

Social Picture and Livelihood of the Boatmen in Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi*¹: An Ecocritical Study

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Received: April 8, 2018

Accepted: April 30, 2018

Available online: May 18, 2018

doi:10.11114/ijsss.v6i6.3287

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v6i6.3287>

Abstract

According to litterateurs, literature is the reflection of social picture and human life. In this sense, it can be expressed that Ecology, Society, and Life are deeply interconnected each other. With the passage of time, ecological and social life is dealt with literature through which happiness and sorrow, - laughter, sob, and complexity of human life get entangled in a single thread. In the justice of literature, the balance of woe is much more than that of weal in human life. Manik Bandopadhyay was a radical minded litterateur of his times. His treatment of human life and humanity for the poor of the poorest is purely and acutely presented in his literary genres. The core philosophy of human life makes the novelist a universal thinker and legendary figure for all ages. He has observed human life and literature as an essential part of environment. Keeping touch in contact with environment, each and every male and female character of the novelist has enabled to accept the reality of life. Manik's globally well-reputed novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, is the glaring example of reality of human life. In the context of ecology, this novel is the embodiment of pessimistic attitudes of the middle class society and the subaltern of 20th-century riverine country, like Bangladesh. Kuber, Kopila, and Hossen Miah are the central characters of the whole realistic novel, who are the symbol of reality of life. Thus the writer has apparently presented the pitiable and miserable condition of the boatmen who live very near by the bank of the Mighty Padma. All boatmen have to rely upon the mercy of the Padma; sometimes the mighty river grasps and devours the lives of the poor communities when the tidal waves blow during the rainy season. The 20th-century novelist has unveiled the neglected, helpless, and, above all, the deprived communities of basic human demands as reflected in the novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*. In the novel, Manik wants to emphasize upon the fact that nobody comes to write their history. 'They have to sweat on the dust of the way all the day and night.'—The writer has drawn a grim image of weal and woe, - sniffles and sobs- and sorrow and happiness of the middle class downtrodden people of the age. In fact, he has focused upon the livelihood of boatmen as well as fishermen with his own sympathy and affection with a view to signifying his contemporary social system as well as life-structure of the poor. For life and livelihood, all boatmen have to endure all sorts of complexities of life through living in the darkness of ecology. They hardly hope to see the radiant future of life, because they are victim of environment and circumstance. As a social reformer and an observer of human life, Manik has enabled to find out the environmental perfect image of the boatmen to 21st-century audiences. For this purpose, this study would like to examine social picture, environmental crisis, and complexities of human life in the light of literary judgment. It aims to look at the origin of ecocriticism, the theoretical framework of ecocriticism made by very recent critics and scholars. There is a bond between environment and literature as briefly discussed in this study. It attempts to look at Manik as a social and environmental novelist. Finally, it would like to shed a new light upon 20th-century social picture and livelihood of boatmen and fishermen of the Mighty Padma.

Keywords: ecology and literature, Ecocriticism, social picture, livelihood, Manik Bandopadhyay, and Padma Nadir Majhi

1. Introduction

According to litterateurs and literary critics, literature is the reflection of social picture and human life. Environment, Society, and Human Life are deeply interlinked each other. For ages and centuries, environment and social system has

¹The English Translation of *Padma Nadir Majhi* is *-The Boatman of A Mighty Padma*.

been dealing with literature, where happiness and sorrow, laughter, sob, and complexity of human life get hung in a circle. In the justice of literature, the balance of woe is much more than that of weal in social life. Manik Bandopadhyay was a litterateur of 20th-century Bengal. His treatment of human life and humanity for the poor of the poorest is faithfully represented in his literary genres. The core philosophy of human life makes the novelist a universal thinker and legendary figure of the age. He has acutely observed human life, social system, and literature as an essential part of environment. Keeping touch in contact with environment, all the major and non-major characters of the controversial novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, has accepted the reality of life. They can never imagine of their existence without pessimism. It seems to the audience that poverty and ill-fate is their constant company. They are deprived of future hope and light; they lead their life style living in the shabby cottages near the riverside. Manik's well-known novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, is the glaring example of reality of human life. In the context of environment, this novel is the embodiment of pessimistic attitudes of the underprivileged society and the subaltern of the 20th-century riverine country, like Bangladesh. Kuber, Kopila, and Hossen Miah are the central characters of the realistic novel. The novelist has clearly represented the pitiable and miserable existence of the boatmen and fishermen of the Mighty Padma. All boatmen have to rely upon the mercy of the Padma; sometimes the mighty river grasps and devours the lives of the poor communities when the tidal waves blow during the rainy season. The 20th-century novelist has unveiled the neglected, helpless, downtrodden, and, above all, the deprived communities of basic human demands of the age. In this novel, Manik would like to emphasize upon the fact that nobody comes to write their history. 'They have to sweat on the dust of the street all the day and night.'—The writer has drawn a faithful picture of weal and woe, - snuffles and sobs- and sorrow and happiness of the middle class deprived communities of his age. In fact, he has focused upon the livelihood of boatmen with his own sympathy and affection with a view to signifying his contemporary social system as well as life-structure of the boatmen. For life and livelihood, all boatmen have to endure all sorts of complexities of life, living in the darkness of environmental circumstances. They hardly hope to see the radiant future of expectation, because they are victim of environmental crisis as well as born-poverty. As a social reformer and a minute observer of human life and social system, Manik has enabled to draw a light upon the ecological grim truth of the boatmen to 21st-century audiences.

