Journal of Kolkata Society for Asian Studies : Vol. 11. No. 2, Dec. 2025

A Journey for Understanding Folk Odyssey of Rural Bengal: Critical Evaluation of *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Road*) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay

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Abstract

This paper examines the paradisiacal innocence of rural Bengal and the Bengali way of life, which is free from the dullness and chaos of modern city life. The characters in the novel *Pather Panchali (Song of the Road*) are poor, yet they consistently observe religious holidays, adhere to customs, and live according to their beliefs. This is because they are satisfied with what little they have and are unaffected by greed. The diverse rural Bengali folk culture encompasses its festivals, rituals, dietary customs, beliefs, and superstitions. The novel is narrated from the perspective of a young boy named Apu, who shares a close bond with Durga, his elder sister. He sees the world through her eyes, learns to engage with nature, and undergoes psychological changes after her death. Eventually, they move from the idyllic village of Nischindipur to Varanasi. The novel depicts a journey and transformation of all the characters from innocence to experience, incorporating folklore and folk cultural elements. The present study aims to highlight the declining values of idyllic rural Bengali life, its lifestyle, and the purity of the folk odyssey of rural Bengal, which lacks the hectic schedules and monotony of modern or postmodern life.

Keywords: *Rural Bengali Life, Folk Culture, Folk Odyssey, Cultural Diversities, Idyllic.*

Introduction

The definition of folklore has been the subject of on going discussions even before William Thoms first used the word in 1846. But the term folklore has recently come into use in the literary field. William Thoms, under the pen name of Ambrose Merton, used folklore in *The Athenaeum* in 1846 and applied the words good Saxon compound, folklore—the lore of the people to refer it to Popular Antiquities and Popular Literature. The conception of Thoms and his enumerative definition of folklore specifically refers to the manners, mannerisms, beliefs, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, and so forth. An anthropologist, William R. Bascom, in his "Definitions of Folklore," defines folklore as "It is old fashioned, grey or white-headed, perhaps first receding from its former

strongholds under the impact of modern progress and industry; it is the born opponent of the serial number, the stamped product and the patented standard" (Bascom, 1996, p. 255). According to American folklorist G. L. Harmon," Anything which tends to break down the cohesion of a group—communications, diversity of knowledge, specialisation, etc. —tend to scatter is folklore" (Harmon, 1996, p. 259). In contemporary perspectives, 'Folklore' is an umbrella term used to describe the material, linguistic, and spiritual elements of a particular culture which are passed down verbally or through observation or imitation. The members of that particular folklore or folkloric culturemay share a profession, a language, an ethnicity, an age range, or a place of residence. This corpus of the customary knowledge of folklore is generally conserved and transmitted from one generation to the next, with regular adaptations due to memories, the requirement of time or purpose and the degree of an individual's competence and performance. Archer Taylor, a renowned American folklorist, writes:

> "... the material that is handed on by tradition either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folk songs, folktales riddles, proverbs or other materials preserved in words. It may be traditional tools and physical objects like fences or knots, hot cross buns or Easter eggs, traditional ornamentation like the Walls of Troy or traditional symbols like the Swastika. It may be traditional procedure like throwing salt over one's shoulders or knocking on wood. It may be traditional belief like the notion that elder one is good for the ailments of eye. All of these are folklores." (Taylor, 1996, p. 261)

However, folk literature is difficult for division and categorisation as a distinct genre due to its oral tradition and the holistic, cosmic links that folklore demonstrates. The borderlines of folklore, which separate many possibilities, are quite blurry, as folklores cross over and incorporate aspects from multiple sources of life. As such, any attempt to sort subjects into categories cannot be seen as clearly and rigidly defined, but rather as a loosely useful method for conducting a good analysis and comprehension. There is a lot of psychology in folklore or folk literature, particularly in folktales. It introduces a person to the realm of mystery and the supernatural, empowering them to discernthe different universes. Folklores depict the complexity of nature and life, the joys and sorrows of humanity, and acts of loyalty or treason. And the tenets are ceremonial, social, hectic, and artistic. William R. Bascom, in 1953, defines folklore in his research paper "Folklore and Anthropology":

