characteres on whose lives the river
has a deep influence. Professor Saroj Bandyopadhyay in his book ‘বাঙ্গালী উপন্যাসের কালান্তর’ has remarked—

“একটা কথা 'গঙ্গা' লিখতে লিখতেই সম্মুখে বুঝতে পারলেন যে, বিলাস সমুদ্রের যেতে না পারলেন, অন্ধ সমুদ্রের আস্থান অরহত তার বুকে বাজতে থাকলে বইখানি জীবনের গভীরতর তাৎপর্যে আলোকিত হত ... ...”

We notice that like his father, Bilash too exhibits his fascination for the sea. His fascination for the sea resembles the same fascination of the river for merger with the sea. Critic Udaychand Das tells—

“আপার্ন থেকে পূর্বতার দিকে যাত্রা। বাধাহীন লীলার ক্ষেত্রটিকে ধরতে ছুঁতে কেবলই পাড়ি দিয়ে ফেরা।”

In the long run, like the river, he also starts for unknown shore less (or limitless) seas. This craving for the sea is prominently pronounced in the songs Bilash sings. It was due to his apathetic mind that he could not seek fulfillment in any woman. This disease he bore within him as he travelled over the Ganges—

“আমার প্রাণে নাই সুখ হে
বড় উথলি পাথালি আমার বুক।” (‘Gangā’ by Samaresh Basu,P-220)

The songs gives expression to the pangs of unfulfilment mentally he is inclined to move towards the far south. The narrator also has hinted at the ‘Door to the south’.

As for the character of Himi the writer has recorded—

“শরীরখানি অকূল হয়নি, কুলের মুখে এসে থমকে আছে। বরষা এলে তায়ের অকূল পাথার।”

(‘Gangā’ by Samaresh Basu,P-252)
From this description; it is quite apparent that here he has tried to show the identical natures of river and woman. The woman’s self that Himi possesses is one with the river and this explains why she has cherished a desire for the monsoon rains. The presence of primitiveness of some sort can be perceived both in rivers and women. In the dry loveless life of Himi, the love of Bilash comes as monsoon showers. So, Himi does not appear to be alienated from the mainstream of the story; as a character, we may observe she complements what wants in Bilash’s life:

"হিমির স্বভাবে বা নদীর স্বভাবে উপস্থিতিই কিন্তু বিলাসের চরিত্রে পদ্ধ হবার হাত থেকে উদ্ধার করেছে— দুর্বল হয়ে যাবার ক্রম পরিপ্রেক্ষিত কাছ থেকে নিক্ষুব্ধ দিয়েছে।"  

Himi embodies all that there is in the river. Critic Jahar Sen Majumder has shown that Himi possesses “জাহান কোমল ভালী পূু আর নরা কোমল” and these qualities of her character become explicit through her relation with Bilash. In the novel, we see that like Bilash she is also looking for a perfect match for herself and this search of hers never comes to an end. It is Bilash who has brought fulfillment to her dull and dreary life. But Himi understood that this hour of fulfillment was only a positing phase and that her mate Bilish would, one day, break free. So ultimately she was afraid to run away with him and stayed back. In the novel ‘Gangâ’ we find. Himi has been portrayed as a perfect embodiment of human reality and the reality of the river. In many respects ‘Himi’ the woman and the river Ganges have become complementary to one another.

In the novel ‘Titâs Ekti Nadir Nâm’ by Advaita Mallabarman, the river Titas has exerted a tremendous influence over character and plot. The Titas flows exactly by Brahmanbaria of Bangladesh. This river has issued from its source the Meghna, and again has get re-united with the same river. Titas is a quiet river. It is not as perilous as the Meghna and Padma. Nor is it a thin shallow rustic river. In the words of the writer-

“তার সাপের মত বক্তা নাই, কৃপণের মতো ফুটিলতা নাই। কৃপণের ভাটায় তার রূপের খানিকটা শুমিয়া নেয়, কিন্তু কাঙ্কাল করে না। গুরুপদের জোয়ারের উদ্দিপনা তাকে বোলায়, কিন্তু উদ্দিপনা করে না।”  

17. Himi’s self that himi possesses is one with the river and this explains why she has cherished a desire for the monsoon rains.

18. The Titas flows exactly by Brahmanbaria of Bangladesh. This river has issued from its source the Meghna, and again has get re-united with the same river. Titas is a quiet river. It is not as perilous as the Meghna and Padma. Nor is it a thin shallow rustic river.
Therefore it can easily be anticipated that the life styles of the people living on its banks will be a little different.

In a book titled ‘Titās Ekti Nadir Nām : Prasanga o Anusanga’ (Edited by Sushanta Das), in discussing the writings of Advaita, Mallabarman, Gunamay Manna has thrown light on ‘Titās’. In his opinion, the structure of ‘Titās Ekti Nadir Nām’ does not resemble that of a classical novel.

He has further remarked:

“নদী যেমন ছোট ছোট চৌর তুলে আবর্ত রচনা করে কিছুটা এগিয়ে তারপর বাঁক নেয়, এই উপন্যাসের গল্প ও তেমনি — এক এক বারে নতুন চরিত্র, নতুন ঘটনা; তবে মূল ধারা একই থেকে যায়।” (অধ্যাতি মল্লবর্মনের তিতাস) 19

Advaita writes —

“নদীর একটি দাশনিক রূপ আছে। নদী বহিয়া চলে; কালও বহিয়া চলে। কালের বহার শেষ নাই। নদীরও বহার শেষ নাই।” 20

This philosophical statement embodies the consequence of the plot and characters of ‘Titās’. Here there is no pause – everything is in a state of flux. The day Basanti first floated a ‘Chouāri’ marked the beginning of the story in the true sense. It is noteworthy that here it is the Titas which controls the story. Those who spend their lives on its shores come variously under its influence. Afterwards in the novel, it is seen that Basanti embraces and embosoms the lost wife and child of Kishore. The secret love that she cherished for Kishore in the core of her heart was probably behind such gesture.

