Chapter III

River Based Societies in the Bengali and the Assamese River-Centric Novels

Man being a social being it is impossible for him to live completely indifferent to society. Everywhere, be it in urban or rural area, in forests or snow-covered Mains or hills, human beings set up society for their habitation. As a result in art and literature there falls inescapably the influence of the society in which it is produced. In the earliest specimen of Bengali literature, Charyapadas, the then society has been extensively and intensively portrayed. The class division in the contemporary society, religious beliefs, rites and practices, trade and commerce, conflicts, sympathies, superstitions—all these features may be discovered without much of labour. Literature of the Medieval period is no exception, for in the tales of Kalketu and Fullara, Lahana and Khullana, Sanaka-Behula-Chand, Lausen etc the pictures of the contemporary society are almost omnipresent picturization of the modern society is eminently present in modern literature. In prose narratives, especially short stories and novels the social scenario of the modern times has been portrayed in a very elaborate manner. The novelists have drawn the portraits of various societies, near as well as remote—societies with different facts of light and shade. The same thing is noticed in the river-centric novels which is our area of discussion.

It comes out very easily from any discussion on river-centric novels that each of such novels is based on one or the other river and in each a particular tribe or community inhabiting the banks and adjacent areas of the river is dealt with. This tribe or community is sometimes peripheral, sometimes native sub-tribes, sometimes community of fishermen—all marginalized and illiterate. It is noteworthy that the society which is the subject matter of such a novel is rural. Where urban society is referred to in a novel, it has only a contextual importance; urban society is not the main subject matter. Rural life or rather the community life of the rural abode, their way of life has been focused in the river-centric novels. The river which is the centre of the novel has a role in the very moueding of the way of life of the people inhabiting
the areas surrounding the river. In all their culture, beliefs, religious rites and practices in marriage and other ceremonies, in their limerick's, song and dance, in all their social customs there is noticed a distinctive trend which distances them from our familiar social milieu. They clutch to their beliefs, rites, and practices, and, at the same time, struggle with the changed socio-economic environment and nature and sometimes with other humans. Those who came out victorious, survive, and the defeated one lose for ever their social identity. But they do not become an extinct species; rather they continue to exist with their separate identity, with their beliefs, rites and customs.

Each novel within the compass of our discussion is full of pictures and characters of the society, but what is significant is that each is distinctly different from the rest as each bears the peculiar features of the region portrayed. In Tarasankar’s novel ‘Hānsulibānkār Upakathā’, there is the picture of the aborigine ‘Kāhār’ society of Bānsbāḍi, a village that exists in the periphery of Radh region of Bengal. However, “তারাশঙ্করের উপন্যাসে উত্তর রাজের (বীরভূমের) গ্রামজীবন সুপারিশ রেখায় রূপায়িত ও সাহিত্যবিদের সঞ্জীবিত হইয়াছে একথা সত্য।”

The ‘Kāhār’ society portrayed by Tarasankar is divided into two groups. Those who are professional palanquil bearers are known as ‘Koshknedhe Kāhār’ and those who guard the residence of the landlord twenty-four hours are called ‘Ātpoure Kāhār’. Banawari is the headman of the ‘Koshknedhe Kāhārs’ and Param Kāhār is that of the ‘Ātpoure Kāhārs’. But both the groups accept Banawari as the chief of the ‘Kāhār’ society. Personal vested interest and frailty of character of Param Kāhār went in favour of Banawari. ‘Kartābābā’ is the deity and protector of the Kāhār society. If any calamity descends upon the individual life or collective life, it is supposed by the Kāhārs to be the result of the wrath of ‘Kartābābā’; certainly somebody must have done something wrong because of which ‘Kartābābā’ has become angry. So it is necessary to satisfy him. At the opening of the novel we find the fear of the Kāhārs of the unknown and unheard of sound of whistling. It comes out from ‘Nimtele Pānu’ that this time a defective he goat is to be scarified at the worship of ‘Kartābābā’. As the owner of the defective he-goat is ‘Nimtele Pānu’ so the ‘Kāhār’ society will have to expiate.
A deep import of the folk-culture and folk-belief is seen in the social life of the marginalized ‘Kahars’. There are ‘Manna’, ‘Magic’, ‘Totem’, ‘Taboo’— as spoken of by Freaser, among the ‘Kahars’ too. The belief in ‘Kartābābā’ is nothing but a belief in the unknown force or spirit. Not only faith in gods, but also in demi-gods is equally seen in the ‘Kahar’ society. There are references to how Amāi, father of ‘Khona Kahar’, tries to help his widow even after his death. There are also references to ‘Kumkalasi’. Banwari is afraid of the dead Kalosashi and Gopalibala—

“বেশি ভয় গোপালীকে। প্রথম পাদকের পরিবার মরলে বিয়ের কুমকলাসী অর্থাৎ জলধরার ঘট কাঁধে নিয়ে যায়ে। বাহীর মৃত্যুর না হলে সে কলসী ফেলতে পায় না। ঠিক মৃত্যুর কিছুকাল আগে সেই কলসী সে ফেলে দেয়। শছ ওঠে। কোথাও কিছু পড়ে না, অথচ একটা শব শোনা যায়।”

There are social ceremonies in the society of the ‘Kahars’, apart from the worship of ‘Kartābābā’. One such is celebration of ‘Bhanjo’. On the day of ‘Bhanjo’, an earthen saucer full of five types of seeds is to be kept on the head. After which water is to be brought from the quay of the Kopai which is following by fearting drinking and dancing—

“বাওয়ারী নিজে মদ ছাড়া বেসেছ। ‘মাতা’ অর্থাৎ পাঁচ-ছাঁটা পাচ ভাটানো ফেলে দিয়ে কুকুরগুলোকে, বাড়ি বেঁধে কতক দিয়েছে ছেলেদের হাতে - দিয়ে আয় গরাঙ্গুলোর মুখের কাছে, বলদ গাই বাছুর - সবাইকে দিবি। খাঁক, আজকের দিনে সবাই থাকে। ভোড়া হস্ত মুর্বণী - ও দিকেও দে।

“এইবার আয় তোরা, বাসে যা। লে চকাকে, লে চকাকে। মেয়েরা, লে গো, তোদের ভাগ তোরা লিয়ে যা। লে চকাকে। বায়েরারা লাও ভয়ই। বাজাও, বেশ মধুর করে বাজাও, বেশ মধুর করে বাজাও।”

And then songs of ‘Bhanjo’ are sang; these are much like the utterance of incantation—

“তীর্জো লো সুন্দরী, মাটি লো সরা।
তীর্জোর কপালে অঙ্গের সিংহর পরা।
আলতার অঙ্গের হাও মাটিতে দিবি,
ও মাটি, তোমার কাছে মনের কথা কলবি,
পং আঁকড়ি আমার ধর লো ধরা।”
In this context, it may be mentioned that in ‘Bānglār Brata’ of Abanindranāth Tagore, there are references to songs of ‘Bhāduli’(Bhānjo!)(P-41) and a few such songs are incorporated. This celebration illustrates the internal conflict between culture and agriculture in the ‘Kāhār’ society.

On the day of ‘Bhānjo’ worship oral battles are fought between different areas of ‘Kāhār’-settlement in which songs full of name-callings are sung. This year the battle shall be fought between ‘Kāhārpara’ group and ‘Chandanpur’(Karali’s) group. On one side there is Pagal, and on the other Nasubala. But in the name callings in the songs of ‘Bhānjo’ there are no curses, rather only ‘অঙ্গ গান’

In the day of ‘Bhānjo’, one must not sleep at night rather keep awake, singing and dancing—“আগরণ হলো বিধি” 6. On that day men and women in the ‘Kāhār’ society enjoy complete sexual freedom; one is free to do what one likes without anybody’s interference—

“যার যা খুশি করবে, চোখে দেখলে কলাবে না কিছু কানে প্রলে দেখতে যাবে না। ওই দিনের সব কিছু মন থেকে মুছে ফেলবে।”

These are the do and don’ts of the ‘Kāhār’ society and their source is folkbelief.

The ‘Kāhārs’ inhabiting the banks of the river Kopai sometimes work as tillers of the land. As they are landless they work in the land of other people rented out to them. Thus Banawari has taken on rent five highs of land from the Sadgope family in the ridge where he will prepare a field for agriculture. The influence folk rites and practices may be seen even in the preparation of the field. Before the beginning of tilling the land Banawari knelt down on the ground and gave ‘প্রাণ’ to the mother earth, and—

“মনে মনে বললে, – তোমার অদে আঘাত করি নাই মা, তোমার অঙ্গকে মার্জনা করছি। সেবা করছি তোমার। তুমি ফসল দিয়ে। আমার ঘরে অচলা হয়ে থেকে। তারপর সে কোঁচড় থেকে খুলে সেখানে নামিয়ে দিল –

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The ‘Kāhārs’ identify themselves with the objects and beings of Nature and never want to hurt them. It is precisely because of this that Banawari does not kill the ‘Kharis’ snakes which have made their abode in his house. He has also cautioned Gopalibala and Subashi not to forget to clap their hands before entering the house or going out.

The plot of ‘Hānsulibāṅker Upakathā’ is the conflict between the new and the old. It is a conflict that has influenced the social rites of the ‘Kāhār’ society. In the novel there is the incident of marriage of Karali-Pakhi and Banawari-Subashi. It is the second marriage of both Karali and Banawari. Karali, metamorphosed by his association with the Babus of Chandanpur, wants to demonstrate his riches and powers. He has spent a huge amount for the celebration of his marriage. There is great arrangement for drinking. Not only that, there is enough of arrangement for feasting. The author writes that Karali—

“দেড় কুড়ি টাকা নগদ খরচ করলে। বাবাই কিনেছে, ছোলার তাল কিনেছে। অর্থিতেজে তার অস্থল আর কাঁচা কলাইরের তাল দিয়ে ভান দেবে না। পাখিকে পাখা-শাড়ি সুরুর নোয়া ছাড়াও দেবে অনেক জিনিস, অনেক গান, রূপ দস্তার নয়, রাপোর গহন। হতে চাররাত দের আটগাছা চুড়ির, গলায় ছড়ি হার, কোমরে গোল।”

In comparison to this grand wedding, the faded marriage ceremony of Banawari-Subashi does not escape the eye. There is nothing here of the rousing warmth of Karali’s marriage—

“পৃথুদ রতন গোপী পানু। সকল কাঁচার মাথায় চোরের কাঁচা গামছা, গায়ে দিয়েছিল বন্ধকলের সুভা-কঙ্কালি ফুজুরা, হতে নিয়েছিল লাঠি গোঁড়া দিয়ে মশাল জালিয়ে সকলে গিয়েছিল। চলে যেয়েছিল, সানাই বেয়েছিল, কাসি বেয়েছিল। কনওয়াঘোরাই গায়ে দিয়েছিল একখানা নতুন চাঁদ।”

There was also arrangement for drinking but this brand was prepared by Pagal Kāhār. That brand of liquor was highly intoxicating—

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Trasankar could touch the heart of the rural society which is like the life-breath of the Indian civilization, the backbone of the Indian culture—

“গোষ্ঠীবাদ মানুষের সমাজচেতনার রূপটিকে বিখ্যাততার সঙ্গে আকর্ষিতে তারাশংক গ্রামীণ সমাজের অপরিমিতি, সমাজবন্ধন, দৈনিক চেতনা, ধর্মরোধ, উৎসব-অনুষ্ঠান-পার্ব্ব্য এবং সেই সঙ্গে এই সমাজভূমির ব্যবহারের চিত্রমালা উপস্থিত করেছে।”

With the initiation of the new ear in the agrarian culture of the ‘Kāhārs’, there enters the machine culture. By and by this machine culture started the control the standard of life of the ‘Kāhār’ society A fellow examples, particularly the introjection of railway and train, may make this point clear—

রেলপথ সংঘটিত কিছু কথা –

1] সাড়ে তিনটির ট্রেন কোপাইমীর পুলে উঠলে তবে কাজ ছাড়ে। (পৃ- ৭৩)
2] দশটির ট্রেন চলছে কোপাইমীর পুল পার হয়ে। (পৃ-৯৫)
3] সাতটার গাড়ি এলে মেয়েরা বের হয়, খাটতে যায়, খুঁটি বেঁচেতে যায়, দুখ বেঁচেতে যায়। (পৃ- ২৯)

The life style of Hansuliibān has been changed by the introduction of railway. At the inscapable call of the railway many ‘Kāhār’ women have left their original hearth, never to returny again. The wavy sound of the train has changed the tenor of their life, their thoughts and feelings. Formerly the people of Hansulibān sang “সিসুঝা জগা পেবাতী, গেল কুল গেল জাকি-সিসুঝা জগা পেবাতী।” but now the boys and girls imitate the wavy served of the train গাড়ি বন্ধে—“কটা তেঁতুল পাদা তেঁতুল।” The rail-road is devouring the social principles and the traditional culture of the ‘Kāhārs’.

As Tarasankar deals with the women of the ‘Kāhār’ society he has brought the example of the river Kopai. As flood comes to the Kopai, so the young ‘Kāhār’ girls, at the call of youth, qlearrel with their parents and brothers, curse the neighbours, flee their hearths, their hair disheveled. Her clothes fall off, her eyes burn, she throws stones and pebbles, and then run away, reandaliging the family. The flood of the
Kopai is, like her, an Amazon. But this is for only a few days. When she calms down, when her anger is exhausted, she comes back to the edge of the village and sits there, calm and quiet—

"ভারসময় এক-পা, দু-পা করে এমন বাড়ির কানাচে নুম গুপচন করে কাদ কি পান করে, ঠিক লোথা হার না— ......কোথা সত্য ঠিক বেল কারার কানা।" 14.

