

# TITASH EKTI NODIR NAM: A CULTURAL JOURNEY

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Artistry stands on the foundation of elements like society, history, time, and culture. The bruises and clashes of the inner world of humanity in literature, the conflicts of dualities, hopes and disappointments, joys and sorrows, tales of life and death, all lie hidden beneath the expanses of consciousness, imprinted in an almost inexplicable manner. Therefore, when a novelist brings a character into a novel, it's not merely from the standpoint of an idea or ideology; it encompasses the entirety of nature, life, environment, society, culture, and independent existence — all amalgamated in the world of literature. In Bengali river-centric novels, this can be understood even better because there lies the life of humans intertwined with the river. How the characters in the novel might discover their self-existence, become substantial, and perhaps attain reality — that reflection emerges amidst the ripples of the river. These river-centric novels include Manik Bandopadhyay's "Padma Nadir Majhi" (1936), Tarashankar Bandopadhyay's "Hansuli Banker Upakatha" (1947), Advaita Mallabharman's "Titash Ekti Nadir Naam" (1956), Samaresh Basu's "Ganga" (1957), Kamal Kumar Majumdar's "Antarjali Yatra" (1959), Ramapada Chowdhury's "Bonpolashi'r Padabali" (1962), Syed Mustafa Siraj's "Trinabhumi" (1971), Devesh Ray's "Tistaparer Brittanto" (1988), and Sadhan Chattopadhyay's "Gahin Ganga" (1996), among others.

The novel "Titash Ekti Nadir Naam" by Advaita Mollo Barman (1914-1951), the offspring of a respected family distant from the cultured society, has been selected for discussion in this essay because the life of Titash is deeply rooted in the essence of primitive life. Unlike other river-centric novels, this novel may claim less independence, hence the cultural connotations that have gradually emerged as the novel progresses. "Titash Ekti Nadir Naam" was first published in the month of Ashwin in the year 1363 of the Bengali calendar. Prior to that, from the month of Sravan to Magh of the year 1352 of the Bengali calendar, the third part of "Ramdhanu" was serialized in the "Mohammadi" magazine. Due to the deteriorating relationship or misunderstanding with the editorial staff of "Mohammadi" or the loss of the manuscript, there was an obstacle in the serialized publication of the novel. The novel under discussion comprises four sections. Each section is further divided into two parts. The sections are divided as follows:

1. Titash Ekti Nadir Naam and Prabas Khandana
2. Noya Basat and Janma-Mrityu Bibaha
3. Ramdhanu and Ranga Nao
4. Duranga Projapoti and Vhasman

In the primitive (!) protagonist-heroine mold of the novel, Kishor and his ever-changing wife, in the final sub-chapter of the second part, succumb to mortality amidst birth, death, and marriage. However, even after that, Malo transcends into a perpetual existence, surpassing the remaining two parts of the novel. We encounter Subal's wife, Ananta, and many others. Alongside them, there is Titash - bearing witness to life's ups and downs. Thus, no particular character stands out - the composite life-culture of Antaj Malo's Malo family is the main subsistence of this novel. The history-lacking river Titash is thus written into "the mother's affection, brother's love, and the pain of wives", as the story goes. From Padma-Ganga-Kalindi to distant dreams, the river that flows in the rhythm of dreams - Titash is its name. Describing the river, it is said in literature, "Titash is the name of a river. Its blue water, rippling waves, lively splashes. It flows like a dream" (p. 13). Born from Meghna, it dissolves into Meghna. It doesn't twist like a snake in its body, nor does it have the cunningness of a miser. Titash flows gurglingly. In the rain, it is youthful, calm in the winter. It sleeps peacefully under the shadow of the wells for a long time. Just as in "Padma Nadir Majhi," when the boatmen go to catch fish in the open Padma, their wives sleep restlessly in the boat, on the other hand, the wives of Titash's Malo family can sleep peacefully while being ferried by their husbands in the river. These calm women of the Titash riverside. They are the ones who know the river the most, love it the most; although that love remains dormant within. Known or unknown, named or unnamed, countless female characters exist in this literature. In collective consciousness and solidarity, they are much more aware than the women of Ketupur ("Padma Nadir Majhi"), Banshbari ("Hansuli Banker Upakatha"), or Dholtita ("Ganga") village. Deep human consciousness, aesthetic awareness, cultural mentality deeply enrich these women. They effortlessly feel maternal tenderness in the ongoing picture of life. Critically acclaimed, it is said: "The story is imbued with the culture of life. The flow of that cherished-preserved, inherited culture, flowing steadily like a thread, is the life-breath of the Malos of Tistapar, the soul of familiarity" (Nirmal Das, 'In the creation of Antaj Malo').