> Folklore, to the anthropologist, is a part of culture but not the whole of culture. It -includes myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, the texts of ballads and other songs, and other forms of lesser importance, but not folk art, folk dance, folk music, folk costume, folk medicine, folk custom, or folk belief. All of these are unquestionably worthy of study, whether in literate or nonliterate societies.... All folklore is orally transmitted, but not all that is orally transmitted is folklore. (Bascom, 1953, p. 283)

Folklore consists of a collection of materials, a cultural process, and a method of inquiry applied

to those materials and processes. There is a significant debate over the exact definition of folklore. It can be simply described as a form of art and literature that is transmitted orally, translated, and transformed, excluding customs, beliefs, crafts, language, and the analysis of all transmitted literature. The two primary questions guiding ongoing discussions about the boundaries of folklore are: (1) Should oral literature be studied within its immediate social context? and (2) Are there notable similarities between the oral histories of mediaeval peasants, contemporary primitive groups such as American Indian tribes, African tribes, Bushmen, and modern groups attached to dominant societies but maintaining some individual traits (e.g., American Negroes, sailors, urban and rural immigrants, natives, Kentucky mountaineers)? Many Chinese folklorists also believe folklore is passed from person to person across generations. In this regard, the Chinese folklorist Nai-tung Ting's comment is particularly significant. Nai-tung Ting, in his "Folk Literature Run by the Folk: A New Development in the People's Republic of China," remarks:

> It holds that since folklore comes from the masses, it must ultimately be returned to the masses. In other words, the role of folklorists should be transitional; the preservation and investigation of folklore should ultimately be taken over by peasants themselves. This view clearly disagrees with the view of the majority of Western experts. To most Western scholars, the peasants are presumed to be illiterate or poorly educated, and too much occupied with the concerns of daily life to record and interpret their own culture. Some folklorists may still secretly sympathize with Andrew Lang's estimate-namely; the peasantry is backward and barbarous. (Ting, 1987, p. 260).

According to the critical theory of folklore and folk literature, Alan Dundes writes: "The term folk can refer to any group of people what so ever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a common occupation, language, or religion—but what is important is that a group is formed for whatever reason it calls its own" (Dundes, 1965, p. 2). It is the four functions of folklore which stand for the traditional cultural forms that are communicated between individuals through words and actions and tend to exist in variation.

In India, folk literature as a literary form and spirit of Indian nationalism started to develop in the late nineteenth century, led by newly formed intellectual groups who were educated in the West and were inspired by the new found sense of nationalism in the direction of their own customs and societies. The way Indians handled the indigenous folklore during this period is very noteworthy in several ways. During this time, the study of Indian folk literature was approached from an Indian perspective for the first time in literature and literary background. Previously, non-Indian perspectives were applied to the facts of Indian folklore by Christian missionaries, distant foreign Indologists or colonial British bureaucrats. Secondly, folklore resources started to be linked with national identity and unity, a trend that persisted throughout the Indian freedom struggles. The other two most obvious instances of it are the discussions around nativistic *Khadis* and Mahatma Gandhi's use of the spinning wheel. Folklore