For this purpose, this study would like to examine social picture, environmental crisis, and complexities of human life in the light of literary sense. It aims to look at the origin of ecocriticism, the theoretical framework of ecocriticism made by recent critics and scholars. There is a bond between environment and literature as briefly discussed in this study. It attempts to look at Manik Bandopadhyay as a social reformer and novelist. Finally, it would like to shed a new light upon 20th-century social picture and livelihood of boatmen and fishermen of the Mighty Padma.

2. Origin of Ecocriticism

Though the term 'Ecocriticism' is a very recent theory, it is difficult to ascertain the exact definition and explication of ecocriticism. Many critics, scholars, and researchers are now trying heart and soul to examine the theory, ecocriticism in the light of literature, linguistics, humanities, and social sciences around the world. Many research organizations are also carrying out scientific research projects through applying the critical analysis of ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism has spread as a useful by-product of the raise in ecological balance brought about during the 1960's, especially in the United States of America. Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1962) is regarded as an epoch making creation in the birth of modern ecocriticism. It was neither the only nor the first book on the matter, that had been contradicted for the decades before the American biologist and writer caught the attention of the public with her literary genre on the harmful and indiscriminate utilization of pesticides, which was creating harmful effect upon ecology, human life, and animal planet. Whereas the book could have been given more priority than it has, its tremendous influence on the public manifesto, which raised a criticism, contradiction, and enthusiastic support, was caused on the one hand by the economic interests of the chemical industry and of large-scale intensive agriculture, and, on the other hand, by getting popularized in USA. (Alias, 2011, p.16)

The representation of nature in literary work, the relationship between literature and ecology, an investigation of underlying ecological values and the human perception of environment are manifested on ecocriticism. Cheryll Glottfelty, one of the pioneers of the literary theory, defines ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. But, the credit goes to William Rueckert because the term 'Ecocriticism' was coined by him in 1978 in his essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," where he drew a new light upon ecology and literature and fascinated human minds. Ecologists, writers, critics, and scholars have been publishing books and research projects on ecocriticism since the late 1960s and 1970s. Scholars and critics began to work collaboratively in the mid-1980s to establish ecocriticism as a powerful literary genre through Western Literature Association, South Asian Literary Association, African Literary Association, Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment and other branches of Literary Research Associations around the globe.

Nature and human life are closely interconnected each other that it is unimaginable for human beings to detach themselves

from its impact. This study would like to examine that Ecocriticism shifts critical focus from social relation towards natural relationship and views the individual as a member of ecosystem. Ecocriticism not only investigates nature in literature, but indicates a velocity of life towards a bio-centric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human concept of global community to include non-human life forms and physical environment. The ultimate aim of ecocriticism is to find out the moral implications of human interaction with nature. (Mukhtar, 2017, p. 315)

According to Mukhtar (2017), ecocriticism is an umbrella term applied to refer to the environmentally oriented study of literature and art, and theories that determine a critical conscience. It is a new critical investigation available to critics and scholars to find out the innovation and potentiality of literature. It is dealt with nature and ecological issues in the global literature. It focuses on ecological problems like pollution, global warming, climate change, deforestation, species extinction and other ecological exploitations and imbalances throughout the world. It is associated with the desire to unveil and answer the current environmental questions. It is the study of literature and ecology from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences and humanities come together to explore environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the reformation and re-modification of the contemporary environmental problems. (p.315)

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literary scholars and critics analyse the texts that illustrate ecological questions and observe the different situations where literature treats the subject of nature. In the United States of America, ecocriticism is associated with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), which hosts biennial meetings for scholars who are devoted to environmental matters in literature. ASLE publishes a journal—Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE) in which current international scholarship can be found. (Wikipedia) Also, FSLE-India, The Foundation for the Study of Literature and Environment organizes international conferences and publishes research papers and thesis on Literature and Ecocriticism from different cores of philosophy in the 21st –century age.

3. Theoretical Investigation of Ecocriticism

The word *Ecocriticism* is a Semineologism.² *Eco* is a short form of *Ecology*, which is based on the relationship between living organisms in the natural environment. By analogical point of view, ecocriticism is connected with the relationship between literature and environment, or how human relationship with physical environment is being reflected in literature. These are certainly interdisciplinary studies as a mixture of natural science and human discipline. (Tosic, 2006, p.44)

In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm would like to explore the emergence of a new type of literary criticism, which is based on ecocriticism. Both Glotfelty and Froman comment that ecocriticism attempts to look at the transformation of literary studies through combining literary criticism and theory with the ecological aspects in a broader sense. This theory launches a call to literature to connect to the issues of today's environmental crisis and complexities. The book, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), also outlines the genesis of the literary response to environmentalism, which existed, only it never constituted a unified and identifiable front, but consisted of isolated articles and essays, as Glotfelty explains in her "Introduction." (Glotfelty, 1996, pp. xvi-xvii) But this epoch making creation wants to represent the definition of literary environmental studies as well as a path to an answer to the question that Glotfelty herself had posed some years ago: "How can we, as literary critics, respond to the environmental crisis?" (Todd, 1998, p.15) She became the first Professor of a class called "Literature and the Environment" at the University of Reno, Nevada, a class that began to familiarize in the American Universities. (Alias, 2011, p.18)

