



Critical Study of the Social Reality in the fiction of Sadhan Chattopadhyay

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Abstract:

The paper presents the critical examination of the social reality in fiction of Sadhan Chattopadhyay, but it is only restricted to the body of work that was published to date (2015). Chattopadhyay was born in 1944, and trained as a physicist, an author of remarkable Bengali fiction, whose work is closely connected to the development of the social, economic and political life of Bengal. He is always recognized in public author profiles and later academic criticism as a significant novelist and short-story author, and by the middle of the 2010s, over six hundred stories and a considerable novelistic oeuvre already existed. What is so impressive about his fiction is that he uses it to turn literature into a manifesto, but it is not. In his novels including Agnidagdha, Gahin Gang, Dui Thikana, Pitribhumi, Paksha Bipaksha, Tentul Patar Jhal, Jaltimir, Matir Antena, Bindu Theke Britte, Panihata, Din Ane Din Khay, he explores the theme of displacement, livelihood crisis, party politics, decline of education, patriarchy, environmental devastation, and public-health calamity. This paper proposes that Chattopadhyay constructs social reality in two movements of close attention to material conditions and critical inquisition into the moral failures concealed within institutions, ideology, and development. His fiction is therefore one of the significant archives of the social life of Bengalis up to 2015.

INTRODUCTION

Sadhan Chattopadhyay holds a very special place in the Bengali fiction of the post-1960s. Born in 1944, Barishal, he studied physics, became a well-known fiction writer, wrote hundreds of short stories, received awards such as the bankim puraskar and the sarat smriti award. Among such significant novels there are also Panihata, TintaRang and Matir Antena, and Jaltimir, which are mentioned in public biographical summaries. It is not merely the breadth of his production that makes him particularly pertinent to a study of social reality, but also that literary responsibility his work takes: it is often said in critical writing that it is literature of changing country, time, and society.

This is already quite a range in a study that is confined to 2015. Academic reviews of his fiction have grouped his novels into a classification of political, livelihood-centered, educational, historical-cultural, experimental and environmental. Among them they include Agnidagdha (1969-70), Gahin Gang (1979), Udyog Parva (1982), Dui Thikana, Pitribhumi, Paksha Bipaksha (1988), Tentul Patar Jhal (1993-95), Jaltimir (1999), Bindu Theke Britte (2000), Matir Antena (2000), Sat Purush Dot Com (2005), Dhar Therefore the paper does not take 2015 as a random point but rather as a significant date after which the key trends of his social vision could be observed. (NBU IR)

The critical analysis of the social reality in his fiction should start with one significant difference. Chattopadhyay is a socially minded person, yet not programmatic. According to an overview of research by the North Bengal University, he never permitted personal political doctrine to spin mechanically on the corpus fiction; instead, he turned social truth and truth of time into literary truth. This is another thesis



summary quotes his own stand that literature is responsible, but nobody can reduce this responsibility to making somebody convert his/her manifesto into literature. This responsibility combined with artistic independence is the key to his fictional approach.

Social Reality as Pressure of History.

The social realism of Chattopadhyay commences with history. The later criticism dates his appearance to the stormy weather of food movement, political disintegration on the Left and an overall middle-class crisis in Bengal; an article reports that in 1966 his first short story, *Bonya*, was published in *Nandan*. Since the beginning, therefore, his fiction evolves within a Bengal which is parsimonious, ideologically divided and socially anarchic. The historical pressure never fades away. Rather, it is transported into other areas of experience: refugee memory, transformation in agriculture, marginal livelihood, village politics, school systems, environmental destruction and the capital pressures on the everyday life.

It serves to give his fiction documentary power, and it is not documentary in the strictly speaking sense. According to a summary of his research on his novels, he aimed at capturing on record the social life that was in motion and to be answerable to time. But his finest novels are not lists of events; they are dramatizations of the way big social processes invade small and local worlds. Social reality in his fiction is thus not simply the exterior of the happenings in the society. It is lived, moral, and psychological fact of the events that occurred within certain communities.

