

The Narrative Influence of Mangalkavya in Chitta Sinha's Novels

Abstract

From the very inception of Bengali Literature writing, Indian cultural heritage has been a significant influence on the writers. It is also a source of inspiration for them because the Puranas provided them with varied source materials. As such, the Mangalkavya is one such adaptation of the Puranas. Therefore Mangalkavya reflected the socio-cultural aspects of the pre-colonial as well as ancient period in India. Despite the colonial hangover Bengali Literature has been successful in reiterating its identity through the pre-colonial tradition. In this regard Chitta Sinha's novels are a very important instance of literature deriving its source material and narrative framework from Mangalkavya. The narratives of Chitta Sinha's novel therefore express and represent the quest for self-discovery, socio-economic status, ancient heritage and culture of the ancient period. The narratives therefore create a fusion of the ancient and the modern in its representation.

Keywords: Novel, Mangalkavya, Puranas, Ancient heritage, Narrative, Self-discovery, Indian Culture, pre-colonial, society, Folk culture, Chitta Sinha.



Pallab Kumar Sadhu
Ph.D Research Scholar
Deptt. of Bengali
Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan
West Bengal

Introduction

During the Middle Ages Mangalkavya significantly influenced the literature of the time. Over the years the different aspects of Mangalkavya like the characters, plot, narrative ingredients have been used and employed in different narratives of literature. Therefore it is imperative to note here that Mangalkavya's influence in Bengali literature including Poetry, Short stories and Novel is immense. The narratives of Mangalkavya which were written from 13th century to the 18th century (Manasamangal, Chandimangal, Dharmamangal, Annadamangal) have left an indelible mark on present literature, for this reason those narratives are now more open to analysis and interpretation. Reception of the Mangalkavya varies in the two halves of the 20th century. While on the second half of the 20th century the narratives of Mangalkavya were vigorously followed whereas in the first half the narratives of Mangalkavya were adapted by many authors. These types of composition are Dinesh Chandra Sen's *Behula* (1907) and *Phullora* (1907), Bhudhar Chandra Gangopadhyay's *Khullana ba Marta loke Chandir Puja Prachar* (1910), Haripada Chattopadhyay's *Khullana* (1911), Batokrishna Pal's *Srimanta Saudagor* (1912), Chandrakanta Dutta Saraswati Bidyabhusan's *Kalketu* (1923). In the second half of the 20th century, many novels were written keeping in mind the narratives of Manasamangal, Chandimangal, Dharmamangal, and Annadamangal. Writers like Mahasweta Devi, Tarasankar Bandopadhyay, Chitta Sinha, Narayan Gangopadhyay, Avijit Sen Amiyobhusan Majumdar, Selina Hossain wrote their novels keeping in mind the narratives of Mangalkavya. Although most of these novels were inspired by Mangalkavya, at the very outset these novels have also become unique forms of art.

Aim of the Study

The significance of these texts being inspired by Mangalkavya is also related with the scope and nature of modern Bengali literature. The critic Asru Kumar Sikhdar questions the relevance and emergence of Puranas in modern literature and also questions the tendency to return to these old narratives for inspiration. In this context Asru Kumar Sikhdar argues that modern literature often resorts to old Puranic aspects to reflect and project modern tendencies.¹ For instance the fire trial or Agnipariksha of Sita or the disrobing of Draupadi or the injustice done to Eklavya etc. are used to convey modern the different aspects of the modern situation. George Steener called this "repeatability". Asru Kumar Sikhdar argues:

"Asole puran kothar modhye nihito thake aporishim srijani sambhavana; tar antorgato aloykik upadaanguli bigyan-juktibaader poroborti prosare batil hoye jay bote, kintu tar gurho sanketik dotna haraina. Fole aysob puran kotha saswato bhabe adhunik"²

It can be argued that life truths are inherent in ancient puranas. Maud Bodkin says in this context:

"These ancient stories owe their persistence as traditional material of art to their power expressing or symbolising, and so reliving, typical human emotions"³

The two world wars, the famine of 1943, the riots in 1946 and 1947 significantly hindered the development of India. So it is important and imperative to analyse the pre-colonial period of our existence. The narratives of the Mangalkavya give us an insight into the socio-cultural aspects of those times. The present writers of Bangladesh are also involved in the same manner with the ancient Mangalkavyas. The socio cultural reasons for this tendency are class discrimination, injustice, fight for independence etc. The scholar Syed Akram Hossain says in this context:

"anek upannasik identity r jonno attyo sandhan o satya sandhaner jonno punorai protaborton korechen oytijhho o itihis r kache;... Selina Hossain er Nil mayurer jouban (1983), Chandbene (1984) tatporjopurno"⁴

The novelists of the 20th century have often ventured into exploring the ancient texts like Mangalkavya to identify and rediscover their roots. These are the reason for the above mentioned points.

