



Challenges of the Fisher Folk: A Study in Abdul Jabbar's Ilish Marir Char.

¹Sanjumanara Khatun, ²Dr. Sravasti Roy

¹Research Scholar, Egra S.S.B. College Research Centre, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore, West Bengal, India

²Associate Professor, Egra S.S.B. College Research Centre, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore, West Bengal, India.

Abstract : Abdul Jabbar in his fiction Ilish Marir Char has delineated the challenges of the fisher folk incredibly. The representative of the fisher folk Zainuddin and his struggle along with his comrades has exceptionally drawn our attention towards the fiction. The real portrayal of the fisher folk and the subalterns of the riverbanks has been depicted in the master hand of Abdul Jabbar. The story surpasses all the pictorial form which is not alienated from the reality. The portrayal of the stockist like Tarabdi has introduced us with the example of inhumanity and cruelty to the last extent. Tarabdi has exploited the fisherfolk for a long time. He has not left any aspect of inhumanity to extract the wretched. The struggle of the fisherfolk has been depicted aptly in this fiction. Nature itself has exploited the Fisherfolk. This struggle to live on the rivers for several days and collection of only few fishes and selling them without any profit has made the fisher folk impossible to sustain. After a long struggle they can collect few fishes which will be sold to the stockist without any profit. Abdul Jabbar has described how the stockist builds up their mansion and the fisher folk hardly manage to bring food twice to their family. With the murder of the character Shindhu, we found that how this oppression and cruelty to exploit the fisherfolk has reached to the last extent of inhumanity. This paper aims to analyse critically the fiction Ilish Marir Char by Abdul Jabbar. An analysis of this fiction and the challenges of the fisherfolk is the aim of this paper to be contextualized.

. **Keywords:** Fisher-folk, livelihood, subalterns, exploitation, class differences.

1. INTRODUCTION:

India has a multicultural, multilingual and economically multi-layered country. Depending on the values and socio-economic structures class differences are also prevalent feature in the cultural inheritance of the country. Fiction writers have tried to depict those layers and their several reflections of the society. Abdul Jabbar has skilfully picked up few elements for his fiction Ilish Marir Char to show and expose the hypocritical masks of the stockists like Tarabdi. The exploitation of the fisherfolk by the stockists, the adversity in nature that challenges the existence of the subalterns and destiny that play the crucial for their livelihood is being sketched by the author magnificently. Over all the appeal of the Bangladeshi Bengali literature has a special place in world literature. Fisherfolk are the person of coastal community who fish for a living. There are millions of peoples whose lives depends on fisheries. Fisheries serve as the main source of the living of the coastal dwellers. Millions of coastal inhabitants are small scale fisherfolk which include the subaltern women too. They are called angler and depend mainly on fishery for their survival. A person's livelihood means securing the basic necessities of life. Livelihoods are necessities and activities that are required to secure means of living. Subaltern is the group of people who are under the hegemony of the elite class. Subaltern classes include peasants, tribes, women and other groups. Exploitation is the selfish act to take advantage of someone or a group who is weak and cannot resist the opponent being inferior. Class differences are the predominant feature in the Indian society which is deep rooted in the caste system since Vedic periods. The problems of caste system are so strong in this country that it is deep rooted in the values of the upper classes and don't allow negotiations to break this glass ceiling. Abdul Jabbar in his masterpiece has tried to point out few challenges for the fisherfolk of the coastal regions. Partha Chatterjee, Ranjit Guha, Deepesh Chakrabarty and Gayatri Chakrabarty have tried to become the voice for the subalterns. This paper aims to investigate the challenges of the underprivileged to earn their livelihood in the context of the fiction.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To analyse critically the fiction Ilish Marir Char.
- To study the challenges of livelihood in the fiction.
- To study the adversities of the fisher-folk through the context.

- To analyse the level of exploitation of the fisher-folk by the stockist in the context.