On the banks of the Titash river, a new daughter-in-law arrives at the in-laws' house, after a long period of separation. The time of Jamila's arrival at her father-in-law's house was marked by seeing Udayotara at the riverbank, reminding her of many past lives. She wished to float a "soui" leaf. Ramu's mother, overwhelmed by affection for Ananta, her son's

playmate, becomes emotionally attached to Ananta's mother. Udoyotara embraces the unfamiliar Ananta. The deep maternal affection of Ananta and his mother, Subal's wife, leaves us enchanted. In the month of Poush, the cultural core of Bengali women, Basanti, Mangala, and Ananta's mother, is released. The sight of them washing rice fills Malo men with excitement, inspiring them in life. The unity of the three sisters, Nayan Tara, Asma Tara, and Udoyotara, enriches our experience of natural life. Their daily quarrels, the worries of everyday life, differentiate them from the women of "Padma Nadir Majhi" or "Hansuli Banker Upakatha". The unfortunate fate of the women on the banks of the Meghna-Padma-Bijoy riverside tells us about their empathy. They also have differences in their upbringing. At least in the first half of the novel (we also notice this in the later part of the novel, through the incident of Basanti being forcibly married to Ramu's house due to the dire financial situation. When she is insulted by her father-in-law, she breaks down in tears), on the other hand, when the girls at the banks of the Titash river are filled with the colors of play, their wedding takes place one day. In "Padma Nadir Majhi", we also see that Kubir's daughter Gopi gets married at the age of sixteen. Similarly, in "Hansuli Banker Upakatha", when we first meet the bird, she is eighteen. Of course, she had already been married to Nayan before that. The heroine of "Ganga", Hemi, however, stays away from this social setup to some extent. In Titash, we see that Mar's marriage takes place at the age of fifteen. However, generally, Malo girls get married two or three years earlier. Deenanath Malo's daughter Basanti gets married after sixteen years, but she no longer remains a "kumari" (there is Anantabala in the postscript of the novel, who does not get married until the age of seventeen).

Adwaita Mallabarmun, with the sweetness of gentle, peaceful, compassionate, and affectionate qualities, captivates the women of Malo society with sweetness. He paints a picture of the banks of the river covered with sarash flowers in "Titash Ekti Nadir Naam" ("A River Named Titash"). Critics note: "'Titash Ekti Nadir Naam' novel clearly portrays the various inclinations of love and longing between men and women. Adwaita Mallabarmun has attempted to illuminate love and longing in this novel through the flowing currents and twists of a river."

Based on the thread of this love, a play of dreams unfolds between the teenage boy and the fifteenth-year-old girl of Shukdebpur. But on a stormy night, like the stormy river, they encounter pirates on their way back to Gokarnghat. Thus begins Anantar Ma's fate, marked by poignant circumstances. The sudden calamity drives the boy, Kishore, insane, and later Anantar becomes a widow.

After four years have passed in the story, Anantar Ma finds a "new residence." In Malopara, Basanti is perceived by Anantar Ma as the scent of musk. Although Subal's widow, Basanti, appears before Anantar, her face, though tainted by Anantar's words, remains beautiful. Despite Basanti's innate femininity, Basanti gradually becomes entwined with Anantar through her colorful threads of maternal affection. She begins to break free from the shackles of the common societal norms to take a stand for life. With boundless patience and strict self-control, she builds a life in her family's honorless existence. Cutting threads for the net, she sustains herself and Anantar. Then, participating in festivities like Kali Puja and weddings, she becomes a part of this society herself.

Gradually, the main female character in the novel, Basanti, finds her place in Malo's consciousness. From the beginning, she is somewhat brave, forward-thinking, and pragmatic. Basanti accumulates experiences from life as a girl and witnesses Subal's tragic death for the sake of her master. Drinking from the cup of life's bitterness, only pain accumulates in her heart. Therefore, although Basanti's face remains beautiful in its natural tenderness, her inner turmoil continues to grow slowly over time, akin to the dark clouds of impending disaster.

