CHAPTER : 3
PROSE NARRATIVE AND YATRAPALA
Evidence of the cultivation of prose was found in Assam even prior to the nineteenth century. During the pre-colonial period Bengali prose was in use for maintaining relations, especially diplomatic relations between the various royal dynasties here. Bengali was the medium of communication between and among the royal dynasties of Tripura, Cachar, Kamta and Ahom. But the form of Bengali was that of the pre-colonial period. This has been discussed in the first chapter of the present work.

In the royal dynasty of Cachar beginning of the use of Bengali may be traced back to the sixteenth century. Evidence of the use of prose as well as verse in this period has been found. A document, letters, royal or governmental orders—for all these works prose was necessary. The script written in Maibang in the sixteenth century or the different appointments and legal documents on rules and laws of the later period prove that Bengali prose was in use in Cachar region before the beginning of the British rule.

Culture and cultivation of Bengali in Assam may be divided primarily into two divisions— pre-colonial and colonial. It deserves especial mentioning that during the pre-colonial phase Bengali was the link-language among the various dynasties in their diplomatic relations. And in the later phase, at the beginning of the nineteenth century we got books of history as well as translated prose. But we had to wait some more time to get prose narratives. By the last part of the nineteenth century was written the first prose narrative of Assam— ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ (The Tale of Malini) of Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar.

The prose narrative ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ was written in 1892, but the work remained unpublished for many days. It was only in 1940 that part of it
was published in 'Bijayini' magazine. It is worth mentioning that the publication of 'Bijayini' was stopped during the Second World War. After long years in 1997 'Mālinir Upākhyān' was published in its full form.¹ Thus the book that was written in 1892 AD took more than a hundred years to see the light of the day. It is necessary here to remind ourselves that most of the works of Ramkumar still remain unpublished in print and book form. From his biographies² we get information of altogether eleven yatrapala, but all these still remain unprinted. ‘Virānganā Patrottār Kāvyā’ and ‘Ushodbāha Kāvyā’ were published in the nineteenth century itself. Other than these, his ‘Ganit-Tatwa’, which was meant for the young learners, was also published. The songs composed by him were published in four volumes under the title ‘Pāramārtha Sangit’. It is a matter of discussion and analysis why a social novel which has women’s education as its theme, ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ was not published in those days. This fact sets us thinking precisely because at that time at least two schools were established for the purpose of spreading women’s education— one established by the Christians and the other by the Hindus. In 1882 AD was formed the Station Committee in Silchar town. In the budget for 1882-83 prepared by the Committee, for the two girl’s schools provision of Rs. 60.00 (Rupees Sixty) and Rs. 42.00 (Rupees Forty Two) only respectively was made. With this aid in 1882 was established one girl’s school in the present Shyama Prasad Road (Shillongpatty) towards the north of the present Women’s College. Pandit Bharat Chandra Bhattacharya, retired teacher of Government Boy’s School, took over the responsibility of this girl’s school. It may be mentioned that he was the father-in-law of Sarat Chandra Choudhury, author of ‘Deviyuddha’. At this time the other girl’s school also was established and run by the missionaries. This school also received financial aid from the Station Committee. About these two schools, we got the following in ‘Silchar Poursabhār Itihas’ (History of Silchar Municipality) remarks:

লোকমুখে ভারতবর্ষের স্কুলটাকে কলাত ‘হিন্দু বালিকা বিদ্যালয়’, অন্যটি হিন্দী স্কুল বলে পরিচিত ছিল।³

2. Shrihattabasi Sharman, Rāmkumār-Charit, Silchar, 1326 BS (1919).
[Bharatbabu’s school was called ‘Hindu Balika Vidyālaya’ (Hindu Women School), and the other one was known as Christian school.]

This was the time and background when Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar, whose mind was tutored by modern thoughts, wrote ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’. ‘Yātra’ or ‘Pālā’ is performing art, that is, what is performed on the stage, and naturally it becomes popular and finds place in the human tongue. But this attribute cannot be applied to the narratives written in modern prose and so this unpublished narrative of Ramkumar remained hidden from the eyes of the people. Perhaps Ramkumar wanted ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ to be a discourse on women’s education, for the benefit of women. It is unfortunate that this work could not be published in book form in the last part of the nineteenth century. Men and women of the time, who were interested in and eager for education for women, were deprived of the taste of this important work.

Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar was born in 1831 AD. His father’s name was Ramsantosh Nandi Mazumdar. Although their family had pride and prestige, yet Ramkumar lived with penury from his childhood. He lost his mother in 1838 AD when he was only a boy of seven. After this he sought refuge in many places, sometimes at Patli, sometimes in the house of his maternal uncles at Buriswar, sometimes in the residence of Zamindars of Guniayuk or at Nachhirnagar in Tripura— and in this way he was growing. His formal initiation to learning, ‘হাতেখড়ি’ (the sacrament of initiation into one’s study) was duly performed at the age of five. But he could not receive education in the traditional academic manner. By the machinations of fate he had to return again and again to Patli, his birth-place. During this period of uncertainty, he endeavored to learn Bengali, Persian and Sanskrit languages:

কোন বিদ্যালয়ের শিক্ষা প্রাপ্ত হয় নাই, কিন্তু তাহার শিক্ষনৃত্য ও প্রতিভা সামান্য ছিল না, তাহাতেই নিজের চেষ্টায় তিনি বাঙ্গালা, পারস্য ও কিছু কিছু ইংরেজী ও অপর সংস্কৃত শিক্ষা করিয়া ছিলেন।

[He couldn’t pursue any academic education, but his devotion to education and talent was not of ordinary stature. So he learnt Bengali, Persian and little bit of English, Sanskrit with his own endeavor.]

About this time the uncle of Ramkumar got married. All the immovable property of their family had to be sold to repay the debt incurred for the marriage. Then Ramkumar left Patli, and went to Nachhimagar situated of Sarail Pargana in Tripura. There when staying in the house of one of their relatives he tried to learn Persian without which, in those days, it was difficult to get a job. At this time Ramkumar came back to Patli for with cholera. Other family members also affected with this diseases. Four members even lost their lives. Any how Ramkumar recovered from the disease. Then he went back to Nachhimagar to Patli. Facing a life of restlessness and uncertainty on the one hand and struggling against poverty on the other— these two forces made him come to Silchar in search of livelihood.

In Silchar, Ramkumar’s near relative uncle by a distant relationship. Hargovinda Mazumdar did the work of ‘Tehshildar’. According to his advice, Ramkumar began some work in the Silchar court without getting any remuneration. As the British administration introduced Bengali in governmental works, he did not chance to face much difficulty in learning his work quite quickly.

Within a short time he was appointed a private ‘Mohrer’ at a monthly pay of three rupees. As he lived under the shelter of Hargovinda Mazumdar, he sent the entire amount to his father. He started achieving higher places in his job and gradually ‘কলেктরী অফিসে রামকুমারের আদর বৃদ্ধি হইল’ 4 [Ramkumar obtained honour at collector’s office.]

At this time in 1859 AD Ramkumar’s marriage with the daughter of Shambhunath Datta of Suhelpur village in Sarail Pargana was celebrated.

Before this Ramkumar had learnt some Bengali, Persian and Sanskrit and

now in Silchar he started learning English with the help of the Deputy Commissioner Major Stuart. Of course this learning was limited by the requirements of his work in the office of the Deputy Commissioner.

Here it is necessary, with reference to the context to mention that when Ramkumar was engaged in government service at Silchar, the famous dramatist Dinabandhu Mitra came to Silchar showing the responsibility of the postal department. It is interesting to note that he wrote a play ‘Kamale Kamini’ with this region as the background. Whether Ramkumar had a meeting with Dinabandhu Mitra has not been established, but it may be quite possible that they met with each other in a small town like Silchar and came to know each other. We have not, however, found any reference or source in the biography of either of the two literateurs in favour of this.

In Silchar, Ramkumar was in service for about forty years. In 1889 AD he retired from service. He had become interested in creative literary art quite early in life of which we have found some evidence. But during his stay in Silchar he wrote ‘Virāṅgana Patrattār Kāvyā’, ‘Ushodbāha Kāvyā’, ‘Pāramārthā Sangit’ and different yatrapala and left the imprint of his genius in both old and modern forms of literary art. After retirement he wrote the first prose narrative of this region ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’.

‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ was written by Ramkumar when he was sixty one. By this time in Bengali literature the tradition of the novel had been established. All the fourteen novels of Bankimchandra had been published; ‘Dipnirvan’ (1876) and ‘Mibāraj’ (1877) of Swarnakumari Devi, ‘Mādhabikankan’ (1877) and ‘Rājput jiban Sandhyā’ (1879) of Rameshchandra Datta had also seen the light of the day. Even Rabindranath’s ‘Bouthākurānir Hāt’ (1878) and ‘Rājarshi’ (1880) had been published at this time. It is worth mentioning that Haranchandra Raha had written the novel ‘Ranachandi’ (1876) fasing on the source materials found in Cachar. In the introduction to the novel, the author wrote:
I haven’t read about ‘Ranachandi’ in any sort of chronicle, this narrative based on the legends of Ranachandi, which are prevailing in Cachar region. A veteran called Rajkrishna was advocate of widows in Cachar. In my childhood I listened from him many astonishing story about Ranachandi. Besides this I listened a lot about Ranachandi from a barber. After my shaving was done I made him sit for long and listen all the stories from him. He was a barber of Gobinda Chandra Narayan, the last king of Cachar.]  

In his book ‘Bānglā Sāhitye Oitihāisk Upanyās’ (Historical Novel in Bengali Literature) Bijitkumar Datta held that Haranchandra Raha was a resident of Cachar region. Dr. Ramdulal Basu in his ‘Bankimchandra Samakālin Gouna Opanyāsikbrinda’ (Contemporary Minor Novelists of Bankimchandra) wrote of four novels of Haranchandra Raha—


The subject matter of the novel ‘Ranchandi’ was taken from Cachar. And naturally, the opinion that the author belonged to this region was aired by many. But recently editor of ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’, has held that Haranchandra Raha was a resident of Kolkata.

At the time when a tradition of the Bengali novel had been established centering Bankimchandra, Ramkumar wrote a prose-tale (‘আখানা’) instead of a novel. In all aspects Ramkumar had a modern mindset, but why did not he want to write a novel with all complexities of plot? What was the reason? It may be a hypothesis that the author wrote this book with a view to spreading and propagating female education in the then Silchar town. Therefore he tried to focus on simple narrative. It is unfortunate that, this handiwork could not see the light of day at

that period. The readers of that era were deprived of the opportunity of reading the book. In the biography of Ramkumar the following points have been mentioned:

a. Ramkumar became so partial to Bankimchandra that he engaged himself in writing a novel in the typical language of the famous novelist.

b. This is the best of whatever prose he wrote. Its language follows the manner of Bankimchandra.

c. The longing for establishing himself as a novelist like Bankimchandra arose in the mind of the plot.