Prof Achintya Biswas, while talking about ‘Titās’, remarked –

“সম্পর্কের মায়াজাল ঠিক একটি নদীর ব্রেতের মতোই। কখনো ঝুঁকে যায়, কখনো না দূরে সরে। কখনো তেসে ওঠে — কখনো কোন অঠালে যায় হাঁসে। ক্ষুত্রপক্ষে তিতাস একটি নদীর নাম উপন্যাসটির গল্পের মতোই। হয়ত বা তার চেয়ে একটি গভীর তাংনাতে মার্জিত। জীবন এখানে জলপ্রবাহের সুতে সংহত — নিরস্ত্রিত আর গতিময়।” 21
In the novel, we find Kadir and Chadir sailing to Gokarnaghat on boat full of potatoes and the boat gets upturned on the river. In that distressful time of monsoon rains, they are rescued by Banamali and Dhananjay. They are all farmers and ‘Malos’ of the Titas shores and have close ties. Again, after a long time, the day the colourful boat owned by Chadir is wrecked, Banamali come to their rescue. After effecting chadir’s rescue from between a no. of ships, they took shelter in Kadir’s place. Here Udaytara comes to meet Jamila. Long ago, during a travel by the Titas, Jamila caught sight of Udaytara and wished to make friends with her. Today, the river Titas seems to fulfil that long-chireshed wish of Jamela.

The novelist knew the importance of such meetings between two humans. That is why he has captured the picture of such a relationship with utmost care. Having cut off all ties with Basanti, Ananta happened to get introduced to Anantabala of Nabin Nagar. Just after being introduced Anantabala wishes to hug him. On the day of ‘Manasa puja’, the two were introduced to one another. Anantabala married Ananta in secret and asked him to keep mum about it. Ananta kept the secret but he never really developed a mental attachment to her. He ultimately discovered a different path to follow for himself. He had a desire to know the eternal mysterious of life through reading. In her conversation with Anantabala, Udaytara tells the flowing tale of the stream of life. A ‘char’ (island) is rising on the river bed of Titas making it shallow. Standing on the chest high water, Udaytara comments –

“জিলাপির পেঁচে-পেঁচে রসভরা, মতা কি ঠাণ্ডা লাগে জল ছাড়া। যতই দেখে মেওয়া-মিছীরি কিছু এই জলের মতন ঠাণ্ডা লাগে না।”

Here we get the hints of an eternal flow of life.

The story of ‘Titās’ is not the story of one person. Here we can hear the harmony of myriad voices. Though major part of the novel is centred round Kishore, Basanti and Ananta, Banamali, Gobinda, Ramkeshab, Subal, Ramprasad, Udaytara, Kadir, Chadir, Anantabala and others are not separated from the main plot of the novel. We observe with surprise that each and every other character of the novel also have some involvement with the flowing river. When this river starts drying up, the
polluted urban culture makes its entry into the ‘Mālo’ society. This resulted in the breaking up of the social set-up of the ‘Mālos’. The ‘Mālo’ society disintegrated into many groups and sub groups once their traditions and beliefs were centred round the river Titas. From floating ‘Chouārī’ during the ritual of ‘Māghmandal’ to the pastime of boat-race arranged to mark the occasion of the worship of the goddess ‘Manasā’, the Titas was the only river in which they took refuge. Gradually they began to get alienated from the same river. The commercialized urban culture and the unfair trade of usury may also be held responsible for this. Shubhankar Ghosh’s remark is quite relevant here. He has said –

“অর্থনীতি ও বাণিজ্যের সঙ্গেও নদীর সম্পর্ক। সমাজ দেশের সঙ্গে নদীর সম্পর্ক গতীর। সুবল কিংবা গণে মালাই নয়, সকল মালেরই জীবনের ওঠা-পড়া, অর্থনৈতিক টানাপোড়েন নদীর সঙ্গে সূক্ষ্মতা।”23

But not only in the community-life of the ‘Mālos’, The Titas exerted a tremendous influence also in their individual lives. Kishore and Subal move southward when the river turns miser and stops granting her boons. There his life is completely transformed. The loss of his new-married wife makes him insane. Subal, too in carrying out the orders of his master Kalobaran meets with his death accidentally while fishing.

As a result, Basanti’s life was changed. Ananta’s mother was another unfortunate woman added to the list. She is unfortunate because she has everything near at hand – a husband and house to keep. But all are so far away! The Titas has a hand in the transformation of these people. Again, Ananta leaves the shores of the Titas forever. Here too, the influence of the river can be perceived – as the river Titas has no irresistible spell over them.

In the Assamese novel, ‘Kapilipariār Sādhu’ (Nabakanta Barua), we find an unavoidable influence of the river over its plot and characters. The story of the novel is centred on the river ‘Kapili’. In the very beginning, the novelist makes mention of the river. Again and again, the novel stresses that Kapili is a living river. Introducing the river, the novelist writes –

“এইখনই কপিলী, নগাঁওর চুকলো। বাতারি কাগজে লিখা। কিংবা কপিলীপারীয়া মানুষে জানে কপিলী দুধরো চুকলো-আনমরো চুকলো। কপিলীয়ে সীইতক বানপানীরে মারে কপিলীর পানীয়েই সীইতর
This introduction of the river presented in the very beginning clearly shows that the river is very intimately connected with the ups and downs the lives of the people living on its banks. At the change of seasons, when the Kapili dries up or when the river moves far away leaving its banks and makes its way through erosion i.e. change its course, the people still consider it great and respect it. In such a case, often the opposite things happen. The running myths of the river Kapili are very carefully preserved in their long-cherished memories. The novelist has related to the readers the myths running through generation in his own words-