In this way, Anantar Ma's mind continues to wander in the spring breeze, filled with the emptiness of hope. Her mind's window gradually closes at the touch of the insane boy (Kishore). Again, in the melancholy breeze of Baishakh, she becomes trust-empty: "If I don't cover my chest with the cloth of trust, it doesn't ache... Anantar Ma doesn't want her days to pass like this." Eventually, she finds liberation from this emotional turmoil. However, peace does not return to her mind. She becomes unstable with worldly desires. Anantar Ma thinks that if a man's wife dies, he can remarry, why can't a woman remarry if her husband dies?

It can be said contextually that raising this question about the age-old tradition is a proclamation of rebellion—the messenger of women's freedom. But in a society divided by gender, where obedience to patriarchal standards is the norm, what significance can be attached to this statement when it comes from an uneducated woman of the lower class! Especially when this criticism strikes sharply when Kishore's wife or Anantar Ma finds no personal identity; she finds no self-recognition—relying on the eternal definition of womanhood. Or perhaps, in the land of superstition and backwardness, this self-reliant consciousness of values is possible. Let it not be a nameless, clan-less, mantra-less sister! But at that time, this dilemma could not be resolved in society. So, she follows her husband's path even after Kishore's tragic death, like a faithful wife, just like the women of eternal manliness in society.

However, "the rebellious woman resides in Subal's wife" (p. 171). Where everything is breaking down, where humanity is forgotten, she stands firm. Because 'she doesn't know how to give up. Lovingly continuing to fight against everything is good'. She wants to escape from the shattered morality generated by tradition. In response to the question of Mangala's wife, Basanti says, "I can do anything. And I can set everything on fire if necessary" (p. 302). When the villagers of Telipara put the necklace on the neck of the women of Malopara and throw them into the river, Subal's wife takes the lead. However, the incompleteness of motherhood within this rebellious woman is also crystal clear. She holds Anantar in the highest regard with the utmost affection for her childlessness. She takes on all the worldly sorrows and sufferings for her. It is for her that she takes up the rights of motherhood with intense conflict, often going to see the regatta. Her head hangs in shame as she is humiliated by Udoyatarar's hands. The burning humiliation lifts Basanti to stand up against oppression.

Because, in her words: "It is better to die with dignity than to live in humiliation" (p. 303). Thus, individual tragedy is portrayed as a societal tragedy in the novel.

"When the Titash River dries up, famine and temptation continue to separate the youth from Malopara. They become disjointed in their efforts. Due to the influence of economic power, Malos' social and cultural life becomes distorted. With the changing times, the economic base shapes the group's consciousness. The sky over Malopara becomes dense with dark clouds. Spring worries about the future of Malopara. Seeing the Malos firmly united, Mariya Vasanti expresses her concern: 'Hey Mohon, you're not going anywhere. You're here, the fathers of saints and the fathers of honey are here. Two out of three pots in the house have gone, and three more pots remain. With this, we will continue to fight until the end. Otherwise, we'll drown in the floods. Whatever house we live in, that's where we'll continue to fight till the end.'

But the taste of freedom is not so easy to give up. Gradually, under the impact of disasters, Malos start losing their social and cultural life. They lose their self-esteem right from the beginning of the 'Bhasman' section of the novel. They completely lose their individuality, characteristics, and culture. Their own social policy bond was gradually becoming loose and eventually dissipated. In the end, despite fighting until the last day of life, Vasanti remains unsuccessful. She cannot withstand the pressure of time.

In the aftermath, Malos completely lose their self-esteem. At the beginning of the 'Bhasman' section of the novel, the novelist indicates, 'Malo completely loses their self-esteem. They gradually lose their personality, characteristics, and culture. They had a bond of their own social policy, which also gradually became loose and eventually separated.'

At the end of the day, even that diminishes. Because, Malo Rani was no longer capable of luxury. She wakes up with a start in Titash's heart, and Malo Rani's heart sinks. There are no fish to catch, so even the netting is stopped. Now Vasanti goes to 'Gawal' with Udoyotara. Because, Udoyotara also falls victim to the same misfortune. Ending up with the same outcome. Vasanti is now hopeless and helpless. Like Joychandra's wife, Vasanti also falls into begging. Eventually, she becomes powerless. But despite being on the verge of destruction, Vasanti dreams of saving the society, just like the eternal Malo. Malo society is standing up again. Vasanti is also standing up against all odds. With this one ray of hope, Subal's wife, like green rice in the paddy field, slowly closes her eyes, where the waves rise, the green rice residue becomes a symbol of new possibilities.

This way, the novel becomes a reflection of life's philosophy.