According to Buell and other ecological critics jointly argue that Literature and Environment Studies are popularly known as "Ecocriticism" or "Environmental Criticism" in an analogy to the term literary criticism—comprise an eclectic, pluriform, and cross-disciplinary initiative that aims to investigate the environmental dimensions of literature and other creative media in a spirit of environmental question not limited to any one scientific approach or commitment. Ecocriticism emerges from a conviction that the arts of fancy and the study by dint of their grasp of the power of word, phrase, tale, and image to reinforce, enliven, and direct environmental question—can contribute more importantly to the major concerns of environmental challenges, like the multiple forms of eco-devastation that impact upon the current globe. Ecocriticism focuses on the aspects of environmental humanities, like ethics, history, religious studies, anthropology, and humanistic geography. Environmental phenomena must be realized; and the prevailing burgeoning array of environmental questions must be identified in the qualitative and quantitative point of approaches. Moreover, a modern poet, like W.H. Auden comments, "poetry makes nothing happen" in itself, the outside-the-box thought investigations of literature and other media can offer unique resources to activate concern and creative knowledge concerning the global environmental prediction. Creative reflections of environmental debris are unlikely to get society

²Buell 1091.

rid of human lifestyle, relying on radically transforming ecosystem. (Buell et al. 2011, p. 418)

Ecocriticism's relationship to the natural sciences has always been extraordinarily ambivalent. Ecocritics and environmental specialists depend on the insights of biologists, ecologists, and chemists as the basis for their claims about the state of nature, and research findings from the natural sciences provide much of the social legitimation for efforts on behalf of conservation. But some ecocritics would like to observe science and technology as the root causes of ecological crisis, both in reducing nature to a mere object to be studied and manipulated by a detached observer, and in amplifying people's ability to inflict damage on nature. As a result, ecocritical investigation has argued for a wide range of discrepant contexts regarding the role of the natural sciences in the cultural inquiries. (p.422)

In the article, *The Indian Review of World Literature in English*, a young scholar namely Shikha writes that Ecocriticism focuses upon not only the application of ecology and ecological dictums to the study of literature, but also the theoretical approach to the web of natural-cultural and supernatural phenomena. It would like to examine the structure of environment in literary genres and theoretical discourse. Since literature has always conditioned human philosophical ideology of nature and environment. Even the aesthetic arts by which our passion and emotion for nature are understood the beautiful, the picturesque, the scenic, the sublime, the wild etc. have been identified by their application in the literary and critical perspectives. Most ecological aspects share a common motivation, like awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life-support system. This awareness makes us desirable to contribute to environmental restoration, not only as a hobby but as a representative of literature. Ecocritics encourage people to think seriously about the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis and about how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications. Arthur Lovejoy's contribution in ecology is also remarkable. He observes that one of the strangest, most potent and most persistent factors in the western thoughts is the use of the term 'nature' to express the standard of human values and the identification which is natural. (Lovejoy, p.3)

In other words, ecocriticism is directly concerned with both natural landscape and environment. But the attempt to synthesize natural phenomena with literary criticism raises conceptual problems, because ecology itself is an abstract concept that emerged in a historical process of academic formation. Depending on the ontological argument of ecology where everything is connected to everything else, ecocriticism wants to investigate what John Bennet comments, "a multi-organismic concept." To create "an image or idea of holistic entity and then, treat that image as a real entity: Environment, 'human ecology', Gaia or the organismic Earth, the universe, God." (Bennet, pp.1996, 356-357) Cheryll Glotfelty, in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, writes regarding Ecocriticism:

What is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocritics takes an earth centred approach to literary studies. (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix)

On the other hand, Richard Kerridge's argument of ecocriticism in *Writing the Environment*, shows the same remarks what Glotfelty does, but with an innovative emphasis on culture. Kerridge opines:

The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in trends of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. (Kerridge, 1998, p.5)

From the critical comments made by Kerridge and Glotfelty it is proved that ecocriticism is based on literature and physical environment, textual analysis in the light of environmental crisis and cultural issues.

Ecocritics and scholars had to wait until the 1990's to observe an official and a direct response from the literary academic community to the environmental debate. It came in a double form. In 1995, a renowned Harvard scholar and Professor Lawrence Buell, with his long time experience of study on Thoreau and the Transcendentalist Movement, authored a book on *The Environmental Imagination*, which represents the marginal genre of nature writing within the scope of mainstream and canonical American Literature. His work represents a thorough as well as in-depth study of nature writing, identified as an essentially American genre, but it also exposes a critical reflection on the way in which environment has been and still is exposed and reflected in literature. What he wants to mean is to focus upon the object and subject of ecocriticism. (Alias, 2011, p.17) In fact, the theory, Ecocriticism is based upon literary studies, environment, science and technology, social sciences, and humanities. In the 21st –century age, many critics, scholars, litterateurs, academicians, scientists, and researchers are very much devoted to investigating the new aspects of ecocriticism in the light of different branches of epistemology.

4. Environment and Literature

Literature can be regarded as an essential part of environment since it signifies the mystery of human constructions, including- meaning, value, language, and fancy, which can be dealt with the crisis of ecological consciousness that humans would like to acquire. Within this dictum, ecocritics are concerned with how literature transmits values contributing to ecological concept. They state that environmental crisis is a question that cannot be overlooked in literary studies. Ecocritical approach is one that aims to transcend the duality of art and life, human and nature, and to work with the principles of interconnection between man and nature. Founding an ethical and aesthetic framework towards a potential understanding of both literature and ecology has a similarity between them. In this sense, ecocriticism poses a unique combination of literary, scientific, ecological, and philosophical issues.