From these points it may be formulated that Ramkumar had sent towards the novel writing. It may be mentioned that his biographer Shrihattabasi Sharman raised a different context. He gave information that, Ramkumar made an adverse criticism of the prose style of Bankimchandra in ‘Balad Mahima’. Later he realized that he had a wrong perception. And thus he endeavored to write a novel in the manner of Bankimchandra—at least the biographer intended to create such an impression. This impression has been upheld by the editor of ‘Malinir Upakhyan’.8

With a reference to this, it may also be held that Ramkumar did not consciously follow the path set by Bankimchandra—the path that was followed by some novelists of the nineteenth century who kept Bankimchandra before their ken. Rather he chooses the form of the prose-tale, not of the novel. He accepted the singularity of the plot-material. It was because he aimed at the spread of women’s education. Perhaps he willingly and consciously retrained himself from entering into the complex waves of a novel proper. May be, his intention was to spread and propagate women’s education by means of a prose-tale, or why did he quite consciously use the term ‘Upakhyan’ in the title of the book?

‘Malinir Upākhyaṇ’ proceeded through a simple plot. It may be held that the plot ends with a particular pointer. There is not much of the rise and fall in the
plot. The author concentrated only on the main theme—Ramkumar focused only on that place. Whereas the novel becomes the mirror of the society, moves from simplicity to complexity by the introduction of new episodes and situations, crowded with the appearances of different dramatis personae in the backdrop of the society, ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ starts from and ends with a single point. There is no multiplicity of episodes and characters, all contributing towards an organic whole. Ramkumar was almost a contemporary of Bankimchandra, the chief’s personality in the realm of Bengali literature of the time. The mind of rich imaginative plain on which Bankimchandra placed his novels is indeed a background in it and there are characters, but all the requirements cannot be supplied only by these two. There must be a overview of life, inward conflict and analysis—these are not there in ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’. The tale or ‘Upākhyān’ begins like this:

बंगदेश के मध्ये শিক্ষাবিদ্যা নামে একধারি পত্রিকার আছে, সেই প্রামে সহজাত মিছি বাল করতেন, তিনি নানা বিদ্যায় বিতর্ক এবং নানা গুণে শিখেন। পঞ্চবিংশতি বর্ষ বয়সে, হেমালিনী নাহি দার্শনিকরা একটি কথার পাতক্রম করেন। তাহাকে হেমালিনী বলিয়া কেহই ডাকিত না, কোন বিবাহকলে যখন সম্প্রদায় করা হয়, তখন হেমালিনী নাম শুনিয়াছিলাম, সকলেই তাহাকে মালিনী বলিয়া ডাকিত, এজন্য আমরাও মালিনী বলিব।

মালিনী একধারির রূপকষ্ঠি ছিল—কিন্তু স্বভাব দেয় তাহাকে কেহই ভালবাসিত না, মালিনী শিশুকালে যখন পিতার ঘর ছিল, তখন পিতা মাতা প্রভুত আমীরপীরাপ তাহাকে বড় মেহ করিত না। সে কথায় ২ কেবল রাগ করিত, মন্দ কথায় যেমন ভাল কথায়ও তেমন; প্রতিদিনের বালক ব্যাবসায় সহিত সর্বাপেক্ষা কল্পনা করিত, তাহাদের চেলার পুত্র এবং অন্য ২ সাথে চরি করিত; নাহি ভালিয়া চরির ফেলিত; যে ব্যবহার নিজের নয় এমন হয়ের প্রতি আপানার সংস্কার বর্তমানের জন্য সম্পত্তি করিত, না হয় বলপূর্বক লইয়া আসিত; মিথ্যা কথা কহিয়া সকলকেই বন্ধনী করিত। তাহার মনে দুরার দেশকাত্রী বসেন না, কুটি ২ তীর্থ করিয়া ধরিয়া নানায়কের কথা দিয়া প্রাপ্ত দিয়া বধ করিত।

In Bengal there is a village called Shimultala. Digambar Mitra lived in that village. He was an erudite and virtuous person. At the age of twenty five he married a ten year old girl named Hemmalini. But nobody used to call her Hemmalini, only at the time of ‘Sampradān’ (act of giving away the bride ceremonially to the charge of bridegroom) her Hemmalini name was heard, everyone used to call her Malini, therefore we will also say Malini. Malini was somewhat beautiful. But nobody liked her due to her ill nature. When Malini was at her father’s house during childhood, nobody liked her, whatever her relatives or her parents. Ill words, even good words made her angry, every now and then. She always engaged herself in brawl with neighbour’s boys and girls. She used to steal their dolls and other things, otherwise mutilated those stuffs. She even swore to prove that those stuffs are not stolen, rather those are her own. Even she used to snatch other kids stuffs by hook or by crook. She deceived others by telling lies. She didn’t have minimum kindness; she used to torture tiny animals in many ways and killed them. Malini never listened to her mother’s advice to learn some household works. As she grown up, her nature detoriated day by day. She didn’t her real nature for few days, right after her marriage, slowly her real nature was known to all. By then Malini was not newly-wed bride, slowly she began to utter, she can retort now.

At the beginning a domestic and social problem has been incorporated. The problem relates to a newly married woman. She is not a faithless and wayward woman, but sharp-tongued. In the second half of the nineteenth century this sort of behavior a demeanor was considered unbecoming and unnatural for a bride or a woman. Vidyasagar in his ‘Varnaparichay’ has incorporated the story of two boys (Gopal and Rakhal). He described Gopal as very good mannerly (“বড়ো সুরোধ”), amiable. But Rakhal is ‘not like that’ (“তেমন নয়”), and so nobody loves him. Vidyasagar cautions:

कोনও बालक /की राखाल /जो बड़ा सुरुवात /तेमन नय |

[Nobody should be like Rakhal. Whoever will be like him, he never be able to learn reading and writing.]

‘Varnaparichay’ was first published in Baisakh 1262 BS, that is, 1855 AD. Vidyasagar wanted social upliftment through education; endeavored to impart lessons on goodness of mind and heart. Ramkumar’s work was fashioned in the same aim. As the story begins we think that a complex plot would be created with the social issue with the newly-married bride in the centre. The Bengali novel-readers had by this time got the taste of the novels of Bankimchandra. But here, as the story advances, it moves toward resolution in a singular line. There are no ups and downs in the plot. The plot moves ahead towards a happy ending. The issue does not attain multi-polarity, rather remains unipolar Vidyasagar compared ‘Subodh’ with ‘Râkhal’. One is good, the other is bad. And Ramkumar penned the story of a bad girl. But, as found in the story, there is increasing purification of the character and manners of the woman—through education. From being a naughty and sharp-tongued woman she developed into a soft-spoken woman, an ideal woman, dear to everybody.

Actually, the spread of education among woman was initiated in Bengal by the middle of the nineteenth century. At the middle of Vidyasagar and the Brahma Samaj conventional education was started for woman who lived within the narrow domestic space. Shibnath Shastri lets us know:


[The president of education council and one of the member of Governor General’s cabinet Drinkwater Bethune, the great soul had been trying to introduce education for women in this country… 7 May, 1849 AD, a girl’s school was established, which is famous by his name. Bethune put his heart and soul to build

it. He was too much enthusiastic about education for girls, like Hare was for the education for boys."

Of course, even before that, some persons had become active for the spread of education of women in Bengal. About this Shibnath Shastri wrote:

1817 সালে স্কুল সোসাইটি স্থাপিত হওয়া অবধি এই প্রশ্ন উঠে যে, বালকদিগের ন্যায় বালিকাদিগকেও শিক্ষা দেওয়া হইবে কি না? এই বিষয় নইয়া সভ্যতার মধ্যে মতভেদ উপস্থিত হয়। রামকান্ত দেবের উক্ত সোসাইটির অন্যতম সম্পাদক ছিলেন। তিনি স্বীকার করেন অগ্রগতি প্রকাশ করেন; এবং স্কুল সোসাইটির অধীনস্থ কোনো কোনো পাঠশালাতে বালকদিগের সহিত বালিকাদিগকেও শিক্ষা দিবার রীতি প্রচার করেন।

1819 সালে বিপ্লব শিন্না সোসাইটির একজন সভ্য ভারতীয় নারীগণের দূর্দশা ও শিক্ষার আকাশকর্তা প্রদর্শন করিয়া এক নিবেদনপত্র প্রকাশ করিলেন। সেই নিবেদনপত্রের দ্বারা উত্তীর্ণ হইয়া Mr. Lowson and Pearce's Seminary নামক তৎকাল-প্রসিদ্ধ বিদ্যালয়ের মহিলাগণের ক্রিয়া উহার ভাষায় স্বীকার প্রচলনের জন্য এক সভা স্থাপন করিলেন; তাহার নাম হইল—‘Female Juvenile Society’।

1821 সালে স্কুল সোসাইটির কার্যরত মহিলা-সভ্যের প্রদর্শনী ইংল্যান্ডের British and Foreign School Society-র সভ্য কিছু অর্থ সংগ্রহ করিয়া কুমারী কুক (Miss Cooke) নামে এক শিক্ষিতা মহিলাকে এদেশে স্পর্শ করিলেন। অধিকন্তু ভিন্ন স্থানে ১০টি বিদ্যালয় স্থাপিত হইল এবং নূনান্বিত ২৭৭টি বালিকা শিক্ষা করিতে লাগিল। কুমারী কুক দুই বৎসর এইভাবে কাজ করিলেন।

কলিকাতার কর্তৃপক্ষ ভর ইঞ্জেট-মহিলা সমক্ষে হইয়া তদনীন্দ্র গর্বর-জেনারাল লর্ড আমহার্টের পত্নী লেডি আমহার্টের অধিনী করিয়া স্বীকার শিক্ষার উন্নতিবধানের বোম্বেলেন সোসাইটি (Bengal Ladies' Society) নামে এক সভা স্থাপন করিলেন। এই সভার মহিলা সভ্যের উৎসাহে এবং যত্নে নানা স্থানে বালিকা-বিদ্যালয় সকল স্বাপিত হইতে লাগিল।

কিন্তু এই সকল বালিকা-বিদ্যালয়ে অধিকাংশ ব্রিটিশ মহিলাদিগের স্থাপিত ও ব্রিটিশ ধর্মোচ্চার কার্যক্ষেত্রে অগ্রগতি ছিল।

সাংবাদিক-ধর্মো-শিক্ষক শিক্ষার উদ্দেশ্যে বালিকা বিদ্যালয় স্থাপন বীটন সাহেব

92

[Right after the formation of School Society in 1817AD, there was a
debate that, whether girls should be allowed to pursue education like boys?
There was dissension among dignitaries on this society. He gave his opinion in
favour of education for woman; he even introduced education for girls in society
governed boy’s school. ....

In 1819 AD, a member of Baptist Mission Society produced a memorandum
where he mentioned about travails of Indian woman and necessity of education
for them. This memorandum instigated all women of a famous school called Mr.
Locosan and Pearce’s Seminary, and then they formed an association called
Female Juvenile Society to initiate education for women in India.

In 1821 AD, some members of British and Foreign School Society of
England collected money and send an educated woman named Miss Cooke to
India under the persuasion of some women members of school society... within
a few days 10 schools were established at different places and more or less 277
girls had been pursuing education. In this way Miss Cooke worked as long as
two years. ...Some dignified English women of Kolkata formed an association
called Bengal Ladies’ Society for the development in the field of education for
women, and they selected Governor General Lord Armherst’s wife Lady Armherst
as their leader. Girls’ schools were established in many places with the enthusiasm
and care of those women members of that society. But most of girl’s schools
were established by Christian women. And the preaching of Christian religion
was part and parcel of those institutions. ...

Bethune was the first man, who established a girl’s school, where preaching
of communal centric religion was not allowed.]