Chitta Sinha is one of the most important writers who have used narrative aspects from the Mangalkavya. Most noteworthy are his new depictions of character, plot and narrative aspects which though inspired from Mangalkavya, are completely new in their representation. In this regard it has to be mentioned that apart from novel writing, Chitta Sinha has also earned reputation in writing short stories (Dukhochorer kusharam o Onnanyo golpo, sudhonyo o sebarer borsa etc.) as well as poetry (Rajeswari, Bela Jai, Dinolipi, Chalchitro, Akonotho, Baul etc.) and essay writing (Kromonoye Adhopatan o Onnanyo Probandho, kolkatar kuasa etc.). His noteworthy novels are *Natojanu*, *Jatugriha*, *Nisad*, *jalabimbo*, *Ritupatra*, and *Manasamangal* inspired *Behula* (1977), *Chandimangal* inspired two novels – *Baromashya* (1981) and *Pita-Putra* (1982), and Bharatchandra's narrative and character (Iswari Patani) inspired *Iswar Patani* (1976).

Manasamangal's narrative and Chitta Sinha's Behula:

Chitta Sinha wrote *Behula* from 26th may 1976 to 8th april 1977, and it was published in 1977. *Behula* is actually the story of unending quest. The novelist recreates the folk narrative of *Behula* by completely disassociating the supernatural elements and distributes the known legend of *Behula* into 17 chapters with different names.

It is noteworthy that in the entire narrative of the novel the character of *Behula* is at the centre stage of all action. In many instances she is also seen introducing different characters in the novel. The majestic novel is created around *Behula*'s confessions and self-doubt. The novel starts with deep scepticism and questioning. She says:

"Tor cheler kalyan e goto sondher deya roktosidhurer tip rat pohanor agei ke muche diyeche. Cheye dekh nil sindur ar sada chandone kemon jorajori. Athocho amonti kotha chilona"⁵

Behula became a widow on her very first day of marriage. As a mark of widowhood *Behula* is stripped of her vermilion and marked with sandal paste in her forehead. *Behula* had hoped for a bright and happy conjugal life. Therefore, it is after her widowhood that she embarks on a journey to reclaim her lost husband- to reclaim her lost hope. She promises:

"tor cheler ei sundor sadhe j bad sedheche, sei sarponaginer ajor venge ami abar basor sajabo, valobasai soja rangabo, tor cheler basonar agune rongin ami rongerong roktakto hobo"⁶

It is not described to whom she addresses this staunch promise, however, characters like *Sanaka* come into mind. In this regard a critic observes:

"Chitta Sinha's *Behula* (1977) uponyase mongolkavyer bisetos Monosamongol er probhav o proyog lokho kora jai. Chitta Sinha ar *Behula* akaloykik athocho abiram jatrar chironton kahini. Lokhiondor k sape katlo ebong tar pran phire pawar jonno mritodeho k bhelai chapiye suru holo ak duhsahosik jatra. *Behula* suru koreche duhsahosik o aloykik jatrai sei mritonjoyi kono mohot ojhar sandhane; jini pran priyar pran phiriye dite paren"⁷

As the narrative progresses we see that *Behula* starts dreaming of *Lakhinder* and reminiscences of how her female friends playfully teased her. She starts thinking of the moments she had spent anticipating her marriage to *Lakhinder*- like repeatedly drawing the sketch of her unseen would be husband. In a bitter moment of irony she even imagines her boat ride with the dead body of *Lakhinder* as a kind of honeymoon, undisturbed from the noises of worldly affairs. Alternatively she grows more sceptical of her avowed quest to reclaim her husband- she ponders whether the witch doctor will be able to even recognise them.

At the end of the narrative while travelling, we learn that *Behula* suddenly senses the disappearance of her husband's bones which are to be found nowhere, neither in her bosom, nor in her lap or in the dingy. But she again finds solace in the reappearance of the bones in the morning. At last

Behula is amazed to ponder that even after losing everything she is at the ultimate end of her conjugal life. In this manner Behula travels through the Gangur river, in her desperation, she overcomes all the troubles facing her and is able to keep her promise. This is how the narrative of Behula achieves success in relating to the Manasamangal Kavya

Chandimangal's narrative and Chitta Sinha's Baromashya and Pita- Putra

Baromashya (1981) comprises the narratives of kalketu and Phullora. In this narrative of Chandimangal the novelist himself says:

"sabinoye swikar kori, ei gronther kendreyo mangalkavyer kahini sutroy manus. Kali, phuli, chandimangaler kalketu o phullorar adhunik astityo"⁸

This novel not only represents the narratives of kalketu and Phullora but also amply represents the many diverse aspects of modern life. The adverse effects of lack of honesty and complicated thinking is aptly shown in Phuli's tragic ending.