“তিনিদুর্লীলা আলোককার মূখ্য শুদ্ধ অথর বরপাণী কপিলীরে লগলগা ঠাইতেক্বরে পায়টার তার ওভারে সেই গায়ন বায়নর দুলিটো, আটইবেল একেইবেল আং— এতিয়াও বেহিরু দুখন নাও তাত তল যাই। বেপারী নাতেলের এতিয়াও তাত তাতেল পান এটা অগনেরেবায়হকে নাও নেমেরে। তাত হেল্লো জলকোচার তলাতল ঘর আং। তাতে কমলাকুঠীরী জলকোচারী হৈ আং। কমলাকুঠীরী আসেরে মানুষ আছিল। দেশর মাঝার করারে জলকোচার বিভিন্ন। মানুষর জীবন। মাজে মাজে হেল্লো তেতে মানুষর মুখ চালবলি বিভাকুল হয়। জলকোচারে তত্ত্বেলা কপিলীর পরা বি পারে মানুষ দুখু ঘর লে যায়। তত্ত্বেলাহে কপিলীর পারে শচিতেরে মেওজারার পারা সেনালী হবলি পায়।”

In this way, legends of this sort enfold the inhabitants of Bhurabandha village on the shores of Kapili. This riverine tale which is replete with belief disbelief and mystery stays in the collective life of the region. We find the inhabitant of ‘Goalpara’ of the village Bhurbandha who was dragged the ‘Jalakumar’ (water-deity) of the river Kapili. ‘Kamalakumari’ (water-goddess) refused to take him as he was physically defective and sent him back to the world.

There is a great body of legends relating to the Kapili. They are as follows –
The Kapili has exerted so much influence on the people of its shores that they are afraid to leave the banks. Once Man Singh, grandfather of Rupai thought of going far away learing the Kapils banks behind. On that time the Kapili snatched away his bullocks appeared and plough out of anger and arrogance. That night Kapili is Bhakat Bairagi’s dream and told him that if the man having royal ancestry (here Man Singh) left the banks of the river, the river would follow him. In Bhakat’s dream, the Kapili appeared with the following features

“চুলি মেলা, আউলী-আউলী চুকু দুটা জোরের দুটার দরে জুলিয়ে— মাতটা ছেরেকনির দরে।”

Having heard about Bhakat’s dream, the villagers prevented him from going away. They collected subscriptions and thus bought him a plough and bullocks. This shows the great influence the Kapili exerts on those dwelling on its shores.

As the story moves ahead it becomes gradually prominent how the Kapili comes to play an important role in the life of Rupai, the hero of the novel. We find Rupai absorbed in the thoughts of the river Kapili while at study is the school of Betharam Pandit. Observing this, perhaps a critic has termed the relation between Rupai and the river as the relationship between man and nature. some of Earlier in some of the short-stories of Rabindranath Tagore such as ‘Āpad’, ‘Atithi’ and the like, we have found a glimpse of such an intimate relationship between man and nature.

Rupai is not afraid to go to the banks; he has no sense of time there. At leisure, he sits on the shore and watenes fishing activities. The writer seems to have upheld the relationship between Rupai and the river as the relationship between man and nature. some of Earlier in some of the short-stories of Rabindranath Tagore such as ‘Āpad’, ‘Atithi’ and the like, we have found a glimpse of such an intimate relationship between man and nature.

In painting the character of Rupai the novelist, it seems, has painted the Kapili. One night finding Rupai missing from his bed, the whole village woke up and got assembled to look for him. Ultimately he was traced on the Kapili shores. In an
attempt to trace Rupai in the Kapili, his grandfather jumped into the river. Later he fell sick and died. Rupai felt hurt which made him sentimental. He stopped going to the shores of the river. He pays all not attention. To learn mathematics and memorizes the Bengali poem ‘Akalbyer Gurudaksinā’. Still he often feels sad in the Kapili.

Therefore his long separation from the Kapili follows. He moves to Nagaon for studies and afterwards joins the freedom movement and suffers imprisonment for a long time. After his release from the jail, when he comes to his village, he again comes into fresh touch with the Kapili. In the mean time, he comes face to face with the hard realities of the world. He finds himself in contact with great minds like Tilak Gosāin, Sudhangshu Babu and so on. By this time, we observe him engaged in a great confrontation with the mother-like Kapili during the flood. The picture of this flood as presented in the novel is quite real and symbolic. Here Rupai is the direct antagonist of the river. In cooperation with Mr. Pillai and Bhakat, Rupai rescue Sonpahi and her father almost from being drowned. His father Bir Singh dies hereafter and the mystery of his birth gets unfolded. Bir Singh and Rangili had no issue of their own. During a devastating flood of the river Kapili, Bir Singh found Rupai floating on the water. From this time onwards, Rupai is their son.

Thereafter is the novel, comes the context of Rupai and Sonpahi. We find here that the writer seeks to place Sonphai as the opposite of the river Kapili. Sonpahi happens to choose the high bunk of Gosain Pukhuri (a pond so named) as their meeting place. Gosain Pukhuri is a symbol of confinement. Kapili, on the other hand, is a free and flowing river. In this way, through the symbol of Gosain Pukhuri, the confined nature of Sonapahi’s love becomes apparent to Rupai. This comes to impose a sort of confinement on his free life. As a result, unavoidably there is a secret confrontation between the Kapili and Sonapahi. This confrontation may be noted in the subconscious mind of Rupai –

"হে তার মনত পরিল গোসাই পুষ্পীত তথা সময়সততি তার এবারে কঁপিলীমে মনত পরা নাই।
এক মুহূর্তের বাবে তার তো চলাচলে বন্ধ হ'য়ে যায় ভেন লাগিল। সি কঁপিলীক পাহাড়লে সেনাপাহাইয়ে তাক কঁপিলীর পরা আত্রাই আনিবু খুজিতে নেকাই নাই। এরা তাকেই দেখো, তাকেই কঁপিলীর কথা সেওয়ারা দিলে। তার মাকর কথা। তথ্যার সি ঠিক করিলে গোসাই পুষ্পীতে সি নাহে। নাহে।"29
It is this antagonism which drags Sonapahi into the path of suicide. It seems that the unjust behaviour of Rupai is behind her suicide. Sonaphai commits suicide in the river Kapili. A critic correctly says—

"কপিলী নেভি কেন্দ্র করি রুপাই আরু সোণমাহীর মাজত প্রেমর সম্পর্কর আরত্তিশি হইছে আরু শেষো হইছে।"  

Thus we can note the tremensous influence of the Kapili over the plot and main characters of the novel.