Female education was spread and practiced under such a backdrop. In
East Bengal and in peripheral Assam too eagerness for spreading female education
was seen even within the four walls of domesticated life. And Ramkumar wrote
‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ in comprising this revolutionary and modern subject that
signified the end of a historical period. As noted already, Malini was sharp-
tongued. This main theme of the story is character reformation of a shrewish and
illiterate wife. [‘মুখরা ও অশিক্ষিতা পত্নীর চরিত্র সংশোধনাই’].\textsuperscript{13} The main issue that is dealt with in the novel may be formulated this:

a. সে কথায়ঃ ২ ফুট রাগ করিত, মন কথায় যেন ভাল কথায়ও তেমন ;...বিরে চ মুখ ফুটিল, সকল কথার উত্তর দিতে শিখিল। \textsuperscript{14}

[She got angry now and then, whether it was good words or ill words; ... slowly she began to utter, she can retort now.]

b. প্রায় পতির সঙ্গেও বিবাদ হইত। এমন কি যে ২ গুণে স্ত্রী লোকেরা প্রশংসা লাভ করিতে পারে, মলিন্দি তাহার কিছুই ছিল না।\textsuperscript{15}

[Frequently engage in brawl with husband also. Even she didn’t have those qualities, for which women are praised usually]

— The domestic life of Digambarbabu became unbearable for this sort of behavior and character of Malini. Malini, his mother and sister—with them Digambarbabu had his small family. But there is continuous lack of peace in the house. His sister Saraswati and his mother complained to him. Digambar sought the help of his friend Dharanidhar Datta to solve domestic issue; informed him of the general and conflict going on between his wife and mother and sister and so an atmosphere of peacelessness prevailed in the family. Dharanidhar said:

তাহার চরিত্র সংশোধনার্থ তোমাকে বলবান হওয়া উচিত। দুঃখভাবের জন্য সকলেও যদি তাহাকে অনাদর করে, তথ্য তুমি অনাদর করিতে পার না, করিলে তোমার দ্বারা পতির কর্তব্য কর্ম কিছুই হয় না, যে বাক্তি ইচ্ছাতে হৃদ্যক আর অনিচ্ছাতেই হৃদয়, পিতামাতা প্রভৃতি আত্মীয়গণকে পরিত্যাগ করিয়া তোমাকে আশ্রয়মর্যাদা হইয়াছে, তাহার সুখ্যুখ সকলই তোমার হস্তে, সামায় অপরাধে তুমি তাহাকে অনাদর করিলে কি যুদ্ধ করিলে তাহার এই জন্যই বৃথা হয়। এইখানে যাহাতে তাহার কুট্টাবশগুলিন দুর হয় যাহাতে উত্তম প্রকৃতি হয় সর্বত্রই তুমি এরূপ চেষ্টা করিও।\textsuperscript{16}

[You have to take care for reformation of her character. Through everyday dislike her ill behaviour, yet you should not neglect her. If you do so, that means

\textsuperscript{13} Shrihattabasi Sharman, Ibid, P.117.
\textsuperscript{14} Amalendu Bhattacharya (ed.), Ibid, P.31.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, P.34.
you are performing your duties as a husband. A woman willing or unwillingly left her parents and relatives, then dedicate herself to you, now her weal and woe depend upon you. Therefore her life will be meaning less, if you neglect her for minor fault. Now you should always try to eject her indecent habit and inspire her to be a virtuous lady.]

Dharanidhar also told him by way of giving advice: your wife might be interested to receive education. [বিদ্যাশিক্ষা বিষয়ে তোমার শ্রীর প্রবৃত্তি জামাহিতে পারে] 17 Here Dharanidhar emphasized on education for woman. He dispelled the doubts of his friend Digambar and made him effective in this matter. It is the mentionable that, education for women was practiced in household only. Women pursued education in their father’s ‘Tol’ (Sanskrit School) under the supervision of their husband.

At the beginning of the tale three is a domestic problem. The problem involving there female members of the family of Digambarbabu may be resolved only by the light of education. This is what the learned young man Dharanidhar Datta thinks. According to his advice Digambar Mitra has planted eagerness for education in his wife Malini. He said to her:

Malini! তোমার যদি শিক্ষার ইচ্ছা থাকে তবে বয়স অধিক হইয়াছে বলিয়া দোষ নাই, তোমা হইতে আরো বয়স্তা কার্মিকীপত্র লিখাপড়া শিখিরাহোন, এবে ঘরে বসিয়া শিখা কোন বিদ্যালয়ে যাইতে হবে না, যখন ইচ্ছা তখনই শিখিতে পারা যায়। 18

[Malini, if you have the aspiration for education, then your advanced age will not be a problem. Many women pursued education at more advanced age than you. You need not go any school, you can learn at home only, any time you can learn your lessons.]

At first Dharanidhar argued in favour of women’s education. Then Digambar materialized it through Malini. This signifies that the massage of the light of education was expressed through the trio— Dharanidhar, Digambar and Malini.

Now Malini listens to the stories of woman of noble qualities from her husband. She is interested to read books, particularly the moral stories. And Malini increased her reading ability. Her education began under the guidance and supervision of her husband. And she learnt the alphabet quite fast. Then Digambar’s sister also launched her career of education. Some changes could be seen in Malini resulting from her response to different stories. Ramkumar narrates:

[Today, Malini had been remembering the story of Sabitri (a virtuous woman of mythology). During her household work, and she resolved to abandon her evil behaviour. Some devoutness had been seen in her towards husband and mother-in-law, and affection towards sister-in-law.]

At the opening of the narrative, the novelist revealed the identity as a sharp-tongued woman. How this woman was transformed has been caught in the dialogue of her mother-in-law:

[Everybody says that education is not good regarding some matter. But it has some qualities too. You witnessed that, earlier there were trifling all the time in our household. I used to reproach against my daughter-in-law. But no sooner she started receive education, than the quarrel had hardly taken place. Now she is showing some respect to me, and an amicable relation has grown up between her and my daughter Saraswati. Earlier they could not tolerate each other. And

my daughter-in-law used to retort against me, now these things are past. Therefore I don’t forbid.]

Gradually the news of Malini’s education was circulated beyond the four walls of the house. There was discussion among the neighbors. The people of the village, who once remained busy censuring Malini and Digambar, now have realized the results of Malini’s education. They have ‘taken initiative for the education of their own wives and daughters’ (‘আপন ২ শ্রী এবং কল্যাণগঞ্জে বিদ্যাশিক্ষা দিতে উদ্যোগী হইলেন’) 21 and not only that, but ‘people of this village established a girl’s school near Digambarbabu’s house’ (‘আমাদু লোকের যদ্যে লিপ্তত্বায় বাড়ীর নিকট একটি বালিকা বিদ্যালয় প্রতিষ্ঠিত হইল’). 22

Ramkumar patronized education for women. The ideal woman of his conception is faithful to her husband and active in establishing and ensuring peace in the family. This theme fully is revealed in ‘Malinir Upakhyan’. In the whole narrative this truth has been circulated; it wheeled around. The social of women in the society, particularly their responsibility and role in the movement for eradication of drinking has been dealt with by Malini herself in different articles. These articles written by Malini had a great impact in eradication of the social malady of drinking.

Thus the author has described the story of Malini and established her as progressive and socially responsive woman. About ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ the biographer of Ramkumar writes:

[This book had not got published. How a husband reformed his shrewish and illiterate wife that is described in story telling way and it established the necessity of woman-education. Whatever this author composed in prose, amongst them this one is the best. Its language is of Bankim-pattern.]

22. Ibid.
There is a similarity between the basic themes of 'Mālinir Upākhyān': ‘पति कर्त्तृक मुख्रा ओ अशिक्ता पत्नीर चरित्र संशोधन’24 and the education imparted to women in the nineteenth century within the periphery of the house. Scholars have divided the education of women in the nineteenth century into four parts. 25

These parts are:

a. The system of education of women within the houses of the natives,

b. The efforts of the Geneva Commission,

c. Special efforts of the Brahmo Samaj and the educated natives and

d. Governmental efforts and plans.

In the nineteenth century a great eagerness and efforts could be noticed in the Brahmo Samaj and the educated natives for education of women. They paid great attention to prorogue education of women within doors. The same method was adopted by Malini’s husband Digambarbabu.

Malini received education in the house under the supervision of her husband. The complete picture of the education of women was almost the same all over Bengal in the initial stage. Golam Murshid informs— women like Kumudini (approximately 1840-65), Nistarini Devi (1840-60), Brahmanayi (1845-76), Manorama Mazumdar (1848-1936), Gnanadanandini Devi (1852-1941), Saudamini Devi (?- 1874), Swarnalata Ghosh, Hemangini Devi it al received education within the walls of the house and became known for their talents. Before marriage they were all illiterate. They received education after marriage with help advanced by their husbands. 26

For the purgation of the sharp-tongued Malini’s character, Digambarbabu at first told her desire for reading awoke. And we have noticed the gradual transformation of Malini in the narrative. Dharanidhar advised his friend Digambar to tell his wife beautiful proposal (‘প্রসন্ন’), that is, stories with a view to enhancing her eagerness. He also said:

When you will feel that she is starting show affection to you, and she is interested to hear your words with this kind of well conduct, then you start talking with her about vice and virtue along with some God related tale in story telling way. Tell her about virtuous and ideal women. When it comes to proposal, women are more obedient than men. Women of all ages don’t have any apathy towards proposals.

Here the initiation to education by the narration of proposal (‘प्रस्ताव’), that is, has been referred to. The fact is, Ramkumar wanted to move. The story forward very cautiously, by maintaining a casual connection in the story, instead of sudden intrusion of events. The light of education shall fall upon Malini—the author depended upon reason for describing the back-drop of this development. This is a significant feature of the story.

The plot of ‘Mālinir Upākhyān’ is simple. Here is only one plot, and there are no sub-plots.

Four members of one family—Digambar Mitra, his wife Malini, his mother and his sister Saraswati—and Digambar’s friend, Dharanidhar—these five are the chief dramatis personal in the story. Ramkumar built the story on the base of these five characters.

The unipolar story stands on a moral lesson. Ramkumar used a contemporary subject of great social import in the fabric of the story in which female characters have received greater emphasis. Sukumar Sen wrote:

बिसेििंेि ओ ताहार अनुकूलीदेि उपयोग देिि याय दे पुििक-पूििकार तुिपनाय नारी-पूििकाइ बेशि फुििििाइ—प्रौिेििी-चरित्रेऽिेि अविसंिादी प्राध्याया, पुििख-चरित्रेऽिेि नय।

[Female characters are more distinct than male characters in Bankim and his following author’s novel. No male characters, only female characters got indisputable prominence in plot.]

Sukumar Sen described this feature to the especial mindset of the Bengalis. Ramkumar is no exception to this. In his story too the predominance of female characters is noticeable. There is a tripartite division in the story:

Firstly, the identification of the rough-tongued Malini,

Secondly, Malini’s eagerness to receive education and

Thirdly, Malini’s activity shows against the alcohol drinking.

We may analyses the story from the standpoint of these three control points. In the first part Ramkumar has introduced a typical problem of the domestic life. The story resolves round the problem that issued in the family of Digambar Mitra in the village of Simultala in Bengal. At root of the problem his peacelessness in the house centering the wife of Digambar.