played a vital role in promoting Indian national unity both in pre and post-independence India. The majority of the literary creation on Indian local customs was brought about by missionaries and public personnel who indirectly helped Indian intellectuals to develop a feeling of patriotic awareness. Indian academics and intellectuals started looking into their customs and culture in 1857 to gain independence from British rule. During this time, several Western academics, as well as Indian authors and intellectuals made substantial contributions to the gathering and analysis of Indian folk lore. The noteworthy works of Verrier Elwin whose important books are *Songs of the Forest*: *The Folk Poetry of the Gonds* (1935), *Folktales of Mahakosal* (1944), *Folksongs of Maikal Hills (1944)*, *Folksongs of Chhattisgarh (1946), Myths of Middle India (1949), Tribal Myths of Odisha (1954)* and *Myths of the Tribal Frontier Agency (1958)* etc. But the folk literary tradition and customs were sufficiently available from the medieval period to modern times. The *Mangal Kavyas* of Bengal is a kind of popular literature that emerged in the late medieval era, projecting the story of the marginal section of Brahmanical society and their struggles against the hardships and hindrances of daily life in the written literary forms. The Brahmins and other upper castes were not featured in these narratives when these were first being composed. Even though many writers who composed literary pieces were from the *Kayastha* stock. This is due to the seeming lack of a clear struggle between *Islam* and *Brahmanism* throughout the pre-Mughal era. Afterwards, the collapse of *Buddhism* and eventual degeneration into *Tantrism,* this field became available for either *Islam* or *Brahmanism* to have agreat impact on folk literature or folklore. The establishment of Muslim domination came as a harsh blow to *Brahminism* and its social standing, emerging *Buddhism* and interming lingit with *Vaishnavism* of Bengal, which was severely undermined and attacked by the establishment of Muslim authority. Besides, several anti-Brahminic movements were active in Bengal at that time. And the indigenous cults were strongly against *Brahmanism,* consequently, folk as a literary form gained much attention in Indian vernacular or native literature. The folk literature in this way emerged from the vantage points of patriotic fervour, the need fora revival of nativistic culture and emphasising traditional values of primitive life style, culture, traditions and traditional ways of India. Indian intellectuals and researchers started to investigate their customs and culture in the late 19th century to revive and establish their cultural roots. The Western education and the sense of nationalism among the Indian intellectuals led them to achieve independence from the British, when native Indians looked back at *swadeshi* culture or atnativisticzeal and fervour. Indian folk literary books during this period influenced intellectual and literary backgrounds of India. The prominent works of this time in respect of folk literature are Lakshminath Bezbaruah's *Burhi Ait Sashu* (1911), Dinesh Chandra Sen's *Sati* (1917) and *The Folk Literature of Bengal* (1920), Zeverchand Meghani's *Halardan* (1928), *Dadajini Vato* (1933), *Lok Sahitya and Kankavati* (1947), *Hamara Gram Sahitya* (1940) by Ramnaresh Tripathy. The other important books of folk literature

are *Bela Phule Adhi Rat* (1948), *Dhart Gatt Hai* (1948), and *Dhire Baho Ganga* (1948), written by Devendra Satyarthi. All these books are the testimonials of Bengal's rural culture and cultural values intricately linked with the humble sagas of people and the simple people of India.

The Bengali folk literature has always been a rich source of cultural heritage and traditions of Bengal and India. The folk traditions, culture and literature of Bengal in the literary forms around 1905 became very prominent as folk literature vigorously attempted to reflect upon the traditions of folk literature, culture of rural Bengal. The noted works of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar (1877-1957), Dinesh Chandra Sen (1866 -1939), Upendra Kishore Roychowdhury (1863-1915), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) and Jasimuddin (1904-1976) are very important in this regard. Under the influence and the scholarship of Dinesh Chandra Sen, Bengali folk literature was rejuvenated by Dakshinaranjan Mitra who compiled four volumes of children's folktales such as *Thakurmar Jhuli (Grandmother's Bag* 1907), *Thakurdar Jhuli (Grandfather's Bag* 1909), *Thakurdidir Jhuli (Maternal Grandmother's Bag* 1909) and *Dadamoshayer Jhuli (Maternal Grandfather's Bag* 1913). Thus, the process of rejuvenating and preserving the lost tradition, orality of folktales, and glorious rural folk culture had been also adapted in Bengali children's literature as a separate literary form.