The river 'Dhansiri' has exerted a deep influence over the plot and characters of the novel 'Surujmukhir Swapna'. The novel is based on the geographical, emotional and cultural relation between the Dhansiri and the two villages lying on its two banks. Not only that, the river has a far-reaching impact on the chief characters of the novel, specifically on the life of Gulach, the hero of the novel.

Dhansiri is a hilly river. The river falls into the Brahmaputra after descending from the Naga Hills also traversing a long distance. The Dhansiri is a chief tributary flowing on the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra. As the river is a hilly one, it is obviously a torrential river. Specially during the Monsoon, heavy showers in the Naga hills makes the river flow at a tremendous speed. The river-surface gets puffed up and overflows the adjoining (adjacent) areas causing a great distress in the lives of the people of the area—

"ধন্সিকি নামি আহিছে নাগা গাছার পরা, কোনোবা নাগিনী গাভরর নাচনি ককালর ছে ধন্সিকির গাত। গৌরট নাগিনীর হাঁচি মিঠা, রংচলী জুর।"

"ধন্সিকিরে হাঁছে।
বে পশে ব্রহ্মপুত্রে। সুইতর বাহর মাজত কিঃহ জানো সোপর সোলেংটো বিচ্ছি। অকগনি রবরা। আজারি নাই।"

এইর কথা কৈ যোয়া-ওহেৰ।
এইর কথা শুনি যোয়া-ওহেৰ।
— নরয়।
নাচনি ধন্সিকির ককালর দেওলগা, দেওধনির ছেৰ।"
The narrator of the story tells us in the beginning that Dhansiri is an ancient river. At the same time he has also referred to the inseparable cultural ties existing between the river and the people living on its banks. The Dhansiri being a carrier of culture and traditions, is intimately connected with the woes and happiness of the people of its shores.

The river also stands by them in all times. But often if is also the cause of their sorrow. Every year the Dhansiri overflows its banks as a result of which the people of the two banks suffer temporarily. But after the flood, the river assumes a new shape and wipes away old woes and all that is old –

“ধনশিরীয়ে পর্বতর কথায় তৈমার কথা জানে, ইরপুর গাঁথার কথা জানে, এরোতারীর কথা জানে, বারিশার কথা জানে, খরালির কথা জানে।

নদীর বৃদ্ধি অনিষ কালের কথা। বেজার, আনন্দর, হাহির। কাল্পনিক জন্মর, মৃত্যুর।

বহত মরমর কথায় জানে ধনশিরীয়ে।

কথাবার প্রাণি হয়, ধনশিরী নতুন হয়। বারিশার বানে খরালির বোনা ধুই লে যায়। কাহিনীবোরো নিকা হয়। ধনশিরীর পারত নতুন কাহিনীর কুঠি পায়।”

The writer has made a mention of these characteristics of the Dhansiri and tried to hint at the realistic outlook – progressive and changing mentality of the ordinary people of this region. An analysis of the characters of the novel proves this statement. In the characters of the novel, there is no reflection of romanticism arising out of personal wants and gains. As a result, the characters exhibit a kind of dynamism – which is an important feature of the novel. In Gulach, we find that though his house and all his belongings are under water during flood, he has no regret. He has more attraction for the soil that accumulates after the flood. He greatly needs this for cultivation.

“ধনশিরিত বারিষা পানী উঠিলে, সি পারতে আনন্দ জুঁপিয়া। ফাকুনময়ায় রিব রিব ক্যান্দ মারিলে সি অকলে অকলে নাচে, আনন্দ কেতিয়ারা শাওময়ায়া বর চল বাগরিলে সি ঘর সোমায়ার সিদ্ধ বাহিলৈলো গলা গে বরসুন্ত ততিত্বদুরি গা ধোঝা, হাঁচে, কিতীলি পারে।”

The river Dhansiri sometimes makes Gulach imaginative. He loves the river – in relishing the unrelished beauties of nature, the poet in him comes out. Though the
novelist has not stressed the poetic self of Gulach here, the readers can easily understand the presence of the novelist himself in these parts of the novel. He is spiritually one with Gulach here –

"হঠাৎ নিজস্ব ওপরে চুকু পরি সি তৈ গ’ল। জরজরীয়া বরফরুক্ষকর বগা বগা টোপালবের নৈর পানীর ওপরত সরি পরিহে অবিশ্বাস। ইমান ধূলীয়া হৈছে। পানীর ওপরত পানীর টোপাল পরিলেও চিঠিকনি উঠে। বগা, কোমল চিঠিকনি। নৈর পানীবের পরিহার — প্রায় নীল। তার ওপরত মেঘের বুকেরপায় নামি আই পরিহে বরফরুক্ষ পানীর বগা বগা চিঠিকনি।" 35

It is noteworthy here that in the novel, we get many a picture of nature presented in terms of the river. The river in its various forms has given rise to various feelings in various persons. For instance, in the conversation between Bhim and Gulach, we have frightful picture of flood caused by the Dhansiri (P-43). In ‘Kārtik’ month the charming influence of pure river-water on Gulach’s mind (P-43); Again the river in the winter season has been to mentioned with reference to the marriage of Gulach and Kapahi. (P-93). It is the Dhansiri river alone that stands by the landless Gulach at all times. Gulach begins his life by making the uncultivated land ready for cultivation. He has a great love for the river which has helped in the realization of his life’s dreams. So, there is nothing unnatural when he weaves his future dreams centering on the river. For this, critic Gobinda Prasad Sarma says that the characters of this novel are “ঘাটালিক প্রভূতি” 36 Moreover it is the realistic turn of his mind which encourages him to cherish such dreams –