It is not that morality has a great value in the lives of the young girls of the ‘Kahār’ society. Many ‘Kahār’ girls at different times left the society holding the hands of different men. A girl like Sidhu is now in Chandrapur living the life of a prostitute. Karali’s mother had fled with a muslim mechanic to Chandanpur, leaving the child Karali behind. This is one side of the coin. There is the other side which the ‘Kahārs’ consider to be destitute, the acts of fate. And as it is the act of fate—

"একধরনের সহস্রধূলিহার মধ্য দিয়েই কাহারেরা মেনে নেয় তাদের বন্ধু বিদের এই আচরণ। পাশ্চিরা মা কসন নিতরাত্রে কেশভূষা সেরে একাই চলে খেত বাবুদের বাগানবাড়িতে। এখনও উচ্চবিন্দুদের উচ্চতায় জীবনের যত পানি এই অক্ষত জীবনের মেরেরাই ধরন করে – কাহার পাড়ায় সোরগোল জাগে না তাতে। কেননা বাবুমশাহিদের ‘আদর্শ’ করেই তারা জীবনধ�ր করে।" 15

And so though Banawari is not devoid of the sense of sin or feminine chastity, he has to make compromise with the nasty acts of the upper class; this is the machination of the collective fate of the Kāhārs-

"কিন্তু বিদির বিধান, উপরে আছে সত্জাতেরা, তাদের ময়লা মাটু ঘুরে সবই আসনি এসে পড়ে তাদের গায়। সত্জাতের ময়লা সাফ করে মেহর। চরণ সেবা করে হাড়ি ডোম বাড়ির কাহার। শাসনে থাকে চাঁদাল। বিদির বিধান এসে। কাহার মেয়েরা সত্য হলে ভ্রমজনদের পাপ ধরনে কারা রাখবে কোথা? কাজেই কাহার জন্মের এ কর্ম যে সীকার করতেই হবে।" 16

Another feature of the ‘Kahārs’ of Hansuliṅk may be discussed in the manner they quarrel. They quarrel not for a day unplugs and it is not resolved cannily. It continues for long day and the phase of name-calling begins in the morning just after getting up from bed. A short period of rest is taken when tiredness grasps, and then hurling of abusive language from outside the boundary of the homestead with
face towards the house of the enemy continues phase after phase. This peculiarity of their quarrelling has been going on the generations and may be called quarrel culture.

In the practice of hunting of animals, one picture of the social life of the ‘Kahars’ becomes clearly visible. The ‘Kahars’ applying a special technique for catching tears or crocodiles and in this is hidden the distinctness of their society. Tarasankar has given a lengthy description of their hunting in one section in the first chapter of the novel. They prepare a trap for catching bears—

“The smell of the drink attracts the bear and when it swallows the banana, the hook gets stuck in its tongue or palate. Then it tries to free itself from the hook, but the opposite result follows. When attempts are made to free itself with its hoof—

“The smell of the drink attracts the bear and when it swallows the banana, the hook gets stuck in its tongue or palate. Then it tries to free itself from the hook, but the opposite result follows. When attempts are made to free itself with its hoof—

For killing a crocodile the ‘Kahars’ go in a batch, pasting turmeric in the body and armed with annex, sticks, look etc. which they find the hole of a crocodile in the riverbank, they first cut the mouth of the hole and then start digging it from above. And then they kill the crocodile stick up in the hole. Sometimes they fasten the crocodile with the loop and drag it out and quit mercilessly kill it by beating it for two-three days. If they find no crocodile in the bank, they adopt another method— they take the buffalows to the waters. The crocodiles come out when the buffalows raise a commotion in the water. Then start the act of dancing and killing the crocodile.

When Bihutibhusan Bandyopadhyay may chalked out the plan for his novel ‘Ichamati’, he had a clean idea about the characters in the normal. In his diary ‘সৃজিতির বেশা’, ‘উৎকর্ষ’ ও ‘ঘে অরণ্য কথা কও’— he laid bare his plan for writing this novel—
Again in 'উৎকণ্ঠাঃ'—

"এই পল্লীগ্রামের যে জীবনযাত্রা শতাব্দীর পর শতাব্দীর পর শতাব্দী এইরকম, এই বাশ শিমুল বনে অপরাজেয় শোভা এমনি ধারা দেখা যায় - কিছুতে কিছুতে এমনি ফুল ফোটে - কত বনিমতলার ঘাট, কত প্রায় মেয়ে, কত হাসি করা প্রথম পড়েহ - এই রকম চলবে। এদের নিয়ে একটি উপন্যাস লিখে আজ মাত্রায় এসেছে... মহাকাল মনে এই উপন্যাসের পটভূমি - নারীকা গ্রাম্য নর-নারীত। ডি ডিচিগির শেষ জীবনের মত প্রতীর তার আকৃতি।" 20

The following occurs in —

"ইচ্ছে আছে এবার একটি বইলে হত দেবো-নাম দেবো তার ইচ্ছাতী। বড় উপন্যাস। তাতে থাকবে ইচ্ছুকতার ধারণাগুলির অপব্যাপ্তী জীবনপ্রভাবের ইতিহাস - কেন নিকুঞ্জের মরা বাঁচার ইতিহাস কত সুখদূঃসার, কত সুখায়নের নিত্যধর্ম শান্ত ইতিহাস।" 21

After going through these we may emphatically hold that the particular side of the society Bibhutibhusan wanted to lay fore in ‘Ichāmati’ is the society of humans inhabiting the region around the river Ichamati. When we discuss the novel with this in mind it becomes clearer that the novelist had as his target the rural society around the river. The place of action he selected for his novel is the village Pānchpota. It should be borne in mind that the time of action in the novel is quite long, spreading over 60-70 year. In the initial pages, of the narrative there are references to the period just after the ‘Sepoy Mutiny’(1857) or the Caboners in the indigo farms and the European owners of the contemporary times. At the ending there are references to the
laying of railway lines between Chakdah and Chuadanga. This shows that the course of action here begins in the second half of the nineteenth century and flows through quite a long period in the first half of the twentieth. Bengal as well as the whole of India was under the British rule at the time. In ‘Ichamati’ a clear sketch of the lifestyle of the rural areas of colonial Bengal has been drawn. The folklife of the peripheral region of the districts of Jassore and 24 Parganas has been dealt with in the novel. It cannot be denied that in the novel –

“একটি বিশেষ অঞ্চলের মানব জীবনের সূচি দৃষ্টের ন্যায় নানা বৈচিত্র্য প্রকৃতির পটভূমিতে চমৎকার শিল্পরূপ লাভ করেছে। সমসাময়িক ঐতিহাসিক প্রসঙ্গ, সমাজ জীবনের চিত্র, প্রকৃতি - বৈচিত্র্য প্রকৃতি পার্থিবত্বকের মধ্যে এতাং যে কয়েকটি বাতীর চরিত্রের বিকাশ ঘটেছে, তাদের মধ্যে ঐ অঞ্চল জীবনের নানা বৈশিষ্ট্য প্রকাশিত হয়ে তাদের চরিত্রকে স্বতন্ত্রতাধান করেছে।”

It is a Brahminical society that has been spoken of in ‘Ichamati’ in which, however, a part of the economic power was in the hands of the European owners of the indigo estates. Coercion meted out by the Neelkar Sahebs or the high handedness of their Indian subordinates, murders, setting houses to fire, forcible occupation of cultivable land – these were but natural incidents in those days. The same things have been presented in the play ‘Neeldarpan’ of Dinabandhu Mitra. The society of men outside the indigo estate was characterized by illiteracy, poverty, superstitions, fears and beliefs class-creed division and hierarchy of nobility- the people were sandwiched among these farces. Brahmins, who were at the top of the caste divided society, were also divided into groups, fighting for their respective interests the lower-caste people were hit by extreme poverty and neglected by the people of the higher social strata. Though they belonged to the higher society, they were confined to a narrow social space. Laughter and tears, tale of happiness and misery flowed like currents of water on the fourth of the Ichamati. In the novel we find that the people lost all patience with the atrocities of the owners of the indigo estates and revolted against them, and when artificial indigo was discovered it signified the beginning of the end of their power and pomp. On the other hand, a fade light of humanism flickered in the rural society ruled over by the Brahmins that had been suffering from rural customs and system of the high-born known as ‘Kulins’. It may be noted that as an unstinted touch of softness could be seen in the men and women of the so-called lower class, so the touch simplicity could be seen even in the heart of the apparently ruthless robbers.
Not only that, it could be seen that suddenly a man belonging to the lower strata by industriousness became rich and an object of honour and jealousy. The author picturized the contemporary social life in the novel with great care and sympathy.

The social life depicted in the novel ‘Ichāmāti’ revolves mainly around Mollānātī and the Neelkuthi at Mollāhātī. Bibhutibhushan has beautifully picturized the atrocities perpetrated by the Bada Saheb Shipton and the Choto Saheb David and their Dewan Rajam Ray on the common folk living in the British Controlled society. Harassment meted out to an innocent and simple man like Ram Kanai Kaviraj brings home to the reader the harsh reality of the time. The colonial masters found in their Indian agents and servants very able mates in their acts of appression and so Prasanna Āmin, Rajaram Ray or Nafar Muchi never repents when the old, warn-out and helpless Ram Kanai is ruthlessly appressed. The conversation between Ram Kanai and Nafar Muchi may be noticed in this context—

“আমারে মেরা না বাবা। আমার বাত শ্রোমার অসুখ আছে, আমি তাহালি মারি যাবে।”

“মরে যাও, বীঁওঁড়ের জলে ভাসিয়ে দেবনি। তার জন্যে ভাবতি হবে না। অমন করত এ হাতে ভাসিয়ে দিইটি।”

In the backdrop of the economic situation, the delapidated rural society which was mainly dependent upon the ‘Neelkuthi,’ there was hardly any sense of workculture. In the morning as well as evening, in the ‘Chandimandap’ standing in the yard of the householder the male folk engaged themselves in cards and dice. The social life of rural Bengal of those days cannot be thought of without this ‘Chandimandap’. Though this ‘Chandimandap’ is associated to the name of goddess Chandi, it was mainly a place of gossiping and idling away of time of the lethargic and workless people. The manner in which Bibhutibhusan described the ‘Chandimandap’ in ‘Ichāmāti’ makes clearly visible a feature of rural social life and in it we may feel the pulse-beat of the life-style of the region—

“চতুঃমণ্ডপ হচ্ছে পশুধামের একটি প্রতিষ্ঠান। এইখানেই সকাল থেকে সন্ধ্যা পর্যন্ত নিক্ষিপ্ত, রাক্ষসের বৃত্তিভোগী, মূর্ত্য রাজার দল জুটে কেবল তামাক পোড়ায় আর দামা পাশা (তারে প্রচলন এসব পাটাগায়ে আদে নেই, ওটা বিলিতি খেলা বলে পণ্য) চালে। তবে সম্পাত ধৃতিবের চতুঃমণ্ডপে আমার জোর বসে থাকে,
It is not difficult to see that during the first decades of the nineteenth century, parasitical nature of the top-class in the rural society begot such a wave of worklessness that submerged the society in deeper darkness.

It is not that there was no exception. There are Nalu Paul and Satish Kalu who belong to the so-called ‘Lower Class’; both of them, by virtue of hard labour and intelligence, rose from dire poverty to socially recognized status of wealthy men. At the beginning of the narrative we find Nalu Paul sheltered in the house of his maternal uncle and oppressed his aunt going to the market of Mollahati carrying on the head a weight of batel-leaves and batel-nuts. With the passage of time this Nalu Paul was changed a respectable Lalmohan Paul. He arranges a feast of fruits for the pilgrims where they start for a pilgrimage and again where they return from pilgrimage. In this is seen a living picture of the contemporary rural society drawn in the novel. The might of Brahminism has also been portrayed, as in the following—

“নালু গড় হয়ে সবাইকে একসঙ্গে প্রাণ করে জোড়াইতে কলমে - আমার একটা আবদার আছে, আপনাদের রাখতি হবে। আপনারা নাকি তীর্থী যাচ্ছেন শোনলাম। এককদিন আমি রাক্ষণ- তীর্থযাত্রী তোলন করবো। আমার বড় সাধ। এখন আপনারা আনুমতি দিন, আমি তিনিস পাঠিয়ে দেবো চক্ষু মহাশয়ের বাড়ি। কি কি পাঠাবো হ্রদম করেন।
A touch of regionalism is felt in this conversation carried on in the local dialect of the region of course, an influence of regionalism on the social life is also discerned. Even the English could not escape this influence; particularly those who came to the villages in Bengal for indigo cultivation and settled there for long illustrated the deep impact of the region in their life-style. This has been beautifully described by Bibhutibhusan—

“সাহেনরা ছোট-হাজারি খেলে বড় অঝুত ধরণের। এক এক কাঁধি পাঁজা ভাত এক ডজন লেজুর রস মেঝে। রাজের টেবিলের ঠাণ্ডা হাম। একটা করে আত্ম শব্দ ঝাঁপে। চার পাঁচটি করে খায়। মাছ সর্দের তেলে ভাজা। বর্দল বাংলাদেশের প্রামে থাকবার ফলে এদের সকলেরই আহারবিহার এদেশের গ্রাম লোকের মত হয়ে গিয়েছে। ওরা আম কাঠালোর রস দিয়ে ভাত খায়। অনেকে ইতেক তামাক খয়। নিঃশ্রেণীর মেয়েদের সঙ্গে মেঝে, অনেকেকে ঘরেও রাজে।”

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But these foreigners were not completely metamorphosed. Where a guest comes from abroad or any English highly placed official visits, arrangements are made for mutton, fish, mango or ghee. And not only this arrangements for drinking, they immensely like mutton as well as pork.

There are quite a few references to festivals in ‘Ichamati’. Some of these festivals are personal or rather domestic—‘Annaprāśan’ of the boy, birthday celebration, Nalu Paul’s arrangement of feast for the pilgrims, Durga puja etc. Among the social festivals and ceremonies the most important is ‘ভেরে পলুদিন’.

‘ভেরে পলুদিন’ is observed on the thirteenth day of month ‘Bhadra’. All the women of the village Panchpota assemble under the old ‘Jeuli’ and ‘Kadamba’ trees on the banks of the Ichamati. The women from various group according to the localities of their abodes and make arrangements for picnic in different spots. It is customary not to cook in the picnic cite but to bring food from home, according to their ability. The women take food on banana leaves. They recite limericks, song songs and sound—

“এই কনভোজনের একটি চর্চারিত প্রথা এই, তুমি সম্প্রতি গৃহস্থ ঘরের বো, তুমি যালো জিনিস এনেছ খাবার জন্যে - যারা দরিদ্রের জন্যে তেমন কিছু আনতে পারেনি, তাদের তুমি ভাগ করে দেবে নিজের আনা ভালো খাবার। এ কেউ বলে দেয় না, কেউ বাধাও করে না - এ একটি অলিভিত গ্রাম প্রথা বরাবর চালে আসতে এবং সবই মনেও এসেছে।”

This social tradition of give and take bridges the gulf of social status between the rich and the poor, though ever so slightly. We may remember how Nalu Paul’s wife Tulshi and the wife and sister of poor Jatin share their food with each other. The separating line between the Brahmins and non-brahmians also becomes slightly thin in this food sharing practice; Tilu-Bilu Beloing to the former share food with the daughter-in-law of the poorest man in the village Nilmani Samaddar belonging to the latter.