One of the principal themes of the story is the transformation of the character of sharp-tongued Malini. At the very opening, Digambarbabu said about the character and manners of Malini:

 basho! Ei pramey praye sakhe! Aamar dhire duaksaba bekha beker jone, kore 2 osha aamar
nishanto abhase heiyeche, dibarajri hoy te mare sende, na hey dhire sende dhorja hoyte, kore 2 osha sampran karite na pariye yadi utokte kichhu kuto bolte kii hoy dekhaite teken aamar o sampran thake na, yae mohe ami tei bolte, te joganjona o dhorjona kichhui
nai, amay korkshe dhraga bolte be keihe sahite pare na, ami tahake yai shea
karite chai, tahai she ahaar duaksab aabro baarile thake. 29

[Dear friends! Almost every one of you in this village knows about my wife’s ill behaviour. Day by day it has got on my nerves. All the time she is engaging in brawls with my mother and sister. Sometimes I could not control my anger, then I became harsh on her, but it made me feel insulted. That time she utters foul words. She doesn’t have shame, fear or morality. No one can tolerate

her rude words. The more I try to chasten her, the more her behaviour becomes evil."

The story gradually reveals the process of the purification of the self of the quarrel-some wife, Malini. This purification came from her listening to the conversations about virtues and vice and God and stories of faithful and virtuous women. This was together in her inner being the eagerness to listen to stories and then to receive education.

The traditionalists in Bengal offered some arguments against education of women. These arguments were:

a. There is no reference to education of women in the scripture,

b. By getting education, women will become faithless to the wedlock and learn to slight the elders,

c. The goal of education is to earn money. Therefore it is not necessary for women, because earning money is not their responsibility and

d. Educated women will become widows.30

Ramkumar has made us stand before some questions related to education of women. Suspius arose in the mind of Digambar Mitra thus:

\[\text{স্ত্রীলোককে বিদ্যাশিক্ষা দেওয়া বড় ভাল বিবেচনা করি না নীতিশাস্ত্রে শুনিয়াছি, দুষ্টলোক যদি বিদ্যা হয় তবে বিদ্যা বলে তাহার দৃষ্টতা আরো বৃদ্ধি পায়, মেষম সর্ব স্বভাবতই দুষ্ট সাধারণ সর্বকেই লোকের ভয় করিয়া থাকে আবার যে সভ্যতার মাঝার মাঝে যায় সে আরও ভয়ঙ্কর, অতএব দৃষ্টা রমণীকে বিদ্যাশিক্ষা দেওয়া, মেষম সাথে সাথে কামড় শিখাইয়া দেওয়া।...বেশ আমাদের শৈষ্যবুর স্ত্রী লিখিত্ব শিখিয়া পূর্বে কেমন ভাল ছিল, কে তাহার প্রশংসা না করিয়া এখন লিখিত্ব শিখিয়া তাহার চরিত কথার নিন্দনীয় হইয়াছে বিবেচনা করিয়া বেশ।31\]

[I heard that from my moral scriptures that, education is not good for women at all. If an evil person becomes intelligent then their wickedness increases more. As an example, snacks are naturally vicious, but it's the deadliest, if a

snake has gem on its hood. Thus educating a woman is similar to train an iguana about how to bite. ... Take an instance of our Shashibabu’s wife. Before getting educated she was such a good lady, that everybody used to praise her. Now think about her character, how it is deteriorating after she received education.]

Malini dwelt on her experiences of early life about education of women:

[During my childhood when grandfather used to recite from book, I learnt many a thing orally from him—‘Night is over, Birds are charping’, ‘All flower-buds bloomed in the garden’ and many more things I learnt, all these banished from my memory. When my father came to know about my learning, he became interested for my education. But my mother didn’t persuit it. She said, “Literate women become widow in early age, and childless also”. Mother said again, “What’s the use of education for girls? They won’t go out for job. We don’t have any education, does it make any difference? Even our priest Mr. Bhattacharyya, a veteran like him forbids it”.

Almost all the arguments against women’s education which were advanced in the Bengali society in the nineteenth century have been referred to by Ramkumar in the story. He even so pressed a doubt about the necessity of education of women and analyzed the contemporary point of view. Side by side he also showed how, after having heard the story of Sabitri, Malini’s eagerness for receiving education grew quite naturally.

The author aimed at unraveling Malini’s education which he did all through by means cause and effect relationship. Here we notice a gradual ascent. He did

not show Malini’s eagerness for education to have suddenly begotten, rather he brought in the references to her experience of childhood to show how the eagerness was there in her sub-conscious mind which came up to the conscious mind at the behest of her husband. This, by establishing the casual connection, indicates Ramkumar’s artistic excellence.

Malini was initiated to education within the house—she began under the guidance of her husband with ‘Shishushiksha: Pratham Bhag’. Of course, before this beginning Digambar inspired her to receive education by taking her tales. The fruitfulness of this inspiration comes out through what she said, “As you wish, I will also start my education” (আপনার মত হইলে আমিও পড়িতে আরম্ভ করিব।’).33 Digambar Mitra was used to tale Malini differ stories which resulted in the growth of her eagerness for learning. She had the habit of listening to stories before which the author did not forget to inform. Quite intelligently he revealed to us through the month of Malini by implying the flashback-technique:

[During childhood, every evening grand mother to make us sleep early, she used to sit with us on bed and tell stories. Then who cares of sleeping, but my sister used to sleep in the middle of the story. Grandmother had a good number of collections of stories. Nobody can match with that. There were many more stories of princes, merchants, and a girl of vermilion complexion. And she

34. Ibid.
knew the story of vermilion complexion. And she knew the story of ‘Staying of Chada’ (Chada Badh). And amongst then, one story is but of all. But she did not like to term it as story; she defined it as a pious tale. It is a tale of ‘নন্দীচূরা’ (who steals cream) Krishna and other cowherds. Once a swan devoured Krishna, but he came out, and these were so many interesting stories like that.

We realize that eagerness for learning was present in Malini even in the past. But her eagerness was thwarted by the adverse environment typical of the period. But her education was then really started under her husband’s supervision.

Self-analysis began in Malini after listening to the ‘Bratakathā’ of Savitri. The tale of Savitri and Satyavan hints at the complete transformation of Malini who occupies the centre-stage in Ramkumar’s ‘Mālinir Upākhyaṇ’, here the story reaches the climax and from this point began Malini self-purgation ‘Savitri Bratakatha’ is the eternal Indian story of a faithful and honest wife. This story purged the character of Malini whatever dark and dismal was there. She has given her mind to do wholesome deeds. The author informs us:

Malini আজ গৃহকর্ম করিতে ২ ও মনে ২ সাধিত্রীর কথা আদ্ভুত করিয়া আপন দুঃখভাব
পরিতাগের ইচ্ছা করিলেন, পতি এবং শাহাড়ীর প্রতি কিছু তত্ত্বিকো উদয় হইল, নন্দীর
সহিতও প্রধান সঞ্চার হইল। 35

[Today, Malini had been remembering the tale of Savitri during her household work. And she resolved to abandon her evil behaviour. Some devoutness had been seen in her towards husband and mother-in-law, and affection towards sister-in-law.]

Side by side her progress in learning, Malini’s character also started to change and she was growing faithful to her husband. By way of giving a report of her daily life, the author says:

Malini দিনের কেলা খান অবকাশ পান তখনই নন্দীর সহিত বিদায় আলাচনা করেন,
রজনীতে পতি হইতে উপাসন গ্রহণ করেন, কলহ বিবাদ ফুলিতে আরম্ভ করিলেন... 36

36. Ibid, P.50.
[During noon time leisure Malini discusses about studies with her sister-in-law. At night she takes advice from husband. Now she does not engage in brawl.]

Malini’s fame as an educated and devoted to husband woman spread in the village. A girl’s school was established in the village with the efforts all the inhabitants. These preparation and spread of education of woman came out to the outer world from the narrow space of the house; it spread in the hamlet of Simultala too. Malini also left a mark as an active social worker. The author writes:

Malini's乌পদेश এবং দৃষ্টান্তে সেই গামের অনেক স্ত্রীলোকের কুসংস্কার দুর হইল, এমন কি পুরুষের মধ্যেও যে সকল জন্ম ব্যবহার ছিল তাও সাংস্কৃতিক হইল 37

[Women of that village got rid of superstition. Malini’s advice made it possible. Now she is an exemplary figure for other women. Even those men also changed completely, who had some evil behaviour.]

Malini became more active in the final part of the narrative. An educated woman, Malini’s progressive outlook and dynamic activities also gave completeness to her character. She has been portrayed as a socially active woman, creating consciousness among women against drinking. She met the other women of the village and brought them together and told them of her resolution:

আমি মনে ২ ছিল করিলাম, প্রতি সপ্তাহে মসিরান নিন্দা বিষয়ক এক একটি প্রবন্ধ গদ্য কি পদ্ধ ছাড়ে রচনা করিয়া তাহার এক ২ ধূম অনুলিপি তোমরা প্রজন্মের নিকট পাঠাইয়া দিব।38

[I have taken a resolution that, I will compose a prose or a verse against drinking habit. And I will send copies of that write-up to all of you.]

Like a true leader Malini gave the incaged birds ("গল্পপত্র বন্ধ বিষয়ক") some instructions. At the centre of the instruction was the advice given to them against the habit of drinking of the husband’s of these women. She wrote in verse an article on against of drinking habit ("মসিরার নিন্দা সূচক একটি প্রবন্ধ পদ্ধ ছাড়ে").

38. Ibid.
Once in every month they met and discussed among themselves. The theme of their discussion was mainly the addiction to drinking and the ways of the eradication of this evil. The misery of the victims of the evil has been shown through the discussions of the women. One result of their efforts was that:

 dalam, धरानीबाबू उपदेश एवं दिगम्बरबाबू यज्ञ सम्राटि इन्हाँने अनुभवसीयर बोधान कामना निर्देशीया सहभागी विद्याध्यायी, सम्राटि एवं धर्मविज्ञान हुज्ज।

[Within six months majority of people have change their bad habits. And for this cause drinking habits has been removed from this Simultala.]

At the ending of the narrative it has been said:

प्रायं छायने सोए अभिकां लोक सुरागान परिस्थित यहाँ, परं ताहाने सुस्ताने सेव। प्रायं इत्यते सुरागी एकबार अनुबंधि हुज्ज।

[Dharanibabu’s advice and Digambarbabu’s care changed Malini from a vitiated to a lady, similarly, May; all women of this country become educated, virtuous and pious by the grace of God.]

One important character in the narrative is Malini’s husband, Digambar Mitra. In the first part of the story his activities have been revealed. His attitude for female education and efforts was something quite rare in the nineteenth century’s life of the Bengalis. In the story Ramkumar endeavored to establish that Digambar is a sincere and honest and socially responsible person.

There are two other members in Malini’s family. They were Digambar’s mother and his sister Saraswati. Both these two characters have undeniable roles in the presentation of events and Malini’s character. Other than in the initial part of the narrative, Saraswati has represented as Malini’s companion. Ramkumar writes that under Malini’s influence Saraswati also develop her good manners (“सरस्वती ओ डल हुई उत्तल”).

The time in which Ramkumar wrote this story is witness to the fact that in Bengali novels and narratives, it was the story, not the character that was of

40. Ibid, P. 50.
greatest importance. The same feature is seen in ‘Malinir Upakhyan’; here the story-line works as the guiding force. Of course, as in the art of telling the story, so in character portrayal, particularly in the delineation of the old neighbor-woman, he has demonstrated his still.