Livelihood, Class and the Margins.

The livelihood of Chattopadhyay is one of the best aspects of his realism. The best example is *Gahin Gang*. In the recent academic article on the novel, the book is said to be a large livelihood-and-society text of the Malo fishing community in Sundarbans. The novel demonstrates how fishers are caught between environmental threat and economic exploitation: they face tigers and crocodiles; however, they are caught in debts, payment in advance system, and the blackmailing system of mahajan. The power of the novel is its ability to reveal the presence of the exploitation not as an abstract type of oppression by a certain class, but as something that has fully colonized a lifeworld: work, danger, family, debt, and survival are all intertwined.

The identical social issue is carried over to *Udyog Parva*, *Dui Thikana*, and *Pitribhumi* albeit in different aspects. The North Bengal University Text *Dui Thikana* is a novel concerning the demand of capital and development on culture belonging: the displacement of the Kolkata-based notion of the cultured Bengali is created by economic pressures that build a space of dual residence, both material and symbolic. *Pitribhumi*, in its turn, can be viewed as a rootless novel, in which people are pushed off the inherited land by livelihood and economic inequality. In either instance the realism of Chattopadhyay transcends the poverty of the village and deals with the displacements caused by the contemporary urban and economic change.

The most notable thing about this is that social reality in Chattopadhyay is not limited to a single place of classes. He addresses the fisherfolk, the rural poor, the lower-middle class, the culturally displaced urban Bengali, the migrant or uprooted subject. Vulnerability to shifting power structures is not one sociological category, but rather the connecting principle. In that respect his fiction is not so much a fixed reflection of society as a warehouse of transition.

Politics, Powers, and Decay of Ideologies.

And, in case livelihood is one axis of the realism of Chattopadhyay, politics is another. *Paksha Bipaksha* is clearly stated in the critical writing as a pure political novel. The source provided by NBU defines it as a linguistic and social construction of a certain time whereas the other source explains that the novel

records the transformation of the political field in Bengal that followed the consolidation of rural power. It transports into the text the way those who used to be on the one side are now, now, the other side, the temptation of power, and how the party formations absorb the opportunism. The social reality in this case is not the naivety of ideology but the rustic of ideology by control, division, and self-interest.

This is the very point where the critical realism of Chattopadhyay is the most interesting. He does not compose party politics as the drama of the slogan and villainy. Instead, he follows the gradual transformation of communal ideals into institutionalised self-interest. The social world of the village in *Paksha Bipaksha* turns into a lab to watch how the elements of political affiliation, ethical hypocrisy and relationships of individuals get inseparable. His realism is not event based alone; however, it is ethical. It inquires on how power reconfigures values.

Matir Antena is a continuation of this political realism into the altered panchayat times. According to NBU discussion, the novel is a record of a politically transformed period, a period where the village is re-constituted of new forms of structures such as panchayati raj, increased participation and reservation policies. However, this change is not applauded in the novel. It indicates that new democratic spaces are still highly interwoven with other more primitive forms of patriarchal domination. Chattopadhyay is dialectical in that realism: he does see institutional development but at the same time he also points to the limitations of that development.

Gendered Social Reality

One of the most significant peculiarities of the fiction by Chattopadhyay is that the social reality is frequently gendered. In *Matir Antena*, the emphasis put on Tahmina Bibi and a woman in a panchayat space is a means of analyzing the response of male power when women start to appropriate agency in the public. The NBU analysis observes explicitly that men tirelessly attempt to avert women in performing meaningful work in the society and that patriarchal reasoning hinders the adventurous urge of village women to modify the rural existence. The novel thus indicates that social change, when it is viewed in the formal political context, does not necessarily disintegrate patriarchal power.

This is among the reasons why the realism of Chattopadhyay was made to be critical and not just descriptive. He does not register that women are in institutions but inquires what structures hold against them, what are the disgraces they endure and how even with reforming public life is male dominated. Social reality as he treats it is therefore not just about class and party, but also about patriarchy as an institution that is replicated within the daily institutions.