There is a close bond between environment and literature. This bond has been reflected through the litterateurs' thoughts and ideas, which are deeply rooted with society, culture, and ecology in the world around. A wide variety of literary genres, such as- novel, fiction, play, poem, story, treatise, and essay have been reflected in the backdrop of environmental issues. Today, environmental crises have become a matter of major concern for many departments and disciplines of the global institutions and research associations. It is an interesting matter for a literary thinker to investigate the texts of the authors who have examined the close bond between man and environment. Ecology and ecocriticism have become important terms in the 21st -century literary realm. Many authors have drawn a new light upon thought and ideology with a view to finding out a potential aspect of ecology and literature.

In 1993, Patrick Murphy founded a potential journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, to “provide a forum for critical studies of the literary and performing arts proceeding from or addressing environmental considerations. These would include ecological theory, environmentalism, conceptions of nature and their depictions, the human/ nature dichotomy and related concerns.”(Glottfelty, 1996, p. xviii) This journal is the most powerful weapon of ecocriticism in the globe around to spread a web of literature and ecology. Its journey is on the increase day by day in the literary fields. While ecocritics investigate literary studies written throughout history and unveil its bond to environment, most of scholarships have now emphasized upon American and British Literature from the 19th and 20th -centuries. Peter Barry, in an essay, “Ecocriticism” in *The Beginning Theory*, comments that Ecocriticism began in the United States of America in the late 1980s and as Green Study in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s. Ecocriticism in the United States of America took its literary bearings from the 19th -century American writers whose work celebrated nature and the wilderness as manifested in America. (Mukhtar, 2017, p.318) Michael P. Branch, in the collection entitled *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment* (1998), writes:

Ecocriticism is not just a meaning of analysing nature in literature; it implies a move towards a more bio-centric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human's conception of global community to include non-human life forms and the physical environment. Just as feminist and African American literary criticism call for a change in culture-that is, they attempt to move the culture towards a broader world-view by exposing an earlier narrowness of view-so too does ecological literary criticism advocate for cultural change by examining how the narrowness of our culture's assumptions about the natural world has limited our ability to envision an ecologically sustainable human society. (p. xiii)

Environment and its issues connecting to literary criticism prove to be an enhancing process to literary studies. Contemporary novels make use of parallel paradigm between environment and literature which depict a detailed critical investigation and evaluation in terms of interdisciplinary studies of ecocriticism. As ecological theorists make a call for an inward transformation in humanities; literary theorists cannot ignore the presence of interconnection between nature and man, particularly in the fact that natural dimension of literature is influenced by environmental complexity. So, a new vision is shaping itself among the theorists, which permits negotiations between man and nature as an inseparable part. As the environmental philosophers, like Bill Devall and George Sessions explicate that the process requires the acceptance of a new vision and a new realization: “But the deep ecological sense of self requires a maturity and growth, an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the non-human world.” (Devall, 1985, p.65)

In fact, literature is deeply connected to environment. Many litterateurs have expressed their views that literature is a reflection of human life, society, culture, community, circumstances, and above all, environment. No literature can be written without environmental issues. For ages, man has been trying to find out a basic bond between literature and environment. The influence of environment has been reflected in literature. In this way, there has established a close relationship between literature and environment, like man and nature on earth.

5. Evaluation of Ecocriticism in the 21st –century Age Perspective

With the passage of time the evaluation and acceptance of a recent theory, “Ecocriticism” is getting popularized and familiarized among teachers, students, research scholars, critics, supervisors, litterateurs, ecologists, and scientists around the world. Such types of research circles are always devoted to find out a potential and an innovative aspect of

ecocriticism through carrying out their scientific research projects in the light of qualitative and quantitative method. They aim to look at the investigation of different branches of epistemology through applying the critical theory of ecocriticism. In this regard, I can mention a globally well-reputed journal, *ISLE-Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, which focuses upon the new aspects of literature and ecology in the 21st-century perspectives. In fact, the aim of this journal is to make the postmodern audiences aware of environmental crisis so that they can be more conscious and careful of ecology. It also would like to make us inspire that ecological issues would be minutely reflected in the Global Literature. We all know that the whole world is getting warmer due to the drastic climate change. As a result, our lives on earth have been in very dangerous situation. Besides these, it is frequently seen that almost all the year round natural calamity is happening frequently and our ecology faces a turbulent and devastating complexity. Now it is time for all of us to create awareness among the global peoples so that they must take pragmatic steps to save our literature and ecology with their concerted efforts without making any delay.

Love and affection towards literature and environment has a long history that we cannot describe in words and language. Many poets, dramatists, and especially, novelists are very much devoted to environment and literature. They always try utmost to show the potentiality and innovation of the theory, ecocriticism through their literary images. It is very interesting to note that many young students, research scholars, and teachers are showing their profound interest towards ecocriticism that we can observe in our scientific research projects, thesis, and scholarly writings in the universities of our time.

