

SIGNIFICANCE OF ‘PADMA NADIR MAJHI’ AND THE POSITION IT HOLDS IN THE HISTORY OF BENGALI NOVEL LITERATURE

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Abstract

ManikBandopadhyay is considered to be a pioneer and one of the most significant short story writer and novelist of Bangla literary world. Most of his work reflects the hardships and truth of real life world that is being presented to us through beautifully scripted stories. ManikBandopadhyay published his first story ‘AtasiMami’(1928) in the journal ‘Bichitra’ during his college days. At the age of 21 he composed his first novel ‘Dibyatrirkabya’. Throughout his career as a writer he composed some of the most prominent and noteworthy works of fictional novel like ‘Janani’, ‘PutulNacherIti Katha’, ‘Ahimsha’, ‘Sarishrip’ of Bengali literature. The novel ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ is considered to be one of the most significant, evergreen and torch bearing composition of ManikBandopadhyay that not only have made the Bangla literary world richer but also finds itself positioned at a special place in the world of Indian literature.

Introduction

ManikBandopadhyay’s most significant novel ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ was published in the year 1936. The story is based on the life of the fishermen who works and recites along the banks of the river Padma of East Bengal (presently Bangladesh) and the struggle they endure to make ends meet.

Though the story discusses the generalized life of the whole fishermen community of Padma river but it specifically revolves around the chief protagonist Kuber who is also a fisherman, picturing the struggles he endures and the feelings he expresses. The writer in this novel has beautifully expressed the problems faced by the fishermen and the hardships they face to somehow carry on with their life. ManikBandopadhyay has presented a real life story in front of the readers that showcase the life of the oppressor and the oppressed. The story pictures how the rich and influential class always exploits the poor and oppressed bringing misery, sorrow and hardship in their life.

ManikBandopadhyay has in fact taken the road not so travelled by writers by presenting a new trend where there is no effort taken to hide the naked truth and bitter reality of the cruel society. The story describes how the poor and deprived, the exploited, the left asides and untouchables, the sexually abnormal are always looked down with despise and hatred and are whipped time and again by acute poverty. The seed of social realism that was once sown by Saratchandra in his writings was nurtured and matured under the active leadership of ManikBandopadhyay. It was ManikBandopadhyay who was bold enough to present for the first time in his work a naked real world society where there was poverty, pitiable death, hunger, disease, hatred, sexual envy, jealousy without ever trying to present a fairytale situation proving to be a flag bearer for all other writers that followed.

Key words Padma, Majhi, Dhiboretic

Aim, Objective and Source

The main objective of our study is to carry out a detailed discussion of the story, plot, setting, character and social life of a regional society as being pictured in ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ and to discuss what position it holds in the history of regional Bengali Literature.

In preparing our paper help was being taken from the original Bangla novel, its Assamese translation and certain other necessary references.

Study Methodology

For preparing our paper both Descriptive and Analytical methods were being used.

Main Theme

ManikBandopadhyay has been the pioneer novelist responsible for the all round development and widespread flourishing of Bengali novel literature. Published in 1936, ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ was his fourth novel based on regional nationalism. It was primarily in the early 30s of the twentieth century that we could first see Bengali novels using plots and settings that were authentically based in Bengal. ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ of

ManikBandopadhyay was the first to use such plots as well as certain other habitual and cultural aspects of a typical Bengali society. As such the importance of 'Padma Nadir Majhi' in Bengali literature is quite significant. The story is based on the simple daily life in the slums of fishermen on the banks of Padma river, which is being such wonderfully woven together by ManikBandopadhyay, resulting in an extraordinary plot that proved to be a literary ornament for his novel. The writer has sought to find out the truth behind human nature and have clearly depicted in the story the very essence of human survival i.e. adaptation and the ability to move forward in life despite all the hardships.

'Padma Nadir Majhi' is essentially a regional literary novel as it is primarily based on the life, livelihood, language, culture of a particular section of people based on the bank of river Padma of Bangladesh. The writer have beautifully depicted the socio economic life of those people, their happiness, their sadness, things they love, culture and traditions they follow, the morality they possess and most importantly the hardships they endure every day. The story pictures how despite the acute poverty of the fisherman society, they enjoy their life to the fullest, be it finding love, peace and happiness or the occasional dreams they see of getting richer.