The menu that we find in ‘ভেরে পলুদিন’ is peculiarly that of rural Bengal—চিড়, মুড়িক, বাতাস, ফলা, চিনিকি মঠ, চালভাজ, দইয়ের মোটল। In this festival the last items are recitation of limericks and songs. Bidhudidi, a woman past fifty recites limericks and sings the songs of Nidhubabu, Nistarini who is lovingly considered the bride of the whole
village sings Shyamasangeet with all these, it is a lively picturization of the women­folk of the village.

Among other festivals, Durga Puja is referred to in the novel at least in two places. One is the Puja celebrated in the ‘Neelkuthi’ of Shipton Saheb and the other the worship of Durga by Nalu Paul. A lot of hustle-bustle was noticed in the village in the context of these two pujas. A huge image of Durga was built for the puja in Shiptons ‘Neelkuthi’. Biswambhar Dhuli of village Manasapota played on the ‘Dhol’ for three continuous days. ‘Yatra’ was organized on the occasion of the Puja. People of neighbouring about seventeen villages assembled to listen to Yatra of Govinda Adhikari. But the Brahmin rulers of the society did not allow the women to attend the ‘Yatra’. But Tilu-Nilu and Tulsi, Nalu Paul’s wife, went to witness the ‘Yatra’.

In the Durga Puja of Nalu Paul we see a living picture of village groupism. Nalu Paul arranged Druga Puja in his house disregarding the opinion of the people of the village. The Brahmin controllers of the society, led by vanity of social status boycotted this Puja; only Bhabani Bandyopadhyay was the exception. At the advice of Bhabani Nalu contracted the Brahmin of the adjacent village. Here we notice the appearance of the agents of the feast of the Brahmins. One of them is Ramhari Chakraborty and the other is Satkadi Ghosal. The two agents bargained with Nalu Paul and agreed to collect Brahmins to attend the fest on condition that he would have to pay each of them five rupees—

“নালুগালের দিকে ফিরে রামহরি ডানহাতের আঙুলগুলো সব ফাঁক করে তুলে দেখিয়ে বললেন - পাঁচ টাকা করে লাগবে আমাদের দুজনের।

- দেবো।
- বাংলাদেশের বোজান -দক্ষিণে দিতি হবে এক টাকা।
- ওইটে কমিয়ে আট আনা করতি হবে।
- আর এক মালসা ছুঁড়া দিতি হবে- লুটি, চিনি, নারকেল নাভি। খাওয়ার আগে।
- তাও দেবো, কিন্তু দক্ষিণে আট আনা করুন।
- আমাদের পাঁচ টাকা করে দিতে হবে খাওয়ার আগে কিন্তু। এর কম হবে না।” 31 ইত্যাদি।
It is a custom to collect fourteen kinds of pot-herbs. Boys and girls of the village came to the banks of the Ichamati to collect the items. 'Khokā,' that is, Tulu also accompanied them. But he did not know the fourteen varieties of the herbs. Through their conversation the author lets us know the names of various pot-herbs—

“এই দ্বারক কতা শাক, গালমানি, বোটুবোটুনি, সাদা নটে, গোয়াল নটে, কুছ নলী, শান্তি শাক, মটরের শাক, কাঁঠাড়াশাম, কলমি, পুনর্বা - এখনো তুলেরো রাঙা আলুর শাক, ছোলার শাক, আর পালার শাক - এই চোদা।”

From only these references to social life we understand that in ‘Ichamati’ there is a plethora of pictures of the society. The author has with great expertise drawn such pictures of the society - the pictures and sketches of Gaya Mem, Prasanna Chakraborty, Ramkanai Kaviraj, Nila mani Samaddar and his art of living a domestic life, the struggle between Neelkuthi and the common folk, bathing in the Ichamati and many more. Possibly because of this that Pramathanath Bishi, in the Introduction to Bibhutibhusan’s best stories, maintains that the daily life of the people is the base on which the short stories and novels of the author stand. This comment is beautifully sustained by the novel ‘Ichamati’.

The great akinness of Samaresh Basu’s novel ‘Ganga’ with Manik Bandyapodhyay’s ‘Padmānadir Majhi’ and Advaita Mallabarman’s ‘Titās Ekti Nadir Nām’ is that in all the three novels the life of the fishermen community has been dealt with. Even then the difference of ‘Ganga’ from the other two novels is also quite clear. In ‘Padmānadir Majhi’ and ‘Titās Ekti Nadir Nām’ the ‘Mālo’ society has been portrayed, but not so in ‘Ganga’. We agree with the critic who maintained—

“গঙ্গ উপন্যাসটি জেলে – সমাজের উপন্যাস নয়। এটি একটি মরসুমের নলীতে জেলেদের মাছ ধরার যাতায়াতের চিত্রগুলো আরও এক মহামায়া – সমুদ্রে যাবার কাহিনী, গতি ও পথ, যাত্রা ও জন্ম মৃত্যু, আশা – নিরাশার দৌলায় জীবনের অচলতাই এখানে প্রধান। এই যাত্রায় গতির সুলভী স্ফূর্তির শ্রেষ্ঠে জেলেদের জীবনে এসেছে।”
The tale of life that we find in this novel was unknown to us and unheard of. Each of the novels dealing with the life of the fishermen community is confined to a geographical space a boundary or region. It is not so in ‘Ganga’; here is not portrayed the life of boatsmen and crew. The main tune of the novel is embedded in the desire for sea voyage of the protagonist Bilas. With a view to ascribing fulfilment to this desire the author has introduced the folk-life and folk-belief of the fishermen community, their friendship and enmity, faith, disbelief and suspicion; the entanglement of the lives of the fishermen with those of the hoarders and whole sellers, various relationships among men and women etc.

As we saw folk-belief about the original progenitor being in ‘Hãnsulibânker Upakathã’, here too we see a similar myth. These fishermen search for the first or original progenitor in Nature. This belief gets fused with respect combined with fear—

"মালোর ঘরের সেই পেঞ্চস পুরুষ। না, মালো জাতের কথা বলছিন।..... ওয়ার কল্যাঙ্গেই সমুদ্র পারের মালো বংশ বড় হয়েছে, ছইড়ে পড়েছেন। মালোরা তায়খন রাজা হয়েছেন দেশের। শুনিতে দক্ষিণ দে হেঁটে এসেছেন। নিশ্চয় কালো বুকুকুচি এক পুরুষ কোচকানো চুল ধরা আছে কপালের ওপর। গায়ে আর কিছু নেই। হাতে এক মস্ত কাঠা। তাঙ্গায় এসে ওয়ার বড় বেপদ হল। দক্ষিণ রাজার রাজ্য। ছোড়ে কি কথা কর্য। তায়খন অবশ্য ধলাধলিতেও বাদা। আসার পথে নতুএ হল দক্ষিণ রাজার চেলাদের সাথে। জিতেন্দ্র উদি। দক্ষিণ রায় খুশি হয়ে মস্ত একখানি গায়ের ছাল দিয়ে চলিয়ে ওয়ারের পথে। ওই হল ওয়ার আসার মূঢ়। বায়ের ছাল পরা, কাঠা হাতে কালো ফুলুকুচি পুরুষ। তোমার প্রচুর সমুদ্রের পার ধরেই ছেল ওয়ার রাজ্য।" 34

This is an attempt at searching out God. The oppressed and exploited fishermen with the help of this attempt further go on continuously to search out their root, their origin. So they create their own God. In the novel we come across many more folk-beliefs and folk-customs. Nature is at the root of their belief; all their consciousness, consciousness of birth and death revolve round this belief. The fishermen believe that at this death their eyes will meet the eyes of the food—besmeared Blue Eyes; if any mischance comes in the water, it shall be felt first in their own house- the house will be disarrayed at the moment of death. We may have
an idea about this from the feelings of wife of Nibaran Sāidār at the moment of his death.

The same kind of belief they have in the supernatural, that is, spirits, as they have in God. The novelist has narrated some incidents about this. One is the incident of the violence let loose by the she-spirits in the village of the fishermen in the month of Chaitra, another is the incident of petting towards the fishermen from that house at Barangar where they stopped to take rest-

"তা যিনি আছেন ও বাড়িতে তাঁর সঙ্গে না। কী ইহ পাটিকেল ছোড়া। বাবারে। ছই ভেঙে, তিন্যন্ত ভেঙে, মানুষ ঘাড়েল করে এক তফসী কাও। একে অন্যরী ৰায় বাকি নেই। ভাবখানা, পালা শিপাপির আচারের কোলে ছেড়ে।

"মাইনারারা দেখে গণিতক সুবিধের নয়। কে জনে কোন বামুন-বিধবা রোপাচারী আছেন ওই পোড়ে ভিড়ে। মেছে নৌকা দেখলে আর রক্ষে নেই। সেই থেকে এখানে আর কেউ নৌকা বাধে না।" 35

The fishermen have almost rites, customs and Prejudices. They have their independent notions about various festivals and ceremonies, for instance, 'Ambubachi', which is an agri-centred festival. But they combine this agri-centred festival with their very dear flow of water—

"নারীত দর্শন করেছেন সন্নাগা ধরিত্রী। মানুষের পাপ সব। .....রাজ্যের চল নেমেছে অস্কুয়াটিফি

দিন। তা ধরে চেন নামে। তাই তারা ধরে কুলায় যিনি ঘরনি, তিনি কৃষ বেশ পৃথিবীর লক্ষণ

নিয়ে আছেন। ইহমতীর কালো জলেও তুমি লাল চল দেখে এসেছ। তারপর আসবে যোগ জল। সেটা

আরও জল। জলের তলে যত অন্য আসবে ঘনিয়ে ঘটে রাতের মতে জামটি বাঁধবে। ততই সুদিন।

"এখন রাখো, ধরিত্রীকে আহাত করে না। মারুপাপ লাভ করেছেন যিনি। তিনিনি, বিশ দশ।

মাটিতে আহাত করে না। তারা ধরের কথা সামায় রাখো। আওরণ ছেলে না। বামুন, বিধবার রানী পোড়া

কিছুই থাকেনা। সেটা আরার ধরের কথা। বড় জাতে পালেন। যাদের খাওয়া জেটে না, তাদের আহার

পেলে সরাতে নেই। ওটো ধরিত্রীর বিধান।

মাটিতে আহাত করে না। জলে জল তোবানো বন্ধ রাখো।" 36
These people, who go underfed, the arrival of any ceremony or festival also bears the message of satisfaction of appetite—this notion is borne by the aforesaid.

To the fishermen community in ‘Gangā’ the Ganga is not only a river, but also their life-giving mother and their only support. If fish is not found in the Ganga, then they ‘নলেন টানে’; they construct an altar on the bank of the river and fall prostrate upon it—this is called ‘নলেন টানা’! With the belief that the mother will become kind to her children, and this will suggest the ending of the quack remedy.

The ‘Mālos’ worship Ganga collectively to satisfy her. In their own parlance this worship is called ‘সাজাত’. Though this worship is collectively, they donot pay any subscription for this. The donate fishes caught in singe ebb-tide—

“সাজাত হল মাছারাদের সার্বজনীন গদাপুজো। সর্বাপেক্ষা দীপে দেয়। হারে ধরে কেউ টাকা পাওয়া দেয়া। মাছারাদের একটি ভাটার পাওয়া সহ মাছ দিয়ে দেয়, যাদের ওপর সাজাতের ভার থাকে। তাতে বলে ‘সাজাতাটা’। সেই মাছ বিক্রি করে যে টাকা পাওয়া যায় তাতেই সার্বজনীন গদাপুজো হয়। তাতে কে কত বেশি দিয়েছে, কম দিয়েছে, সেটা কোনও কথা নয়। যা পায় তাই দেয়।” 37

In almost all the villages of Basirhat this puja is celebrated and naturally in the locality of Damini and others. In this Puja some amount of display of splendor is also noticeable. From the town the ‘Yātrā’ companies also come and ‘Yātrā Pālās’ are staged; thus the Pālās ‘Santanu and Ganga’, ‘Nal Damayanti’, ‘Shakuntala’ and ‘Chitrangada’ were staged in the village of Himi and others. The Puja was erected on a bamboo structure, the sides and the top covered by terpauline, on an open space within the locality. Drums and Kānshis are beaten; the rich and the poor alike are carried away by the joy of Ganga Puja; men and women drink intoxicants. The image of Ganga has also been given—through the eyes of Bilash—

“কান পর্যন্ত টানা টানা অপলক চোখ, কালো তারা দুটিতে কী তারাসু। লাল টুকরুকে ঠাঁট পূর্ণিতে মিশিয়া হাসি। সোনার মতো রং। চতুর্ভূজা মূর্তি। নাকে মাটি বড় নথ। হাতি মুখো বাহন মকরের ল্যাঙ্কি কুমোর এমন বুকিয়ে দিয়েছেন, যেন জলে রাপটা মারছে। মাটি লাঘু শুভ্র দিয়েছে বাড়িয়ে। অপলক গোল চোখ দুটি লাল টুকরুকে দেখা যায়।” 38
Reference to the game of ‘Bāchād’ at the time of Ganga Puja is also there. The game of ‘Bāchād’ is nothing but pulling up the trunk of a Tāl tree and then dragging it to a distance. The group that wins achieves respect. As the game of ‘Bāich’ occurs in ‘Titāś Ekti Nadir Nām’ so the game of ‘Bāich’ played by the fishermen occurs in Ganga. The game is organized by the rich people of the village, especially. In this games, some boats stand in the same row in the river and they start all at once; this is really boat-race in which they best rowers always win. Sometimes ill-feeling among the sailors is generated centering the competition. Once as a result of this kind of ill-feeling Arjun Mājhi had tried to break the legs of Nibaran Śnādār. He had started fighting with Bilas as he could not even defeat him in this game of Bāich. We come to know from the mouth of the narrator Panchu something about this ‘Bāich’-fight.

Bilas—

“গত সালের আগের সনে তিনটি মাঝিকে জড়ে করে, তাদের দৌড়ার তুলে, তুলকলাম কাপুর করে, ধলাতার নাম রেখে এইজন্যে। অক্ষয় দোৰ্ধ ছিল সারাপুলওয়ালাদেরই। অহোন বাপের সঙ্গে পারেনি, বোটাকে জন্ম করতে চেয়েছিল।” 39

The struggle for life of the fishermen depends entirely on Nature. When Nature becomes kind to them there descends upon them happy days and where Nature becomes unkind they suffer endless misery. Natural calamity like a storm destroys their habitats. The year Nibaran had gone to the sea for the last time, a storm has flown away his hearth and home and a number of fishing nets had also been destroyed. Side by side come ‘কাট’ of Shravan and Chaitra. Rivers become shallow in Chaitra. The fishermen go to swamps fens and canals for catching fish, but these are also fall of mud and water-insects. Whatever the catch, it does not suffice even a single meal in a day. The fisherman goes out for begging, putting on the coloured dress of a Gājan-mendicant. The inmates of the house remain unfed. When begging does not satisfy the appetite, the fishermen lose their character and seek refuge in stealing and lifting. One may be caught while stealing and lose one’s life in ‘হাকর’, like Abhoy Mālō. The ‘টাইটা’ thrown at him in the dark pierces through his chest.