In Assam female-education was given a start in the last part of the nineteenth century. Some people supported the effort, some tried to oppose it. In this context it may be held that the creation of the character of the old neighbor-woman by Ramkumar is extra-ordinary. This woman, a typical represent alive of the old world, complained first to Saraswati and then to the mother of Digambarbabu against female education. She said:

[Oh, Digu’s mother! How could you allow your daughter-in-law to pursue education? May Digambar like a long life by the grace of God, but that’s not the issue. I just want to say you sister, “Your daughter-in-law will be childless. My son Shridam had given a book to his wife for reading. One day I noticed that book in her hand, on that very moment I tore off that book. And I rebuked her beyond the limit. I warned her that if she will does it again then be prepared for the worst. Right from that moment she never utters a word about study. You don’t know how to get done all household works by your daughter-in-law. In a household if there is any mother-in-law of true sense, then how could a daughter-in-law will dare to do anything at their own will? They are basically like clay, whatever shape you want, you could form them like that.]

This is the real picture of the Bengali life of the nineteenth century when by the side of the enlightened Bengali society there visibly exist a section engulfed in darkness. With an expert hand Ramkumar visualized this within a short space. Though the character of the learned youth ("জ্ঞানবান মুখক") Dharanidhar Mitra seems to be imposed, we have to admit that this character is introduced as essential for the development of the story. The development of the story found a significant course because of the advice and instructions given by Dharanidhar to Digambar. He holds:

a. অন্যান্যে উপদেশ করিলে স্ত্রীলোকেরা বড় মনোযোগ করে না কিন্তু প্রভাব হস্তে উপদেশ দিলে অভিজ্ঞ শিষ্য সমাজ সহিত গুনে এবং চিরকাল মনে রাখে। 42

[If you give advice to the women, they don’t take any interest in it, but if you advice them in a story-telling way, then they listen to it with so much respect and keep it in mind forever.]

b. অতএব তুমি যদি বিদ্যামন্ত্র বিষয়ে তোমার স্ত্রীর প্রবৃত্তি জন্মাইতে পার, তবে তোমাকে বড় পরিশ্রম করিতে হইবে না অন্যান্যেই তোমার মনোরথ সুসম্পন্ন হইবে। 43

[If you can grow interest for education in your wife, then you don’t have to do much hard work, and your wish will be fulfilled easily.]

The story-line then develops in the course suggested by Dharanidhar’s advice and advances towards the denouncement. The story ends not only with what happens to Malini, but with what happens to Saraswati, followed by the establishment of the school for female education and the efforts for eradication of drinking; the story ends with the references to the role of women in the social issues confronting the society.

The small village Simultala, which was enchained by superstition, unsympathetic to progressive thoughts—that rural abode gradually became broad-minded and the standard-bearer of enlightened mindset.

The thought-current or the theme of a novel or a story comes to the fore by sheltering itself in the form through in which it is expressed. This form gets its

43. Ibid.
life from the artistic method of the author. The best medium of this artistic method is the prose-style or style of composition of the author. About this Rabindranath told:

किंतु रचायकित्री नैपूनताय साहित्यः महामूलः...ह्या भाषाय मध्ये संपर्कत हइति थाके।
इति मनाने प्रकाश-क्षमता बृद्धि करिया देय। एविष क्षमताः लाभे जन्य मनुष्य चिरकाल
ब्याकुलः।

[But skill of composition also most valuable part in the field of literature ... It has been preserved in the language. It increases the possibility of expression for the mankind. It’s an eternal possibility of expression for the mankind. It’s an eternal eager of human being to acquire that power of expression.]

Every author gets restless for achieving this ‘power’, for style is the employment of those linguistic devices consciously selected or unconsciously, by means of which the author establish the desired connection or relationship with the targeted readers. Ramkumar establishes this connection by the device of a simple, uncomplicated story-line. It is necessary to add that in the nineteenth century one of the important features of a novel or story was this simple, uncomplicated narration.

We may lay bare and characterize the prose-style in ‘Malinir Upākhyān’ by quoting some experts and using them as a formula:

Descriptive language:

a. मालिनीर एक बिखरा ननदी छिल, प्रथम ताहार सद्दे परे बृक्ष शाङ्तीय सद्दे झकडा
हइते आरड़ हइल। कलह करिबार जना सर्वदा ताहारे गोष्ट अवेशण करित। वोजन
वेरुका एवरो भाने ना सेईक्षा बलिया ताहार मने दुःख दित। आवार एमिए मुखरा
छिल केही ताहार सहित कथिया आटिया आसित ना प्रतिबिख्रीणाग पारतपक्षे केही
ताहारे वाढिते आसित न। मालिनीर धर्मशाला लग्छा एवं भय किति छिल ना, शोरजनके
मना बलिया मने करित ना, ए विषेये पति कथिन उपदेश करिले, ताहारो अनुरोध
करित ना, प्राय पति ददे बिखर आहेत।
[Malini had a sister-in-law and she is a widow. At first Malini engaged in brawl with her, then she did the same thing with her mother-in-law. She always tried to find out some flaws in them to start a brawl. She used to make some serious accusation that nobody could think of. She raised those issues and hurt them. And she was such a shrewish that nobody was able to cope with her. Neighbours even didn’t come to their house. Malini didn’t have shame, fear or righteousness. She didn’t show respect to elders. She didn’t listen to her husband’s advice about etiquette. She engaged in quarrel with him on and off.]

b. মালিনী দময়নীর প্রস্তাবে শুনিয়া আহ্রাদির হইলেন এবং অনেক বিষয়ে জান লাভ করিলেন। যখন বিনমণিকে পুরুরিতে উদর হইতে দেখিয়া অম্বাকার সমুদ্র শির পঞ্চাব পলায়ন করিল এবং রাত্রিযোগ পঞ্চাব পরমালঙ্কার পরমেশ্বরের মহাম কীর্তন করিতে লাগিল। তখন মালিনী শব্দে পরিতাপে নিত্য ক্রীয়া সমাপন করিলেন, পুরুরিতের মত ননীর সহিত গুহার কাঠে সমাপনে উভয়ে পুথিক পাঠ করিতে বসিলেন, দিশরূপ বন্দুক নিকট যাইয়া মালিনীর বিদ্যাচিক্ষার কথা এবং তাহার স্বভাবের বন্দুক পরিবর্তন হইতে এসমত কথা বলিলেন, ধর্মীবারু শুনিয়া সন্তান হইলেন, এবং যখন বেরুপ উচিত বোধ করেন সেরুপ পরামর্শ দিতে লাগিলেন।

[Malini listened tale of Damayanti (mythological female character), and received knowledge about so many things. Darkness escaped and hid inside the cave of mountain, when the sun arouse in the east. And night-blind birds started to sing in praise of the Almighty. At that time got off from the bed and completed her daily household works. After completing works she started her study with sister-in-law like previous day. Digambarbabu told about all things like Malini’s education, and as of now the reformation of her character to friend Dharanibabu. He was pleased by this development. From that day he had been giving advice, whenever he felt the necessity.]

Dialogue:

a. Male:

আমাদের বন্দেশীর ভীষণোর প্রায় বিদ্যাহিনী, তাহাতে করিয়াই জানের সহিতও সম্পর্ক নাই। মূর্খলোকের অনদীক্ষ কেবল অধ্যাপার আঘাত থাকে, তাহারা ভালমন্দ কিছুই দেখিতে

In Bengal most of women are illiterate, thus they remain ignorant about many a thing. Mind of an ignorant paraded by darkness, they don’t have any idea about good and bad. Wise people use to say that, there is remedy for every disease except ignorance. Snakes are controlled by incantation or medicinal herbs, but it’s not possible with the ignorant. Stupid and quarrelsome women brings only suffering, on the other hand educated, virtuous, polite and obedient women brings happiness. Which household is enlightened with these natures of women, and then it can not be pervaded ever by the darkness of grief.

b. Malini’s dialogue:

i. When she was illiterate:

Stop now! Don’t add insult to my injury by saying all these things. Whether I am happy or unhappy, does it make any difference? To whom I will say my weal or woe? Or, what the use of say all these things? ...

I never engage in brawl willingly. One can’t simply tolerate, what your mother and sister utter with their mouth. One can’t simply tolerate too much, yet I am a human being. Sometime it’s really intolerable. But others are not aware of

47. Ámalendu Bhattacharyya (ed.), Ibid, P.33.
these, they only find my mistake. But I am not that kind of woman, who can turn this into truth and act like good person.]

ii. When she became literate:

प्राण नाथ! अजिका रात्रि बड़ अधिक है नाइ, यदि कठि बोध ना करने तब, केवन एकटी प्राण नाथ बलुन।

[Oh, dear! It’s not too late, if you don’t have any problem, and then tell some stories before going to bed.]

It is evident that the character is being moulded by education. And the moulding of character is seen even the style of the speech. This change in the character as well as the style of speech gives the narrative a touch of realism. But it has been clearly shown in the story that Malini’s character becomes to some extent artificial after receiving education. Ramkumar has shown greater expertise in the delineation of the characters of Ram’s mother and the old neighbor-woman, even in the delineation of Malini’s character of the early days.

c. Dialogue of Ram’s mother:

[Oh, Sister-in-law! I don’t have any time to spare idly. It’s been almost one month; my husband is bed-ridden for fever. He can’t move a bit. So many Ayurvedic physician or kavirajs tried to cure him. I promised to perform pujas to many a gods. Even I promised to sacrifice a goat to Goddess Kali. But all are

50. Ibid, P.54.
nothing but futile. All the time he asked for so many things, and I am disgusted of making sick diet every now and then. I hardly go near him; I feel shy sits near him through out of the day. Today Kaviraj has given a pill; he instructed that, it should be given with dry ginger and honey. We don’t have honey in our house, therefore I came to you. If you have honey in your house then lends me some.]

d. Dialogue of the old neighbor woman:

[Oh, Digu’s mother! How could you allow your daughter-in-law to pursue education? May Digambar like a long life by the grace of God, but that’s not the issue. I just want to say you sister that your daughter-in-law will be childless. My son Shridam had given a book to his wife for reading. One day I noticed that book in her hand, on that very moment I tore off that book. And I rebuked her beyond the limit. I warned her that if she will does it again then be prepared for the worst. Right from that moment she never utters a word about study. You don’t know how to get done all household works by your daughter-in-law. In a household if there is any mother-in-law of true sense, then how could a daughter-in-law will dare to do anything at their own will? They are basically like clay, whatever shape you want, you could form them like that.]

It becomes clear from the aforesaid formulated points that Ramkumar has employed two styles— one in the narrative parts and another in the dialogues.

a. In the descriptive parts there is a predominance of Sanskritized words and sophisticated language. In the descriptive sentences about

ninety percent of the words came from Sanskrit without change or 
with a little change.

b. In the language of the dialogue there is greater influence of the 
spoken language or dialect. It is worth mentioning that in the portrayal 
of female characters, especially the characters of Ram’s mother 
and the old neighbor-woman, this reception is more forcefully 
exhibited.

—In these dialogues there is little of embellishment or sophistication, but there is 
the factual and credible picture social life. Superstitions which are referred to in 
the dialogues were present mainly in the characters of woman of the nineteenth 
century. The author of the narrative has brought them up with a great skill. In the 
language of an eminent scholar:

[Ram’s mother and her neighbour, an aged woman— both of them are 
vivid character. Rural atmosphere is interded in this tale, but it is strange, that 
Ramkumar had not taken any effort towards it.