Though the theory, ecocriticism, was originated in the United States of America, but now its demand and popularity are spreading throughout the globe. The votaries of ecocriticism always try to deconstruct this theory in a wide variety of critical and creative approaches. For example, we can mention an Indian Literary Research Association, like, *FSLE-The Foundation for the Study of Literature and Environment*. *FSLE* is playing a dominant role to focus upon ecology and literature among the South Asian Nations. We cannot at all deny the importance of this research association. Its aim is to organize seminar, symposium, mini talks, and above all, international conference so that our novice researchers get much pleasure and inspiration towards environment and literature. Not only that, the duty and responsibility of *FSLE* is much more than we think in this sense that each and every research scholar and young teacher can be able to carry out their research project through getting financial supports from this research institute. To fulfil this noble mission, the *FSLE* would come forward to establishing its own identity and fulfilling the demand of today's fans of ecocriticism. Since the evaluation of ecocriticism is getting on the increase day by day, the renowned academicians should teach the novice researchers research methodologies in order that they can be able to apply any theories, including ecocriticism in the philological fields subtly.

In the Bangladesh perspectives, it seems to me that we are still now far away from the theory, ecocriticism, because we haven't realized the depth of this theory yet; for this, we should concentrate ourselves upon environment and literature. A definition may be clarified in this sense: Literature is a criticism of human life, which is based upon society, culture, and ecology. Literature is written through environment and circumstances; there must have a deep relationship between literature and environment since environmental questions are reflected in literature. If a writer wants to meditate himself to literary writings, he must cope with his contemporary environment; otherwise it would be difficult for him to unveil the real picture of ecology. Reading literature, it becomes apparent to us that most of litterateurs have tried to highlight his contemporary environment in his literary works. Anyway, through literary meditation, we will have to go into the deeper sense of ecocriticism, where there would have an intersection between literature and environment. Then it might be feasible for the 21st-century audience to evaluate the inner meaning as well as signification of ecocriticism properly.

6. Manik Bandopadhyay as a Modern Novelist

Manik Bandopadhyay (1808-1956) was a Bengali novelist and is regarded as one of the most leading litterateurs of modern Bengali fiction.

Shortly after making his debut in the realm of philology in 1935 through a short story, *Atashi Mami (Linseed Aunt)*, Manik was devoted himself to writing fiction. Publication of *Diba-Ratrir Kabya/A Poem of Day-Night* (1935) and *Padma Nadir Majhi/The Boatman of A Mighty Padma* and *Putul Nacher Itikotha/The Final Speech of Puppets-show* (1936) distinguished the writer as the most reputable novelist in the Bengali Literature since Bankimchandra, Rabindranath and Saratchandra. He established himself with focus on the ordinary rural and urban settings, livelihood of the common man and woman with colloquial style and with a common narrative technique. He was a great storyteller who perfected his fiction with his inner philosophy into human mind.

Manik's literary work was influenced by both Marxian philosophy as well as Freudian philosophy, which are quite different in natural settings. His writing stands in stark contrast to that of other contemporary influential writers, like Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay who represented human life in rural Bengal in a gentle and lyrical insight. Though he had some common similarities with Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, he distinguished himself with profound and rational

investigation of the lives of the ordinary people of the age. His writing depicted the pitiable condition and miserable existence in the light of rural Bengal. His primary concern was to look at the dark alleyways of human mind, even among the supposedly simple pastoral lives, and not the serene and calm beautiful nature, like William Wordsworth, that was always in the background in his literary career.

Since early period of life, Manik had to struggle with poverty and epilepsy. The symptom of epilepsy first surfaced when he was involved in writing *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *Putul Nacher Itikatha*. The novelist continued and unabated ailment, problems and crises ruined his psychology and philosophical thoughts. Eventually, he resorted to alcohol for respite, adding to his misery.

Manik was a radical minded as well as realistic litterateur. Realism and radicalism were clearly observed in his literary works; his core philosophy of life was also manifested in his fiction. Manliness as well as humanism was clearly grounded in his writings. After the World War II, in the socio-economic, political, and national life of Bangladesh, directly and indirectly ups and downs of human life have been reflected in his fiction. He was one of the greatest dutiful literary representatives and the most powerful literary artists of Bangladesh. A contemporary Bengali literary critic comments:

He was a successful literary artist of Bengali Literature in this sense that he had enabled to represent the tragic events of the-then middle class and the lower middle class society, which was cruel, truthful and practical; no writer of Bengal was equal to Manik. Loss of the middle class and downtrodden people, degradation of humanity, depression and melancholy were tragically reflected in his novels. Though Manik Bandopadhyay was a radical minded writer, but he was honest and ideal artist. (Jalaluddin , 2011, p. 22) [My Translation]

Analysing the literary criticism of Manik Bandopadhyay, Dr. Kazi Deen Muhammad comments that Manik had achieved a remarkable reputation of his contemporary writers. He represented the mysterious truth of human life in his fiction. He was a writer of metaphor and simile, while he had connected with human character; he simply indicated in a very intelligent manner, like Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*; desire for sexual attraction also was placed in his fiction very minutely. Another prominent Bengali literary critic, Narayan Chowdhury wrote that his realistic attitude had detached him from art and life. Even in the middle and later part of his life, it was not untrue to say that he was subconsciously a worshipper of ugliness.