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The ‘চোটা’ of Shrāvan is much more unbearable. At this time fish cannot be caught even by engaging a whole day’s labour. Terrible famine stores the fishermen in the face. At this terrible time many fishermen want to flee from the river and seek refuge in the village. The fishermen of the north flee the area because of the onslaught of flood, and start begging wetted by water and dried by the sun, the skin of the fishermen gets the colour of the boat; the pulling of the fishing net results in bleeding of the palms, but fish is not caught we see Thandaram getting back home and thinking of working in the field. Fishermen living in the neighbourhood of the town seek refuge in begging in the roads of the town. They mortgage domestic utensils, beg for excess water from boiled rice. Critic correctly hold that the religious faith of poor fisherman is based on economic structure — “মাছারার ধর্মবিধানেও অন্নীতিকেজিতে”.

Sometimes they chant the name of Krishna, they pay respect to Kali when they row their boats past the temple of the goddess. And again they marry by exchanging ‘কষ্ট’.

In the novel the chemistry of the relationship between the fishermen of the east and the west may be noticed. This relationship between this two is much like that between water and oil. The fishermen of the west think that fishing in the Ganga does not fall within the right of the fishermen of the east. So they bear antagonism towards each other; here too the cause of antagonism is economic. There is a note of disrespect in the mind of Rasik for the people of the east. The author says —

“রসিক এ অজান্তে, পশ্চিম পারের জেলেপাড়ার মাঝি, মাছারার। পুরুর মানুষদের খুব ভালো চোখে দেখে না। যেন পাড়ার এই গল্লার সীমানায় শুদ্ধ তাদের। এখানে কেউ এলে জল ফেললে। তাদের বড় রুক টাটায়। মনে করে, তাদের বেঁধে রাখা জলের সীমানায় বেআইনী চুকিয়ে পুরুর মাছারারা।”

The fishermen look at the inhabitants of the plains with an eye of suspicion. They are afraid of the custodians of law, the merchant and the middleman. The colourful life
of the town does not appear credible to them. They become the easy victims of exploitation of the merchants. When fish becomes scarce in the rivers, the boatsman borrow many from the money lenders who take advantage of the situation and demand high rate of interest. When they take things on credit, the shop-owners cheat them and squeeze prices at a high rate higher than the market-price. When the fishermen are exasperated by the rate of interest, they are compelled to pledge the boat and the fishing-net to the money-lenders. The condition of those who have neither money nor fishing-net is worse. They take boat and net on rent at compound rate of interest. This practice of borrowing at high rate goes on from one generation to the next. They take hand cash from the money-lenders by pledging even valuable ornaments and utensils of silver. The author has given a picture of how exploitation is meted out to them by the merchants and money-lenders 43–

क) “बल्कि, सब महाजनों को एक कथा हुये हार के जाकर। बाड़, तोमर नाह मानते पारौं ना, को किसा आमार लोह। पैटे घेते ना पेले एसे लौको बाँधा रेख ठाकना ने यावे। आदार आसा पड़ते ना पड़ते बिना उदुल लौको ने यावे। आमादेवों दिते हैं, निले उदुल होय की करूे? तां तोमर ना पारले आमार की करव ।”

“अनस्त बल्कि, हाँ, अवशेष महाजनों के पिता का बच्चे ही किबु मानस है। एकदेवा माजना तो आर छड़े दिते ना हो। पेले सेने दुर्ग ठाका महाजनको सिले की हुवे, बांसार करुवे तार देष्टा। एथा तोमर बाँधासूंदि जलखानिति दिये दिये हैं महाजनको। बलले महाजन, बुड़ो होय अनस्त, जलखानि रेखे देव आमार काखुए। यदि वर्षा गड़ेया ना घेते पारौ। मरे धरे याव, तबेने लौकोउ आर जाले आमार किबु मानस होय यावे।” (पृ-२२७-२२८)

ख) “परंतु बल्कि, कौरार्की केमन दिले एवार महाजन। अनस्त बलले, तो होयेह, दूरे चाल। निम्न निम्नि एरेह। ताधरे, एक मस पुरने हुवे तो हाल। दाम दरेे, बोल ठाका मधु।

“बोल ठाका मधु। परंतु चमकार उपाय नेह। बलले, हाँ, अद्वेरे मोटा लाल चाल दरेे। तोमर निये होल, आमार निये पणे। बाजारे दाम हल बारेर मधु।” 43 (पृ-२२९, २३०)
The naked face of exploitation is seen in the merchant’s lust for female flesh. If the fishermen fail to repay the money of the lenders with interest, the latter extend this hands towards the wives and daughters of the victims. In the novel we find how Brajen Thakur spends the night with the wife of Rasik for his failure to repay money. The picture of this kind of exploitation is caught in the thought of Panchu –

“সমুদ্রের কাল নয়, গঙ্গার কাল নয়, মহাজনের মন তাই পাথর হয়ে গেছে। এখন সে নিবারণ সাহারকেও মানে না। মাহাজানের জাহার কথা বলে মহাজন। বলে, তোমার বাড়িতে যাব হে। দুটো সুর্য দুঃখের কথা বলব। বউয়ের শরীরে কাপড় চোপড় আছে তো। গুনেছি, মেয়েটি তোমার ভাগর হয়েছে।”

The fishermen borrow money not only from the merchants, but also from the whole-sellers and the ‘ফার্সে’ and this money in local parlance is called ‘পা�镧লি’. The lend money to the hard-pressed fisherman and realize money in another way. When the fisherman come with their catch the whole-sellers of fishes take advantage of the situation and set the price at a much lower rate. As Panchu and Bilas borrowed money from Damini so they come to her to sell the fishes they caught and she pays them much lower price. These female agents live in bamboo huts on the banks of rives. In their localities most of the inhabitants are girls. At night some drunken men frequent these localities. It is quite common for the girls there to engage themselves in prostitution. Even such an influential harlot-agent as Atarbala sells her body. She does find herself in the wed lock for it would not allow her a free and independent life. Himi, the chief female character, also spent a year in the town with the man of her choice. This is quite natural for them and there is no sense of sorrow or shame in them for this. They have their families so long as they retain their youth, Damini lived with three men, one after the other. There is no searcity of colour in their amorous acts, but this amor is primitive and violent.

As already noted, the backdrop of ‘Ganga’ is not limited to any geographical specific space, and so the picturization of the social character of any specific space is absent here. The people who are dealt with in the novel are only fishermen. In the narrative-world of the novel the pictures of this exploitation, their catch of fishes and sale, their daily struggle for existance, their customs and beliefs are all presented one
after another. In ‘Kāler Pratimā’ Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay holds that—“মূল চেতনা
নদীর প্রতিকূলতার সঙ্গে জড়িত মৃত্যুরোধ”।

We agree to this view of the critic and hold that the picture of human life which is
inseparably fused with nature has been portrayed here.

The novel ‘Titās Ekta Nadir Nām’ (1956) of Advaita Mallabarman has in its
centre the river Titas which flows through the district of Kumilla in Bangladesh. This
novel depicting the life of the fishermen living in the banks of the Titas is widely
different from Manik Bandyopadhyay’s ‘Padmānādir Mājhi’ (1936), Manik
Bandyopadhyay belonged to a Brahmin family, but not Advaita Mallabarman who
belonged to the ‘Mālo’ community. This is one reason why in his nature there was no
romantic aspect as if was there in Manik’s. So his delineation of the life of the
fishermen appears to be more credible than that in ‘Padmānādir Mājhi’ for he knew
since his birth this community like his palm. He was born in the banks of the Titas in
the house of a fisherman, and here he saw the harsh realities of the life of the
fisherman. He inwardly wept for these people sandwiched between social class and
economic class. Later on though he lived in Kolkata he never become oblivious of
these wretched people. In the pages of the novel he spoke about these hopelessly
marginalised people. The variegated picture of the life of the fishermen community
living in the banks of a river, their manners, customs and beliefs found a concentrated
expression in ‘Titās Ekta Nadir Nām’ while identifying the ‘Mālos’ the novelist in
‘প্রথমাখ্যাত’ of the novel said—

“তিতেবস নদীর তীরে মালোদের বাস ছাড়া বঁধা নৌকা, মাটিতে ছড়ানো জাল, উঠানের কোলে
গাবর মটকি, যেরে ঘরে চরকি, টেকো, তকলি — সুতা কাটার, জাল বনার সরঞ্জাম। এই সব নির্যাত
মালোদের সৎসার।

“নদীটি যেখানে ধনুকের মতো বাক্সিয়াছে, সেইখানে হইতে গ্রামটার গুরু। মতে বড় গ্রামটা — তার দিনের
কলর্ব রাতের নিউতিতেওঠাকা পড়ে না। দফিন পাড়িটাই গ্রামের মালোদের।”

Gokarnaghat is the name of the village about which the novelist spoke. The ‘dramatic
personal’ of the novel are the ‘Mālo’ young people like Kishore, Subal, Basanti.
Their life-story has been narrated in the novel ‘Titās Ekta Nadir Nām’. It is probably
because of this that Professor Barun Kumar Chakraborty described it thus—
The Titas is a river neither big nor small, rather a medium-sized one. The ‘Mālos’ frequent the bosom of the river with boats for catching a variety of fishes available in its waters. Of course all the ‘Mālos’ do not have their own boats or fishing nets. Subal’s father was one of those ‘Mālos’ who lived by catching fishes with another man’s boats and received money-wages for their labour from the owners, who compelled them to toil ward, but did not pay them wages comensurate to labour – a common form of exploitation. Sometimes the owners made them do works which involved great risk to life. In the novel we see how Subal died while accomplishing a risky work.

In the village Gokarnaghat there are a few ‘চৌটি মালা’ who have their own boats and fishing nets with which they catch fishes in the river, bogs and swamps. But though they owned boats and nets, their persistent poverty was never overcome. Boys and girls also after finishing or even not finishing their primary school education joined the profession of their fathers and grandfathers. A fisherman like Ramkeshab belongs to this category. On the other hand there are a few well – to-do fishermen who live in the banks of the Titas. Kalobaran’s family falls under this category; this ‘Mālo’ family is quite moneyed in the locality inhabited by the ‘Mālos’. In this family every year six-seven mounds of thread is spin for making fishing nets. Kalobaran and his two brothers catch big fishes with big nets. Though they are quite well-off, their wives spin the thread the whole night, Kalobaran’s mother is a woman of temper and is esteemed by every body in the locality, of course she is not unmindful of the weal and woe of the people of the locality.

If needs be mentioned that Advaita Mallabarman tells the story of the ‘Mālo’ community of Gokarnaghat in ‘Titās Ekti Nadir Nārī’ but also those of Nayanpur, Sukdebpur as well as those who live in the banks of the river Bijay. Some of the ‘Mālos’ of Nayanpur take huge tanks on lease and farm fish, and when the fishes become big, transport them to other places. The ‘Mālos’ of Sukdepur also do not depend entirely on river and fish for their income. They also depend on cultivation of land; so they are at once fishermen and agriculturists. The novelist informs that they have——“একদিকে নদী মাছে ভরভর আর আরেকদিকে মাঠ ফসলে হাসি হাসি।”
Of all the ‘Mālos’ those living on the banks of the Bijay have to face the most difficult struggle for existence. This river is fed by water only in the rainy season. The river becomes most pitiful in the month of Chaitra when the life of the ‘Mālo’ becomes unbearable. But those who go to other places for catching fish don’t have to face so pitiful condition. But there is no end to the sufferings of those like Gouranga who cannot go to distant place—

“পৌরাঙ্গ মালোর দিন আর চালিতে চায় না। একদিন আকু খানা ডোবায় খেড়ে দিয়া কিছুই পাইল না, নামিয়ে টরবং করিয়া পচা। জলের ভাব উঠে, আর খেড়ে দিবে দিন-চারিটা ব্যাঙঝাল হইতে লাগিয়া এদিকে উদিয়ে পড়িয়া যায়।

........ঋতু যৌবন থাকিতেই শোকহইয়া গিয়াছিল। গাল বসিয়া বুক দাড়িয়া মত সরু হইয়া গিয়াছিল। বুকের ভন দুটি বুকেই বসিয়া গিয়াছিল তার। তারপর একদিন সে মরিয়া গিয়াছিল।

Gauranga was saved by the death of his wife, or his condition would be like that of Nityananda Mālo. In the house of Nityananda, he thought about the four members of the family but found no way out and now only smoked tobacco.

Advaita has with sincerity and fidelity drawn the picture of the ‘Mālo’ society with all their rites and manners, religious beliefs and practices and customs. Widow-remarriage is not recognized by the ‘Mālos’ of the Titas-banks and so, Basanti who had become a widow in her full youth, could not be remarried. Once Ramprasad of Yatrañāri tried to introduce widow remarriage in the ‘Mālo’ society and was abased for this, for—

“হরামের চক্রুষ্টী ঠাকুর পুরোহিত দর্পণ খুলিয়া মালোনিগকে বুকাইয়াছে, বিধবার কিছু নিজে নরকে বাইতে হইবে। কাজেই ব্রাহ্মণ পণ্ডিতের কথা শিষ্যধারায় করিয়া রামপ্রসাদকে তারা অপার্থ্য করিয়াছে।”.

In the ‘Mālo’ society, in the families in which there is no able-bodied male earner, the women earn money by weaving or repairing fishing nets, but they have to depend up seasons. They get works in the months of Baishākh and Jyaistha, but become unemployed in the rainy season, and again get some work in Bhādra. Ananta’s mother finds it very difficult to have both ends meet in the rainy season; she even finds it difficult to provide a morsel of food to the child Ananta. In this season
rain water pours into her house through the holes in the thatched roof which she cannot repair —

“It is a tale of the thatched roof which leaks when it rains. The roof needs to be repaired. But she cannot afford the cost of repairs.”