But I must say that, Ramkumar was down to earth while writing this 
prose takes, it is not mere imagination. In that remote past he fulfilled a social 
responsibility in Silchar town. In Bengal, so many people had showed responsibility 
and awareness.

Ramkumar’s prose is a witness of his deed, and it is really surprised to see 
this write-up in the context of that period.]

In ‘Mālinir Upākhyaṇ’ there is a noticeable predominance of complex and compound sentences. In comparison simple sentences are conspicuous almost by non-existence.

It is necessary to maintain that in Ramkumar has introduced various rites, and particularly the story of ‘Sāvitrī-Satyavan’. This ‘Bratakathā’ was greatly popular among the woman of the Surma-Barak valley. Meanwhile the prose version of the ‘Bratakathā’ of ‘Sāvitrī-Satyāvaṇ’ composed in the nineteenth century has also been discovered. Ramkumar was conscious at the same time to note the people of the period. He was careful and attentive to the use of proverbs or form of proverbs like ‘पोटे कृता मुखे लाज’ (Concealment of one’s eager desire on account of backfulness), ‘सं तद्द त सं एवं असं तद्द रे असं हईवे’ (A man is known by the company he keeps) etc.

It is also necessary to note that Ramkumar’s prose has been polluted by the mixture of the sophisticated and orthography forms of Bengali language. This defect known as ‘Guruchandāli’ has greatly influenced ‘Mālinir Upākhyaṇ’ in which, again orthography of some words is defective.

We believe, if Ramkumar had received modern education and environment he would be free from these defects. However, in spite of these defects, it may be held that the fact he paneled the story in Silchar was considered the identifier of a modern mindset in this peripheral region at that time. Herein lies Ramkumar’s great success; he became peerless in the face of the defects.

3.2 Yatrapala of Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar: ‘Bhagavatir Janma Abang Vivāh’:

The spread of Bengali yatra (popular dramas of Bengal) is not limited to only Bengal; rather its popularity is seen beyond the periphery of Bengal. Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay (1898-1971) wrote of spread and propagation of yatra in his ‘Manjori Opera’:
The roaming yatra parties begin their rounds from the time of Durga Puja and visit different towns and villages and come back by the end of Aghrahayan. They take rest in Poush, then after the Saraswati Puja in Magh and again go out from Kolkata to cover the whole of Bangladesh; in the east they visit from Guwahati to Digboi, then Sylhet and Silchar, and then visit Katihar, Purnia, Kishanganj etc. in Bihar.

It becomes clear from this that Bengali yatrapala became widely popular in Assam. It is worth mentioning that this pattern of popularity of yatrapala has been following since the nineteenth century. And in this sphere the contribution of Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar must be mentioned and acknowledged.

But before initiating any discussion on the yatrapalas of Ramkumar it would be wiser to dwell on the history of Bengali yatra in a brief manner, for Ramkumar’s only published yatrapala, ‘Bhagavatir Janma Abang Vivāh’ (Bhagavati’s Birth and Marriage) must be studied in the light of that tradition.

The word ‘yatra’ has for its root the verb ‘ya’(যাত্রা), which means to go, to depart. The word ‘yatra’ has been used in connection to such words and expressions as ‘Samaryatra’ (to go to the battlefield, to go for fighting), ‘Shobhayatra’ (procession), ‘Dharmayatra’ (to go on pilgrimage) etc.54

It is worth mentioning that the use of the ‘yatra’ is found in the ancient classical writings of Bhavabhuti, Abhinava Gupta, Biswanath Kaviraj et al. But the regular use of the word is found in Bengali writings since Chaitanya Era, that is, the beginning of the sixteenth century. The festival of birth of Chaitanya has been called ‘yatra’ by Vrindavan Das (1507-1589) with some semantic change:

People enjoy the festival of birth of Chaitanya without understanding its significance. It is the full-moon night of Falgun and it is worshipped by Brahma and others.

It ‘Shri Chaitanya Bhāgavat’ of Vrindavan Das is found the detailed description of the theatrical performance of ‘Krishnalīlā’ by Chaitanya and his party. A reference to this performance is formed in the Sanskrit play ‘Shri Chaitanya Chandroday’ of Kavikarnapur Paramananda Sen.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century (approximately 1507-08 AD) Shri Chaitanya Dev performed ‘Krishnalīlā’ the whole night with his followers, the minute description of which is found in the work of Vrindavan Das (Middle, Chapter XVIII). The author of the history of Bengali literature Asitkumar Bandyopadhyay wrote:

[This is the first reference to acting or performance of yatra-song. But the practice of calling this sort of acting with songs and dance as yatra had not become current at the time.]

Side by side, in Assam of that period, there was frequent use of the word ‘yatra’ in the works of Sankar Dev who spread the Vaishnav faith. The first play in Assamese language is ‘Chinhayatra’. The editor of ‘Rukmini Haran Nāt’, Ambikanath Bora informs:

[One play called ‘Chinhayatra’ was written in which there was a Sutradhar; there were dialogues not only of Sutradhar, but also of other characters; there were songs through which ideas not expressed through dialogues were expressed.]

Sankar Dev’s plays dealing with Krishnalila were ‘Rukminiharan’, ‘Kāliadaman’, ‘Pārijātharan’, ‘Rāslilā’ etc. It is worth mentioning that the Assamese lyric-plays of Sankar Dev (in which Sanskrit, Assamese and Brajavalī are used) have been called public performance or yatrapalā (‘আসারী অভিনয় বা যাত্রাপালা’) by Asitkumar Bandyopadhyay. The critic also holds that within the time-frame from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the lyric-plays in Assamese literature assumed the complete form of dramatic ‘yatrapala’ or ‘yatragan’.

On the other hand, the Bengali yatrapala could not achieve controlled and well-knit form before the nineteenth century. Any mentionable example of Bengali yatrapala between Chaitanya Dev and the eighteenth century has not been found. Of course, in Bengal, yatragan centering Krishnalila and the life of Chaitanya started to achieve popularity since the eighteenth century. But the printed version of any yatrapala has not been found before the nineteenth century. Here, the comments of Baidyanath Sil are worth noticing:

[No yatrapala or play written in the sixteenth-seventeenth-eighteenth centuries has come down to us. The yatrapalas we hear of those which we actually find, appear to be the products of comparatively modern period.]

In Bengal Krishnayatra was the main branch of yatrapala. Beside this those were Chandiyatra, Bhasanyatra of Manasa, Rasyatra, Chaitanyayatra etc.

But the type of yatra changed in the nineteenth century when 'Vidya-Sundar' Palas appeared in the literary scenario. It written in 'Samachar Darpan':

[A yatra of a particular form has been created which falls within the tradition of ‘Annadamangal’ of Bharatchandra Ray.]

Gradually Vidya-Sundar became very popular in the rural areas. In the language of Ajitkumar Ghosh:

[The story of Vidya-Sundar, because of its human touch, became the most popular among the actors and producers of yatrapalas. With the appearance of Vidya-Sundar yatra also appeared the Khemta dance from which none of Vidya, Malini, Radha, Sita, Ram, and Krishna etc. combed escape. Obscene gestures and songs of low taste became a part of this type of yatragan.]

Two things come out from afore mentioned comment:

a. The story of ‘Vidya-Sundar’, that is, the impregnation of Princess Bidya as a result of her secret love with Sundar and ultimate legal marriage of Vidya with Sundar by blessing of Goddess Kalika.

b. At this period low and nasty taste made inroads in yatra.

However, yatra was freed from the bondage of low taste and immortality by the last part of the nineteenth century. In this development important roles were played by Harimohan Ray, Matilal Ray, Manomohan Basu, Madanmohan Chattopadhyay et al. It would not be an overstatement that yatra was saved and protected from obscene and distasteful songs and expressions by such yatrapalas.


By the last decades of the nineteenth century yatra crossed the bounds of the city of Kolkata and began to be popular in various regions and towns. There are evidences of the performances of yatrapala in Burdwan, Nadia, Hugli, Dhaka, Mymensingha, Barishal, Jessore, Sylhet etc. It is worth mentioning that the evidences of the performance of yatra in Assam since the fifteenth-sixteenth century exist. It has been earlier mentioned that this culture was created and developed in Assam under the leadership of the Vaishnav Master, Great Sankar Dev. But evidence of Bengali yatra in Assam is found since the last part of the nineteenth century. Beside this, we find what has been written about yatra of Manipur in the pages of the ‘Samāchār Darpan’:

[A group of yatra players has recently come and performed yatra in a few places in Kolkata. Some people must have the yatra performed by them the night of 29 on Shravan, Saturday, in the parlour of Shrijut Babu Matilal Sil of Kalutola. The following is a rough account of their yatrapala full of dances and songs:

These women are a surprising band. / Women impersonate Krishna. / They plays impersonate Lalita, Bisakha, Chitra and Ranga Devi / Sudevi, Champaklata, Bidyadevi / And Indurekha also celebrate Raslila with Krishna. / Male players play music and the heroines has chorus. / They play with Krishna / But they have no beauty. / They have loud voices. / If you heard that voices, you never forgot. / They dance with music but it's only like jumping. / Jaydev sing songs and his style is unforgettable.]

This news may be considered a great example of the performance of Krishnayatra in the North-East India. The history of Bengali yatra in Assam stands on the combination of two separate and independent streams— the independent tradition of the North-East and the equally independent tradition of Bengali yatra.

Among the authors who composed yatrapala in Assam in the nineteenth century, Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar is second to none. It comes out from the biography of Ramkumar that he wrote eleven yatrapalas, before which he had written a few 'panchali' (metrical composition). Sukumar Sen expressed yatra comes from panchali.63 Before entering into any discussion on his yatrapalas we would dwell on a little on his panchalis.

Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar's boyhood was a tale of unbearable poverty. The only consolation of his life at that phase and the anchor of his thoughts were music and literature. His writings of the early youth received praise. He wrote a yatrapala called 'Dātā-Karna' when he was only fourteen. This pala was performed, due mainly to the inspiration and activities of two music lovers of Patli, namely Joykishore and Nandakishore Choudhury.

The story of ‘Dātā-Karna’ has been taken from Mahabharat. The story, in brief, is this:

Karna had vowed that he would not drink water till he killed Arjun. Besides he also vowed that he would not refuse anybody who sought his help.

To see whether appeared was really bound to this vow; Krishna appeared before him in the form of a Brahman and expressed his desire to eat the flesh of Brishaketu. Karna satisfied the Brahmin by serving him the flesh of Brishaketu.

Young Ramkumar was much attracted by the charitable character of Karna. Perhaps this attraction was caused by the following two factors:

a. The charitable nature of Karna and

b. Weakness for Brishaketu.

Though the subject matter of the pala ‘Data-Karna’ is the charitably of Karna, who appeared in the guise of a Brahmin, became satisfied and brought Brishaketu back to life by his restoration power.

For five or six years since the composition of ‘Data-Karna’, Ramkumar did not write any other book. Meanwhile he joined the Cachar District administration as a clerk. After his arrival at Silchar he wrote ‘Shrimatir Kalankabhanjan’ which was published in 1851 when Ramkumar was twenty.