The novel 'Titash Ekti Nadir Naam' was translated into English by Kalpana Bardhan as 'A River Called Titash' in 1992. She describes the novelist as 'the insider narrator.' We also notice that the novelist, with the same sensitivity of the storyteller, describes the available experience as seen through the eyes of the character in this novel. And when nearly 59 songs are used in the entire novel, we understand that the elements of life in society were intricately interwoven. The narrator tells about such a song: 'Now it's deep night. Now it's time for the boatman's song. It's such a time when the essence of life rises above life's emptiness. Now the ears hear the heartbeat of the night, and in this hearing, one can feel the unknown touch of deep thoughts. Much unknown power beyond mystery tells stories to people at this time.'" (P. 320) In the direct experience, the rich observation and analysis of the unity of Malo offspring truly immerse us in a life experience. Therefore, towards the end of the novel, he clearly states in the book: "Malo had their own unique culture. Their culture was unique in songs, stories, proverbs, and other folk literature. In worship, festivals, and the language of everyday life, their culture was distinctive. Their songs, gradually acquired, were as sweet and intimate as their melodies." The continuous flow of Malo life's cultural richness touches vast horizons of life without any hint of sadness, fatigue, or impurity. The flowing nature of this culture in society uplifts life itself, which is beautifully portrayed in this novel. The author of social certainty has directly drawn from life in his novel. When the upcoming Kali Puja approaches and there is talk of raising funds, Baharul advises the Malos that if they establish a school for their children, it would be a suitable initiative. It is agreed that accepting life's challenges is supported by Baharul's proposal. Those who criticize their life and culture do not even come to their minds. On the other hand, when collecting funds for worship, Baharul, the collector, says, "The net is not going to catch fish anymore, my boy. Your worship will go on without your contribution, but if you delay selling the net, it will take longer to catch fish" — then life finds its ultimate meaning in harmony with itself through this prayed-for artistry amidst life's struggles.

Just like in the 'Rainbow' segment, when Dhononjoy notices Kadir's boat sinking, Bonmali comes forward to help. The boat sinks, but through everyone's determined efforts, the crops are saved. In the relentless rain, as soaked Bonmali wipes the water off his shoulders, Kadir expresses his gratitude in a heartfelt manner, saying: "Malor's son, you've saved the big harvest today" (p. 184)." And Bonmali, observing Ramprasad's justice in Kadir's face, is overwhelmed! These people of the Antyaja community, who reside far from the high-class society, may not be so literate in education, but in terms of human life-view, they belong to a much higher class. Kazi Nazrul Islam conveyed an elevated call in his poem 'Conjuror's Trick', "Are they Hindu or Muslim? Who asks that question?/ Conjuror! Tell us if people are drowning, my son is dying" - those illiterate people seem to rise as the fiery representatives of that sentiment. Many more examples like this are easily found in the intricate text of the novel. Life's joy resonated with such sincerity within the rural nature of Bengal, and it seemed that Rabindranath sought to return to this joy in the soil of Bengal, finding his inspiration there. But with the rapid changes in the economic landscape, this grand stream of Bengali culture continues to dwindle. We find evidence of this in 'Titas Ekti Nadir Naam'. However, one's intrinsic connection with the undercurrent of the flow of self cannot be defeated; it cannot be thwarted. Standing against formality becomes crucial then. We find this message awakening in 'Antorjali Jatra', 'Tistaparer Brittanto'. He embraced Advaita in his life, ingrained it in his literature. During his journalistic

career, he collected various forms of folk music. He utilized this vast diversity of folk life in his storytelling. Notable among these are 'Baromasi Gaan', 'Bhaifota's Song', 'Jalshawa Song'. He composed and sung 'Maghmandal Brata', which is based on the Hindu ritual prevalent in the rural life. 'Maghmandal' and 'Jalshawa' are related to the prayers and marriage rituals of Kumari girls. The narrative at the beginning of the 'Prabash Khanda' of Titas mentions: "At the end of the month of Magh, a festival erupted in Malopara. This is only the festival of the Kumari. The name of the ritual is Maghmandal Brata" (p. 33). 'Hansuli Banker Upakatha' also mentions the Mangalchandi Brata, which is solely for women. Another such women-centric event is 'Jala Biya', which is a part of the Manasa Puja. Researcher Achintya Biswas says: "The entire subject should be considered as the original folk culture of Malo Krishi" ('Titas Ekti Nodir Naam': Element of Folk Culture in the Novel). Additionally, we find 'Arabba' of Dol Purnima celebrated in Shukhdebpur. In this novel, where the Vaishnavite influence predominates, even Krishna's mantra, Kishore's mind, was colored in the sky of the heart at this festival.