Manik was a social and environmental critic of his times. He very minutely drew a new light upon environmental crisis in his literary works. Human life is victim of environment and social circumstances; this grim truth the modern novelist has pragmatized in his famous novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*. Hayat Mamud comments: "He has written his literary genres with focus on environment and life; this truth is always praiseworthy to us." (Mannan, p.250) [My Translation] His life was very optimistic and painful; he never enjoyed a happier and romantic life. Mamud also argues: "Being defeated in life, exhausted, deprived of joy, happiness, and shelter, he never compromised for any purpose within a short spun of 48 years. There is no alternative way to respect this novelist in this sense that he unveiled the frailty of Bengalese characters very purely and minutely." (p.251) [My Translation]

Manik willingly accepted poverty lagging happiness and joy behind. He would love the poor of the poorest that we can see his proof in the fiction, like *Padma Nadir Majhi*, he tried to universalise human pessimism; and the poorest people were born in such an environment, where there were no hope and light of life; there were depression, melancholy, and misery. He very nearly came in touch with the poor communities; and he got mixed with them and tried to understand their social system like a guidance and decision-maker of the family; and then he brought their everyday occurrences in his own fiction. He was a real observer of ecology and situation; he left his evidence in his writings.

In the novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, I would like to investigate ecological crisis and social system of the boatmen of the mighty river Padma; they have no home, no shelter, and no food. In fact, they are totally deprived of basic human needs. We are told that nobody comes to write their history. They are the poor of the poorest in their ecology, in the poor environment, with great hardship; they have to lead their livelihood depending upon the mercy of the mighty Padma. The river snatches many poor and innocent lives away almost all the year round while they are gone into the deep river with a view to catching fish. Thus, our legendary novelist, Manik Bandopadhyay has brought before us the "Social Picture and Livelihood of Boatmen" in his novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*.

Now I would like to let you know how "Social Picture and Livelihood of the Boatmen" have been reflected in the novel *Padma Nadir Majhi*. Analysing the two terms, like Social Picture and Livelihood in the light of the novel, this study aims to look at the poor community of the 20th-century Bengal; it attempts to look at the environmental crisis of the age, analysing some powerful characters of the novel. It mainly focuses upon the abode of the fishermen of the mighty Padma. It is very important to note that there is a deep bond between human life and the river. The people below the poverty line, who live beside the river and the ocean, rely upon the mercy of the nature though sometimes they have to fall victim of natural calamity, especially during the rainy season. The boatmen and fishermen of the river Padma have to accept the same fate.

7. Social Picture

Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi* (1936) is regarded as one of the most readable, translated, and controversial novels in the history of Bengali Literature. The Freudian Philosophy as well as the Socio-economic aspects of the livelihood of the boatmen living very nearly beside the mighty Padama has occupied a remarkable place in this discussion and criticism. The novelist has exposed the practical social picture of the poor community in his novel. Kuber, Kopila, and Hossen Majhi are undoubtedly the most powerful characters; and the text has been written based upon these central characters. But concerning society and human life, Manik Bandopadhyay's ideology is much more acute, subtle, vast, and inner sighted. If we analyse the characteristics of some major characters, we can examine the social system of Manik's age. The novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, is the symbol of sexuality, selfishness, and demon, through which the writer has presented the social dreadful image of the boatmen.

A minimum socio-economic system is necessary for human morality as well as ideal balance. Life and livelihood, which has been presented in the novel, has crossed the minimum limit of socio-economic plight; and poverty has occupied a special place. In Bangladesh context, the poverty of the boatmen is not a drastic event, for which human psychological complexity would bring about a dangerous situation, and each character would be abnormal. Therefore, abnormality has not devoured the boatmen; rather they are habituated to accept the environmental crisis. In that ecological complexity, human conscience, natural instincts, and morality remain inactive. In the novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, there is no abnormality of man and woman, but there exists a beastly nature, Humayun Kabir, a well-known Bengali literary critic of Bangladesh, regards them as "Sub-human." To become a man, the comment of Gilbert Highet is very acceptable: "Thinking, learning, remembering, knowing, imagining, and creating new ideas; preserving, and communicating knowledge over distance in time and space. Not only, is it wonderful in its compass and variety: it is unique. It makes us human." (Mannan, p.332)

In the novel, no character is a part of society in this sense that through the character we get an ancestral image. Conflict as well as tiny inspiration of eternal human instincts is the right indication of the novelist through which he has represented the real social picture of the downtrodden; and it is certainly revolutionary in the history of modern Bengali Literature. The aim of his scientific efforts is to get man and woman revolted through biological self and helplessness. As a result, the social picture of the boatmen of Ketupur village touches our mind inevitably. Regarding the social system of the boatmen, Manik Bandopadhyay has presented that the slum of the boatmen is situated beyond eastward of the village. There are many vacant places surrounding the village. But the shabby cottages of the boatmen stand still side by side. It seems to us that the poor people are cheating themselves in the narrow and open space. It is seen into the matter that there is no want of space on earth, yet they have to cope with their social system. The landlord has occupied all the lands from the boatmen, within a very small piece of land; they build their shabby huts, where the tax is somewhat less. The child never stops crying and screaming. God of hunger, god of smile-tear, and god of dark heart hardly accompany with them. The Brahmans of the village and the gentle people never let them go into their houses; the stormy of nature wants to devastate them; the rain water goes into the huts; the whole body thrills due to the attack of chilly wind with this, disease and trauma are added.

It needs no telling the fact that the boatmen are deprived of natural instincts due to severe poverty and humiliation. As a result, we can see that Kuber, Kopila, and Hossen Miah, who have failed to grow up like social beings; in a word, they have no sense of social norms, moral sense, and social strata. Finance, lust, and selfishness are the basic elements to almost all characters of the novel. They have no love and affection towards their children, which seem to us like beastly nature. A beast, due to its instinctual attraction, wants to keep in touch with the offspring and but, after sometime, it forgets its relation with the calves. The boatmen do the same. They hardly take care of their children; on the contrary, they behave with them like a wild beast. They never feel necessity of taking care of them. The children are fully deprived of parental love, care, and affection. As a result, they grow up through cruelty.