“সি যেন চুকুর আগত সেখিলে—ধনমাখন তার মাটিরপরা আতিয়া দুরে দুরে হৈছে। তার মাটি দিনক দিনে খে হৈছে। বাও, শালি, আহরে তার পাথর নন্দনবন হৈছে। লাহপাহীয়া সেঁদৌয়ায় শইচেরে তার পথার ভরি পরিহে। ততরাই ধান দইচে কপালইয়ে ধান দইচে সি তাঙ্গুরি বাড়িচে— বিবিযাত সী পতারফর পরা ফরলে নিছে মেটমরা ডাঙরিয় ভার। ন’ জহার ধানর সামুদ্র ধৰতচোখাল আমলেল মোলাহি উঠিছে।” 37

The river Dhansiri has brought about a complete change in Gulach’s life. The river showers all her love & affection on this homeless, helpless young man and bestows on him an honorable status in the society. It is for this reason that Gulach too is very grateful, to the river. He feels a close spiritual affinity to the river. So, he addresses the river –
The mutual bond between man and river, the unshakable faith that man reposes on a river has in its roots the boons that man receives from a river. This is perhaps true of any agrarian society. The novel has presented such a picture in connection with Gulach and Tara also. Kapahi aunty conspired with old Saphiat and thus arranged for Tara’s marriage with her half-mad son. Hearing the Moulabi’s words, Tara fled from Saphiat’s house. It was mid-night then, Tara, being stricken with fear, runs away directionless and reaches the riverside.

‘Matsyagandha’ (1987) is an important riverine novel by the famous Assamese writer Homen Bargohain which has for its setting the river Mahaghuli and which is based on nuptial ties between the ‘Kaivartas’ and the upper caste Ahoms of the Dhakuakhana area. The picture of an inter-caste marriage between Kamala, the ‘Kaivarta’ girl and Maniram, the Ahom youth, has been presented in this novel.

In the very beginning of the novel the north bank of the river and its south bank have been referred to in the form of conversations. From these conversations, it is quite obvious that the both banks of the river are quite different with regard to their life-styles. Hence it is learnt that comparatively the villages lying on the south bank are more neat and clean and perhaps more advanced financially than those in the north bank. We find that the villages on the north bank remain all dark as soon as it is evening—no lamp is seen anywhere. The travelers find it extremely difficult to tread their paths in such complete darkness. A traveler from the south bank turns wrathful of the villagers of the north bank under the circumstances. He tells his companion—
The villages lying on the north bank abound in rivers and lakes plenty of fish is found in them.
The people go for fishing in a body. In the days of fishing all the ‘Kaivarta’ villages emit the smell of burnt fish. The people belonging to the upper caste take fried fish. In case they have surplus fish, they get them dried up in the sun. But the ‘Kaivartas’ are underdeveloped economically. So they cannot fry their fish as it is expensive. The result is that they eat burnt fish. These ‘Domi villages, therefore, give out only the smell of raw and burnt fish.

Menaka is the chief character of the novel ‘Matsyagandhā’. She is a ‘kaivarta’ girl. Her father Duryodhana was well-off as a house-holder. Catching fish was his chief occupation; despite that he cleaned some plots of land inside dense forests adjoining his house and made the same his own. He had two sons and two daughters – Behula and Menaka. The inhabitants of the village Garaimari on the bank of ‘Mahaghuli’ are ‘Kaivartas’ by caste. They earn their livelihood by catching fish in the river. Besides this they also resort to a little bit of cultivation –

“মহাঘুলি নেতি পারট গর্বমারী এলখন ডাঙ্গ কৈনত গাঁও। মানুষের দুর্লভ কিছু কিছু পরিশ্রম করি অন্ততঃ দুবেলা দুনাসী প্রাতঃকেই খাওয়ালে পাই। মাছ ধরাই জীবিকার প্রধান উপায় যদিও সুবিধা বুজি চুরুরিয়া গাঁও মানুষের ধরত মরকীয়া হয় বা চাপরির হাবি মাটি ভাতি বজরত অন্ততঃ মুঘালে খাব পরকে সিঁহতে মেরিতর করে। মাছে বজরত মাছে ওয়ালি হয়, কিছু বজরত সিঁহতে কেতিয়াও মাছে উঠিত মুল্য নাপায়।”

The Novel speaks of a time when there were no motorcars or buses plying the roads of the region; nor was it connected through railways. As a result, though the
rivers or pools contained at an abundance of fish in them, the ‘Kaivartas’ could not sell them for lack of customers. So, they had to spend their days in poverty.

The two daughters of Duryadhana were beautiful to look at. He had a desire to marry his daughter off to rich grooms serving government offices. But the epidemic disease spread by the water of the ‘Mahaghuli’ stood on the way. When the adjacent villages were afflicted with the epidemic, it spread from one place to another through water. In those days, rivers were the main source of drinking water. In addition to this, the people of those poor villages used rivers water for bathing, washing clothes, and for other useful activities. But when people in large numbers died in the nearby villages owing to the epidemic, the dead bodies of the dead were thrown into the river for want of time. The Mahaghuli which supplied to the ‘Kaivartas’ a rich source of fish, now brought death –

“পাঁচ ছ বছরীয়া লরা এটার মরাশ নৈত তাহি আহিহে। পাঁসী লে হাউ বিউজের ঘরীলে দুইি আহি
সিহতে মতা মানুহের করক বলে বেঁচে পর অপেক্ষা করিহ লগা নহীন।
অলপ সময় লিছতেই মানুহের মুখ বাগারি বাগারি বাতরি আহিল যে উড়ির সাতোলাঙ্কুক, মিরি পাঁচে,
বর্গাঙ্ক, গঠিরাঙ্ক আরু মি গাঁধুরি গাঁধুর হাইত মহামারী আরু হইছে। এদিন এরাটির ভিতরতে এশমন
মানুহ মরি শেষ হইছে। মহামারী আরু সময় অভাবত সরু নর লরা ছোয়ালি পুরিবাল বোরার মরাশ মানুহে
মহুলি নৈত উদুয়াই হইছে।” 42

