Reflection of Socio-Economic and Cultural Turmoil of 1940s and 1950s in Short Stories of Manik Bandopadhyay: A renowned litterateur

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Abstract
The Progressive Movement or the Marxist Cultural Renaissance occurred in a blood-thirsty and horrible situation which was the outcome of The Second World War, Famine, communal riots, Partition related refugee crisis and the Tebhaga Movement. Contemporary undivided Communist Party of India was the pioneer in this intellectual development. All – India Progressive Writers’ Association (1936), Anti-Fascist Writers and Artists related Organisation (1942), Association of Friends of the Soviet Power (1941) and the famous I.P.T.A (1943) were established mainly for earnest endeavour of the Communist Party. Eminent author Manik Bandopadhyay was associated with the Anti-Fascist Cultural platform from 1943 and embraced the Marxist philosophy with heartfelt desire. He got membership of the Communist Party in 1944 and continued his creative works through a perfect amalgamation of identity of litterateur with identity of dedicated and devoted party worker in different areas of Bengal. He created extraordinary short stories (1943/1944-1956) in backdrop of food and clothing related severe crisis, famine – stricken terrible situation, hegemony of influential people of black market related trading system, moral degeneration, flesh trade/prostitution adopted by poor and helpless womenfolk, communal riots related bloodbath and aggressive peasant unrest etc.

Keywords: Anti-Fascist, Literature, Marxism, Progressive Writers, Bengal

Introduction
Deep-rooted impact of the Progressive Movement was skillfully manifested in a large number of books such as Marxbadi Sahitya – Bitarka and Banglar Sanskritite Marxbadi Chetanar Dhara (edited by Dhananjay Das), Sekaler Marxjya Sanskriti Andolan (written by Anuradha Ray), Samakalin Bangalir drishite Soviet Desh (1917-1947) written by Debabrata Bhattacharyya, Pragatir Chetana Pragatir Pathikera (edited by Debashis Sengupta), Panchasher Mannantar o Banglasabitya (written by Binata Raychaudhuri), Sanskritir Pragati (written by Sudhi Pradhan), Pragati Sahityer dhara beye (written by Kanak Mukhopadhyay), 46 No. : Ekti Sanskritik Aandolan Prasange (written by Chinmohan Sehanobis) and Bangla Pragati Sahitya Samay o Sanskritir Itibritta (edited by Biswabandhu Bhattacharyya and Dilip Saha) etc. I went through various books and a large number of essays published in well-reputed periodicals namely Ausishtap, Ekshon, Ekshate, Prakitshon, Paribach, Giribayuddha, Akademi Patrika, Nandam, Korak, Aneek etc. for thorough understanding about this cultural phase. Manik Bandopadhyay and his exemplary stories could be understood only keeping in mind socio-economic scenario of that troubled time. The author declared that

… Lekhak- kobider sadharon lok manushe pangte taphake sari ek bishesh sreir rahasayanoy jib kor rekheche. E rokom dharrna srishtit jonyo dayi obaso lekhak kabirai. …Sejonyo nijeke sadharon manus bhava
Manik Bandopadhyay produced famous stories such as *Aaj kal parshur galpo*, *Dushshasaniya*, *Namuna*, *Gopal Sashmoul*, *Shatrut Mitra*, *Raghab Malakar*, *Cholok*, *Pehlyabatha*, *Shilpi*, *Kangerit*, *Chhinije khayni keno*, *Praner Gudaam*, *Digbi*, *Bagdipara diye*, *Mejay*, *Upay*, *Ekti bakhate ebeler kahini*, *Haruner Natjamai*, *Chhoto Bakulpurer Jatri*, *Masipisi* etc. in the background mentioned here. He actually deviated his excessive tendency towards Freudian psycho-analysis and depiction of sexuality with picture of complicated human relationships through his creative world in the Marxist cultural phase and adopted policy of upholding victory of the classless people via indomitable spirit of struggle. This sea – change would be highlighted in this article about the renowned author whose outstanding comment can be quoted here –