Moreover, this study would like to represent the three major characters, like Kuber, Kopila, and Hossen Majhi with a view to exploring the social picture of Manik's novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*.

Kuber is the protagonist of the novel. Centralising the character of Kuber, Manik Bandopadhyay has highlighted the wholeness of an unknown chapter through the known realm. Kuber is the poor member of the slum of the boatmen and sometimes, the fisherman and the boatman of the mighty river. He has to tackle the uncertain future for maintaining his livelihood throughout the year. He deals in fish lending own canal to other fishermen, hiring other boat, he gets engaged into fishing, and again he tries to get mixed with his neighbours, Dhananjoy and Jadu for catching fish in the river. None of these dealings is permanent to him. At the time of catching hilsha fish, he earns a little income, but which is very uncertain to maintain his family members.

At every step of life, Kuber has faced dilemma and complexity. He has no ability to protest against the injustice with strong personality. He has to accept his cruel fate and cheat without any protest. To endure humiliation is his everyday

concern. Kuber respects and fears the mysterious Hossen Miah like other fishermen. He neither refutes him nor accepts. Hossen Miah has become a powerful man like a god to Kuber in-between acceptance and rejection. Losing his wife and son at the colonial Moinadip, Hossen Miah seems to be helpless while he is summoned at the dock of justice of Rasu. Seeing this situation, Kuber feels sympathy towards Hossen, where darkness lies in the mind of Kuber. Since he is not a powerful man in the society, so he worships power.

However, at the slum of fishermen situated at Ketupur village, Kuber is obedient to two persons; one is his own crippled wife Mala and another is stupid Gonesh. His attitude to them is very stony in affection as well as cruelty. Cruelty and sympathy works in Kuber. Throughout the novel, Gonesh has stayed with Kuber with great affection and obedience. Though there is no selfishness of their bond, we cannot deny Kuber's cruel attitude towards obedient Gonesh. Though Kuber has no power and pelf protest against injustice, his cruelty and anger is attributed to Gonesh.

Kuber's selfishness, cruelty, laziness, and timidity have occupied an inevitable place of his uncontrolled sexual attraction. When he gets married the crippled Mala, his sexual attraction towards clever Kopila, he conceals. Time passes, but he never forgets his old memory. Kopila has very recently got married, a child died prematurely in sick bed. Then she quarrels with his husband Shama Das, and leaves his house forever. Due to the natural calamity, when Kopila's parental house gets submerged, Kuber brings other members with Kopila in his own shabby hut. After then his physical relation with Kopila develops gradually. Due to the dire destiny, Kuber and Kopila have to take shelter at the colonial Moinadip of Hossen Miah. The mysterious sexual relationship between Kuber and Kopila has occupied the dominant theme from the fourth chapter to the last of the novel. Sexual issue is found in male and female characters of the novel. The novelist has wanted to give freedom of the uncontrolled sexual attraction between Kuber and Kopila. In this regard the statement of Sukurmar Sen is very acceptable: "Hunger of poverty and subconscious sexual delirium between the poor and the rich, which is the fate of creative character of Manikbabu." (Mannan, p.338) [My translation] A strong speed of unhappy sexual relationship is represented not only in the characters of Kuber and Kopila, but also in the heart of the novel. Manik has presented the practical image of human life with a very strong and powerful style. The daily biological ambition would be the only driving force of the common man and woman; and that is very natural between them. For this Humayun Kabir undoubtedly comments: "Manil Banerjee is a proletarian novelist obsessed with problems of hunger and sex, not so much because of the influence of Marx or Freud as because of his direct experience of life in the raw." (p.338)

In the novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, Hossen Miah is found to play his role of unsocial and sexual activities. It seems that Moinadip is the pleasure-ground of free love and sexuality, where he wants to build an empire for his customs. He might have a secret intention to set up an open abode for sexual attraction. This is the major concern to the postmodern audience. The novelist has not presented any sexual relation of Hossen Miah with any woman in the novel. Based upon the illicit relationship between Kuber and Kopila, it is proved that Hossen Miah is hypocrite, demon, and conspirator like a Machiavellian.

Moinadip seems to be a free colony for sexual attraction between man and woman. Those who go there go for their natural instincts. On the contrary, those who return from that place come back due to the failure of sexuality. There is no denying the fact that sexual impulse is the dominant issue of the novel. Moinadip seems to be a free land of sexual attraction beyond the question of family-structure, social bond, religious norms, and moral code of life. As a result, inevitably the novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, is based upon the socio-economic strata of the boatmen at Ketupur; the dream of Hossen Miah is to break the empire at Moindip. Through the art of characterization, Manik hopes to expose the practical social system of the poor community of Bengal.

8. Livelihood of the Boatmen

One of the most popular and well-known novelists of Bengal, Manik Bandopadhyay has shed a new light upon the livelihood of the neglected, the downtrodden, the helpless, and the deprived of his contemporary age. His epoch making creation, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, is a unique combination of environment and human life. In this novel, Manik wants to represent that nobody does write their history and fate. They live from hand to mouth. He has focused on their sorrows-happiness, smile-tear in a very pitiable condition. The boatmen who live near the river Padma suffer in the long run. The novelist with love and sympathy wants to unveil the miserable existence of the livelihood of the boatmen very apparently.

