



**International Research Journal of Humanities, Language and
Literature ISSN: (2394-1642)**

Impact Factor 5.401 Volume 7, Issue 5, May 2020

Association of Academic Researchers and Faculties (AARF)

Website-www.aarf.asia, Email : editoraarf@gmail.com

River: Life and Livelihood: A Saga of the Marginalized in *Padma Nadir Majhi*

**Dr. Gargee Chakraborty, Associate Professor,
Dept. Of English D.K.College, Mirza, Assam**

Abstract

The boatmen and fishermen who devote most of their time and energy in the hearts of Padma have an intimate link with the river in search of a living. Thus the river employs an overwhelming influence on the life and livelihood, hopes and hears desires of the people who cannot but adore it. Here the image of Padma is used as a metaphor of life by the novelist Manik Bandopadhyay in this novel. People all over the world depend on river for agriculture, industry, energy, transport and for their livelihood. The way Padma is swayed by turmoil, the novel's protagonist's life too was undone by many ups and downs and calamities which had fallen on him.

Key- words: marginalized, livelihood, metaphor, river, Padma.

Introduction

The social life of the people residing by the river side gets reflected in literature from time to time. It is seen that ecosystem, society and life are intensely interrelated with each other. A close relationship exists between river and human beings. The impact of the river Padma, the mighty river of East Bengal (presently Bangladesh), in the lives and livelihood of the people residing on the banks of it is incontestable. In, Manik Bandopadhyay's skilful handling of the river Padma, it has become the core of the novel to the extent that the river grows like an independent character in the novel. Written in the backdrop of mysterious and dangerous Padma, the novel depicts the struggle, fear, emotion, happiness, sorrow of the fishing community of Ketupur village situated on the banks of the river Padma. The poor and the downtrodden people of the village, solely depend on the river for their livelihood. The river sometimes supports them and sometimes brings tear to their eyes. But In spite of all these, the bond they share is clearly an everlasting one. During the progression of the novel, we witness Padma evolving as a character in the novel.

Objective

The paper attempts to figure out how the novel's protagonist Kuber's inner identity and strength are constructed with the partnership of the river Padma.

© Association of Academic Researchers and Faculties (AARF)

A Monthly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories.

About the author

Manik Bandyopadhyay (19 May 1908 – 3 December 1956) was an Indian writer and novelist, regarded as one of the major figures of 20th century Bengali literature. During a lifespan of 48 years, battling with illness and financial crisis, he produced 36 novels and nearly 250 short stories. His notable works include *Padma Nadir Majhi* (The Boatman on The River Padma, 1936) and *Putul Nacher Itikatha* (The Puppet's Tale, 1936), *Shahartali* (Suburbia, 1941) and *Chatushkone* (The Quadrilateral, 1948). He is a radical minded author of his times. His treatment of human life and humanity for the poor of the poorest is realistically presented in his works. The fundamental philosophy of human makes the novelist a universal thinker and renowned figure for all ages. His novel is a glowing specimen of reality of human life. The novel is Manik Bandyopadhyay's one of the most widely read novels, discussed and translated into several foreign languages.

The Plot

The novel begins with a depiction of the exploitation of the helpless people where their catches made after a lot of struggle hardly earns them the money in the market. Even people from the neighbourhood take away fishes from them without paying on several occasions. It is indeed a hard life for them. Outlining a socio-political landscape of 20th Century, the story line of *Padma Nadir Majhi*, progresses with the unwavering vision of Hussein, a Bengali Muslim, to build a little model world in the island of Padma delta and offer his people a better life. Hussein Miya enters the novel with an aura of mystery around him. He has a flourishing business and also bought a huge boat. However people who return or rather fled from Moynadip, after working there has a different tale to narrate. Rasu and Aminuddin say that the island is infested with lions and tigers, snakes and crocodiles and there is forest all around. The novel is the reflection of cynical attitudes of the middle class society and the subaltern of 20th Century riverine country, like Bangladesh. Kuber, Kopila and Hussein Miya are the pivotal figures of this realistic novel.

It narrates the story of a poor fishermen community residing on the banks of the river Padma in a fictional village called Ketupur in present day Bangladesh. Perpetually dependent on the river for fish, the lives of the fishermen community form the crucial point of this river-centric novel. It revolves around Kuber, a poor fisherman. Sole earning member of his family, he resides with the other members of the fishermen community on the peripheries of Ketupur where he lives with his wife, daughter, and two sons. In his daily quest for survival he befriends a local businessman Hussein Miya, who is suspected to be involved in human trafficking and other underground activities. *Moynadip*, a remote silt bed island or *Char* stands at the heart of Hussein Miya's rags-to riches story. The helpless victims of either natural catastrophes like floods and cyclones or social banishment accompany Hussein Miya in his new settlement in search of a new beginning. The hopes and aspirations, despair and grief and longings for a better life of this downtrodden community has been well brought up. The horrible poverty which gapes in the face of these harassed people almost every day has been skilfully knitted into the narrative.