3. DISCUSSION:

The fiction *Ilish Marir Char* deals with the problems of the fisher folk. The fisher folk is represented by the fisherman Zainuddin. Tarabdi, the stockist of that area represents the bureaucratic society. Tarabdi has gone to the far extent of inhumanity, cruelty and oppression. His exploitation towards the fisherfolk has elevated the level of the fiction as an art of literary piece. The representation of the character Tarabdi has surpassed the portrayal of all evil in the literature. He is a blood sucker. He is the poisonous parasite of the society who sucks his own benefactor. He extracts the maximum amount from the fisherfolk and snatches everything away from them. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, Frantz.,1961) asserts. Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well. He has not any mercy even on their wives. Being revengeful he murders and raped Haren's wife with his armours. The fiction starts with the river bank where all the ferries gather and waits for the low tide. Abdul Jabbar has given a vivid description of the bank of Ilishmari where the water intrudes miles of inland and engulf the paddy fields. The description of the bank with the broken boats, vendors, the post office, the police camp and the local alcohol shop along with opium has added the essence of the banks. The fisherfolk leaves at midnight to catch fishes. They throw their nets several times in the river and try their luck. After several attempt they could collect a little number of fishes. They sail their boat ashore. They now bargain with the buyers. The boats stink with tuna and hilsa. The fishermen return in the midnight. Their wives play with them. They needed to be kept cool. They return by selling the fishes and collecting their shares. They keep the biggest hilsha with them. This is not for sale. The first hilsa is for their houses. They would serve the meal for the day. This hard struggle is not enough to afford their meal twice.

There are only two stockist old Tarini and Tarabdi, one is Muslim and other is Hindu. These shares are divided into four parts- one is for the stockist, other two is for the helpers, and the one is for the boatman. The shares will be distributed by the stockist. The collection of fishes is very flexible. They worship Badar Ghazi and Varun Dev before going for fishing. The rainy season is best for fishing. There are clashes between the fishermen. They always pray for the rain. Usually, they can collect more but destiny plays the crucial role often. They borrow the fishnets from the stockist and the boat too. So, they have to pay all the debts. If they can collect more fishes, they can have their meals for few days. Abdul Jabbar has shown the class differences distinctly. The Fisher folk struggle hard to collect the fishes by dwelling on the rivers for several days without seeing their family. They fight with the storms and the clouds to earn their livelihood. But, the stockist like Tarabdi who is the representative of the upper class exploits them all. The approach of Abdul Jabbar is to expose the stockists and how they extract all from these subalterns and build up their mansions. Frantz Fanon (Fanon, Frantz.,1961) argues What matters today, the issue which blocks the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Zainuddin's wife has lent all her jewellery to Tarabdi's wife to buy the fishing nets. In the midnight around 2pm they have started to throw their nets. There's no star in the sky. It's very unpredictable how much fish can they collect. They sail along with the low tide. They will return to the Ilishmarir Char. They are being hopeless deliberately. Hardly there are fishes in the low tide. At the high tide they are hopeful. With the approaching rain they are hopeful to have plenty of fishes. They praise the river Ganges for her benevolence. The fishermen talk with each other and gradually going to ashore. They aspire for the rain. As if the rain brings their fortune and pours in the lap of Ganges in the shape of fishes. The first fish must be given to the stockist. They keep their boat on the dock. The crowd jumps on their collection. Females are also there. Zainuddin is unaware of everything. The crowd bargains. The fishermen don't negotiate. They set in for Birlapur. The woman Padmarani shouts. Padi bargains. Haren and Kanai shouts on her. Padi gives the money from her waistband. Zainuddin counts the money. Zainuddin shouts on her that this is not from her own husband. Both are adamant not to negotiate on price. When Padmarani leaves the place, they are prepared for drinking. After drinking to the full extent, they leave for their houses. The author has picked the element of drinking alcohol to convey the message that the merrymaking for the underprivileged is the means of alcohol only. They drink to their full extent. The little money they got is being wasted on the alcohol. this aspect of the poor folk is prevalent feature in the narratives that are drawn from real life instances. Zainuddin's mother and his wife welcomes them. Being drunk Zainuddin pours water in his plate instead of dal. He speaks with Sakina, his wife, on fishes. His mother explains that his father collected several fishes usually. They couldn't pull the nets it weighs so much. The fisherwomen distributed the fishes to doors. His wife Sakina forbids him to drink. The culture of using slang has been also picked by the author. The use of slang has elevated the artistic value of the fiction that the author merely not fictionalised the characters but draws upon from practical cultures.