*Lekha chara anyo kono upayei je sob kotha jano jay na , sei kothaguli janabar jonyoi ami likhi. Anyo lekhakera jai bolun , amar ebishye kono sandeloi nei je , tara keno lekhen preshner jatabo ei . … Lekhak nichhak kalam pesha – major. Kalan- pesha jadi tar kaje na lage , tale rastar dhare bose je major kloa bhange tar cheyo jiban tar byartho , beche thaka nirarthak.*

*Kalam- pesbar pesha beechi niye prosbansay anando pai bole dukkho nei , ekhono majhe majhe anyomanaskatar durbar minbute abankar bodh kori bole aaposb jage je , khati lekhak kore bho bho !* (included in a collection entitled *Keno likhi*; January 1944).

**Discussion on relevant stories**

In the essay entitled *Bangla Pragati sabityer atmasamalochana* (included in Dhananjay Das- edited *Marxbadi Sahitya-Bitarka*) Manik Bandopadhyay announced that –


During terrible crisis occurred due to the impact of the World War II and famine, poverty-stricken rural women of Bengal adopted the path of prostitution when their husbands were missing while searching for jobs and their children were on the verge of death and destruction. Social value – structure had gone through tremendous upheaval and *Mahila Atmaraksha sahitya* tried their level best for rehabilitation of those helpless women in rural family-system again. In the story entitled *Aaj kal parshur galpo* Surama was a perfect representative of those enlightened women actively engaged in social welfare. Those sophisticated urban ladies helped Mukta, wife of Rampada, to establish herself in her family again. Rampada showed defiance in face of rural influential stalwarts and got full-fledged support of Banamali and Karali in rural bichar-sabha. Statement of the character Karali about Mukta actually reflected view of the author - ... Gaye kbete payni , soami kachhe nei ,tai sadare kbete kbete geche. Or doubta kiser !

In the story *Ke bache , ke bache!* one can find skilful depiction of psychological impact of the scenario of horrible death for starvation and central character entitled Mrityunjay was not able to lead a normal life with his family after being witness of such an incident while going for office. Here endnote of the story can be quite relevant for understanding the whole plot.
Sare satser chal was an extraordinary story in backdrop of terrible famine of 1940s in Bengal. Here Sannyasi crossed a large distance to reach his village as early as possible with burden of sare satser chal with him because he wanted to try his best to arrange food for starved near and dear ones of his impoverished family. At last he reached his destination in spite of extreme fatigue and severe hunger but found nobody in his house. Then he breathed his last in fathomless despondency-

Kono ghare keu nei. … daoay sare sat ser chaider putuli namiye Sannyasi hisab ar kalpana diye byapartar badis pete bolsa.… Kathay paliye kathay moreche barir sobai, Sona bauthan suddhu ?

Bhalte bhalte jhimote jhimote eksamay dana theke hunrei diye utbone pore Sannyasi nishabde more gelo.

In rural Bengal clothing related crisis reached its zenith during 1943-1944 simultaneously with acute food shortage and this problem was thoroughly highlighted in the book entitled Kapar Chai written by eminent Communist leader Somnath Lahiri. According to Soumitrashankar Sengupta Manik Bandopadhyay's famous story Dushshasaniya was an important milestone in backdrop of this Kapar related crisis. The rural area shown here was of Midnapore district which was also highlighted in Hungry Bengal of Chittaprasad, a well-known artist with special expertise in manifesting trauma of the devastating famine. Kanak Mukhopadhyay, a well-reputed leader of Marxbadi Communist Party, in her book Pragati sabityer dhara beye opined that-

Sottoi ghater meyeder lajja nibaraner upay chilona , anek baritei kaparer abhabal meyera baire berote partona. Ken ba kalapata , kachupata dwara konomote lajja nibaran korte chesta korte. Kathashilpi Manik Bandopadhyay ei parishthiti dekhe etoi bicholito hoyechilen je ei galper seshe Rabeyaake tini ar bacher pathi dekhate parenti, se jale debe atmabaty kar lajja nibaran koro.