Phullora of Chandimangal is the prime source of influence for this two part novel with the main character as Phullora. The Devi offers Kalketu and phullora kingship to establish herself. The Devi is not present in the novel, however it is replete with people with greed, selfishness, people who cater only to personal interest. Such people are lawyers, clerks, office assistants etc.

"Krome agiye jai sei budhiman manush kortik pata phander dike, jekhane sarbonash sarbograshi, je sarbonasher hat theke bachte, bachate phuli ke manot korte hoi kalo elo chul, ushno buker rokto, joybon dipto sorir amonki akbarer jonne hatdhora amulyo jibon o"⁹

Most the people to whom Phuli went to save her husband, use and abuse and degrade her. The narrative represents the vice of the age in portraying such characters (lawyers, clerks etc.) in the 12th chapter of the novel. In representation the novel deviates from the original. Here there is no poverty in the life of kali and phuli. Chitta Sinha's Phuli is not scantily clad, rather she is modern woman.

"mochor diye kapur pora, nai dekhaye dhong, anchol gorano kotha sob akhon ropto...se match kora bojhe komor bhanga cholon bojhe amonki shampoo korao"¹⁰

The profession of kali and phuli is also changed from the original. kali goes to the Nurpurhaat, and kali has cordial relations with anna, kali and phuli's relationship is not at all single dimensional in its extent- phuli has relation with anna as well. The transformation in kali, due to his greed, is so intense that even phuli finds him a stranger. This is how the narrative is changed from the original.

Pita-putra (1982) is divided into four parts- Bhubaner kahini, Dhanopati upakhan, Pitri aneswane srimanto, and Srimanter antim matri sammodhan. The novelist mentions the trading Bengali community of

colonial Bengal in the introduction part of the novel. In this context the novelist mentions:

"ei grontho puraner assposto chaya ache; bises kore dhanopati o simanta name o abhijane. Puran protimar amon beboharer karon sikor samporke uske dewar jonnoi"¹¹

In the first part of the novel Bhuban is a father with dreams. He thinks that his son will become a big trader who was once a son of the poor fisherman. His ship would fly across the oceans, he would roam the whole world and trade will flourish as he would become a rich and prosperous man.

In the second part of the novel the son Dhanopati embarks on the journey to fulfil the dream of his father. Dhanopati had dreamed of a big trading ship. Before going he instructs his wife to take good care of their son Srimanta. In the third part, Srimanta being an infant had seen his father for only a year, however in the original Chandimangal Dhanopati leaves his wife while she is pregnant for six months.¹² In the fourth part it is shown that how srimanta had to face many questions regarding the whereabouts of his long gone father. In this context the father and son did not meet in the court of Salibahan King (Sinhala). He searches for his father even in the prostitute quarters. While searching he meets Subala, Bhavsindhu Manna, Bilasbabu, Radharamanbabu etc. in this regard Srimanta believes:

"ami iti modhe bujhiyachi tahara sombhranto ghorer kono grihini nohen, tahara bajori romoni matro orthat barbonita"¹³

This novel shows the landlords of 19th century and also the love for mistresses. In one instance, Dhanopati being inebriated sleeps with one prostitute. Chandimangal's original representation of Dhanopati is much less degrading. The critic Barnik Roy is of the view that the Dhanopati-srimanta tale of chandimangal though have some similarities with this novel, srimanta fails to discover his father. In the novel the absence of supernaturalism, the father son separation happens. Srimanta does not wish to return to his mother after knowing the true identity of his father. His self-discovery reveals that although he is the son of his father but still it is a father who is perverted and demented. This is a major deviation from chandimangal where Srimanta did discover his father.