School and Crisis of Institutions.

Institutional decline (particularly in education) is another significant branch of the social vision of Chattopadhyay. *Tentul Patar Jhal* is known as a novel of modern reality of education system of Bengal, which NBU research knows, whereas *Dharitri* addresses the same issue in its later stage. *Tentul Patar Jhal* analysis cites the culture of tuition, undermining of the state institutions, pressure of the private education system, and the loss of the formerly strong relationship between a teacher, student, and guardian. The school is turned into a miniature society where the value, money, prestige, and decay meet.

The importance of this institutional realism is that it extends the definition of social reality past the dramatic, visible. Not only does Chattopadhyay interest herself in spectacular crisis, but also in gradual erosion. A disorganized school system, an undermined teacher's organization, education as a servant of careerism and market rationality are to him as expressive as party wrangle or economic exploitation. In his seriousness on these spaces, he takes the Bengali social realism into the areas that most obviously political novels overlook.



Environment, Public Health and Development.

The most modern feature of the Chattopadhyay fiction until 2015 is that it is tending toward environmental and popular-health realism. According to the NBU thesis, Jaltimir, Bindu Theke Britte, Shesh Rater Sheyal and Panihata are some of the environmentally conscious novels. The importance of Jaltimir is especially important as it makes arsenic contamination fiction. The critical summary observes that the novel shows how arsenic gets into the water, into crops and later into the human body where it affects several villages and kills at least one of the lead characters of the novel. Chattopadhyay does not rest on symptom; he employs the novel in order to generate awareness. The social reality in this case is the lethal combination of poverty, environmental vulnerability and neglect by the state.

That frame is widened by Bindu Theke Britte. The NBU interpretation perceives it as an environmental protest novel of industrial pollution and noise and of conspiracy between owners of factories, politicians and administrators. The main character Sudhamay is a protesting character against the pollution and the infringement of the right of ordinary people to a living environment. This is among the most obvious examples in which Chattopadhyay fiction relates environmental realism to questions which also may be described as human-rights questions: health, habitat, dignity, and the right to oppose in destructive development.

Chattopadhyay realism is now more mindful of historical space, surrounding, and experimental temporality, but remains rooted in the banal lives, by the time we arrive at Panihata (2014) and Din Ane Din Khay (2015). Even in cases where the form is made more exploratory, the force of the social is at the center.

Form, Technique and the Limit of Documentary Realism.

The essential question that must always be posed of a critical study is how Chattopadhyay makes this vast social range a fiction. The solution is in the fact that he did not want to give literature a low opinion. According to the NBU materials, he plays with subject, character, time, language, image, and even such mode as magic realism. That official uneasiness is of importance. It avoids the fiction being turned into sociological record per se. However, Chattopadhyay is not a realist so much as a realism mediating, realism therefore comes in with the help of narrative structure, symbolic opposition, polyphonic struggle, and ethical uncertainty.

It is also due to this that his fiction is still convincing as a piece of literature. He is a socially responsible person who is not a mechanically partisan one; historically conscious rather than imprisoned in reportage; responsive to the oppressed, not bluntly to reduce social contradiction to easy formula. This is one of his strengths, this critical distance. It makes his fiction to be felt not only with oppression, but with confusion, compromise, aspiration, and failure. His work is thus never a static category of social reality, a dynamic zone of tension.

CONCLUSION

By 2015, Sadhan Chattopadhyay had already constructed a large collection of fiction that may be interpreted as a stratified map of the social reality in Bengal. His novels explore memory of refugees, exploitation of classes, Left politics, village authority, struggle of women in the public, destruction of the environment and institutional corruption. But it is not only in the themes that he picks. It is in the gravity of his transformation of the social pressure into the literary form. He does not betray social commitment and does not betray fiction to dogma. Rather, he creates a historically, morally, and formally dynamic realism. That makes him irreplaceable in studying Bengali fiction until 2015.



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