We can remember own language and statement of the reality-conscious author here- Kapor je dite pare na emon marader pasbe ar sbhe na bole Rabeya ekta bostay katakguli it pathor bhore mathata bhetare dhubiye galaybastar mukhta dari jarye ete bidbe pukur palker jaler nich , pake gie sanye nielo.

In another story entitled Masi Pisi Manik Bandopadhyay had shown development of undaunted spirit of struggle among women who were earning themselves because they had to survive withstanding famine and crisis generated due to half-starved condition. Masi and Pisi were the symbol of eternal motherhood in their never-ending troublesome journey of protecting Ahladi from clutches of oppressor and alcoholic husband and trauma of domestic violence. They had some personal issues of conflicts in their household also but they forgot those petty things while acting as an umbrella for Ahladi. The courageous womenfolk even became ready for struggle against onslaught of Kacharibari and Darogababu when those local powerful people tried to send Ahladi to her husband without her consent-bati ar daa rakhe bater kachei. Yuddher ayojon kore tairi boye thake Masisipisi.

Jake ghsnb dite boy is a satirical story where Makhan was compelled by circumstances to use his wife Sushila as a coveted gift for Dassabheb with whom he was involved in vested interest. The author depicted greedy nature of Makhan skillfully in his illuminating story - Makhaner du-chokh jaljal kore othe. Sushilar nishwas atke jay. Aaj kodin dboare Makhan ei Contractta bagabar chesta korchilo- prokando Contract, lakb takar opar ghare asbe !

Shilpi was a significant one among well-reputed stories of the eminent author and in this story central character Madan tati refused to make clothes following directive of Bhoban Ghoshal, a pillar of black market, though he was facing extreme poverty in the life of weaver. He did not compromise with his self-respect and his indomitable will power was manifested in end of the story-Buro Bho!a shudhboy : Bhoban theye nuki suto niyecho Madan ! Tat chalicebo
Chiniye khayni keno was undoubtedly an outstanding story written by Manik Bandopadhyay who tried to show through Jogi, a representative of subaltern people, that a large number of people died for starvation but did not adopt the path of banditry because they lost all vigour and power of taking initiative due to starvation related acute crisis:- Sedin bujhlam babu keno etolok na kheye moreche, eto khabar hater kache thakte chiniye kheye was undoubtedly an outstanding story written by Manik Bandopadhyay who tried to show through Jogi, a representative of subaltern people, that a large number of people died for starvation but did not adopt the path of banditry because they lost all vigour and power of taking initiative due to starvation related acute crisis:- Sedin bujhlam babu keno etolok na kheye moreche, eto khabar hater kache thakte chiniye kheye morechi, kheye on, kheye bhalo. Sutro hossa, kheye shokho na, kheye jukho, kheye kuchhiyo. 

Haraner Natjamai is a story which is important for documentation related to role of rural women in the historic Tebhaga Movement. Kanak Mukhopadhyay in Pragati sahityer dhara beye made a significant statement about this masterpiece-- Gramer meyepurusher ekotre pratirodher sangram chilo Tebhaga andoloner baishistya. Krishak ramanira egiye esechele, egiye andoloner madhye. Tebhaga andoloner madhye sabid hoyebilen Aahkan- Batasi- Sarojini- Uttamara. Taderi samagotra ei kabinir “Moynar maa”. Tara sudhu sangramer samasto jhuki niye asbroh dey na, nijera jamidar jotdar puliser sange larai kore.

Here one can remember comment of Chiraranjan Pal, editor of the book entitled Tebhagar Nari – Kebolmatro sakb bajye grambaiske satarka kora noy, kaporer kokore bali, it, pryojone bati, latib, jhata niye purush conrader. sathe kadbe kadbi miliye pulisher akronon pratirodhe egte eseche, kokkono purush conrader. arul rekhe njernai samner sarite ese larai-e netritto diyeben, pran diyeben egiye sangrami naira. (included in the essay of the book – Haora jelar Tebhaga andolone sangrami nari written by editor Chiraranjan Pal).