In the next segment Abdul Jabbar has described sharply the condition of the poor fisher folk. Kanai's wife Laxmi lent a bowl of rice, few potatoes and a small bottle of oil from Sakina. She has not yet returned them since these fifteen days. She exchanges low quality rice in place of fresh one. Laxmi again asks for a bowl of rice. Sakina declines her request. She is also helpless. She too runs her family in poverty. Sakina gives Laxmi a bowl of flour. Laxmi promises to pay her back. Malati's mother Laxmi and Sakina gossip about Sindhu. Haren's wife Sindhu is a beautiful woman. There is contradiction in between Sindhu and Sakina although they are friends. They argue on their food-habits. Sindhu talks about beef. Sakina talks about turtle, pork, etc. Zainuddin's mother concludes the argument with the statement that we need to eat on our own choice and dress up according to the folk. Here Abdul Jabbar draws a distinction between the food habits of the Hindus and the Muslims. The religious differences have created class differences among them. Different food habits are adopted by different religions. Zainuddin's distinction of the drinking glass shows her religious beliefs, whereas Ratan the educated hunk takes meal at Zainuddin's house without any objection. Ratan drinks sorbet from their glass. Sakina is jealous of Sindhu's attractive figure. Sakina alerts Sindhu to return the saree to Tarabdi otherwise she could be in danger. Sakina also alerts her not to go to Tarabdi's house often for grocery shopping. When Zainuddin talks about Sindhu's beauty Sakina is infuriated and alerts Zainuddin that to have an eye contact outside of his house might cost him a lot. Laxmi goes for household service at Tarabdi's place. Sindhu goes to the grocery shop. People talks about Sindhu. Here the writer has aptly depicted the village culture that portrays a pretty woman always a fallen woman. Kanai sends the first fish to Tarabdi's house through his daughter Malati. Zainuddin opposes that. He asks that Kanai should not send his sixteen-year- hello old daughter to Tarabdi's house. When Zainuddin's mother asks Kanai to marry away his daughter, Kanai replies that he hardly can earn his livelihood. How could he be able to marry away his daughter. Kanai and Haren ask Zainuddin to conceal the number of fishes they have collected. But Zainuddin sharply declines their proposal and said he will remain honest in every circumstances. The attribute of honesty is also picked up by the author to explain, the adversity might cause their misery but cannot threatened to be dishonest. It's the honesty of the characters like

Zainuddin that raises the mansions of the stockists for years. The attribute of honesty is inherited by Zainuddin from his father. Character like Tarabdi can rely blind folded on the fisher-folk. Tarabdi explains that the fisherfolk are dishonest. He knows everything about the fish market. But can't help it. But he has full faith on Zainuddin as he is trading from his father's time. Zainuddin's father was an honest man. Hence Tarabdi has full faith in Zainuddin. Zainuddin asks Tarabdi to split forty rupees. Tarabdi keeps twenty-five rupees and give away fifteen rupees to Zainuddin. Zainuddin asks to split this fifteen-rupees into three parts. So, Kanai, Haren and Zainuddin have five rupees each. Tarabdi asks not to lie taking his son on his lap. Kanai was so furious that he wanted to tap Tarabdi's neck. Zainuddin asserts clearly that he never cheats on. They bought the grocery while returning home. Tarabdi asks Haren about last night guest. Zainuddin can sense his intuition. Kanai, Horen and Zainuddin discuss about the court case of Tarabdi with old Tarini. Kanai, Haren and Zainuddin knows well that Tarabdi is cheating on them. This is the common fate of the fisherfolk. They are illiterate, they don't know how to Calculate their shares. They all leave it to God. Tarabdi asks Horen about the last night guest. Horen was furious about Shindhu's virginity. He could not ask anything to Shindhu. Only shades his tears. The love for their wife is absolutely depicted in this fiction. The character of Shindhu is full of life and femininity. Haren is suspicious about Shindhu's virginity. He thinks that she into might lost her virginity to Tarabdi. That old cheater is vicious. But he is wealthy. Tarabdi has given him Shindhu a saree and blouse. Shindhu returns it to Tarabdi's wife. Sakina helps her to fight the combat against Tarabdi. Zainuddin also questions how could the stockist dare to gift saree and blouse to Shindhu. Zainuddin accuses Haren. Shindhu is infertile. Zainuddin asks Horen that if he.