The folk narratives from any culture constantly combine the elements of realism and romance. Generally speaking, the descriptions of folk literature are romantic but contain some realism. Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay's *Pather Panchali* is a prime illustration of the combination of the two, such as romantic realism. The book skilfully captures, to the last detail, the livelihoods of poor rural people and the life of rural Bengal. The book introduces readers to the rustic, ritualistic, gastronomic, religious, and superstitious aspects of rural Bengali society. It is more than lifelike, a panoramic portrait of Bengal sketched in a naturalistic device. The novel's portrayal of Ray family emphasises the most important theme: how extreme poverty persists and how, despite their dire circumstances, Durga and Apu, two children, continue to enjoy pure and innocent joys of life. The Bengali novel *Pather Panchali* depicts the beliefs and customs of ordinary people by revolving around the lives and happenings of the rustic people of Nischindipur village. The folk motifs appear in this novel as a dispersed shadow across all the levels of the novel. Here, folk elements are not an undesired intrusion, rather, their appropriate fusion gives the book an ethnic and native feeling and strengthens its status as the 'Odyssey of Rural Bengal.' The detailed examination of the characters, diets, rituals, recitations of folktales and proverbs, fairs, entertainments and superstitions reveal the existence and importance of folk components which serve as the purpose in *Pather Panchali*. The movie *Pather Panchali* (1955) by eminent Bengali director Satyajit Ray is based on the renowned book of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. In this film, Satyajit Ray depicts a rural Bengal and rural and rustic

family life in an isolated village. Through the screening of the movie, Indian rural life and life style reach its' zenith point and a global appeal forces us to refer to the movie as popular even if it is acknowledged as an example of high/serious art. This high and serious art is portrayed in this fiction with utmost subtlety and vividness. The folk elements in contemporary Indian fiction are extremely sublime, vivid and lifelike, picturesque, which have been realistically portrayed about the serenity of rural life. Nandini Sahu, in her "Folk in Contemporary Indian Fiction," comments:

> One of the most recurring themes in the novel is how poor people being thronged by every hardship do not give up the spirit to live and even in most adverse circumstances, never shy away from cherishing the little pleasures of life and the things which give them hope and keeps them bonded and combats the poverty from which they are suffering is nothing else but love. It is also the portrayal of idyllic village life where people are satisfied with little things. The joy and grief of one family are also shared by the others in the village. (Sahu, 2021, p.128).

An Idealistic Rural and Rustic Life and Life Style:

The book offers the readers a chance to be acquainted with the inclusive aspects of rural Bengali life and life style of Bengali culture. The novel narrates the heterogeneous personalities, such as Bhubon Mukherjee, a wealthy and well-respected man, and the egotistical and heartless Annodya Ray. The novel illustrates the cohabitation of pundits and ignoramuses simultaneously. The characters in the novel, such as Pitom, the metalsmith, sweet vendor Chinibas, and Shorno, the milkman, receive specific recognition due to their individual traits, qualities and personalities. The genuine taste is retained in the comic depictions of Proshonno, the principal of the rural school of Nischindipur village. The major focus of the book is the battle between Harihar Ray and his family's constant struggle with poverty and poverty-inducedprecarity of life. This family always fights against extreme poverty and the ill fates of life. Their happiness to them is the occasional period in the general drama of pain. Moreover, the austere skeleton of the Ray family is realistically shown through the depiction of Indira Thakuran, Harihar's aunt and the cottage of this aged aunt. The narrat or writes:

> In the eastern part of Harihar's compound, there was a thatched hut, which had lain unrepaired for a long time. It was there that the old woman lived. On a bamboo peg hung two dirty garments, the torn ends of which she had knotted together. .... To one side of the room, there was a frayed grass mat and few torn baby quilts, crude patchwork affairs. Some torn clothes, which were all she had, were tied up in a bundle.... The old woman had a jar too, made of sheet brass, an earthenware vessel for curds, and a few odd earthenware pots. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji, 1999, p.9-10)

The widow of Tomrej paints a vivid picture of the terrible reality of what is sometimes considered aromantic hamlet life. Tomrej's wife has endured intolerable and pitiful treatment at the hands of Annada Ray. After the demise of Tomrej, his wife is responsible for repaying Annada Ray for the loan