There is a story behind the writing of ‘Shrimatir Kalankabhanjan’. An assistant of the Tehsil office had written ‘Kalankabhanjan’, which was sent by the author for necessary modification to Ramkumar. But Ramkumar not only modified it, he himself wrote a panchali in the same subject and gave it the little ‘Shrimatir Kalankabhanjan’.

At the period, that is, the middle part of the nineteenth century, this panchali achieved some popularity. It has been written in the biography of Ramkumar:

Ramkumar nobodir raajit pachali eke tumbul andeolen upajit korirajchil. Kobir sahaambari
kobir rajmohon dana kobirajkuri eke pachalir gune etadush mahit haiyachilien be prohor
abrodhobhik saaker korir tita urohar awhinaker udonko koron. Lankhi purseimai raajit tehaar
gulle bibopul janmohon samakte koripak prasiddi guliokdodarar eke pachali gite hoi. Bodo
Ramkumar Nandi's panchali had a great impact. Late Rajmohan Datta Choudhury who lived in the same village as Ramkumar became so charmed that for the performance of this panchali he spent a good sum of money. On a full-moon night in the presence of a huge audience the panchali was sung by a few eminent panchali-singers. Many gentlemen and Sanskrit scholars, having heard the panchali wholeheartedly praised it. Rajmohan Choudhury was so enthused by this that he would have all the panchalis performed, which Ramkumar nights compose, at his own cost.

Two other compositions 'Lakshmi O Saraswatir Dwanda' and '1305 Saler Bodhan' of Ramkumar come under the category of panchali. It is apparent from the title of the former that its subject matters are the conflict between Lakshmi and Saraswati. '1305 Saler Bodhan' was written on the 5th of Chaitra. In this pala arrangements for against animal sacrifice in the puja of Sati have been given and at the ending has been incorporated a rhyme titled 'Gazi Saheber Gan' (Song of Gazi Saheb) in which rural words generally used by Muslims have been incorporated:

आल्लाहजी ! हेकमते बानाइलाय केलाय गाछ
तार खेलेर उर खेल।
काहिलाल खाई, बुगुल खाई, खुरेर बिराम खाई
कंचाचेळार छालन खाई, पारखा केला छल्ला खाई,
पाता काठी। खाना खाई, कौनचित्त याय ना बरबाद।
खेल बिना हय ना रे भाई हेहुः हुराद!!

Great Allah! how artfully you created the Banana tree / which is covered by layer after of skins. / Every part of the tree we eat / or put to different uses and / no part is wasted. / Hindus funeral ceremony is incomplete without the outer skin of the Banana tree.

64. Shrihattavasi Sharman, Ramkumar Charit, PP.46-47.
The background of the writing of the panchali’s of Ramkumar must be learnt before discussing. Because a little discussion on the performances of Bengali yatra of nineteenth century’s Assam would help us enter the later discussion.

Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar composed eleven yatrapalas in all—‘Nimāi Sannās’, ‘Sitār Banavāś’, ‘Vijay Basanta’, ‘Padānka Dut’, ‘Kangsbadh’, ‘Umār Āgaman’, ‘Mārkendeya Chandi’, ‘Rāślīlā’, ‘Dolyāṭrā’, ‘Jhulanyāṭrā’ and ‘Bhagavatir Janma Abang Vivāh’—from the large number of which it is not difficult to understand that, though he engaged his mind to other branches of literature (poetry and prose narrative) he earned greatest reputation for his yatrapalas. Or why should he have written so many palas on such a variety of subjects?

Most of the yatrapalas of Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar are based on mythological stories. The only exception is ‘Nimāi Sannās’. But he accepted the materials not only from Krishnalīla, but also from the Ramayānan and Bhagavat, as well as from the life of Mahādev, the God of gods. Such a pala is ‘Bhagavatir Janma Abang Vivāh’ which is taken from the mythological story of the life of Mahādev.

It is evident from the title of this pala that in it Ramkumar reconstructed the story beginning with Uma’s (the daughter of Himalaya, the king of mountains) and ending with Uma’s marriage with Mahādev. What Mahādev said to Narad is worth mentioning:

आमार नंदी भगवतीর जन्म अविधी परिमाय पर्यंत एकपाधी गीतिकाय रचना করছে। মধ্যে 
মধ্যে ভূতেরা অভিমায় করে থাকে; আমি মনের পূর্বক শ্রবণ করেছি, কাব্যাত্নি সুন্দর 
হইয়াছে, মূল ঘটনাগুলি বিশদরূপে বর্ণিত হইয়াছে এবং কোন প্রকার অতিরিক্ত নাহ। 66

[May Nandi have composed a verse-narrative the subject of which is the birth of Bhagavati till her marriage? The spirits also sometimes acts in plays. I heard it attentively, the narrative is beautiful. The main incidents have been described elaborately and there is no exaggeration.]

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Two things come out clearly from what Mahadev said:

a. Mahadev’s follower, Nandi, has composed a verse-narrative; the subject is the birth and marriage of Bhagavati.

b. The followers of Mahadev sometimes perform plays and the verse-narratives of Nandi and present one in his opinion is beautifully composed.

We are of the opinion that Ramkumar in the dialogues put in the month of Mahadev adopted the technique of attracting the audience and listeners. In fact this technique became very vital in creating moments of dramatic moment. It strong thins and deepens the relationship between the audience-listeners and the characters in the play. It creates a curiosity in the mindsets of audience-listeners for the following and subsequent scenes.

There are forty eight scenes in the yatrapala ‘Bhagavatir Janma Abang Vivah’ in which the major characters are Mahadev, Uma, Giri, Menaka, Narad et al while the minor characters are Indra, Madan, Rati, Urvasi, Jayapur, Vijaya and a few more.

According to Puran, Sati, though not invited, attended the yagna (sacrificial fire) performed by Daksha. But her father Daksha, during the performance of the yagna used abusive language about Mahadev in front of who attended the performance. But Sati could not endure the abusive language hurled towards her husband and committed suicide. At a later time she was born in the womb of Menaka, the wife of the king of mountains Himalaya, and was called Uma. The yatrapala of Ramkumar begins with the tale of the birth of Uma. A maidservant came to the king of mountains Giriraj and announced:

महाराज ! राजमहिषी एकटी कन्या समाज प्रसन्न करेंगे। 67

[Maharaj, the Queen has given birth of a girl-child.]

Then the king saw the new born daughter in the inner quarters of the royal palace and he thought that this girl was not ordinary. His thought was proved correct by what the girl-child replied:


125
Father, I am Nature; creation, existence, and destruction occur according to my wishes; I am the inner self of all begins, I help the living begins rises the sea of earthly life, I am the owner of the universe, I am the image of Brahma.

Ramkumar created no complication in constructing the tale of the yatrapala, for he initiated to create the impression of a clear story-line in the minds of the unsophisticated listener-viewers. He followed the conventional technique of the yatra in building up the tale.

Giriraj observed the ‘image’ of the daughter. After this the course of action advanced towards the declared denouement— the marriage of Bhagavati. Not only the plot, but the art of characterization of the author illuminates this end.

Some doubts appeared in the mind of Giri Goddess Bhagavati explained such subjects as learning and knowledge, the sublime being, conscience etc. in an easy, uncomplicated language. In fact, Ramkumar clearly and artistically brought these deep subjects home to the listener-viewers which were natural, given the condition of the then society.

Uma gradually grew up in the inner chambers of the royal palace. And also became quite unruly which adds to Menaka’s anxiety. Menaka told the girl of only eight:

You’re no longer a mere child, you’ve learnt nothing of House-hold works, do you think after your marriage your mother-in-law will allow to remain seated let you play the whole day?

69. Ibid, P. 68.
This anxious thought of Menaka is quite natural. After her marriage, Uma will have to do domestic works in her husband’s house, the mother-in-law will not allow her to remain idly seated, possibly she will not let her play any more—such thoughts pain the heart of the mother. It needs be pointed out that universal thoughts of the mother for the daughter have been expressed here. The playwright has expressed this very concisely, but not without artistic beauty.

Almost by the middle of the plot, Narad has given information about Uma’s marriage. He informed:

ইনি ত সেই দক্ষ কন্যা সতী দেবী তিনি শিব সীমান্তিনী, তবে শিব বিনা তাঁর আর কর কোথা?

[She is Sati Devi, daughter of Daksha and the consort of Shiv, who else but Shiv can be her bridegroom?]

Introduction and elaboration of the plot is the main concern in a yatrapala. Ramkumar has effectively employed the technique to attract the audience in this pala. He has not complicated and loosened the construction of plot by introducing incorporating characters and events which are unrelated the plot in a simple way and in a simple language without introducing unnecessary sub-plots.

In prose-narratives sub-plots have some important role to play, but here in this yatrapala, not sub-plots but merely some descriptions of the Heavenly court have been given and these are necessary for the unfolding of the main plot; to make the plot more realistic. The happenings in Heavenly abode have laid bare the backdrop of the birth of Uma.

In the abode of the gods, Indra and other gods were anxiously discussing to device the means to kill Tarakasur. Finding no way out, they sought the help and advice of Brahma; they asked Brahma how Tarakasur could be killed. The creator Brahma revealed to them how they could reach the goal:

সতী বিরহে সেবায় মহাদেব তপস্যায় নির্গত, এদিকে সতীনি হিমবাণ গৃহে জন্মগ্রহণ করে মহাদেবের তপস্যা করতেছেন, এক্ষণে উভয়ের পরিপ্রেক্ষ্য কার্যসম্পন্ন হলে মহাদেব ঔরসজ্ঞ গুরুত্বের উত্থিত হবেন, সেই কুমারকে সেনাপতি করুন যেদেশে তারক নিহত হইলে এক্ষণ আপনারা তাহারই উদ্দেশ্য করন গে।

71. Ibid, PP. 74-75.
[The God of gods Mahadev was rapt in meditation, and Sati, born as the daughter of the Himalaya, was praying for Mahadev. If they are wedded, their son would be born and when this son would be elated the commander of the heavenly own, they only Tarak would be killed. So the gods should engage their endeavor to that end.]

With reference to this endeavor of the god came the story of Madan and Rati. Efforts of Madan to break Mahadev’s meditation have been celebrated in song number 20, the last two lines of which are:

বিরাপাক্ষ বক্ষ লক্ষ করি মদন তখনে,  
এড়িল বাণ ভাদিল ধান, চাহিলা কেঁপ নয়নে।\(^{72}\)

[Madan shot the arrow aiming at the breast of Birupaksha / then his meditation was broken, with angry eyes he looked at Madan.]

Madan had to sacrifice his life for aiming the arrow at the breast of Mahadev. When Madan was burnt to ashes by fire coming out from Mahadev’s eyes, Rati made a prayer to the gods:

হে দেবগণ, তোমরা না অমর? তবে কেন প্রাণভয়ে মহাদেবের ধান ভাঙ্তে সাহস হলো  
না? প্রাণনাথকে লিখিয়ে বুঝিয়ে এ দুঃসাহসিক কার্যা নিযুক্ত করলে, এখন যে কেওকে দেখতে  
পাই না, তোমরা না বাক্সিস্তা। বলছিলে মদন “চিরজীবি হও” কেমন চিরজীবি হলো  
হোয় ২ বৃথা অন্যকে কেন দোষারূপ করি সব আমারই কপালের দেষ, হাসয়।\(^{73}\)

[O gods, aren’t you immortal? Then why did you not dare break Mahadev’s meditation? You goaded my beloved husband into the dangerous deed, and now you don’t come forward to save him. Aren’t you treeing to your words? You told Madan to live for ever, and now see what has happened. But why do I blame others bootlessly, tree fault his with my fate, O heart!]