The slum of the boatmen is situated at Ketupur village based on the piece of a narrow land beside the bank of the river. Though there is no want of vacant land surrounding the pastoral, the shabby cottages of the boatmen stand side by side. They have been living very densely like their forefathers. There is no light, no wind, and no glimpse of growth of life-where life is full of darkness, poverty, and unhappy state of mind.

When the rainy season appears, the boatmen are very busy to catch fish in the river. They have no time to gossip; they catch fish for all day and night wearing a very piece of torn cloth and enduring a chilly wind and trembling with fear due to the storm of the river, which may occur anytime. When the ship comes near the bank of the river, the boatmen run to and

fro like the crickets on the river water, which are the light of the boats.

The Padma as well as the creek are the only sources of livelihood. They lead their families by catching fish in the river. Many of them have no net of their own and they borrow others' net and catch fish. Their life is full of danger and uncertainty. They have to depend on the mercy of nature; the rain water goes into their shabby cottage. They are gone to the deep river to catch fish because of hankering after happiness, peace, and new dawn of life though their life is very risky. But they can never fulfil their dream and expectation. Rather they have to fall victim of disease and depression. They have to struggle hard and soul just to eat only for a single day. Their birth is cruel, joyless and melancholic. The taste of life is full of hunger and thirst, lust and love, selfishness and narrowness to them all. Regarding their livelihood of the boatmen, our novelist writes, "God lives in that abode, gentle village. He would not be found here." (Salam, 2008, p.24) [My Translation]

The boatmen have no time to take a single rest. When it is time to catch fish, they hope to get happiness and peace for which their mind is full of expectation. They are devoted to struggling round the clock. But they never get pleasure and happiness at all though they have a full-faith in heart. They work hard and sweat from their thin body; they are deprived of respect and dignity in the society. They are deprived of property, land and prosperity. Due to the storm clouds prevailing in the afternoon of Baishakh Days, their happier family is shattered like the river erosion. God of hunger-thirst, god of smile-tear, god of dark soul don't accompany with the boatmen at all despite worshipping. Although their livelihood is full of satiety, anxiety, and unhappiness, yet they exist, they want to live on earth like a tiny creature.

The mighty have been ruling the poor and the weak for ages. The exploitation has grasped the poor, weak, landless, merciless, and helpless boatmen. Though the boatmen are very weak and timid, they have to work hard for livelihood. They are always cheated and dwindled by the ruling people. Though they get more fishes, they cannot change their lots anymore; the reason is that if they get more fishes, the price gets decreased. They have to subscribe five fishes to Chalan Babu when they catch more than one hundred fishes. At the time of bargaining, if nobody stays with the boatmen, they are deprived of fixed price. Thus they are exploited and cheated. They have to accept cheat as well as exploitation, which seem to be their born-curse. This is the norm of their society and environment. According to the novelist, "To get the boatmen cheated is like a social custom, they have undoubtedly accepted ten social as well as religious norms without any debate, without any protest." (p.24) In the livelihood of the slum-dwellers, the balance of sorrow is much more than happiness. They have to struggle against poverty all the year round; they have to starve. The rain goes into their shabby cottage in want of roof and straw. In this way, their lives and livelihood get continued until death.

From ecological point of view, we can come to the judgement that Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi* is based upon livelihood and social picture. Each man has to cope with environmental situation at every sphere of life. Where there is an environment, there is a life. Life and Livelihood depends on environment. At very moment man has to face natural calamity; sometimes he dies prematurely. This is the code of human life.

Manik's ideology concerning environment is perfect and practical. He may be regarded as a social as well as environmental critic of his times; he very subtly has presented the question of life and livelihood in front of the postmodern readers. He has willingly accepted poverty to know the pitiable condition of the downtrodden community of Bengal. His attitude to ecology is very practical and universal; he is a critic of ecology and life in this sense that he enables to get mixed with the poverty affected people of the mighty Padama. He wants to understand their environment and social circumstances. He tries heart and soul to realise their complexities of life; he is in the guise of a pauper, he unveils the real mystery of social picture and livelihood of the boatmen and fishermen of the river of the age. The novelist personifies poverty of the poor community; he wants to universalize the pessimism of human through his famous novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*. Certainly, this novel is the embodiment of environmental crisis, where no man and woman can imagine without complexities of life; we can compare Manik's novel with Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophical term, 'Pessimism', where life is full of satiety, unhappiness, sorrows, and tears of a vast ocean. He has characterized male and female with a view to highlighting the social picture and livelihood of the boatmen of the mighty Padam of the 20th-century age. We sense that environment grasps each character where there is no open door of life. Protagonist and anti-protagonist-nobody gets rid of environmental crisis. All of them fall victim of circumstances. In this way, this study would like to focus upon social picture and life-structure of the boatmen of the mighty Padma through investigating the novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*.

9. Conclusion

From the above discussion, we can come to the concluding remark that this study focuses upon the original concept of ecocriticism. It sheds a new light on the theoretical background of ecocriticism in the light of environmental critics, scholars, and ecological thinkers around the world. There is a deep relationship between environment and literature also reflected in this discussion. This study has also a brief focus on the evaluation of ecocriticism in the light of 21st-century age context. Manik's treatment of social system and livelihood of the boatmen of his times has clearly been depicted in this research project. The well-known novel, *Padma Nadir Majhi*, gives us a perfect image of environmental crisis, the

grim truth of the poor people and their indescribable miserable existence as well.

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