that he owed to her. Though she makes every effort, the widow is unable to repay the loan. Without offering her a remedy, Annada Ray locks Tomrej's rice store, showing her that she is not worthy of pity. A Bengali agricultural civilisation with a carnivalesque flair is called the village Nischindipur. The population village is diverse in terms of caste, class, race and community. In addition to depicting the dichotomy of affluent versus poor, in the novel, the novelist also makes their mindsets and personal lives the main focal point. The author is virtuousin depicting various dresses, foods and eating habits for different social strata of Bengal. Additionally, the narrator describes other common Bengali foods from the countryside. The main characters of the novel, Apu and Durga, come from a very low-income family; therefore, delicious food is a faraway dream for them. However, brother and sister somehow put together various dishes to satisfy their appetites. The author depicts a moment in the eighth chapter of the novel where Apu and Durga relish green mango with salt and mustard oil and compare it with mango pickle. To illustrate the differences in economic power amongst the villagers, the author uses the description of the village feast as *Bonbhojan* to emphasise various rural Bengali delicacies. The meals cooked by Apu's mother, Shorbojaya and Shejbou, Shorbojaya's wealthy neighbour which reveal the disparities of the socio-economic backgrounds of the two families.

> The custom was for every family to take its own food; and some of the women used the occasion to show off to their neighbours by making a public display of what they had brought.... All the unhappy Shorbojaya could scrape together was some coarse rice, and not much of that, a little very ordinary pulse and couple of egg plants. *Shejbou* of course was there with all the Mukherji children; and their banquet, which was spread out for all to see, included milk thickened syrup made from fresh sugar cane and a delicious confection of bananas and rice. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p. 225)

Rural Folk Theatrical Performances:

For a considerable amount of time, Bengal (including Bangladesh), Odisha, and Assam have been home to popular theatrical performances such as *Jatra*. Since the word *Jatra* comes from the verb *Ya,* which means to move, *Jatra* may also refer to a 'procession' or 'cavalcade' honouring a god or goddess. In the late medieval era, *Jatra* emerged from the fusion of popular Bengali performance styles, including *Kavi Gaan*, *Pânchali*, *Kirtan*, and *Katha Kata*. With the custom of wor shipping *Shakti* cult in *Chandi Jatra,* and *Jatra* as a separate dramatic performance which had started to take shape in rural Bengal. The greatconflict between the demons and the goddess *Chandi* was the subject of the story. Later, in the 16th century, when the *Vaishnavite* movement swept over Eastern India, apopular imagination gave rise to a different type of folk performance known as *Krishna Jatra*. When the Muslim era came to an end, amateur *Jatra* took on a new meaning, but its brilliance gradually faded as the concept of heavenly love and devotion gave way to a secular one about human desire and affection. It had been assumed that the colonial rhetoric of high and low culture ultimately led to the

downfall of *Jatra*. The British theatre replaced *Jatra* as our source of amusement and education due to the swift expansion of urban culture and taste. Regretfully, *Jatra* has since been living on the outskirts of our society, projecting an image of being a subject of entertainment. In this novel, *Pather Panchali, Jatra* is a special entertainment for Apu and Durga provided by the author. The author writes:

> The *Jatra* at last began, and from that moment the earth for Apu ceased to exist, and all the people on it, except for himself and the actors on the stage in front of him. The stage was his entire world, and the players its entire population. The atmosphere of the play was set by the violinists who opened the performance just before dark with a tone poem in a traditional mode known as Imon... The stage was lit with lights which hung in clusters from the wooden structure above. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p. 255)

The Folk Ballads, Festivals and Rituals:

In the history of Bengali, the folk ballads are extensively popular and rich. Through ballads, common Bengali people have been using them since the Middle Ages to express their hopes, dreams, joys, and family values. The ballads became inaccessible to the general public during the colonial era due to the exposure of Western knowledge systems but they solely served to benefit rural women. Women of this era used proverbs and ballads who had no formal education but used them as a means of transferring both ordinary and spiritual knowledge among themselves. Generally, elder folks would teach their younger counter parts the melodies and sayings. The author depicts the elderly Indira Thakuran in the book, who is wellversed in songs and enjoys passing the mon to generations like Apu and Durga. When Durga expresses her happiness, Indira Thakuran also emulates her elderly widowhood with Durga. Durga shows her happiness in the twenty-first chapter of the novel by singing a ballad that Indira taught her when they were enjoying the *Chorok Utsav*. From the author's words:

> Durga was off like a shot and very happily too. The orchard was thick with bushes as high as a man's head, and as she pushed through in search of the leaves, she sang a song her old auntie had taught her and nodded her head as she sang. 'When I saw the yellow gleam in the forest my heart was glad; But I lost the ring from my nose and now I'm sad.' (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p. 254)

In a different instance, Durga resorts to the folk proverbs that are frequently recited in the villages as a *mantra* to halt the rain. Durga says:

> "Rain, rain go away from me,
> There's a *Koromcha* fruit on our lemon tree."
> (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.110)

The intricacies of Bengali folk culture may also be understood through the music of many rural

festivals. The novel depicts the songs of the *Chorok* festival, which takes place in the last month of the Bengali calendar, *Chaitra* and songs are sung by *Brata* spectators through the various ceremonial performances. Even though the song has a religious tinge, religious and rural myths of the ancient ideas are combined with folk creativity.

> From heaven there came a chariot, down to earth's wide plain;
> The Lord God Shiva was in it, and his arrows fell like rain.
> A corpse from the age of Satya and mud from the age of old;
> Sing Shiva, Shiva, brothers all, and their drums like thunder
> rolled."(Bandopadhyay Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.248)

The folklore experts are vigorously interested in the *Bratas* or rites which are undertaken by women due to their rural beliefs and customs in rural Indian Bengali communities. Even though it carries the burden of the great tradition and religions for the common people, the simple rural folks, which integrates *Lokayata cultures* in its unique style and places giving more emphasis on performative elements rather than on religious doctrines, perceptions and rituals. In essence, these *Bratas* offer rural women a safe platform to express themselves and creatively openly through their *Bratakathas* about their struggles, joys, goals, and frustrations. The heart and soul of *Bratas*, of course, are its songs and performances. Similar to other Indian states or provinces (around the time the novel was written), Bengal has its own *Bratas*, which showcase the rich cultural diversity and heritage of Bengal. The scene of the novel is set in the *Rarh* region of the then-undivided Bengal. The author incorporates these *Bratas* of this particular *Rarh* Bengal into the proclamation of the novel. The narrative provides a detailed account of several Bratas, all of which are significant and integral parts of the simple annals of rural Bengal. The author very appropriately inserts the *Holy Pond Brata*, in this particular rite, through which a sister desires her brother's long and healthy life. In the eleventh chapter of the novel, this is portrayed toshow the pure and unselfish relationship between Apu and Durga. The author attempts to delineate Durga's devotion and affection for her brother, Apu, by adhering to the sublimerituals of the customs which she followed. Therefore, considering her status as a virgin, the girl, Durga, begs the *Holy Pond* (whom she regards as God) to grant her brother a long life through the song *Holy Pond Brata*. The author adopted these folk ritualsand also included themin the plot of the novel.

> Oh, holy pond; oh, holy flower!
> I worship you beneath the noon-day sky.
> A maiden's purity is my dower;
> My brother lives and blest am I.
> (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.93)

In the rural areas of Bengal, men also occasionally participate in the *Bratas*, even though these are

typically associated with women. One such instance of them is *Chorok*. In the last month of the Bengali year, *Chaitra Brata* is performed very effectively. On the concluding day of the month, the *Brata* performers engage in a variety of strenuous physical exercises to demonstrate their supernatural or spiritual strength, which they have developed throughout their monthly penances.

> Some ten days after the *Gajon* dance came *blue worship* day, so named after Shiva, one of whose many epithets was God of the Blue Throat. The day after that was *Chorok* itself. The principal rite of the *Blue-Worship* ceremonies took place in the evening. The sannyasis first performed a dance round a date palm tree and then broke off the spikes from its trunk.
>
> (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.247)

The author presents this particular aspect very vividly and describes it with pictorial dexterity, with intricate details:

> One of them will pretend to be a corpse, and the others will bind him up in funeral clothes and carry him to the *Chatim* tree, where they burn dead people. When they've taken him there, they'll bring him back to life again, and they'll hunt round for a dead man's skull ... and when they've got one, they'll march round with it in a procession, singing songs and reciting holy texts. They recite lots of holy texts as they go round and round with the skull. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.247)