Statement of the author in this story is nothing but ultimatum for oppressor class – Manusher samudrer, jharer suttal samudder sange lara jay na.

Another landmark story entitled Choto Bakulpurer Jatri showed us a scenario which was a perfect amalgamation of the Tebhaga Movement of the rural peasantry and struggle for survival of the factory labour class. Two main characters namely Dibakar and Anna had to go through a terror-stricken environment created by police/ military atrocities while trying to reach Choto Bakulpur village to meet their near and dear ones. Manik Bandopadhyay depicted psyche of those pillars of exploitation skillfully- Sanger jinis besbhusha chebura dekhe ar kathabarta sune sotti sotti ter pabar jo nee je eri sottikarer nirbo sindharon golvehari. chasamajur maghabatar chara anyo kichh noy, kintu setai hoye dartyeche darun sandeher karon. Je tanob choleche Chottobakulpure kodin dhoire, te te sottikarer kono birhu mukkhub chotele, majhele sathe niye sddb kore kokkono tar madhlye ast chey? Tao abar hungam khabor konjur janbar pore! .... Tar chyeo bari kotba, sandeher kotba, charidike eito rjel bundaker samaroja dekhe ota motu bharke jayni, dibhiy nirbey nishchinto bhab.
Pyak is a story where author tried his best to uphold significance of life of labour class over lazy lifestyle of urban middle class. Kanak Mukhopadhyay in Pragati sabityer dhara beye rightly opined that - ... Ei madhyalitto batathakothito bhadrajiyaner proti Manik Bandopadhyayer jeno sahajato bidyesh royechhe. Bhadrajibaner kritirimatar birnddbei tini bidbha korechen sobar age.

Je bachay story is a perfect reflection of horrible food crisis and death related to starvation. Here Nalini is such a character who left village for starvation and continued as relief worker in urban sphere. She sent money for her poor mother who stayed in village home but her mother died due to acute poverty before the financial help could reach her. The renowned author described the situation efficiently at the end of the story - Dhananjay datolya aushahalayer kichu dure Nalidder barir kache Nalinir maar bari. ... Barir kachakachi jete ekta bidhri durgandha nake lagghilo; uthone pa dite gandbiota ghan o gare hoye utthlo.

Dakshiner ghare darja khola. Payer shabde ekta shyal khola darja diye chunte beriye ese rannagharer kanach diye dobar pashe bash bone chole gelo.

In Raghab Malakar story we can observe picture about severity of clothes related crisis and central character Raghab adopted path of looting just for distribution of clothes related to black market among poverty- stricken needy people of village area. He was imprisoned for his attempt and was wounded also- Pattugaye gyey pulish dyakhe ...lath-kora kaptor bhag bataara niye joralo ekta danga hoye geche gato ratre. ...Raghaber matha phete chouchir hoye geche. Raghab bache ki marbe thik nei.

Picture of flesh trade was depicted in famous stories entitled Namuna and Gopal Sashmol. In Namuna, helpless father Keshab tried his level best to protect daughter Shaila and requested Kalachand, an ill-reputed pillar of racket of prostitution, to marry Shaila if he really wanted to take his daughter with him. The author had made perfect statement of the contemporary situation in the story - Kebal Keshaber noy, erokom abastha aro aneker hoyeche. Anna nei kintu anna paasar ekta upay pana giche meyer binimoye. Kaek basta anna, meytey deher ojoner du tin gun. Sei sangh kichu nagad takao, ja diye khankoyek bastra kena jete pare.