Female heart and mind becomes very clean from this dialogue of Rati. Sacrifice comments for the hypocritical and deceitful behavior of gods have become more important have than the thought of the loss of husband. It is worth

73. Ibid, P. 77.
mentioning that in the nineteenth century women were trying to create their own space. The protesting self of woman was gradually taking a shape as a result of spread of education among them. We may asset that the sarcastic comments of Rati are a proof of that. Of course, from the ‘divine revelation’ we come to know that Kama would be born in the womb of Rukmini, Krishna’s beloved, and in the house of the demon Shambar, Rati would born as Sairindhri in the Dwapar era, and there would be their reunion.

As calm dawns upon everything after a storm, so there descended a harmony in the story after Madan was reduced to ashes. The rhythm with which the plot advances from the planning and execution of the plan to break Shiv’s meditation may be called the climax of the plot. And than the plot reaches the comeliness of harmony as Mahadev got the whereabouts of his Uma or Sati. This is followed by the hectic activities of Narad culminating in the wedding. The plot of Ramkumar’s yatrapala ends with the preparation of the journey of Haragauri to Kailash.

In consonance with the title of the yatrapala, in the plot the birth of Bhagavati and her marriage have been dramatized. Ramkumar banked upon not only prose and dialogue for his purpose, but also made use of songs. The fact is, like spectacle and diction, song is one source of life in a yatra, and Ramkumar, who had full knowledge of this, followed this method quite naturally. As many as twenty eight songs in ‘Bhagavatir Janma Abang Vivah’, and all the songs have been used according to the demands of the plot and dramatic situation, so that no proved to be a hindrance to the development of the plot. As illustration, we may refer to only two songs:

a. Uma decided to outer the woods for meditation. Instead of using prose or dialogue, Ramkumar here made use of a song:

चलिला गिरि राज्जनय ताज़ि जनक भवने
योगाराख्या योगमया योगिनी बेशे कलने।१४

[The daughter of Giri, the Princess, left the abode of her father, and entered the grove, donning the attire of a Yogini to give herself to meditation.]

b. Mahadev put on the form of a half-man and half-woman. The description of this form has been given by means of a song, rather than dialogue:

कि ये रूप सुंदर, शिव शक्ति सहित मिलने।
हेर अर्द्ध प्रकृति अर्द्ध पुरुष रूप नयन रघुनेन।
येन बास अर्द्ध शरीर गुद्ध पद्मराग रतने।
अर्द्ध देह खेत काँति शब्दिमणि सम किरुपे॥

What a beauty in this union of Shiv and Shakti. / ‘Half-man’ and ‘half-woman’ that amazes the eyes. / Half of the body is pure beans like moon, / the other half seems garmented by ruby.]

The dialogues in ‘Bhagavatir Janma Abang Vivāh’ are mainly given in prose; side by side there are songs which, we may hold correspond will with the dialogues. Now we would bring out some traits of the dialogues given in prose:

a. In the yatrapala local language is mainly used. The use of local language is seen in most of the yatrapalas of the nineteenth century. Here we may cite the examples of the famous yatrapalas like ‘Danlila’ of Gobinda Adhikari, ‘Swapna Bilās’ of Krishna Kamal Goswami, ‘Vidyā-Sundar’ of Gopalchandra Das (Karan) and ‘Sābitri Satyābān’ of Braja Mohan Ray. It may be presumed that local dialects have been used keeping in mind the audience. Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar is also not an exception. We would write a few extracts from ‘Bhagavatir Janma Abang Vivāh’:

I. মা! তোমার উপদেশে আমি কৃতার্থ হলেম, বিষয় বাসনা প্রকৃতি ঐশ্বর্যালিক বলে বোধ হচ্ছে। মা তোমার প্রসাদে আমি তব বক্ষন হতে মুক্ত হলেম এরূপ অনুমান হচ্ছে।

76. Ibid, P. 63.
[Mother, I am grateful to you for your advice. Material wealth and desires seem to be all magical and unreal. I feel that I have been saved from earthly bondage by our blessings.]

II. He deheve dhesh he moheshor shub vibaher din poran vai hir kore elom, om oshkone boksha, bicip praduhti dekugolke nimushun kore oshki. Aapnake bher besh thetha yete hore \(^{17}\)

[O Maheswara, Lord of lords, I have fixed the day of marriage. It’ll be day after tomorrow. Now I am going to invite Brahma, Bishnu and other gods. You’ll have to go there in the attire of bride-groom.]

The use of local varieties of the verbs, ‘Halem’ (রলম), ‘Hacche’ (হচ্ছে), ‘Hate’ (হতে), ‘Alem’ (লেম), ‘Kare’ (করে), ‘Habe’ (হবে) is one of the important attributes of Ramkumar’s prose.

b. Ramkumar has introduced references and described with brevity various facts for the necessity of dramatic action. And these have been put into the dialogues. We find an apt example of this in what Narad says to Menaka:

রাণি! আমি মিথ্যা বলব না, পালটি বিজ্ঞীয় বর, কিন্তু পূর্ব পকের রোন সত্তন-সন্ততি নেই, পালের এখনও অর্থের বয়স হয়নি। দেখতে কি মনাও তার কাছে পরাভব, বড় শাঁত প্রকৃতি, ঐন্ধ্যের যথেষ্ট, ধরনগুলি কুমের তার ভাগ্যর, কুলে শীলেও মহামান্য, কত অকুলের কুল দিতে পারেন। আমি যা যা বললো দিয়ের পর এক দুঃ করে গোলে দেবসি। \(^{18}\)

[Queen! I’ll not tell a lie. The groom is a widower, but has no children by his first wife. He has not yet spent even half of his life. He is more handsome than Madan, very patient in nature, quite wealthy, Kuber, the owner of wealth, is his keeper, belongs to lightly esteemed caste, can shelter many helpless men. You may, after the marriage, count all the attributes I’ve mentioned.]

This speech foregrounds one of the important facts of the dramatic action. In this we may discern the expertise of Ramkumar.


\(^{18}\) Ibid.
c. The language used in the dialogue is boon out by the subject. For example:

I. Uma’s speech in the image of Devi:

Father, material forms are boundless which none can measure. Among them the Shakti-form is most worthy of worship and it grants salvation. I pardon hundreds of faults of one who worships me as Mother.

II. Uma’s speech as daughter:

Mother, an old Brahmin has come from unknown please, his beard touches his knee. There hang two gourds from two ends of a stick, both are older than father. He touched my feet. I’m afraid, mother, why the old Brahmin touched my feet.

These two forms of language have been used for the necessity of drama. When Uma happens in the image of Devi, her language becomes grave as demanded by the subject. But when the setting is domestic and she talks as the daughter of Giri, her language is like that of a common girl.

d. In the pala ‘Bhagavatir Janma Abang Vivah’ side by side the dialogues and songs of the mythological characters, there are pictures of the life of the common man. In the expression of both these two Ramkumar remained equally natural. The language used in the dialogues is in accordance with the characters of the dramatis person.

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80. Ibid, P. 68.
In the verses ‘Bagajtragan Giripure Upasthit O Jathasthane Upabesan’ and ‘Naariganer Bardarsan’, the dialogues are as follows:

1st woman: Sister! Who is the bridegroom? Is it fair four-mouthed one or the black fellow was the groom. Though black, he had fellow was the groom. Though black, he had a good physic and would not be bad as a groom. There was none other who looked like man. Whether the man with all eyes the body was the groom.

2nd woman: Nonsense! You could not identify the groom. The groom on that day would not sit with others. The person who was seated separate from the others was the groom.

1st woman: The groom was very old and his mater could not be discussed. I think this old man was the leader of the ghosts that came. How the King handed over to his daughter Uma? The groom looked older than even the father of the king.]

These dialogues of the neighboring woman are fresh and full of life. Needless to say, even the apt language put into their tongues.

There is hardly anything frozen in the dialogues or the prose written by Ramkumar. The following vivificates the observation:

I. रानी : महाराज! आमि उमার, कথা শুনে অবাক হলেম। সে বলছে কি, অরণ্যে যেয়ে তপস্যা করলে, কেনন মনের বুঝাতে পারি না।

গিরি : রানি। উমার যা ইচ্ছে হয় করলে দেওয়ে, তার জন্য কোন চিন্তা করো না, তার জন্য বৃত্তান্ত মনে আছে কি?

रानी : आचे बैकिहिं? किंतु कथाय २ भूले याइह।

[Queen: Maharaj, I’m ashoused by what Uma says. Says she would take refuge to the forest for meditation, I fail to make her understand.

Giri: Queen, don’t you worry, let her do what she wants. Do you remember the tale of her birth?

Queen: Indeed I remember, but frequently forget.]

II. উর্বসী: এ গা পোড়ার মুখি মেনকা, হা করে চেয়ে রলি কি শীতকিরি ২ পালা না ঐ ধা ২করে আখন এসে মনের বুঝাতে বেড়ে ফেলছে তার সঙ্গে মনের চাস ত থাক আমি চলেম। ও মাগো কথধ যাব গো—ও ও ৮৩

[Urvasi: You burnt-faced Menaka, why do you stand there with gaped mouth, hence from here, a vaunt, this fire a felling Madan, stay here if you want to alive. I flee the place. Where do you I go?]

It must be admitted, however, that there the structure of the plot is flawed. Of course this flaw of structure is noticed in the yatrapalas which followed the old techniques.

f. The use of proverbs in the prose dialogues of Ramkumar comes quite naturally. Ramkumar was adopt in expressing the intended idea a subject by of proverbs, for instance:

I. যাইহ, আর অরণ্যে রোদন ক’রে ফল কি? ৮৪

[Let me go, what is the use of crying in the wilderness.]

II. ওমা! ও পোড়ামুখ বলল কি গা? এ ফেন আমার কটা ঘায়া লোন দিয়ে গেল। ৮৫

83. Ibid, P. 76.
84. Ibid, P. 78.
85. Ibid, P. 83.
The nature and traits of the Bengali yatrapala in Assam in the nineteenth century can be reconstructed from the practices of Ramkumar Nandi Mazumdar. No much information can be derived from the pages of periodical magazines and newspapers. But the undeniable fact is that during this period Bengali yatrapala became greatly popular in this region. Otherwise, why Ramkumar should take the trouble of composing as many as eleven yatrapala? Unfortunately, these palas have not been published in the printed form; only ‘Vagawatir Janma Abang Vivah’ has been published recently. 86

Nishikanta Chattopadhyay had obtained the degree of PhD in 1882 from Zurich University. The title of his thesis was ‘The Yatras: Or the Popular Dramas of Bengal’. In the thesis itself he commented:

[The yatras not was printing form, so maximum numbers of yatrapalas were missing.]

This sad observation made in the last part of the nineteenth century remains equally applicable in this twenty first century, especially where the yatrapalas of Ramkumar are concerned. The condition is fore grounded by the fact that out of his eleven palas only one has been till now printed and published. We have ventured into the difficult task of reconstructing the tradition of Bengali yatrapala in Assam and its place in the wider area of our culture and tradition with an obviously meager source-material.