Prof. Satyendranath Sarma has remarked that the ‘helplessness of the downtrodden’ in quite evident in the novels of Homen Bargohain. Many people of the village Garaimari’ died in this water-borne epidemic. Duryodhana as well as his two sons also fell a victim to the epidemic. From this time onwards began the distressful life of Memeri, Menaka’s mother. Once she took opium in effort to be free from stomach-diseases and became addicted to it in course of time. Menaka also took this addiction from her mother. In course of time Behula and Menaka were married to the rich family of Digambar. But the two husbands – Jaihari and Purna were men of contrary natures. Jaihari was diligent and enterprising while Purna was an idler. The result was that the economic condition of Jaihari improved gradually while Purna was fully engulfed by poverty. Digambar drove his son Purna out of the house for his sluggishness.
As a result of this, Menaka began to look upon her in-laws as enemies. Thus when Kamala, her sister-in-law, tries to commit suicide for her unwanted pregnancy due to her illicit affair with the upper-caste chap Maniram, Menaka thinks of taking revenge on her in-laws for a moment. Next moment, the thought of a greater revenge occurs in her mind. This revenge involves a social injustice—the one done to the lower-caste people by the upper-caste for centuries, Menaka calls up the memories of her childhood—her shadow fell on the paddy-crops kept in the sun for this offence, she was beaten by an upper-caste lady. Not only was that, the crops on which her shadow fell given to an animal as feed.

Menaka learnt from Kamala how she became pregnant. The story of her being pregnant leads the readers to the story of Parashare and Satyabati delineated in the Mahabharata. The background to the sexual union of Kamala and Maniram is structured on the story of Matsyagandhā where Parashara happened to have sexual intercourse with Satyabati, daughter of a fisherman while crossing the Ganga the result of which was the birth of Vyasa, the composer of the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata tells us that Parashara created mists by an incantation in an effort to keep the act of their union in the dark. The sexual union took place in a boat surrounded by mist. The novelist has used exactly the same background in this novel. Here the river 'Mahaghuli' acts as the Ganga—the catalyst behind the sexual union between Kamala and Maniram. Again, as in the Mahabharata, this also creates a social bond between two opposite castes. A heavy downpour of rain helped in effecting this bond—

“মূলন ধারেরে নামিব ধরা বর্ষাকে এটা মোরা-কোয়া পরিবেশ সৃষ্টি করি আকাশ পৃথিবী একাকার করি গেলাইছিল। পছোরা বতাহত আধ্যাত্ম নের পানীয় অলেক সরু-বের টৌরে সৃষ্টি হেছিল। টৌর আধ্যাত্ম টলুড়া নাওক্ষে বিপন্জনক ভাবে নাজিবলৈ ধরিছিল।”

In this way, the river Mahaghuli assumes an important place in the story and plays a decisive role in the climax.

Kamala's (unwanted) pregnancy drags the story to a turning-point and Menaka uses this as a tool. She makes Maniram marry Kamala by force. She resorted to both tricks and force to tame Maniram which shows her firm determination to achieve her goal. Her experience taught her that though Maniram, the upper-caste Ahom, used Kamala for sexual enjoyment yet he would never agree to marry her. But Menaka took this as a challenge to make the impossible possible. She must marry the 'Kaivarta' girl off to
the Ahom chap. History should change its course on the bank of Mahaghuli. So when Maniram refused the proposal, she threatened him that she would spread false scandals about her mother’s character prior to her marriage. She did so in order to make Maniram yield to her pressures—

“মেনকাহই শান্তভাবে কলে— ঘরি ললৌ, কথাটো মিছাই। কিন্তু কমলাই যে তাইর গভর্নোত তোমার সাথেক ঠাই দিয়ে সেই নির্দিষ্ট সংবাদ কথাটো তুমিই যেনেকো নামঘরত শুনলে খাই মিছা বুলি ক’থ পারিবা, অর্থাৎ তোমার মায়ের জীবনীকালের ব্যভিচার মিছা কথাটোকো নাম ঘরত শুনলে খাই সংবাদ বুলি কোম।”

At last, Maniram submits to Menaka’s unbending resolution. He consents to marry Kamala. As a result, Maniram was cast out of his home and society. Vedavyas, the writer of the Mahābhārata, arranged for Matsyagandha’s marriage elsewhere; but the modern novelist in far more brave in this respect. He arranged her marriage with the youth who was responsible for her pregnancy. This explains why he has chosen a strong character like Menaka.

There is no doubt that Menaka is one of the most powerful characters in the state-house of Assamese novels. It must be admitted that though the river has exerted a symbolic influence on the plot-story of ‘Matsyagandhā’, the nature of its influence on the characters, particularly on the chief character Menaka is not prominent.

Nalindhar Bhattacharya, the critic, remarked about ‘Matsyagandhā’—

“উপন্যাসনাম ঘাই বৈশিষ্ট্য হ’ল এশাকী গ্রাম্য, নিরক্ষর আরু দরিদ্র মহিলার প্রতিভাহী কষ্ট আরু সাহসী ভূমিকা। সামাজিক অবহেলার বলি, অর্থনৈতিক সংকটে জুরলা, পারিবারিক বেমানালিত অভিষেচ মেনকার চরিত্র অন্তর্গত উপন্যাসিকে বেছি গুরুত্ব দিয়ে।”

At the very end of the novel also, we come to know about Menaka’s determination of character when she says that she has not actually degraded Maniram from the point of view of caste, she actually upgraded him to a higher position in terms of caste and one day she will upgrade everyone one by one. This boldness is a
characteristic feature peculiar to Menaka. Perhaps this explains why critics like Tosheswar Chetia records—

“হোমেন বরলোভাজিত্র কীর্তি গীভরস্ম মৎস্যণাঁশা তৈ পালিয়েই হেমদুর মণ্ডিরামক কীর্তি
গোসাইর ছায়া কীর্তি জাতীয় জাতকরণ করাও অন্যান্য হেদুলকে এটা এটাখেই কীর্তি জাতীয় তোলার
জেহাদ ঘোষণা করা হচ্ছে।”

The area adjacent to the banks of the river Sonai which flows through Nagaon-Morigaon is the setting on the Assamese riverine novel ‘Matsyakanyā’. The life-story of Pemada, a fisherwoman living on the bank of the Sonai forms the plot of the novel. But the Sonai is not the only river mentioned in this novel – The river Luit or Brahmaputra too has found a place. But at the very beginning, we have to admit that the way river has been presented in Nabakanta Barua’s ‘Kapilipariyaśādhu’ or in Abdul Malik’s ‘Surujmukhir Swapna’ as something inseparable from plot and character, it is not the same here. The description of personal struggles for existence seems to be the objective of the writer. Still, it sounds improbable that a river would have no impact on the lives of fishermen. The river always plays a great role in their personal social and economic life. There is no exception here.