The story does not only depict the poverty ridden lives of the fishermen but also draws an analogy just like the wideness of the river the people too have huge selfless hearts and as the river changes its behaviour with changing season people too have various colours of their life that may swing with time or situations. The primary character around whom the story revolves is Kuber and his wife Mala. The husband who is a fisherman undergoes severe hardships to earn a living for his family. Even during such conditions just like the surging tides of Padma river his love for his sister-in-law Kapila overflows the brim of his heart. Kuber is illiterate but he knows that such a situation of his is a taboo and will bring doom to his family but it is all because of the ripe adolescence and womanhood that Kapila had possessed Kuber and made him attracted to her time and again. The writer has brilliantly pictured their secret love affair that would sometimes blossom and sometimes shrink within the boundaries of the society but have never let them float away in it. Such was his love for her that when near the end of the story he was being forced to leave Ketupur for Mayanadweep because of the conspiracy plotted by Humen, the protagonist Kuber took his sister-in-law Kapila along with him in a boat leaving everything behind.

The novel 'Padma Nadir Majhi' broadly shows us two pictures. One being the daily life and hardship of the fishermen community of the area and the other being the conspiracy plotted by Humen Mia to populate Mayanadweep. If the later is kept aside, we get to see a detailed and realistic picture of the social structure of the fishermen society, their struggles, their happiness, the family bonds they possess and the daily life they live that the writer have tried to show us quite frankly in this novel- hence this novel have been rightly glorified to be a 'KALOTIT' literary work.

The writer in his novel has symbolically drawn a similarity between the river Padma and the fishermen community. He imagines the community to be the river and the life of the fishermen that moves forward despite all the hardships in life to be the never stagnant water of the river Padma that overcomes all barriers and flows ahead. Mentioning about the river Padma the writer phrases-

*"Padma to kokhaneukhukaina. Kobe a nodirsrishthioiache k jane? Samudragamijolproba herajaumhurterbiram nai."*¹

Life on the banks of Padma savours the very fact that the river never stops and neither will their life and the struggle associated with it. The writer skilfully phrases-

*"Eibishalekavimukhijalashrotoke Padmar Majhibhalbashibesara jiban"*².

†It must be noted that the continuity in flow or the change in human life that is so much invigorated in 'Padma Nadir Majhi' was also seen in the literary works of Rabindranath Tagore which was continuous progressive increment in nature and hence considered to be of great importance and relevant to human world. He was a strong believer that changing situations and time could make a bad person good as there is always a strong force in the form of almighty behind him trying to enlighten him and show him the right path. Whereas ManikBandopadhyay believed in the fact that it is man himself who is solely responsible for his deeds and it is he himself that could bring a change within himself. Gunmoi Manna in his book 'Bangla Upanyasar Silpangik' have said-

*"Padma Nadir Majhite Manikelikhechen 'Jibanerswadekhanesudhukhudha u pipakhai, kaam u mamatai, swartha u sankirnatai'- arthatmanusheruddeswitohobar j karonguli Maniknirdeshkarchen, tar sobeimanobik, tar prabritigata. Pachepathokersandar beshemanobatitkumudharonemone ache, tai jug koredichen, ishwarthakenuigrane, bhadrapallite. Eikhanetahakekhujiapawyaghaibe na."*³.

Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, another prominent figure of Bangla literature have pictured an ideal society where there is value for each other, there is morality among men in his works but in Padma Nadir Majhi, ManikBandopadhyay have reflected the true nature of the real world that could be so cruel and inhuman at times which we saw through the life of Kuber and Kapila. The women with indecent character in the writings of Saratchandra are brave, have sacrificed and suffered a lot and are epitome of patience but ManikBandopadhyay's Kapila in Padma Nadir Majhi is a woman with no such qualities and hence imparts no

value to the society. Padma Nadir Majhi truly explores newer dimension of the society and carries to us the flavours of the real world.