In the widely acclaimed masterpiece ‘Titās Ekti Nadir Nām’ one of the most noticeable features is the colorful dishing out of the social practices worship, and festivals of the society of fishermen. In the ‘Magh’ of the novel there is seen the ceremony of ‘Māghmandal’ observed by unmarried girls. The author informs that the girls of the ‘Mālos’ never become old wenches, for they get wedded quite early. The ‘Māghmandal Brata’ is observed by the ‘Mālo’ girls for marriage. In the month of Magh, every day the girls take bath early in the morning in the waters of the Titās and, after returning home, worship the stairs with ‘Bhānt’ flower and water sprinkled with a bundle of a type of grass called ‘Durba’ and chant a folk incantation —

“নও নও সুরুজ ঠাকুর লো সুতার জল, মাপিয়া জুখিয়া দিব সপ্ত আঁজিল।”

In the book ‘Banglar Bratapārban’, Shila Basak has spoken of a few other incantations, for example—

“উঠ উঠ মূর্ত ঠাকুর বিখি বিখি বিদ্যা, অথবা যে জল জুখিয়াঙ্কা, কাজে আর বাগে / সেই জল বুঝলাম মোরা দুর্বার আগে।”

On the last day of the month of Magh, the brata-observing unwedded girls build ‘চৌরায়ি’ with coloured pieces of paper and float them in the river. There ensuer a great competition among the boys to catch the ‘Chouāri’. They believe that the boy who catches the ‘চৌরায়ি’ of a girl will marry that girl. A festive look prevails in all the river-quays. Drums and sehnais are played on and the women sing their traditional folksongs. In the novel there is the incident of the grim competition between Subal and Kishore to catch the ‘চৌরায়ি’ floated by Basanti.
Another very important festival of the community life of the ‘Malos’ is ‘Dole’. The ‘Malos’ of Gokarnaghat join the ‘Malos’ of Shukdevpur to sing the joyous ‘Dole’ songs. First they sprinkle Abir in the feet of Radha & Krishna and then start the game of colour among themselves. On that day the dress of the ‘King of Holi’ becomes very peculiar. The garland around his neck is made of the skin of banana tree, the head is coronated with banana leaf; he wears a torn dhuti and dons a torn ‘fatua’. In this festival singing competition is held between the group of Krishna and the group of Radha. Although these songs verge on the erotic, they bring temporary hours of joy to the ‘Malos’ whose life is surrounded by sorrows and suffering.

In all the three important events of life— birth, death and marriage the ‘Malos’ spend money. Where in the house of Kalobaran, a well-to-do resident of ‘Malopara’, boys and girls were born, competing with each other, as it were, one day the mother of Kalobaran, with a view to welcoming the newcomer, invited the mother of her neighbor Ananta for auspicious ‘osfFFt?’ which is sounded five times if a boy is born, but thrice if the new born is a girl. The novelist here has drawn a very realistic picture of how the birth of a child is celebrated—

“মেজবউর সে ঘ্রাণী আর নাই। শীর্ষ। উপুজ হইয়া মাটিতে পড়িয়া আছে। চুল আলুপালু। চুড়াত সময়ের প্রকৃতকালে তার মুখের ভিতর নিজের চুল পরিয়া দেওয়া হইয়াছিল। সে চুল এখনো কতক কতক মুখ করিয়া বড় কেহ হইয়া পড়িয়া আছে। রঙে একাকার। তাহ প্রধা রক্তের চেলির মত একঘিরা মানুষ। নন্দীর মত নরম, পুতুলের মত দূর্বল। বড় পেট ফাঁড়িয়া এত দূর্বল ছোট মানুষুটি বাহির হইল কি করিয়া।”

On the sixth day after the birth, pen and inkpot are kept in the room of the new-born for setting down his or her destiny. On the eighth day the rite of ‘আটকলাই’ is performed when eatables like ‘ফট, ভাজাকলাই, বাংলা’ etc. are distributed among children. Thirteen days of ‘অষ্টচ’ is observed. On that day the barbar comes and shaves the chins of the mate inmates of the house; the priest chants mantras. In the yard a ‘চাটাই’ is spread on which paddy seeds are scattered and then the new mother, clad in a saree, comes with the newborn and stands there.
The ‘Mālos’ of the Titas-banks consider it good to spend money in marriage. Although Shyamsundar is a businessman, he lives in the ‘Mālo’ locality and so in his marriage the ‘Mālos’ also participate. At his marriage ‘বাতাসা’ was distributed in hand falls.

Among the religious festival, the greatest amount of grandeur is seen in Kali Puja. The artisan comes from distant places for building the image of goddess Kali. The building of the image takes a whole month. For four days the fishermen do not catch fish. On the previous day of the puja it is customary to take vegetarian food for controlling the passions, and only then the observer of this rite gets the right to prepare the offerings is the goddess. The mothers of Ananta and Brinda and other women help the priest in his work. Where the puja is duly done, all those present there, young and old, get ‘সদন’ of items like চিনি, কলা, সল্ট, বাতাসা mixed with ‘আলোচাল’ unboiled rice for the whole night ‘Yatra Pālā’, ‘Kabigān’ continue.

No sooner Kalipūjā is ended than comes another festival, ‘উজ্জ্বল সজ্জানি’ when the women and girls prepare ‘পিঠা’ - indigenous sweet meats. On the day of ‘সজ্জানি’ at dawn men and women alike take bath in the waters of the Titas which is followed by the eating of varieties of ‘পিঠা’. After that ‘বঙ্গর্ণীর্দত্ত’ comes out where ‘কমা, বাতাসা’ etc. are given as ‘ধূ’ in is a matter of joy to catch the objects of ‘লুই’.

In the novel, Manasā Puja of the ‘Mālos’ of Sadakpur is also spoken of. In the month of Shrāvan, every night the ‘Padmapurāṇ’ is sung. During this period the ‘Mālos’ do not catch fish at night. Banamali Mālo sings verses relating to the episode of Chand Saudagar in the accompaniment of drums and cymbals.

“সাত পাঁচ পুঁত্র যার ভাগবতী মা ;
আমি অতি অভাগিনী একামার নীলমণি,
মধুরার মোকামে গেলা আর তো আইলা না।”

Singing of Padmapurāṇ is completed before Manasā Puja As a reminiscence of the marriage of Behula, they arrange ‘জালা-বিরা’. Before setting sail with the corpse of Lakhindar, Behula had given some boiled paddy-seeds to her mother-in-law and the wives of her husband’s brothers and told them that the seeds would germinate the day her husband come back to life. The seeds had really germinated -
Critic Prabhash Chandra Samanta feels that the story of Atlanta’s mother is very much similar to Behula of Manasamangal. He holds—

"বাণিজ্যিক বেষ্টিত মৃীকৃতি বাছিয়া আমার মন কলার মানারে। ভেষে জামার মধ্যে রয়েছে যদীর বৃকে ভেষে বৃষ্টিবেষ্টিত মানুষবরাহ বঁচা মরার জীবন বৃষ্টিবেষ্টিত মানে মালার মধ্যে মানার মানারের উড়ে, উড়িয়ে, ভেষে নীর্দিষ্ট উড়া যা।" ⁵⁶

The critic Prof Achintya Biswas has designated this practice as -

“মালোকৃষ্টির আধিম লেকসঙ্ক্রান্তি” ⁵⁸

The ‘Mālo’ community living on the banks of the Titas has another social festival, boat-race—the competition is held among the expert sailors in the neighbouring areas. Prof. Biswas has discovered hints of carnivalism propounded by Michail Bakhtin in this boat race or ‘Baich’. This event is held in the month of Bhādra. The spectators come from distant places by boats. In the novel we find Banamali, Udaytara, Ananta, Anantabala, Basanti and their likes assemble to witness the boat-race. At times during the race a boat dashes against another; the boats get broken, heads are broken, hands and legs sustain injury, even there may be a case of death. But the race continues. Before the race starts, they chant the Badar sound of the five Peers.

We would refer to one more things before putting an end to this discussion the songs and proverbs current in the ‘Mālo’ community of the Titas banks. These two and story-talking ‘পরজাত’ are features without which the distinctness of the ‘Mālos’ cannot be brought to the fore. In the novel the variety of songs sung in religious festivals, marriage ceremony, ‘brata’, ‘yāṭrā’ and boat-race have been presented very aptly. For instance during the journey of the youngsters for distant place they sing ‘উড়িয়ে বাণিজ্যিক’ etc, and again during boat-race we find references to different types of ‘সাজিস গান’. Such folk-songs are intimately associated to the socio-religious life of the ‘Mālos’; they
cannot be separated from this life. But not merely the songs, but also 'শিলোক' or proverbial utterances help portray the whole life of the 'Māloś', some such 'শিলোক' are—

"সু-সুল-ছিট্টা রইছে, তুলবার লোক নাই....।" বা "গাঙে গাঙে দেখা হয়, তবু ভইনে ভইনে দেখা হয় না।" 59 etc.

Such proverbial utterances are so solidly rooted in 'Mālo'-life that picturization of this life remains incomplete without them.

If we cast a glance at the social scenario and characters presented in the river-centric novels in Bengali and Assamese, it is immediately felt that each of the community-lives has its own distinctive features which are spontaneously reflected in their lifestyle.

The plot of Nabakanta Barua's novel 'Kapilipariār Sādhu' is weaved around Rupai who happens to be the son of Kapili. It was Kapili who handed over him to Dhirsingh. This Dhirsingh of the village Bhurbanda belong to the royal lineage and Rupai is his foster child. His relationship with the river Kapili is shrouded in mystery. The novelist has drawn the picture of this relationship and the conflict embedded in it with great care. The time of action in the novel is pre-independence India; the first half of the twentieth century. The novelist has drawn with great expertise the picture of a remote rural society in the middle part of Assam of the period. Within the compass of the novel the conflict between the rural and the urban abodes, the condition and system of education in Assam, independence movement and some other issues have been incorporated. The society that has been picturized in the novel is as coloured with variety as the eternal rural society is. Not only the inhabitants of the village Bhurbanda, but all the villagers inhabiting the banks of the Kapili believe that at least two boats shall sink in the river Kapili every year. At the turning of the Kapili where the Borapani has met her, every boat laden with merchandise offer 'Tamol-Pān'. The people believe that 'Jalkumar' inhabits this spot. Thus developed a mysterious, foggy world of belief and disbelief around the Kapili. It appears as if this world crossed the bounds of the mental world of the people living on the banks of the Kapili and entered the mental world of the novelist himself and then spreads itself through the mental world of the reader—
These people believe that ‘Jalkumar’ and ‘Kamalakumari’ donot drag away the persons who are physically challenged and so the Kapili first dragged and then released the man from Goalpara who had his right eye defective. They also believe that when epidemic broke out, the river Kapili did not touch the house in which the man lived with his family. They donot remove themselves from the Kapili though the river becomes the cause of their sorrows and sufferings. Floods of the Kapili submerge the village every year, but the villagers donot leave the place. Once when Dhirsingh’s father Mansingh wanted to leave the place, his ox and plough were carried away by the Kapili and warned Dhuni Bairagi in a dream that if Mansingh left the village, the river would follows him. The people of the village did not allow Mansingh to go away from the place and Mansingh himself became afraid. The people purchased for him plough and ox by paying small subscriptions.

There is a school in the village a lower primary school. One teacher is Betharam pundit. The school sits in the morning, for at noon the boys do the work of the cattle-herd and go to the village market and for other errands. Punishment of standing on one leg is given to the pupils who cannot do sums. Greater punishment is inflicted for more serious offenses. The school ends at eleven, but there is no watch there; time is decided by the eleven O’clock train. The school ends when the sound of the train is heard.

It is not that only the villagers catch fish in the river. The Kapili is quite a big river. Here the Behari fishermen catch fish with fishing net and sell their catch at Dharamtul. From Dharmatul loads of fishes are sent to Guwahati, Nagaon. It is a sight to see the Deshowali fishermen netting fishes. They donot catch fish like the villagers working in groups-
There are other description in this novel of fishing in the Kapili –

“There are other description in this novel of fishing in the Kapili –

These Deshowali fishermen take rice once only at night. While fishing they eat 'chātu' with chilly on banana leaves. The village people eat ‘pokka bāt’ with burnt fish, they donot sell out their catch.

Fear of Ghosts is very deep among the villagers; we have noticed the references to ghosts and spirits in Tarāsankar’s ‘Hānsulibānker Upakāthā’. It is said that ghosts have no shadows. When the villagers come to the bank of the Kapili in search for Rupai, they are afraid of the shadow of Rupai which they consider to be a ghost. These people search for the shadow of Rupai, see if Rupai has a shadow. But they cannot overcome their fear –

“In the novel there are references to driving out of ghosts by magic and incantation. The grandfather of Rupai jumps into the Kalipi in search of his grandson and fall ill by fever. The people held that the man must have been possessed by the ghost of the haunted house. The Mayang region of the Morigaon district is famous for magic, incantation and enchanters. An enchanter is brought from there. He –
It is brought out through hints that there had developed a kind of business in the rural societies centering round the existence of ghosts and their fleeing the place.

The novelist has allowed us a glimpse of the distinctive atmospheres of the urban and the rural aboder through the eyes of Rupai, when he came to the house of the lawyer in the town to appear at the centre examination he was at a loss as to how to talk. His father has taught him to address the lawyer as 'আঃগা'. In the half hour recess during the examination he eats 'ফুলী'; purchases 'নকুলদালা' for the daughter of the lawyer who is in her early teens. But the townsfolk are very health-conscious and so the girl refuses 'নকুলদালা' on the plea that she might be attacked by Cholera. The fact is, she does not take 'নকুলদালা', but takes 'Rasagolla' and 'Sandesh'. The novelist has presented a subtler picture of the poor rural people than that of the middleclass urban people. The crowd of people and shops and car create an antagonistic attitude in the mind of Rupai. But he liked the smell the burnt petrol. The town-school is so different from the village school. Here, at Nagaon, the school-house has its roof covered by tin and the school is so big. A wooden bridge is to be crossed to go to Haibargaon. One has to pay one paisa to cross the bridge, but the school-goers donot have to pay. The presentation of this fact brings to the fore the elemental 'Pay and USE'-nature of the modern urban life.