The life-struggle of Pemada, the fish selling woman, has been presented in this novel. In the novel, Pemada’s life has been presented in two parts. Two men have come to her life in two different times. Before her marriage, she fell in love with freedom-fighter Gopen Das. They were to get married but Gopen fell a victim to British bullets and his martyrdom finished the possibility. Rupen, her son, was born as a result of her relation with Gopen. Surath Mahaldar is the second man in her life. Pemada was attracted to him because of his gentle manners and refined tastes but he was alone, cut off from all his relations. The novel reconcited this two at the very end of the novel.

For Pemada, Gopen’s love was the only inspiration by which she was carrying on her journey of life. It was this love that brought to her both condemnation and joy. The unwritten pride of being the wife of a martyr keeps her always away from the crowd – this feeling has given her the touch of individuality. In her love with Gopen,
the river has played a role. It was not the river Sonai — it was the great Brahmaputra or 
the Luit. They first got introduced to each other in the big fish market on the sandy 
bank of the river. The writer informs us —

"পোনতে চিনাকি হিছিল দুইতর বিশাল বালি চাপরিত। তাই মাকর লগত গৈছি, নিচেই পুরাতে 
মাঝেরা ঠাইলে। গোপনে দাস তেতিয়া কলঙ্কত। সি মাকর শাঙ্খ পিছত গিয়াতলি ভোজর বাবে মাছ 
নিবেলে আহিছিল।" ⁴⁸

It is not that the ‘Barnai’, that is, the Brahmaputra was only amorously linked to Gopen’s life. The river brought dreadful nightmares to his life. He lost his father in 
the river in his childhood. His mother had passed away even earlier — the river made 
him guardianless:

"মোহনর বয়স তেতিয়া মাধোন পাঁচ। পিতাই নাওয়েরে মাছ মরিবলে গৈছি। বরনেন্দ। বাতার 
দুপুরিয়া। ধুমুক্ত হ'ল। কোটের বুক্ত ধুমুক্ত অতি ভয়ানক। পিতা আর পারলে কে গোলহি। আমার কেবাটিও 
পুরুষ এইদেরই বিখনক বুক্ত লে চলি আছে।" ⁴⁹

When Gopen and Pemada were absorbed in love for one another the thought of the river occurs in Pemada’s mind. The waves of the river seem to have sanctified 
their love for each other. The splendid sight of the river in moonlight makes Pemada 
imaginative;

"পেমদাই ভাবিছে, তৈয়ার গরা তের টৌয়ে খলকী লগাইছে কিন্তু গরা নথলা অর্থে শথ নকরি 
বালি চিয়াই নিশ্চয় টৌয়ের উভতি গৈছে।

"এই বালির বিশ্বুত অংশটোরয়ই হ'ল বালিমাহী চপরি। ইয়াপলে নিচেই পুরাতে একায় বালিমাহী চরাই পরি 
চকুরে মনিবন নোয়ারা নিচেই সরা সরা পোক্কের খুচিযাই খুচিযাই পেটলে নিয়ে। লুইতর বালিতো যে 
কতবের বন্দ থাকে। একোড়ারা বালিত হেনা বালিচন্দা আর সোপর কলাফও থাকে। তাই বালিত বাহি কর 
ভাল লাগে। বিশেষকে তের বিপক্ষযোগ্যত রঙ বেলটোয়ে রায়টোর কারণে মেলানী মগার সময়। জোরের 
পোহরত বালিত ঠাই কেনকুয়া লাগিব পারে তাই কব নোয়ারে। সেই অভিজ্ঞতা তাইহার হোয়া নাই।" ⁵⁰
The ‘Barnai’ is also connected with their struggle for existence. Their occupation is to catch and sell fish. The local fish-market is on the bank of the river. Fish of different varieties are sold here. The fisherman use various kinds of boats – some small and some big – to catch fish in the river. The fish of different sizes are seen to leap above the scanty water on the deck. The paikers (wholesalers) of the market buy the fish first, and then they sell them to others.

"বনাইর পার্নু ভালমান পাইকারী সেপারী। মাছের সৈতে নাওবের আহি পার পাইছেহি। নাওর চুপঁরীয়া পাঞ্জীত মাছেরের চুলকিয়াই আছে।”

The Sonabariāl ghat where the market is situated is the very place where Maneswar died accidentally while catching fish. He was Gunadas’s husband and Pemada’s father. But he died as a result of snake-bite. Fish is sold at higher prices during the Bihu festivals. The fishermen become zealous about fishing in the river then. All of the fishermen go to ‘Kunji Bil’ for fishing at the time. The ‘Barnai’ leads them to a tributary and the tributary takes them to ‘Kunji Bil’. But Maneswar could not throw his net on the water for catching fish. His death occurred before that. It is not that the Brahmaputra or the Luit has played a part in Pemada’s love life only. The Brahmaputra and its chars (island) extended help to even the love-life of Gunada, Pemada’s mother. After the death of Maneswar, there developed an affair between Gunada and the fish-merchant Puhiya. Gunada was still in her youth then. She also liked Puhiya. Under the circumstances, they passed a whole day together on the char of the river as they pleased. The writer has only hinted at the sexual act, but he did not describe it in detail. The following part of the novel is really an instance of superb artistry;

"এদিন সরু নাও এখনেরে তাইক লুইতর চুপঁরী এটালে লো গেছিল। তাত সইতে দিনটো আপেন খুটী মেত কটাইছিল।”