A good novel is one that can create an environment, a proper setting, an exact plot in order to rightfully describe the characters, and Manik Bandopadhyay have been able to do so in his work Padma Nadir Majhi. It is this very fact of the writer who have so brilliantly brought the characters to life in a perfect setting that have made Padma Nadir Majhi an extraordinary piece of literary work. The changing characteristics of Padma river, her forward flowing water, the social structure and behaviour of the fishermen community, their struggles for life and livelihood, love-hate relationships, natural disasters are the various colours with which the writer have beautifully painted the picture making the novel complete. The writer have been always conscious of the natural and manmade environment around which the characters were made to revolve which showed us the social awareness real life sightedness and sensitivity he possessed. The skill with which the writer have described the environment of the story for him being so conscious to have such impeccably incorporated the simplified typical East Bengal culture, dialect, and way of life into his characters making them alive is truly appreciable. Even the dialogues of each character were so customised that they would let the readers grasp the characteristic of that individual with ease. The language used by Manik Bandopadhyay lacked the rhythm of Rabindranath Tagore, neither did it have the emotional touch as used by Tarakshankar Bandopadhyay nor did it have any similarity with the language used during Kallol era literature. Rather a minute similarity in the language can be drawn between Jagdish Gupta of Kallol era and Manik Bandopadhyay. Works of both the writers had critically elaborative poses and used language that could lift the spirits of the oppressed and constrained. Padma Nadir Majhi is essentially an elaborative and descriptive literary work.

The writer has opened the curtains of reality on the complications of life in slums in Padma Nadir Majhi and hence some critics of Manik Bandopadhyay would compare him as “Kallol Kulbardhan”. It was by far the writers belonging to Kallol family/genre that introduced a newer dimension of thinking into the Bangla literature. Writers of this family exhibited a revolutionary thinking breaking all stereotypes and rituals associated with the society. Their writings reflected love, compassion and respect for those who were left aside by the society but they lacked the closeness with people and connectivity with the soil. Their writing were more of a work of fiction than of reality. Manik Bandopadhyay in his writings always tried to present a true picture of the real world society without applying any fairytale or illogical aspects to it whereas the writers of Kallol family did although romanticism was not absent.

Another pioneer figure of regional Bengali literature Sailjananda Mukhyapadhyay in his book ‘Koila Kutir Desot’ pictured a story revolving around the coal mines and life of the miners in the slum. Even here the writer failed to describe in elaborate and in minute details the true raw situation of life in slums. The writer Sailjananda plotted romanticism of the middle class society on the base of the surrounding environment and the slum society. But Manik Bandopadhyay primarily focused only on the slum life of the fishermen society and their daily struggles even though traces of romanticism could be seen in his book ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’.

Manik Bandopadhyay was extraordinary in depicting the real raw world of the Bangla slum life and showing the world a picture that could truly enhance the reader’s imagination in understating the life of poor and in doing so he enriched the regional Bengali literary world with resources of immense and incomparable value. ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ is a literary work describing and focusing on a particular region and a life performing a particular occupation and the success of this book have set a benchmark that have always inspired newer writers to compose their own work on similar plots and streams. One such writer was Adwaita Mallabarman and his noteworthy novel ‘Titash Ekti Nadir Naam’. The plot and setting of this novel is based on the river Titash and the people of Mallopara that recites along its banks. The story revolves around the life and the struggle for existence of the Malo people. Just like Manik Bandopadhyay’s ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’, ‘Titash Ekti Nadir Naam’ of Adwaita Mallabarman the true core of the story is based on the river the land and the people. The exclusivity of ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ is that it is raw and crude and use of real world situations and the minimal use of poetic ideologies by the writer. A regional story with regional practices of the people of that region and situations so much customised of that region makes this novel a jewel of regional Bengali Literature.