Kuber's Quest

The central character is Kuber who is a simple but poor boatman who doesn't have fishing net and a boat of his own. He is extremely hardworking but In spite of that his life is full of complexities. He is a family man, on the verge of an illicit relationship, yet constrained by his love for his family members, his wife, a bed-ridden miserable home maker, unable to gain her husband's sympathy yet loving him all the way, an ordinary mother thinking about the well-being of her children and family but unable to do the required, her sister, a seductress, and

neglected being, receiving warmth and sympathy and recognition from her brother-in-law. So he depends on Dhananjay and though he works the hardest, he gets only one third of fish in lieu of his labour. Nevertheless he depends on fishing. But the business doesn't remain all the same throughout the year because Illish (river Padma is famous for Illish or Hilsa, a variety of fish) abounds in the river at a particular season. Thus although his health is not permitting himself he cannot give it a miss during season time. Ironically, towards the end of the novel, Kuber embarks on the journey to Hussein Miya's river island to avoid a false charge of theft. Padma's peace and calmness is disturbed by high tide, storm and flood. Likewise peace and happiness of Kuber's life also gets disturbed as he was cowed down by many ups and downs and calamities of his life. The river stands inseparable from Kuber's life. The novel also portrays the continuous tussle between nature and men. The same river causes him pain which sustains him in need by providing him his only means of livelihood. But in any case he loves the river. He admits that there is no bigger pleasure than sailing through the evergreen Padma.

The river

The river Padma is in the centre of the lives of the marginalized communities of fishermen, boatmen and small peasants. It silently observes people's daily chores, small joys and sorrows. Written before the World War II, the novel criticizes the society that supports elites, while inhumanly exploiting the underprivileged and impoverished class of fishermen. Even for small needs the fishermen community depends on the local landowner's mercy and charity. The novel ushers in a new hope for the dwellers who finally became able to break away the shackle of cruel nexus of corruption and exploitation at the hands of the rich and powerful and start a new life. Kuber's journey to Moynadip visibly points to the emergence of the new era where people like him have the choice of whether or not to accept their fates unchallenged. His evolution marks the ultimate crossover to a new world order that boasts of equality and justice. Moynadip is thus a metaphor of freedom where people work together without getting exploited by the privileged and the powerful.

Mala and Kapila, two central women characters of the novel are considered as two different symbolic representation of the river Padma. Like Mala who is calm, quiet, patient, Padma is also calm, quiet and patient, contributing positively to the lives of these poverty stricken fishing community. On the other hand Kapila, is mysterious, unruly, restless, impatient and destructive like Padma on rampage. When in full spate Padma takes away everything from these poor people leaving them helpless.

Padma never dries. It flows eternally towards the sea. Similarly the hopes of these people are also alive when Hussein Miya landed his helping hand and settled them in his new island.

Influence of Marxism

Novelist Manik Bandopadhyay, influenced by Marxist philosophy, depicted lives of marginal people, such as boatmen and fishermen of the riverine delta of Bengal who were earlier debarred as subjects in Bengali novels. It is vital to the understanding of the concept of human labour and the role of human nature from the Marxist point of view. To Marx and Engels, human labour represents a decisive intervention between humans and their non-human surrounding. In *Capital*, Marx wrote,

“Labour is, first of all, a process by which man, through his own actions, meditates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature...through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature”.

The interdependent relationship between nature and human labor forms the basis of Marxist materialism and its criticism of capitalism. At the heart of Marxist analysis and critique of

capitalism lies the relentless existence of Nature. The protagonist Kuber belongs to a class ridden society, exploited by moneylenders and landlords. He breaks himself free from this exploitation by his own efforts. The foregrounding of the marginalized classes and their desire for change sets the novel apart from others. This cognizance of the interdependent relationship between human labour of the subaltern classes and their riverine environment in Bengali Literature draws considerably from Marxist production relations.

Conclusion

This contemporary Bengali classic is an instinctive and captivating saga of the marginalized fishermen and their life struggle. Padma is their lifeline, their mother and father. She is their protector as well as destroyer. She offers plenty and also snatches away most unexpectedly. The river is in a way the Goddess who is always in the background, controlling the lives of her dependents with an invisible thread.

References

- Bandopadhyay, Manik. *Padma Nadir Majhi*. Bangla Publishers Private Ltd: 2006
- Sharma, Sailenjeet. *Padma Nadir Majhi-Ekhan Ananya Upanyas*. Sarbamangalam Publication, Pathsala: 2006
- Mukherjee Radhakamal. *The Changing Face of Bengal: A Study in Riverine Economy*. Univ. of Calcutta, Calcutta: 1938
- Mukherjee Upamanyu Pablo. *Post-Colonial Environment: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel In English*. London, Palgrave Macmillan: 2010
- Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. London, Routledge: 2006
- Marx Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. I, Translated by Ben Fowkes, London, Penguin Books: 1976.