The river plays of role not only in the first part of her life, but also in the later part while she experiences a transformation. A fish merchant named Surath Mahaldar falls in love with Pemada. Pemada’s beauty personality charmed him. Surath also depends on the fish abounding in the rivers and pools. Here too, the Brahmaputra is
behind their coming closer to each other. Surath discovers Pemada amidst thick mists on the bank of the river-

“তেও পুহমহিয়া কন কুঁগলীয়ে আবরা ব্রঙ্কপুহের বালিত, পারলৈ ওঠা মাছরীয়ের কেইটার তচ্ছরত এজনী তিরোতা মানুহ দেখি আচরির হন। পশিরে ব্রঙ্কপুহের বুকুত জোনটা মার গেছে। .... সেংেহে পুরাটো লুইতের বালিত সহ্যিয়া খেনেহে লাগিছে।” ৫৩

As for the character of Pemada, we note that in the novel she has been compared to river or fish more than once. When her mother became fed-ridden, she took to the roads as a vendor and began her quackery. The novel contains superb description of her physical beauty of the time-

“গার রং মাছর বরনীয়া, মিহি, পিছা পিছল, জেউদি চরোয়া বধর। পলীত সাঁতুরী সুরার যিকোনো এটা পুরঠ মাছর দেইই তাই রহস্যমায়।” ৫৪

The pervasive influence of the river can also be seen in the character of Surath Hazarika. He is proud of being a fish-merchant and he is very dutiful to his caste. He does not even hesitate to forsake his own son because of this dutifulness.

The impact of the river on his character can be perceived from his words to his son:

“আমার নিজের মাছুরোহিনির প্রতি তোর এটি কর্দম আছে। নদীবিলায় কাশে কাশে থেকা এই নদীয়াল মাছুরোহিনির।” ৫৫

or

“মাছরীয়ের নাতি অরু এজন প্রধানত মাছ ব্যবসায়ীর পুত্র হিচাপে মই গরিন্দ।” ৫৬

In this way, it can be seen that on the plot and characters of the novel ‘Matsyakanya’, the river has exerted a great and far-reaching influence.
References:

1. Srikumar Bandyopadhyay – Bangasāhitye Upanyāsēr Dhāra, (P-564)
2. Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay – Hānsulibānker Upakathā, (P-5)
3. Tapodhir Bhattacharjee – ‘Nadir Upanyās, Upanyāser Nadi’, Bāṅglā Upanyās
   200 Bachar, Edited by – Biplab Maji, (P-159)
4. Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay – Hānsulibānker Upakathā, (P-8)
5. Achintya Biswas – Samartha Pancham : Tarasankar Bandyopadhyayer
   Hānsulibānker Upakathā, (P- 185)
6. Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay – Hānsulibānker Upakathā, (P-130)
7. Ibid, (P- 170)
8. Ibid, (P- 309)
9. Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay – Ichāmati, (P-3)
10. Indranī Ghosal – Bāṅglā Nadikendrik Upanyās, (P-75)
12. Ibid, (P- 51)
13. Indranī Ghosal – Bāṅglā Nadikendrik Upanyās, (P-77)
14. Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay – Ichāmati, (P-224)
15. Saroj Bandyopadhyay – Bāṅglā Upanyāsēr Kalāntar, (P-329)
   Nadimātrik Upanyāṣḍhārāy Gangā Sristi Samiksha (edited by—Udaychand
   Das and Biplab Chakraborty), (P-34)
   Nadimātrik Upanyāṣḍhārāy Gangā Sristi Samiksha (edited by—Udaychand
   Das and Biplab Chakraborty), (P-170)
18. Advaita Mallabarman – Titās Ekti Nadir Nām, (P-13)
   Prasanga O Anusanga (edited by –Sushanta Das), (P-67)
21. Achintya Biswas – Prasanga Advaita Mallabarman O Titās Ekti Nadir Nām,
   (P-147)
22. Advaita Mallabarman – Titās Ekti Nadir Nām, (P-337)

165
Uttardhawni Patirika, Editor- Biren Chanda, (P-251)
24. Nabakanta Barua – Kapilipari Sādhu, (P-13,14)
25. Ibid, (P- 14)
26. Ibid, (P- 15)
27. Ibid, (P- 15)
(8/5/2009), (P-18)
29. Nabakanta Barua – Kapilipari Sādhu, (P-60)
Upanyās (Edited by –Nagen Thakur), (P-239)
31. Swamim Nasrin – Surujmukhir Swapna Bichār, (P-42)
32. Syed Abdul Malik – Surjamukhir Swapna, (P-12)
33. Ibid, (P- 1)
34. Ibid, (P- 67)
35. Ibid, (P- 8)
36. Gobinda Prasad Sarma—Upanyās Āru Asamiyā Upanyās, (P-322)
37. Syed Abdul Malik – Surjamukhir Swapna, (P- 53)
38. Ibid, (P- 143)
39. Ibid, (P- 88)
40. Homen Bargohain –Matsyagandhā (P- ‘Kā’)
41. Ibid, (P- 10)
42. Ibid, (P- 12)
43. Satyendranath Sarma – Asamiyā Upanyāsar Gatiḍhārā, (P-161)
44. Homen Bargohain – Matsyagandhā, (P-54)
45. Ibid, (P- 75)
46. Nalinidhar Bhattacharya – ‘Ramdhenu Yug Āru Homen Bargohain-r Dukhān
Upanyās’, Homen Bargohaina-r Sandhānāt, Edited by—Namita Deka,(P-68)
47. Toseswar Chetiya – ‘Homen Bargohain-r Upanyāsat Bāstabbād Āru
Bhabitabya’, Homen Bargohain-r Jiban Āru Sāhitya, Edited by-Amiya Kumar
Handique, (P-70)
48. Lakshminandan Bora – Matsyakanya, (P-5)
49. Ibid, (P- 6)
50 Ibid, (P- 8)
51. Ibid, (P- 11)
52. Ibid, (P- 22)
53. Ibid, (P- 86)
54. Ibid, (P- 27)
55. Ibid, (P- 81)
56. Ibid, (P- 80)