At the time of Mahatma Gandhi’s Dandi March of 1930, Rupai reads in the Bengali-medium school at Nagaon town. This time, however, he as to live in the lawyers’ house almost like a servant, Going to the matoket, cutting wood for the oven are the works done by him. The novelist has given beautiful list that gives us an idea of the prices of foods in the market, the list also gives us a fair idea of the economic condition of the people of the period. Rupai goes to the market –

'উকীলের ছাত্র বজায় হিচাপ দিব লাগে। সি কাগজ এখনকে লিখি সদায় হিচাপ দিয়ে।

কাবী মাছ একুরি :

2 অনা ৬ পাই
For buying ‘বিরি’ he was beaten up by the wife of the lawyer and Haria, he leaves the school and enlists himself as a volunteer of Purna Lowyer and goes to jail by offering Satyagraha. He discovers that even within the jail, as in the society outside, there division of caste— who belongs to the upper caste and who the lower. All the satyagrahis who took part in the movement are kept together in the jail, as if the jail itself was a small society—

"জেলতি সি বুজিলে—বন্দী মানুষের মাজবো উক্তী, হরিয়ী, হতিয়ীক, বনুয়া ভাগ আছে। মণি উক্তী, বিমলা মাষ্টার এজলোক বেলেলে থাকে। খোয়া বোঝাই বেলেলে।" 66

Social division existed not only in the outside, but even within the four walls of the prison. Here is a reference to the of the Maymansingh district. Here is also a reference to the migration from Bengal to Assam. The tremendous pressure of ‘Dadan’ taken from the lordlords (Jamindar) compels many people to have refuge to such places in Assam as Rupahi, Juria, Mouriabari, Bhuragaon etc. Where, they discover their surprise, there were no landlords or Jamindars. There they start the cultivation of jute and chilly. Thus a large number of people, in their ones or twos, come to this region from Bengal. They—

‘ইচ্ছামতে খেতি করে—মরাপাটি আরু জলকীয়া। বরো যাও খেতি উলিয়ালে—আমার আঁচ বেতির দরেই। পেছে দ পালিয়া হয়। মরাপাটি বেটি টকা পায়। তারে বহীন বাপোর কিনে—থি ঘুটি করে—রেচনী'
The tale of the freedom movement of India recurs in the novel. Gandhi’s call for boycotting foreign goods created great response from the people who left everything behind to join the freedom movement. One of them was Sudhangshu Babu. This thin and gaunt looking man had a shop of cloths and stationery goods at Pan Bazar in Guwahati. The name of the shop was ‘Redimony Company’. With his own hands he burnt to ashes all the foreign goods in his shop and joined the Congress. After that he sold only ‘Khaddar’ and oil of the Bangalakshmi Company. Not many people bought ‘Khaddar’ and so Sudhangshu Babu was gradually impoverished and was enlisted among the economically down tradden class. But there is no sorrow for this in his heart. Even within the jail he inspired the inmates by singing swadeshi songs.

When Rupai comes back to the village after his release from jail, he finds that the old school is no more there Bhakat and he joined hands to establish a new school. It was the practice in the villages in Assam to use the worst worn-out house as the Pathshala. This almost completely broken house was repaired by them with wood and bamboo. Slowly the people of the village came forward to keep them and the school was established. The nephew of Tilak Gossain, Basu became the teacher. They placed the responsibility of the school to the hands of the teacher and freed themselves from anxiety.

Pictures of the society galore in the novel. One significant picture is that of the Gossains. When Rupai goes to Tilak Gossain for getting ‘Diksha’, the appression meted out to the ordinary people by the Gossains is revealed. Tilak Gosain does not give him DiksHa. He has already given up this job because the poor disciples always appease the Gurus at the cost of the rights of children. He does not want to construct a shrine for the Guru with the money paid by children for their education at school.

“দুঃখী শিশু লরা-ছোয়ালীর মাছুল ধনের পটা ব্যরংনি পঠাব লরা-ছোয়ালীক লরাখান দিয়াই গোসাই ঘরর লেঠা ঘুঁড়াব—তারে গোসাই ঘরর মনিকুটর চাপর দুয়ার সজ্জোয়া হব—ভবি চোয়াচোন বাৰু? মই সেইৰেৰ এইৰে৷”

“দুঃখী শিশু লরা-ছোয়ালীর মাছুল ধনের পটা ব্যরংনি পঠাব লরা-ছোয়ালীক লরাখান দিয়াই গোসাই ঘরর লেঠা ঘুঁড়াব—তারে গোসাই ঘরর মনিকুটর চাপর দুয়ার সজ্জোয়া হব—ভবি চোয়াচোন বাৰু? মই সেইৰেৰ এইৰে৷”

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All that was new to Rupai, for he had seen other Gosain in his own village, when a 
Gosain came, the whole village became agog with activities —

"বারীর ভালোরা ভাল কল্পনেকা দি গঞ্জই সাত হাত নিলগর পরা সেবা করে। গোসাইয়ে ভারির বুঝা 
আঙুলটা জুরুলিয়াই পানী দিয়ে। তাকে সিহতে সিহতি লয়।" 69

The terrible flood of the river Kapili is the misery of West Nagaon. About this 
a critic writes—

"কপিলীর বাবর্দ এই বিস্ফূর্তী রূপটার লগতে সেনারীয়া রাইবজর ব্যথাভরা কারুজার ছবি উপন্যাসকথন অতি 
সার্থকতার দাতি ধরা হৈছে।" 70

A picture of the devastating flood of the Kapili especially a living image of the flood 
of 1934, finds a place in the novel. The district of West Nagaon was completely 
submerged, the railway track went under water, ferry boats could not ply because of the 
terrible current of the Kapili—

"দৈনাঙ্গর পার বাঙালি। বর পানীর পানীয়ে শিখিয়ারীর পান্তার বেরি ধরিলে... নখালারা খাতত এক্কুনা 
পানী। গুরুসার হাটিয়ার পানীয়ে রহা তল নিয়ালে। কল্পর সেীতে উজাই বলে। সীমান্তের মছিলত 
আফনর সুর বন্ধ হল। হাহাকার। রুপাইদীর গাওনের চিন্তার নোহায়া হ'ল। পাকী আলিতে মেল চনানীয় 
পথার। আরু আদ্রী মানুহর সমুজ। বরতা বিশিষ্টার ঘর। রেল আলিতে সেই একে অবস্থা। ঠামে ঠামে 
দিগছে। রেল বস্ত, নাও ও নচলে- কপিলীর ইমান মোতি।" 71

The helpless and homeless people took refuge on the high roads. The condition 
became so hopelessly bad that it took six – seven days for any helping hand to come 
to the affected people. In the novel it is noted that on the eighth day a boat with help 
arrived. Corruption became common even in the distribution of relief materials among 
the flood-hit poor people; blankets sent for distribution among them became traceless. 
These were later on found in the hands of the men under the contractor of the jail. 
Sarees sent from Punjab for the affected women never reach the destination. From the 
report of the honest, industrious and sincere south Indian officer it comes out that the 
curtains in the houses of another officer are really made of those sarees sent for 
giving relief to the victims of the flood. Thus the sad tale of the people inhabiting the 
banks of the Kapili has been painted in the novel.
Social reality comes to the foreground in the description of the ‘Srāddha’ of Rupali’s father, Dhirsingh. After Dhirsingh’s death, Rupai, in accordance with the rites followed in their village, undertook fast for eleven days, and yet could not do the Srāddha because he had no flood – relationship with Dhirsingh. They believed that according to the Hindu system only a person having blood – relationship of the dead could do the ‘Srāddha’. And so –

“দহার আগাদিনা ঘুরি পাঁারপা ধীরচিঙ্গ আজ্জাক একন আহিন। বিড়ি খায়। দাঁতবোর কলা।
তাকে দেখিয়েই রূপালির বেয়া লাগি গল। সি কিয়া ওলালে হঠঠাৎ”

Thus various scenes, pictures of the society have portrayed on the pages of the novel ‘Kapilipariār Sādhhu’; we have only endeavored to cult with brevity the chief portraits.

The backdrop of Syed Abdul Malik’s novel ‘Surujmukhir Swapna’ is the village Dalim situated on the banks of the river Dhanshiri. The people whose life has been portrayed in this novel belong to the Muslim community. The plot of the novel has been constructed on the struggle for life of an apparently poor, but firmly determined young man Gulach who wants to change his fortune by dint of hard labour. Though the majority of the population of the village Dalim belong to the Islamics faith, others like the Hindus, the Nepalese, the Mikirs also inhabit this village. They rear cattles like cows and buffalos, cultivate paddy, mustard seed, gourd, chilly etc. They sell milk. Iswara and Allah co-inhabit the place; pebbles and trees are worshipped by the people –

“পূরে ধনশিরি, পছিমে ডালিম। ধনশিরির পছিম পারে ডালিম গার্ধ। তিনিকিউর হয় ঘর সরু পূর্ণি
গাওখন। হিন্দু-মুসলমান, নেপালী-মিকির মিলি গার্ধ। নির একেকারে পারত ওঠর ঘর নেপালী, সিহতর
মহ-গরর খুটি, ঘর থকা গোহালি আরু মানুম থকা ঘর। সরিয়াহ পারে, গোমধান বোয়ে, গার্হীর বেচে,
জলকীয়া, জাতিলাওর খেত করে।

-সিহতর গাতে লঙ্গা ছইক্ষ ঘর মুসলমান। দূটা চুরুরিত দুজাগ ন-ডালিম, পূর্ণি ডালিম- সিহে ডালিম
গার্ঘ একেকেই।
The people of the village are not financially well-off, but are all self-dependent. Most of them depend on agriculture and they cultivate their own land or the land of other people. Each village believe in earning and procuring the things they need by hard toil. The chief character in the novel Gulach and Kapahi and Tara undertake hard labour to earn their livelihood. The people of Dalim would leave behind a life of happiness and never become perplexed to embrace a life of toil; they do this to preserve their sense of self respect. In the analysis of the character of the mother of Gulach we discern the image of women of the village Dalim –

"মাক ডালিম গাওরে ছেয়ালী। বহি খাব নাচান। পাঁচ বছরের পরা ভুই কঠীয়া করি, খরি ফলি, ঢেকী খুনি খাইছে। কাম করিবলে ভয় নকরে। গাটো ভালে থাকে মানে মাপি নেথার্গ – খাটি খাম।"74

From the economic view-point, there is another aspect that attracts attention. Of course, with economic aspect a social aspect is also involved in this. Sometimes boats of some big merchants come to this village through the river Dhanshiri. From the merchants the inhabitants of Dalim take the seeds of potato, mustard and other vegetables. The merchants come again after a few months to receive their dues. These merchants never suffer from want of money. They at times extend their hands towards the wives and daughters of the village which create some unrest in the village society. One such merchant appeared in the life of Kapahi. As a result of this the domestic life of Kapahi and Nahar come to an end. At first, of course the people of the village did not appear to have much of headache, but later on Kapahi was socially boycotted –

"খোঁ আহিন মাহত মে বছরের মেজারিয়া নাও লে উজ্জাই আহিনিল, পুরুষ ডালিমর ঘটিত নাও বাছি গাওর মানুক মাহ, আলু, পিয়াঁজর কঠীয়া দি কুঁড়িলুয়া নৌকায় তোতীয়া তার হাতত ধনর মোটা দেখি"
It has been already noted before that the society mainly portrayed in ‘Surujmukhir Swapna’ is predominantly Islamic. Like any other society, this society also has certain beliefs and customs of its own which are related to religious thoughts and emotions. According to their belief each individual must get married at least once in life\textsuperscript{76}. The novelist has focused some light in an intelligent way on this while speaking of the marriage of Bafi, — an almost handicapped son of old Safiat — 

“গাষ্ঠিত ঘোরা, কনা, লেংঙা কোনোয়ে বিয়া নকরোয়ামে নেথাকে। বিয়া করোয়ামটা চুমত, অবশ্য-পালনীয় ধর্ম। বিয়ার পরিণাম যি কি নহওক। বিয়া নকরোয়াটা ভাংরু গুঞ্চর কথা, পাপর কথা।”\textsuperscript{77}  

As most of the inhabitants of the village Dalim are ploughmen, they do not get much of time for shaving or pruning the beard. Shaving is done only in Aswin, Kārtik and Māgh – Falgun – Chaitra. It is not unnatural not to have a shave for a month and a half or two months during the ploughing and sowing season. There is one more thing – there is not barber in Dalim. A few tailors are there who have scissors. Sometimes a man may steal a scissor and cut his hair with that. A tailor would not allow his scissors for cutting cloth to be used for hair-cutting. But most of the young men of the village know how to cut hair —  

“এথরে কেচি, এথরে ফাঙি, এথরে ফুল, আন এথরে চোটাল বা বের লোহোয়া মাড়ল ঘরর চা’র। ভালকে চুলি কাটিব জনা ভেকাইতর বর খাটির।”\textsuperscript{78} 

In the novel the co-existence of Hindus and Muslims in the village has been foregrounded. The people belonging to Islam are quite earnest in adhering to religious laws and principles and generally donot worship anyone else by Allah. But in several places. In the novel the Hindu goddess of wealth Lakshmi has been referred to while emphasizing the sentiments of the Muslims about wealth for example “সঁট নিসিবা, সঁট গ’ল মানে লকিমিয়া গ’ল।” (পৃ-৩৮) ; “কাপাহি আরু তরার লগে লগে গুলচর ঘরলে লকিমিয়া আলিহি।”\textsuperscript{79} (পৃ-১১০)
Assamese culture and folk-belief also equally flow in the life of the peoples of the region. The proof is found in the reference to ‘বাজাল গান’ and ‘Jalkumari’. It is worth noting that though Gulach belongs to Islam he is almost indifferent to religious rites and practices—

“তার আগরটো শুকুনবারে বহন অভিচিতি আরু রাতিপরার পরা সাজিকাটো গুলচ জুমানামাজ পাটিলে সিপ্রীয়া গাওর মেঘজিদলে গুল। নামাজের সকলোরের নীতি-নিয়ম সি নেজান। তথাপি কেতিয়ারা মদে করিয়ে সি মেঘজিদলে থে জামাতর লগদে উঠাবহ করে। অবশেষে আজি তিনি বছর সি কির নামাজ বাহিরে অন্য নামাজ পাটা নাহ। তার ফনেতেই নপরে।”

It appears that in Gulach’s life doing work is more important than following religious practices, and in this his friend, philosopher and guide is Chandra. Chandra and Bhim, inspite of their being Hindus, have helped him greatly. This testifies to the fact of co-existence of the Hindus and Muslims in the rural life.