‘Hansuli Banker Upakatha’ of Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Samresh Basu’s ‘Ganga’, ‘Titash Ekti Nadir Naam’ of Adwaita Mallabarman are some of the noted regional novels that focused on regional and regionalism but none have ever characterised a river into such a prominent and influential character as it is been done in Padma Nadir Majhi by Manik Bandopadhyay. The Padma river in the story played a key part in lives of the people and its might and never ending flow have always symbolized the life of the fishermen community. The writer have characterised the Padma river as an inseparable part of the story and as such the story revolves with all other characters keeping the river as its centre. The Padma river have moulded the shape of the life of the fishermen community by gentle loving touches at times and with anger and destruction at other. The fishermen slum community is knitted together by the flowing water of Padma as it is the river itself that determines if necessities and demands of the fisherman community living in those slums is to fulfilled or not and the poor people have no other option but to be dependent on the river as their only source of daily income. The writer has skilfully managed to describe the river’s appearance, form, intentions, and habits in such a magical way like that

of a women and yet he have never tried to make her a dominant character overpowering others. Padma river not only symbolizes its continuously flowing waterto the life of the fishermen slum, that can never stop no matter what is being thrown at them. The generalized behaviour of the fishermen slum and their everyday work somehow or other will seep an inevitable character of the Padma river. Padma river if at times feed them, provides them with livelihood then during other times it does not hesitate to take back what was rightfully always hers, yet the society always loves the river and never could they be less grateful for everything she has done for them. The book ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ is truly a literary marvel that glorifies the bond between man and nature and explains how much the life of humans could be affected by the flowing waters of a river.

The writer in Padma Nadir Majhi has given a description of the outer characteristics of the people rather than trying to provide an internal soul search of them. There are a few bangla novels that falls under the same category like ‘Durgesanandini’ and ‘BishBrikhya’ byBankimchandra, Rabindranath’s ‘Naukasubi’, ‘Sokher Bali’ and ‘Gaura’, Saratchandra’s ‘Shrikanta’, ‘PatherDabi’, ‘PalliSamaj’, ‘Grihadaah’ and ‘Charitrahin’, Tarashankar’s ‘Hasuli Baker Upakatha’and‘NaginiKanyarKahini’, Bibhutibhusan’s ‘Ishamati’ and ManikBandopadhyay’s another noteworthy book ‘PutolaNaserItikotha’. All the writers in the above mentioned books had one common mentality and that is as the story progressed the characters were brought into the picture or the scene and only after placing them into the necessary plot would their characteristics sprout or psychological dissection be carried out. ManikBandopadhyay in his book ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ have carried out a brilliant outer physical and inner psychological representation of the characters and thus can be considered a nonparallel literary book of human nature survey and observation. KuberKapila and Mala are the primary characters of this book where the fight for existence by Kuber the fisherman is constantly altered or modified by nature and human that is so close to him. Kuber the chief protagonist has two characters. One being his life as a fisherman where he constantly struggles to earn a living for his family that is in acute poverty plagued by diseases and hunger and yet dreams, love-lust and anger being omnipresent. The other character of Kuber is so much influenced by human and the nature surrounding him. Being a poor fisherman he is subjected to all sorts of exploitation by nature by the rich and powerful that in turn have created a distinct characteristics within himself who is always angry and lacks self confidence, can never raise his voice, and feels left alone by the society. It was because of the conspiracy woven by the rich that made him leave Ketupur for Maghanadweep.Kuber is truly a unique character of bangla literature.

Conclusion

ManikBandopadhyay’s ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ is a revolutionary literary work that have performed the role of a torch bearer for the Bengali literary world and have explored untouched aspects of the human society and painted a wonderful picture of infinite dimensions of human emotions that was so rarely found earlier. The superior presentation of the plot and the real life resembling characters have knitted such a wonderful web of situations in the story, that it makes the reader feel as if he is standing in the core of the whole story and watching life of the fishermen flow continuously like the water of Padma river. The book ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’ is truly a jewel of Bengali literature.

Footnotes

1. Bandopadhyay, Manik : ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’, page - 13
2. Bandopadhyay, Manik : ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’, page - 15
3. Bandopadhyay, Manik : ‘Padma Nadir Majhi’, page - 22

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