In the Eastern region, when the boatmen row their boats, Murshida sings Baul songs, some sing Bhatiali, some sing Baul or Baromasi songs. On the journey abroad, far away, Kishore, the romantic of the heart, sings - "With the sound of flute by the riverbank, love in the air feels sweet" (p. 43). Descriptions of Muslim society's folk songs are also found in the novel. Songs to which even Malo was invited. The people of the lower strata of society were like two flowers on the same branch. There was no room for communal differences there. Additionally, in the notable 'Ranga Nao' sub-chapter, where it ends, we find the following song being sung: "Everyone is mine, but I belong to no one. In my heart, the sound of the ocean roars. I went to the riverbank hoping to cross. There's a boat but no boatman, only the dinghy floats" (p. 296) -- it seems like the expression of an early springtime mood. The statement of Russian folklorist Y. M. Sokolov seems to be correctly depicted here: "Folklore is an echo of the past, but at the same time it is also the vigorous voice of the present." Life on the banks of the Titas was peaceful, pure. Unlike 'Padma Nadir Majhi', there was no request for a profound, sorrowful, or desolate birth here; instead, amidst various joyous celebrations, the newborn is welcomed. They find the most joy during marriages. And on the occasion of the Uttarayan festival, Malo 'dances and jumps around', 'cooks Panchanna delicacies' to enjoy life. And during all the festivals and occasions, they bathe in the Titas to become pure and holy. Titas was an integral part of their culture. This annual boat race on the Titas was a big tool for their enjoyment. We also find a mention of it in the novel 'Ganga'.

In the intimate formula of life, artists had recognized puzzles, verses, maxims, and rhymes -- this extensive compilation is woven into the pages of this novel. In the novel, Udoyotara's elder sister Nayanatara is called the 'Queen of Verses' and is asked to compose verses for Vinidra's nighttime recitation. Everyone understands these verses. So when Udoyotara says, "The hijol tree holds lightning, when evening comes, thunder strikes - what does this saying mean?" (p. 238). Then little sister Asmantara promptly responds - 'Hat'. It is understood that within the cultural context, they are all free. Additionally, 'Proposal' is intricately connected to their lives. Although sometimes it remains unwritten and unspoken, symbolically it becomes intertwined with the story of life. Later, the description of Ma and Basanti's 'Proposal' - the sub-chapter on birth, death, and marriage - draws our attention. In this context, the critic's statement is supported: "The proposal or folk tales' form and style have infused the novel with the unique geographical characteristics of Titas. Like familiar stories of folk life, they are their life's philosophy" (Achintya Biswas, 'Proposal, Advaita Mallavarman, and Titas Ekti Nodir Naam').

When Adwait portrays real experiences through the lens of art, his novel's language becomes simple and straightforward. Embracing and following commonly used words, idioms, and expressions in everyday life, Adwait has incorporated a plethora of vernacular words in the dialogues and descriptions of the novel. Therefore, colloquial terms like 'thisara' (overripe), 'sait' (sweaty), etc., are scattered throughout various sections of the text. When Malo and others talk to each other, they use words like 'potijna' instead of 'pratijna' (promise), 'Ramasad' instead of 'Ramprasad', and 'nao' instead of 'nauko' (boat). The regional dialect's own vocabulary is also abundantly used here, such as 'tirthere moddhye Kashi, ishtire moddhye mashi' (Kashi amidst pilgrimage, aunty amidst delicacy).

However, amidst the tumultuous current of time, this rich tradition-based and vibrant culture has faced disruption. New, lighter forms of folk songs and travel songs are gaining prominence, taking the place of the solemn, soulful, and culturally rich songs. When the symbolically represented expression 'Ganga is drying up' transforms into reality, we see that despite the firm resolve to protect the culture, Basanti and Mohan's efforts to rejuvenate fail. The sorrowful atmosphere of separation is not felt amidst the storm of commercialized culture today, or rather, amidst the invasion of pseudo-culture and electronic media in the name of culture. Sadly, our culture is being distorted in this way without our realizing it. The consciousness of that realization is not being expanded in our modified thinking. Hence, Adwait elevates the tragic aspect of history in the novel with straightforward language. Even though we are sinking in darkness, they leave us breadcrumbs of enlightenment. Through that, we can advance in our search for truth.

**Reference:**

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