One common feature in the rural areas is the disturbances created by deer, birds and elephants in the land under the plough. A field full of standing corn is instantly destroyed by these beasts and birds. So the villages are afraid of them. They are greatly afraid of elephants, for the mighty beasts not only eat the paddy, but destroy the crop by trampling over it. The same fear persist in the mind of the protagonist, Gulach—

“টুনি বালিমাহীয়ে পথারার ধান খাই কিমান চুকুয়ান ? হরিণা পড় আরু বনরীয়া গাওরি বা হাতীরে আমামি নকরিলেই হয়। হাতীয়েই আটইটুকী বেয়া। এফলার পরা মহতিয়াই যায়।”

Some references are there in the novel to the rural Assamese costume. In the social life of the Assamese people costumes made of jute, muga and endi woven by looms have been in use from very old days. Manually driven looms are found in every household in the rural areas cloths are woven in the house not only for domestic use, but also for sale. Assamese women draw beautiful pictures on the ground of the cloth woven by themselves—
In any discussion on Assamese dress and dress – material, an important room is occupied by ‘গামোজাখা’ a type of towels without which the discussion remains incomplete. References to ‘গামোজাখা’ recure in ‘Surujmukhir Swapna’ too. Here ‘গামোজা’ is used like a scarf to cover the body of Tara –
”গামোজাখনে গাটো তাকিবকে পরা নাহি।”

‘গামোজ্যা’ is invariably there with Gulach. If matters little if he has want for a new dress. Formal, good dress is necessary only when he goes out to have a stroll in the village, otherwise a ‘গামোজ্যা’ is enough –

“অনন্ত চোলা সি প্রায় নিপিলেই, করবাত গাও ফুরিবৈলে গলেহে পিঙ্ঙে। কালত গামোজকন হলেই যথেষ্ট।”

Of all the social institutions marriage is a very important one. We can gather much information about a society from the rites observed at the time of wedding. In social or domestic novels wedding occupies an important place. In this novel the rites observed in a social marriage Dalim have been discussed. There in this village when a boy and a girl elope to get married it is not considered immoral or unethical. If both the boy and the girl agree to got united in wedlock, nobody raises any objection. But Gulach and Chenimai could not be married even after they had eloped because of the objections raised by the guardians of both the two families. As the Maulavi had not yet come to read out the Nikāḥ, so the objection could be raised and upheld. So later on when Gulach bought the advice from Chandra for marrying Kapahi, Chandra advised him to proced by taking every caution-

“এই মেলবী বদেষ্ট করি থরি। লোকর ঘোলালীর লগত এনেই ঘর করি থানিবি নেকি ? আনি পায়ে মেলবীর হতুই নিকাহ পাচাই লবি। তেটিয়া আরু তহতক কাটাত একু কোনর নোয়ারে। চেনিমাইক আনেতে নিকাহ পট্ট থোয়া হলে, সেইখন খেলিমেলি হ'লেঙেন নে কিনা ?”
Gulach followed Chandra's advice letter by letter where his Nikāh with Kapahi was celebrated. The Maulavi came in time. Though here again there was the issue of elopement, but Chandra opined that it was a marriage all the same. So nobody would raise any objection to the marriage which had the sanction of the society. The Maulavi will have the Nikāh read out the moment the bride arrives. The bride will be helped by Chenimai. Chandra also impressed upon the Maulavi to complete the rituals as soon as the bride arrives. Accordingly the Maulavi did his work—

"কাপাহী গৈ বহুর লাগে লাগে মৌলীবী আছিল। কিছু অকৃষ্ক গাওয়ানটো বিকামের সাক্ষী থাকিল। মৌলীবীরেই উক্তীলো হ'ল - বোহোরেও পালিলে। দরার নাম ফি, জেয়ালীর নাম ফি, তেই তিনেরে কাজে বিশেষ মনোযোগ করা হান্নিলে, মৌহরণও মৌলীবীরেই তিনি কর ললে - পঞ্চাষ টকা।" 86

In the presence of two witnesses and receiving a rupee as 'dakshina' the Maulavi completed the Nikāh of Gulach and Kapahi.

The village Feast is another important event in the village society in Dalim. Grand feasts are organized in the village twice in a year, one, by the middle of the month of Baishākh, or by the beginning of Jaisthya when preparation for ploughing are made, and the other in Māgh after harvesting is complete. Both the feasts are considered very pious by the inhabitants of Dalim. Many people contribute various goods to the feast for getting cured of diseases or with the hope of fulfilment of any desire.

On the day of the feast nobody has any other work in hand. Houses and clothings are cleansed, and the people become fresh by taking bath. In every houses various items eatables are prepared, particularly 'পিঠা' made of grinded corn. Meat is cooked collectively in a place in the Masjid—

"থাবেলি পরত লরা-ছোয়ালী (নামাকে ছোয়ালী অবশ্য) লে গঞ্জ রাইজা মহজিদলে আহে, মহজিদর চার্জ চোত্তাছ শালি পাতি বলে, হিচাপ করিন নিয়র লগত অহাসিনির কারণে গাইমুরি এটা দুটা পিঠা রামি ও পরিদুর্দুর পিঠা রাজজ্জয় পাচিত জমা দিয়ে। প্রতিজনের পাতত বিকামেরই হেতের মাসে দি যায়।
আজলেতে হোজর রাজজ্জয় বজে এই মাসের তরকারীবিনিহে। রাইজা অক্ষা অক্ষা খাই পিঠা-তরকারী টেপোলা বলিগুলি ফরাধি নিয়ে। চালা পচা অনুসরি ভাে পায়।" 87
Quantity of eatables is given according to the social status of the families. The ‘Mollahs’, village chiefs or sardars receive greater quantities. The eatables cannot be prepared for these feasts by anybody, because it is a pious work. We come to know of this from the thought-current of Tara (‘Surujmukhir Swapna’, Page no-84).

In the region which is portrayed in the novel at times the village enchanters may be seen. It is probably a special feature of rural life in all the parts of India that everywhere we come across ‘Gunins’, ‘Vaidyas’, ‘Achārjees’ and Fortune Tellers. They do all sorts of works from treating the diseased to driving away ghosts. In this novel the same phenomenon is seen. Here the name of the enchanter is Bahadur –

“বেঞ্চে রোগ চিকিৎসা করে, ভুত প্রেত খেলায়, মঞ্চল চাই হেরেয়া বজ্জর সমান দিয়ে, আরু হাতর আর চাই ভাগুর কথা কর। গুলচেএ হাতধন মেলি বেজার কাখতে বহিল।”

It is hardly surprising that the people of a village which is almost untouched by the light of education will continue to clutch to superstition and blind faith. But even in such a village the message of social change is heard in the mouth of Chandra. He speaks of river-embankment, of female education, of school-college- hospital-Police Station, and the people look at him, their mouths gaped. There are detailed descriptions of the houses of the financially well-off people of the village as well as of the huts of the poor. On the whole, it may be held that this novel of Syed Abdul Malik has caught the very pulse-beats of the rural life of Assam.

Homen Bargohain’s novel ‘Matsyagandha’ occupies a special place in the history of the river-centric fictions in Assamese literature. In this novel the author speaks of the village of Mahghuli and Garaimari. The people who are dealt with here have the social identity as ‘Domes’. They are apparently not recognized as belonging to the cultured society; rather they are objects of neglect and slight. The civilized people consider them uncivilized and illiterate. They donot grant these hopelessly marginalized peole any consideration as human beings. Though they belong to the Hindu fold, they are separated from the other sections of the Hindu Society. Their way of life is different from that of others. They catch fish, burn them and then eat. The smell uncooked fish and burnt fish floats in their village. At the opening of the
From this we can well understand the identifying equalities of the ‘Kaivarta’ villages. The influence of Great Srimanta Sankardeva on the folk-life of Assam is immense. In every region, in towns and villages, there are ‘Namghar’ the people of the village, after a day’s hand toil, go to the Namghar’s at dusk and utter the name of God. There are references to ‘Namghar’ in the novel under consideration. By means of such references the novelist reveals to us the pulsebeats of the rural life of Assam in its true character.

But the society suffered much because of superstitious beliefs and the problem of untouchability. Even the shadow of a low-born fellow created a sense of hatred in the mind of a high-born gentleman. This high-born and low-born caste system was so deep rooted that it proved itself to be an obstacle on the way to consider the low-born to be human beings. When Menaka and her mother Memery went for collecting paddy seeds instead of catching fish being financially hard pressed, the shadow of the little child fell on the seeds, for which a high-born woman rebuked them very harshly—this brings to the fore the naked appearance of the caste-divided society—
The ‘Domes’ (Here, ‘Kaivarta’) had no right to step in the premises of even an ordinary cast Hindu. If a thirsty man asked for water, he would be given water in an aram-leaf; if a ‘Dome’ is touched by one, bathing oneself was the act of expiation—these was the primary rules of the society. We see in the novel how the low-caste people were hopelessly neglected and marginalized.

The people belonging to the ‘Kaivarta’ community in the village Garaimari were hard-working. Though catching fish was their primary source of earning, they also work in the fields of well-to-do people or cultivate the fallow land to earn food for at least two months. They catch whatever fish, they get during the rainy season and sell them, but never get the right price for this. They cannot send fish to the town because of bad system of communication and all their catch gets rotten. Local purchasers of fish are scarce, because the people depending on agriculture only occasionally purchase fish or exchange paddy seed for fish. Cultivators are also equally good at catching fish and so they generally do not require to purchase. The big amount of the catch of various fishes remains unsold and so the poverty of the fishermen is a continuous problem. Education has not spread among the fishermen; only now and then a man passes the Matriculation examination and becomes a clerk in any office. Education for women is almost absent in this community of people. It is considered enough if a girl learns the alphabet. The backwardness of these people in almost every front comes out from the wearisome thoughts of Duryodhan about the marriage of his daughters Behula and Menaka—

“সিছি ধূমীয় দেশ্বিমার ছেয়ল্লি বিয়া করাবল হায়াস করে। ছেয়ল্লি কথ-মার পরিস্ত জনা হলেতো সোপ্রত সুসাগা। কিন্তু বিহেতু কীর্তি সম্প্রসার মাজত আখর চিনি পোয়া ছেয়ল্লি দরবত দিলেকো পাবল নাই, গতিকে রায়েই যাতে শিকারে অভার ক্ষতিপূরণ হয় সেইটো সহিতে বিচারে। চাকবরিণী কীর্তি যি এখন নতুন উদ্যম সমাজের প্রস্ত পাখ লাভ করিয়ে সেই সামাজী লাগা সমানে সমানে তাল মিলাহ চলিরতো দেশনিরার ছেয়ল্লির প্রয়োজন সিছি তীনেটাবাহে অনুভব করে।”
The novel ‘Matsyagandha’ contains a variety of pictures of the society of such ‘Kaivarta’ village. One aspect of the suppression and oppression meted out to the low-born people is not to allow their sons to go to school. The time which is shown in the novel is the period of the region of the great Queen Victoria. There was no scope to refuse admission in a government school, but the high-born people could not tolerate or digest the idea that a low-born child would become equally educated as a high-born one. In the novel we find such a situation- when Digambar belonging to the ‘Kaivarta’ fold, went to Mahaghuli Government M.E. School to have his sons admitted, there the head master felt that his brains would burst with anger, but could not express his mind because of the fear of the government-

“কিন্তু লাগে লাগে তেরো মনর ভিতরতে অগতাগতি করিবলৈ ধরিলে - 'কটা ভোমর পো, যার গন্ত হত লাগিলেও গা ধূল লাগে, তার পুত্রকে এতিয়া বামুন-পোসাহির লরার লগত একে শারীরে গা ঘুরাহি বাহি স্কুল দেরিতে। মাছ মারিবলৈ এরি এতিয়া সিহুত চক্তিত বাহি টিং জোকরা বাহু হত।’ “

This inherent hatred for the low-born people resulted in the mental torture meted out to the two sons of Digambar, Jaibari and Purna. The shout of ‘Dome’ ‘Dome’, was harried upon them, starting a quarrel with them on any excuse continued. A time came where the two boys could no longer bear such forms of oppression and were compelled to leave the school. From this it is not difficult to understand that the high-born people ruthlessly oppressed the low-born.

The theme central to the fabric of this river-centric novel of Homen Bargohain is the revenge taken by the neglected and hated community against the oppression perpetrated by the high-born in a caste-divided society. This avenging is completed when the son of the high-born class Maniram marries Kamala of the fishermen community. This is the plot of the novel. The agent of this revenge taking is Menaka. Menaka could not forget oppression meted out to her and her class and took revenge when an opportunity came. She is the daughter of Memeri and the wife of Purna. The social scenario of the time has been beautifully visualized through how and what Menaka does in the course of the story. In the society portrayed there were no qualified doctors and scientific medicine. The patients had to depend only on the village apothecary, ‘Vaidya’ or ‘Ojha’? Menaka was such an apothecary, and enchanter, an ‘Ojha’ or ‘Gunin’. Her area of operation was to treat the patients suffering from tooth ache, perform abortion etc. Needless to say in most of the case she cheated the people. She was attracted to incantations and roots of treer etc. since
her early days. She visited the houses of the ojhas and vaidyas of the region and learnt from them the art and she even learnt the art of driving away ghosts or evil spirits, when hunger completed her, she earns money by practicing black art. Once she was caught red handed when she was catching worms from teeth. In the village there was no arrangement for treating teeth problems and she was of the called at or called in. There is a detailed and realistic description of how she treated the patients. She was called in the house of the ‘Mouzādār’ when his younger son had a tooth-ache. The eldest son was a student of class ten, and he had faith in scientific treatment rather than on the art of the ‘Ojha’. He caught Menaka’s artful practices. She uttered various incantations and then asked the small boy to puff out wind from his mouth on her palms when she finished puffing there could be seen five worms on Menaka’s palm. She wanted to have the people believe that these were the worms of the boy’s teeth, but the elder son spoke sarcastically to her.

Menaka performed abortion not less than trice in her life. One of the pregnant women thus treated by her died. We come to know from this event how far the people could go in the name of respectability, to preserve the prestige of the family. When, after abortion the girl started to bleed profusely, her parents did not take her to any doctor for fear of condemnation of the society, rather carried her back to Menaka.

On the big canvas portraying the society, the ceremony that occupies a very important place is Bihu. There is a vast plain to the north of the villages of Garaimari and Mahaghuli. The plots of agricultural land in this plain belong to the people of Mahaghuli and these are cultivated by those of Garaimari. So the plain may be said to have been owned jointly by the people of both the villages. In the part of the plain situated to the north of Garaimari there is ‘Bihusthali’ under a big ‘Simul’ tree. Young boys and girls of Garaimari perform Bihu dance and songs in the ‘Bihusthali’ from the fifteenth day of the month of Chaitra. There is a social aspect in this is as well; there is the shadow of the caste division in the celebration of Bihu.
Though the young men of the village do not take part in the dance, the moment Bihu celebration begins and all the ‘Bihusthalis’ reverberate with the sounds of drums and pipes they cannot remain indoors; they roam from one ‘Bihusthali’ to another to see the performance of dance and songs. In the Ahom and Mising villages celebrations are organized at night. But the boys and girls of Garaimari and Mahaghuli do not dare celebrate at night. It was, in such a celebration that Maniram saw Kamala first and liked her.