Earnest endeavour of a poor father to save his daughter from prostitution was not successful because ultimately Shaila became victim of circumstances in spite of marriage with Kalachand-Mandodori nishabde mota ektara note bar kore Kalachander sanme dibloro. Ektu iostoto kore nsteguli bate niye Kalachand santarpane gunte arombo korlo. Gona sesh bobar por mone bolo se jeno mantrabhale thanda hoye geche.

'lokta ke?'
'Sei Gajen. Chal beche la hoye geche.'

In end of the story Gopal Sashmol, Manik Bandopadhyay had shown us that flesh trade was nothing but the outcome of acute food crisis and starvation. Ratan, daughter of Bhushan, was a victim of this curse – Bhushaner meye Ratan sei aandhakarer bhetar theke ese Gopaler hat dibloro.


In stories such as Praner gudam and Dhan, Manik Bandopadhyay showed that there was an evil nexus between imperialist colonial government and pillars of black market during famine. Governmental food storage – keeper Sashanka was terribly shocked when he came to know the truth of chora byabsa. Kanak Mukhopadhyay in Pragati sabityer dhara beye described the horrible situation - ... Sashanker se bhul bhenge jay. Majut sabityer chora byahsor narakiya bhishato mph khule jay tar chokher samme. Nishibhar prahasarner sesh pardata sore jay chokher samme theke jakshan purbadin se je bhikharinike ekta dudh diye sahaya korechilo, sei bhikharini egge ese nispando bachhatik Sashanker paer kache namiye rakhe. Bole, ‘Tomar dudh kbye morche balu'.
In the story *Dhan* one can easily observe that Sharat Halder, Narayan and Jagat Kundu were agents of the colonial government. They did not want to distribute food to the needy and impoverished people and always conspired against mass—interest. Here I will again quote Kanak Mukhopadhyay – Khudharto manusher mukh theke dhanguli gudamjato kore. Abar janatar akramon theke bicholar jonyo gudamer dhan sori phele. Ahuboshe theke boche jay. Kintu manusher bhoge lage na. Manusher biruddhe choleche ei ati kut, amanushik sharajantro.

Petlyatha is a landmark story where poor Bhairab was tortured and became victim of conspiracy of rural influential people such as Kailash Babu and Kanja Daktar. Here ultimatum of Kailas, the symbol of oppressor class, can be quoted – … Date dat ghasle Kailas gale ek char bosie dey Bhairaber, ‘Bolini toke, ami chara e elakey gurn- chagol kena-bechar licence karo nei, chagol bechte hole amake bechte hobe? Ghare tor kota matha re haramjada, got-got kore sadare chole geli chagol bechte bann on mone t’

Local Ram, Shyam, Jada, Madhura, who were representatives of the subaltern class, took revenge on behalf of Bhairab and Kailas got punishment for the exploitation and torture done by him.

In the story entitled *Dighi*, one can find backdrop of the outstanding Tebhaga Movement in rural Bengal where peasants were determined enough to achieve their goals – Dhaner panna bhag mora nimu. Morum bichol Khodare janiya thachhi. Manik Bandopadhyay depicted sexual exploitation of women during the unrest-

Kal era pulish daler sathe hana diyechilo Kodpur gaye. Ekta mota meye chilo gaye, ….Hasitullar kaner kache ko’jon bolaboli kore meyetake niye aney maja korar galpo, tara bhag payni. … ke prothom tene niye giche, seshe ke ghar theke beriye ki rokom bhangte aapsosh kore bolechilo, more geche!

Manik Bandopadhyay taught us through his story *Gaen* that poor people must accept the path of undaunted struggle for existence and they should not surrender to death and devastation due to famine related horrible crisis. Rajen Das, its central character lost mass appeal because he only described endless trauma but not attempt for triumph of poverty – stricken population. His competitor Naraari was able to understand mass psyche and he made propaganda for survival related struggle through his songs – Karun hoye othe Narabarir maraner gaan, …. kintu chokhe jabe na, kadat na …. Krodhe, jabe tapto hoye othe nishwas, batguli jenu egie boye jete chay Narabarir daake saay diey sisulkheko meykhekheko manushkheko rakshasgulir tui dhore tene phasi latke dite –

In the story *Chelemanushi*, the author propagated the importance of communal harmony while skillfully creating the environment of fear during the days of riot. *Apod* was such a story where Manik Bandopadhyay described the acute financial problem in urban middle class household for pressure of refugee related trouble. *Kanad Ray*, its main character, had to go through this trouble – Barite lok haroni, pet bereche dute. …Pakistan theke da’jon atmiya ese ghare chepeche bote ebong tader pet bhorate hoyay rationer aaini chal- ata Mangalbari sesh hoyeche.