Irrational Superstitious Life Style of Rural Bengal:

In his unique style, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay highlights the darker side of the public imagination, presenting a balanced and accurate picture of rural Bengal and Bengali life in the book. The superstition has its roots in illiteracy, andit is rooted among the uneducated rural people. During the pre-colonial and colonial periods, rural Bengal was home to many irrational customs like child marriage and *Sati Pratha,* inhuman customs which are rooted in the superstitious life style of Bengal. In this book, *Pather Panchali*, the author presents superstitious practices through the eyes of a child, Apu, rather than giving a straight forward account of them. By illustrating Apu's meeting with Aturi, a so-called witch, masterfully illustrates the impact of superstition on a young boy's thoughts. Believing all the tales about Aturi, an elderly woman, Apu is terrified and fear-stricken at the place.

> Apu went pale. 'Aturi the witch! 'And they had come there just as it was getting dark. Everybody knew the story of the fisherman's son. He went to steal some of her English plums and she caught him. She sucked the spirit out of his body, wrapped it up in leaves, and threw it into the water; and the fish ate it.... Everybody also knew that if she wanted to she could suck a little boy's blood by just looking at him, and then she would let him go. He would not realize at the time that his blood had been sucked, but when he got home and had his dinner and went to bed, he would not be able to get up again... The old woman screwed up her eyes. Her sunken cheeks were quivering. She thrust her face forward to see them better, and then she began to move towards them, one step at a time. Apu knew he was caught. Escape was impossible. She was angry, and for some reason or other it was with

> him. Any minute now she would suck the spirit out of him and wrap it up in leaves. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.135)

The embellishments and cosmetics in the novel serve as symbols of grace and significance among the ladies of *Pather Panchali,* demonstrating the enduring beauty of Bengali culture. With its view into customladen daily life, the novel *Pather Panchali* offers a deep insight into the ordinary and customary life style of chewing betel leaf, which acts as a marker of the culture of rural Bengal.

After a long walk of civilisation, humanity plunged into oblivion, forgetting sublimity, serenity and purity of rural Bengal. We are now sceptical and incredulous towards our modern narratives of life and life style. Besides, postmodernism condition laments the fragmentation, such as a fragmented society, life, culture, and moral values, which looks back to glorify the lives of old values and culture. Harking back into the past, we with utmost import anceenquire about the importance of folks and to revive folk literature which projects the folk Odyssey of rural Bengal in contemporary times. Folk literature kept a particular nation's history, customs and traditions alive for a very long time through its adaptations and appropriations in the literary field. The preservation of traditional norms and rituals is the major goal of folk writings which doesn't only cater the entertainment and aesthetic pleasures. Because of its innate simplicity, folk literature has been successful in preserving historical memory in people's thoughts and emotions. As a folk narrative, *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Road*) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, has made rich past of Bengal more approachable and memorable through the adaptations and appropriations of folk elements such as stories, festivals, folk songs, *Jatras,* ballads, rituals, traditions and customs of rural Bengal. Therefore, folk elements become in this fiction as a source of literary medium to help people from different strata of society to access it for knowledge of an ideal Bengal. In this way, this novel of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, translated as *Song of the Road,* reaches the fragrance from the local to the global level. The novel transports everyone back in time to revisit the simple annals of the glorious past of rural Bengal. In this way, folks are born, live their lives, and eventually embrace death, like the calm flow of a large river. The names change with the passage of time, but families struggle with unforeseen disasters, and parents love their children without conditions. And from this distinct point, *Pather Panchali* is not only an ideal example of folk literature, rather it also heightens human awareness for survival and consciousness of the motto of loss of reality from generation to generation. We, "Like the displaced protagonist Apu, we too are facing a near irreversible destruction of our own homelands, and with it the cultures and ways of life that have sustained our joys and sorrows for centuries. The destruction of the natural environment is a catastrophe that requires no translation." (Gupta, 2019, p. Translation, *Pather Panchali*: Why Translating This Bengali Classic in the 21st Century Holds All-New Challenges).

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