As ‘Matsyagandha’ is essentially a novel of rural life, so in it we find such more of the rural society. The novelist’s efforts here over to reflect in clear terms the community life of the ‘Kaivartas’ among all the village communities. We have only focussed light on some scens of this village life. So perhaps the critic says-

“একেবের ‘মৎস্যাগণ্ধ’ উপন্যাসিক হোমেন বরগোহাঙ্গির সামাজিক চত্বরাইক এক বাতিত্ত্ব সাহসীরূপ লেখী। হাজার হাজার বালবালার ভারতীয় সামন্ত সমাজের বর্ণবাদী ব্যবহার অভিশাপ-কৈশর্য সমাজে এক নিঃরূপ বাস্তব ছবি অকন্ন করিয়া এই কাহিনীর লেখক বরগোহাঙ্গির ক্ষান্ত থাকা নাই। যুগ যুগের লাঙ্খিত বক্তিতে অনন্ধিত কৈশর্য সমাজের রিলেই সফলভাবে এই উপন্যাস লাঙ্ঘি ব্যাপক হইয়া এক অভিনব বৌখান্ত আরু অভিনব কান্তার এনে অর্থে এই উপন্যাস নিম্নম সামাজিক ব্যবহার বিদ্রুপে এক প্রতিবাদী অভিযোজনা লাগি কঠি পারি।”

In the Assamese novel ‘Matsyakanya’ of Lakshmiandand Bora we find as the setting the Barchila region which lies on the banks of the river Sonai in the undivided district of Nagaon (present Morigaon district). The main interest of the novel lies in the story of Pemada, a fisherwomen who lives in a ‘Kaivarta’ village in the Barchila region. In the fabric of the lifestory of this woman belonging to the so called low cast community the regional social life with the portrayal of different situations and characters, has been caught.

The plot in ‘Matsakanya’ has been set under the backdrop of the Non-co-operation Movement of the Forties of the last century. The waves of this Movement organised under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi spread themselves to the different corners of India. In line with the ordinary peoples of other parts of the country, the
people of the Barchila region also joined the Movement to shatter the shackles of foreign rule. Their leader was Gopen Das, a ‘kaivarta’ youth. Gopen was in love with Pemada, but the main plot of the novel is not the love-relationship between the two. The main plot is the struggle for existence of Pemada and the love-story is only a part of the main plot.

In the fabric of the general story of the life of the fishermen community is narrated the story of a particular tribe. And although the story of one tribe is the main interest in the novel, in natural association came the stories of other tribes, the characters belonging to them and their social milieu. Needless to add that the time reflected in the novel is of the pre-independence period. In those memorable days the students community also joined the movement to realize the dream of independent India at the call of Mahatma Gandhi. Hailing though from the ‘Kaivarta’ community, Gopen was, as a student, quite good. He won scholarship at the Matriculation and Intermediate of Arts examinations. But he left the college to join the freedom movement and headed the procession during the non-cooperation movement at Barchila. A long bench was covered with coloured bed cover for the important leaders coming from the town to sit on; there were two big pillows too. This was the token of respect showed by the rural community to the important leaders. When the speeches of the important personalities were started, the Daroga of the area, Brikodar stood up, note book in hand. His responsibility was to convey to the government of any unwanted comments were made in the speeches. From narrative of the organization of the meeting we can form some ideas about the movement of independence and the administrative activities of the time. Gopen Das had to go underground just after the meeting. In a secret meeting held at Barchila, Gopen held that the British Government had started taking strict measures, but they would have to leave India—

“আজির পরা আরু সভাসমিতি নহয়। সকলো কাম এনেকে গোপনে করিব লাগিব।”

The movement gathered momentum and so the Congress Party sent instructions to the leaders to go underground. Pemada too was present in the secret meeting. From this it is understood how the women of the rural areas also joined the movement, to work for the country.
In the society portrayed in the novel, pre-marital love affair was only a natural thing. It was not an unnatural practice to flee the house with the lover, rather it was a normal practice. So, against the love affair of Pemada and Gopen, her mother had no objection. Moreover, Gopen was really worthy of Pemada and he was a patriot. Gopen has deep respect for Gandhiji. For Gandhi, thought of the people of the lowest social strata and published the magazine ‘Harijan’ for them.

But the daily activity to earn the daily bread cannot cease. The blacksmiths of Barchila make choppers and axes; the potters produce earthen utensils; corn is reaped, grass is brought from the outfields for the cattle, cows are milked and from milk curd is prepared. These activities get momentum because the month of Agrahāyān is at hand. This is the time for various festivals at Barchila.

This is the season for catching and selling fish. Gunada, Pemada’s mother, purchases fishes from the market and carries them to different villages and sells them. But now that Pemada is a grown up girl, she cannot leave her alone in the house. So she takes her daughter with her as she goes out to sell fishes. The big market is there on the banks of the ‘Barnai’ (that is the Brahmaputra). Here is the wholesale fish market. Gunada purchases fishes from that market. The novelist has given a beautiful description here—

“কর্তৃকের পার ভালোমান পাইকারী বেগারী। মাছের সৈন্তী নাওবের আহি পার পাইছেই। নাওর চপচপিয়া পানিত মাছবের চপলায় আছে। বিধ বিধ মাছ - টৌি, টিভল, ঢেকেরো, কুটি, শিলখরিয়া ইত্যাদি।
উফলাল মারি থকা মাছবের দেখি পেমদার বেল বাল লাগিল। এই মাছবেয়েই তাঁর মাকক দুথুড়ত তাত যোগার করিবালে সুবিধা দিলে। হয়তো এইরের মাছেই তাঁরো ভিবিয়তর রোজগার থাল হব পারে।”

In the fish market many information about the land can be gathered from Puhia, another fish seller. A government spy has been murdered in the Mauja of Hatichong. For this Lakshmi Gosain has absconded. The people have broken tow bridges at Bebejia so that the police cars cannot enter Hatichong. A few military camps have been established there. Untold oppression has been let loose on the people.

But the oppressors are themselves the citizens of the land.

The Police or the military search the village at night. The personnel are more active in perpetrating atrocity on wives and girls than in catching the volunteers of the freedom movement. Sometimes they snatch away costly objects from the houses. So, with a view to warning the people conscious the satyagrahis organize the soldiers for
peace in the villages. They keep guard on the village at night in groups. Whenever they see police personnel, they sound the horn to make the people conscious of the ensuing danger. Tilak Deka and Gopen Das became martyrs as they tried to warn the people in this way. But still they could not save the respect of Pemada who was gang raped by three police personnel.

Meanwhile the society also witnessed some changes. Fish Business became beset with problems. The financial condition of Gunada- Pemada was not quite good before, but now in the issue- ridden land they have to submit to fasting sometimes. They could not go anywhere and everywhere for selling fish; moreover the female body is a great enemy of a woman. There are other problems too. A new type of agents developed in fish business. They are moneyed people. They go to different river-points to purchase fish in huge quantities. Puhijâ Das and his like cannot compete with them because they have money-power. These agents sell fish to the army-

"এবিধ নকে সৃষ্টি হওয়া ঢিকাদার ধরণের মাছ পাইকারী বেপারী নিচেই পুঞ্জাতে আহি বললুইত আরু আন নৈ নৈ চট পাইয়াই। সিরিহং মাছের আরু নৈ নৈ সড়ক সিরা মহলদারর পরা চরা দামত মাছ কিনি সেনার ছাঙ্গী বেচেগৈ।" 99

Financial difficulties compelled Gunada to give her profession of a seller of fish, and she embraced the profession of an enchanter and fortune-teller. During wartime prices of all commodities became sky-high. So, sometimes Pemada has to do the work of a maid. The price of rice has become double and huge quantities go to the army camps. The dishonest traders have entered the business of fair - price shops. They banked on black marketing of rice, salt etc to earn greater profit-

"নিমথ নিয়া সেলমন লোকনবোর পাইছে ছররার দেহা ধরা গোলাম সোপাই। ইয়াত সেই লোকান পাইছে তইতর যামিনী মৌজাদারর ভয়েক বাপথনে। সিরিহং নিমথনবোর কলাবজারত বেচি কোহোনারে ধন চলছহে।" 100

The people of this class, who were slavish to the British government, did the work of informers and informed the government of the activities of the freedom fighters. In return they earned goodly amounts. With that money Shovan Tarani has purchased, few bighas of land, purchased two elephants, and got ‘লিল’ by auction. As money came to his hands, he married twice.
In those days, in the village there was no facility for treatment of the diseased persons. They had to go to the town for treatment. The means of conveyance for the common people was the bullock-cart. But everybody could not hire a bullock cart. Puthiya is a moderately well-to-do man and he has a covered bullock cart. Gunada is carried to the town hospital in that cart. But the hospital was occupied by the army. So she was taken to Parama Kaviraj of Amolapatti and kaviraj- medicine was bought.

Owing to mothers illness Pemada was compelled to start selling fish door to door. With this was the business of the incantatory and the apothecary, especially selling medicine for abortion-

"পেমাদা পোহারী হন। শয়গত বিবাহী মাকক পুওয়াই এমুঠি খুওয়াই বি ওলাই যায় সফিয়া গার নোম নেঙেখা সমামতে তাই ঘর পায়ছি।" 101

"তাই চারমাইল অােরে অােরে সংগাহ তিনি দিন হটিত মাছু পাঁচী আরু দলা লৈ বধে। শুকুনবারে দলংঘটিত। শানিবারে ফুলগুরি আরু দেওবারে জাজরিত।" 102

Here in the narrative of the rural life, quite naturally various aspects of rural culture have been incorporated. The novelist has drawn the picture of the village market with great care. Some facts of physical geography of the area found place in the description of the village market.

"দলংঘটের শুকুনবারীয়া হাট। ... জাজরিত পাশ্চিমে মিনিপুরবাড়ি। তারা কায়েদিয়েই লাই গৈছে কোশাই নৈ। মিনিরবাড়ির মেজার ঘটবোঁটেই হল দলংঘট। ইয়া এখন দলং হোসাই যথা আছে বারেই ঘটক এই নাম। তাতে প্রতি শুকুনবারে এখন হটী বধে। এই জাজর হাটতে মানি পুরবাড়ির এখানে হাটী থাকে।

হাটীর আটিংতে বেছি মানুহ থােকা ঠাইতে মাছু বেছ। আগত মাছু লৈ বাহ আছে পচারা মানুহ আক চারিজনী পোহারী। বাকী তিনিজনীর মাজ্জত পেমাদা ভোটােরা জিলিকানি জিলিকি আছে। ।...........

মানুহ এটাই এহালি কবী লাগা কুটি মাছু দাম সোহাত তাই কলে - এটা দুলিকি। সি কৈ চালে - তিনি সিকিরে হোনে। তাই মুখখন অক্ষরান একতীয়া কুরি তামোল সিক এথোপা মাটিত পেলাই কলে - তিনি সিকি। তাই ঐ দেহি সোয়ামুয়া। ঘোয়া ঘোয়া, পাখীরক মুখখন খুই আহার। তেমার মাছু দেশ শুনী মোর জীয়া মাছ হালিয়েও লাজ পাইছে।

শোকর মানুহিরিনে তাইর পরা মাছ কিনিম কোজা মানুহটেলৈর র লাগি চালে। মানুহটেল লাজতে কাণ মুখখন রঙা পরিয়ে, চিক দুটা থর তে হৈ গৈছে মুখখনে কেোটাো রং সলাইছে।" 103 ইংরাজি।
Newspapers generally do not come to the Barchila region. Only one weekly newspaper comes by post to the Head Master of the Lower Primary School, Faringa Hira. The paper comes to the post office in every Friday. As the peon is seen with his bag of letters, people assemble at the door of the Post Office. The Head Master, Faringa Hira comes to the Post Office from the School and receives the paper. He enters the school, reading the first page of the paper wearing the glass spectacle bound in white steel. But today the paper bears the news of the independence of India. This gladdens his heart and he dismisses the school an hour before time.

“The newspaper does not come. The Head Master said, ‘Today the newspaper comes. People have gathered at the door of the Post Office. The Head Master, Faringa Hira comes to the Post Office from the School and receives the paper. He enters the school, reading the first page of the paper wearing the glass spectacle bound in white steel. But today the paper bears the news of the independence of India. This gladdens his heart and he dismisses the school an hour before time.”

The Novelist, Bora, lays before us familiar scene of the rural society by means of this reading of the newspaper. It is perhaps because of this that Dr. Parag Kumar Bhattacharjee identified him as a successful picturizer of rural life.

The country became independent, but this did not put an end to the sufferings of the suffering people. Rather, the people who were the favourites of the British government now made their appearance as big patriots. A new class of contractor appeared in the society. The very person called Haladhar, who was once given shelter by Pemada, started the work of a contractor, supplying sand, stones, earth, cement, bricks etc. He became busy with receiving payments of his bills by satisfying the demands of the engineers.

In ‘Matsagandha’ there are few episodes of the oppressions of the government officers on the common people. When the Health Officer, Balen, failed to get fish from Pemada without payment, he managed to call in the police and send her the judicial custody for three days. There she was gang-raped by the Daroga and constables.

As there are the descriptions of the cottages of the poor in the novel, so there are information of the domestic life of the wealthy people like Surath Mahaldar—
The tendency among the people of the so-called lower class people to change the profession or to conceal the social identity by means of higher education has been noted in the novel. Surath is a fish trader, but his son attained higher education and obtained law Degree. He is unwilling to follow his father’s profession. He intends to go to the town and join the Bar. He would, if it becomes necessary, forget his paternal identity.

Festival or feast is also mentioned in the novel at least for once. The feast thrown by Surath Mahaldar has been described in great and minute details has been given by the novelist—

“ঘোড়া ঠোকাকাের হাজিরা যানু ছাড়া দুটো বর্ষার বাজর মানুষ বিয়া, অন্যসহ, জুটিয়া মাথায়, জওয়াদি আলোক বর্ষার বাজর বেশ কোন লাই হ্যা।

কুজন পড়ি অনাইছে শেষ লিথি না বাজুড় তার পড়ি অনাইছে দুটো আরু তালিকায়।

Many more pictures of the society are there in the novel from which it is easy to catch the main tenor of life of a particular community inhabiting the region.
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