Bagdipara diye was a famous story which was created in backdrop of the Tebhaga Movement and *Dulali* was a perfect symbol of fighting spirit of the subaltern women.

In *Asahojogi* we can find an exemplary character Ramen, who distributed food among starved people to save their lives adopting the path of revolt against his father Harishnath. The author described the courageous endeavour of Ramen skillfully – Dersho chele guadm theke chal bar kore bitaran kore. Kache o durer anekguli gaa theke bazar bazar lok e kaloker joryo. Ramen gaye gaye dhyarita pitiye diyechilo.

Kalobajare *Prem dar* is a satirical story where Dhananjay and Lila loved each other but their love affair was not capable to reach marriage ceremony due to Niranjan, an influential and rich pillar of flourishing black market. Niranjan was determined to marry Lila and so plan of Dhananjay was completely devastated. The author had written – Lila dirghanabimba theke phele, ‘Tumi ja bheeche, amio tai bhabechi. Kal amra biye korte chaile jago kal karo sadhya ache thekay? … tarpor? Tomar amar dujoneri jibon nosto hoye jabe. Kono labb nei.’
Dhananjay  dirghanishwas pheke bole , ‘ Sotti labh nei .’

Upay is an extraordinary story where Mallika was a helpless, poor but brave woman of a needy refugee family taking shelter in railway station – Kolkata shaharbar ekbarer chokher samne takhono upayhin nirshroy manushguli ei stationer ashroytakute gur- chagar moto gadi gadi kore dinratri katachhilo… Ekkhanna chhatai jutai yellai jurtai pare thek tototai chih Mallikader thai. Mallika ultimately saved herself from the evil clutches of Pramatha and his racket of flesh trade by murdering him brutally. She took all money of Pramatha with her after killing him and returned home. I will quote here own language of the eminent author-

Mallika … ekgal base , ‘ Bhater kasto pamu na ar. …. Moyla kaporkhan poira abar janu ishtisane , abar dakaitra amare kinte aibo. ‘

Gala namiye phisphis kore bole , ‘Eibar chora niya janu lukaiya. Bujhchhos thakurjhi, lukaiya ekkhanna chora niya jann.’

Conclusion

Manik Bandopadhyay was committed enough for Communist Party but he never sacrificed or surrendered his identity of a true author for political connection. So he vehemently opposed Chinmohan Sehanabish when Chinmohan opined that middle class intellectual people should not bother to discard art and literature related creative activities for a temporary phase for full- fledged engagement in works of Trade Union and Kishan Sabha etc. Manik Bandopadhyay did not support the viewpoint of Chinmohan Sehanabish that a committed author must visit the place of subaltern unrest and uprising if he wanted to produce perfect realistic literature. Chinmohan himself showed utmost respect and gratitude for literary contribution of Manik Bandopadhyay in his essay entitled Manik Bandopadhyay o Pragati Lekhak Andolan included in the book namely 46 No. : Ekti Sanskritik Andolan Prasange.

Jel theke phire es dekhiam amader sange jor deor aparadhe itimaadhye halu prakashaker darja Manikbabur kache ruddha hoye giyche , emon ki samayik patrikay sarbhabhuk pujakshatrisguli pariyyanto aparadhibhanye sange besh niyamitobhabei lekha chaite bhule jachhe Banglabhashar ei sreshtho kothashilpir kachh theke. ……


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