The Narrative of Annada Mangal and Chitta Sinha's iswar Patani

Iswar Patani (oct, 1976), including 11 chapters, was written by Chitta Sinha being inspired by Bharatchandri's Annadamangal kavya's first part named Anandamangal or Annapurnamangal:

"Iswar Patanir kahini sutrer jonno ami kobi sresto Ray gunakar bharchandrer kavya rini. Choritter proyojone tar asamanyo pad samohar samanyo paribartan nischayi

sahridoy pathak pathikar khoma pabe”¹⁴

The novel is divided into two parts- the first part includes six chapters, which tell us about the lineage and profession and hobby of the ancestors and the sickness of iswar. The second part is divided into two sections- ak kuasa nibir chandralokeand majh gange daha which tells us about the conversation with young and beautiful housewife, this is taken from annadamangal’s annadar bhabanando bhabone jatra. Chitta Sinha’s depiction makes Iswar more human in its extent, with all types of human frivolities.

Iswar is plagued by different family problems. Some people even started criticising iswar’s family problem, even to the extent of deeming his third daughter as a prostitute. Iswar finds himself in despair but still believes in God. He wishes his son to be a good boatman who would one day bring a golden boat. Iswar believes nobody understands him. Iswar faces a lot of financial crisis in his daily affairs but still he prays for his children.

“toder pet vorle, mon vorle amar sukh, amar santi. Ami r kisshu to chaine. Akinkhe kohrine. Kisshuna. sudhu chai tora sukhe thak, valo thak, santite thak”¹⁵

Once he meets a young and beautiful housewife, who in her divine majesty and dark glorious hair, red vermillion clad forehead, the epitome of divinity itself, converses with iswar. Iswar enquires about the husband of the graceful housewife and her destination. She responds by saying that out of customary beliefs she could not name her husband but she does describe about her husband:

“apon bhola, loke dake pagla, nitti dolbedhe ganja bhang khai, heta hotha pori thake, mon chai to ghore phere noile edik sedik ghore”¹⁶

This is a clear reference to lord Shiva. In Annadamangal we find that:

“bishesone sobises kohibare pari/ janaho swamir nam nahi dhore nari/ati boro bridho pati sidhite nipun/kono gun nai tar kopale agun”¹⁷

Iswar elaborates on the poor economic condition of the family. When the young housewife steps on the wooden plank, it turns into gold. ChittaSinha says:

“seutite podo jora rakhite rakhit/ seuti hoilo sona dekhite dekhite” (p 73)

However, Iswar humbly refuses the pleasures of being rich. He sees “Sonarajar Dhibi” or “Ketusonar Garh” has no prospect left. So he throws away the golden plank. He rather asks the housewife to grant him the wish of keeping his children in prosperity

“dibi Jodi mago, Jodi sotti dibi, tobe ei kotha de, amar santan jeno thake dude bhate”¹⁸

This novel concludes with the representation of Iswarpatni not only as a selfless responsible father but also as a humble and honest human being.

Review of Literature

The inclination of using the references of the Mangalkavya narratives in the Bengali novels is not too old. Especially in the 20th century it has been more frequent and in the 21st century it is endowed with the new subject matters and is formed in a maganimous style. Though there are some previous general discussion and criticisms on this newer interest of the Bengali novel no well constructed and witty analysis is found till now. Almost these previous illuminations some notable works are : the essay *Bare Bare Champaknagar* by Ashru kumar Sikhdar published in the *Desh Patrika* (6th september, 1997), *Mangalkavya O Adhunik Upanyas* by Prasun Ghosh published in the *Visva-BharatiPatrika* (January-March, 2007), *Vraman brityanta, Upakhyan Noy* by Harsha Dutta, published in the *Desh Patrika* (2nd May, 2013). It has highlighted the novel *Dhanapatir Singhalyatra* by Ramkumar Mukhopadhyaya, *Upanyase Mangalkavya: Pragadhunik Bonam Adhunik* by Roshni Biswas, brought out in *Antarmukh* magazine (October-December, 2014)

Again it goes without say that two previously written articles have already given a glimpse of the elementary research on Mangalkavya based Chitta Sinha’s novels. This article are as followed *Upanyaser Praturipe Manasamangal: Nirman O Binirman* by Jahar SenMazumdar and *Bangla Upanyase Myth Puran* by PrasunMajhi. Both of these works are done from a particular point of view and gives rather a partial documentation. Therefore ChittaSinha’s novels based on the Mangalkavya narrative demands a proper minute and analytic research.

Conclusion

The seclusion of the Bengali novel from European influence was initiated by Mahashweta Devi, Tarasankar Bandopadhyay, Debesh Roy and others. From that point onwards, Indian folktales started to influence the narratives of novel writing. In this regard, MangalKavya became areliable and versatile source of inspiration for many writers. Hence we see that the characters and themes of the MangalKavya are imitated in writings of modern times. Chitta sinha’s four novels are a glowing instance of such inspired writing.

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Footnotes

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