The author shows the concern for the caste system. Zainuddin drinks only from his own glass. But once the liquor has entered into his body, he is out of senses. The craving for their own boat and net recurs in the whole fiction repeatedly. The collection of decreases gradually. They send three fishes to their homes. That will be cooked up for their meal. Every day passes by in this situation. Tarabdi has lost the court case against old Tarini. Twelve hundred rupees he has to pay on demurrage. He has lost the land on the bank. He seeks revenge now. He will teach a lesson to Tarini anyhow. The fisherfolk has also betrayed him as witness. Those who lend his boats, his nets have cheated on him. He is furious. His revenge motif may destroy several families. He is angry with Sindhu too. She has complained to his wife. His wife charges him of adultery. Kulsum, Tarabdi's wife is aware of their fourteen-year son and ten-year old daughter. Tarabdi never leaves his prayers, although he is a pylon. When Zainuddin sees sleeping Shindhu, he becomes lusty. Shindhu also responds to his infatuation. According to Marcus Green's study of Gramsci's argument on the intersection of subalternity (Green, Marcus E.,2010): In its original incarnation, the term was not a code word for the working class but rather a heuristic device that made it possible to grapple with how domination and subordination are all is an effect of the base in which multiple relations of power converge and overlap between different social groups.

When Tarabdi comes to know that Zainuddin is sharing Tarini's land for cultivation he disagreed to give the boat to Zainuddin. Zainuddin being jobless goes to Tarini for help. Tarini's educated son Ratan comes for help. Ratan gives the boat to Zainuddin on deposit of hundred rupees. Ratan is graduate and his sister completed Matric. Tarini encourages Zainuddin that he will help him out all through. He wants to beat the demon Tarabdi. Tarini's son Ratan taught Zainuddin the calculation of the shares. Tarini's daughter Rohini also supports them. She convinces her father to give them major shares. At the instigation of Ratan, Rohini steals money from her father's locker to give away Ratan. Ratan takes the money and helps the poor folk. For five days they could not sail their boats. Those who have no cloth to cover their female parts, who have no food to place before their kids, who have no ways to earn their livelihoods in flooded circumstances are the poor of all. Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* speaks for the subalterns that "They are too poor to matter." (Ghosh,A.2004) Ratan feels for them and stretches his helping hand towards them. Gandhiji remarks, "Even God dare not to appear before the poor except in the shape of bread." Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's famous book "Can the Subaltern Speak?", actually simply advocates that "the subaltern cannot speak." Ratan becomes philosophical with the sufferings of the poor. He is worried about the class distinction. He is susceptible to religious faith also. He summarises that the religion has gifted us the title like Brahmin, Pope and Moulabi. Occupation distinction has given us the title like driver, clerk, boatman, minister and master. "The term subaltern means an officer who is junior or of a lower rank in British military. Primarily, this term was used for the description of the officers below the rank of captain. So, in general, this term denotes a person who is inferior or subordinate in position in the late 19th century and early 20th century, Antonio Gramsci who was an Italian Marxist thinker had used the term Subaltern whenever he talked about hegemony of the ruling class or the colonial group over the subordinate class of peoples like peasants and other workers of similar position. From then onwards, the term subaltern has been in continuous use not only in the postcolonial studies but also by subaltern studies group for which Ranjit Guha was the founder" quoted by M.S.Vinutha (Vinutha,M.S.,2020). Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak talked about 'Strategic Essentialism'. Strategic Essentialism speaks about the solution of unitary action against the odds. This concept denotes an institutionalised and ideological presentation of the world. According to Spivak (Spivak, G. C.2005.): Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through... single coerced yet willed suicidal terror of the destruction of dynasty temples and the violation of women, tenacious and powerfully residual. It has not the banality of evil. It is informed by the stupidity of belief taken to extreme. Abdul Jabbar has picked the elements for his fiction very carefully. He has talked about the subalterns and their helplessness to the stockist and nature as well. Both of them exploits them completely. Nature plays an important role as the destiny of the young fisherfolk. But nature was quite kind in past days. At the time of Zainuddin's father they could collect enormous fishes and earned enough to raise their family. The challenges of the livelihood of the fisherfolk is quite hard nowadays. They go on the river in the midnight and throws their nets in the river. Luck favours very often. They sell the fishes to the fish stockist and bring the money to the boat stockist. They give the entire amount to them and have their equal shares which is so little that it is quite hard to place the meal for the family twice. But there are people like Tarini and Ratan who are quite educated and have compassion towards the fisherfolk. Several writers of Bangladeshi Bengali literature have recorded their experiences and incidents drawn from the real-life instances. Compassion towards the fisherfolk had produced several literatures such as *Padmanadir Majhi* by Manik Bandyopadhyay, *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* by Adaitta Malla Barman, *Sabarcharit* by Nalini Bera, *Samogra Sankhachil* by....., *Kalindi* by Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, *Kado Nadi Kado* by Syed Wahidullah, *Char Purnima* by Jhareswar Chattopadhyay, *Sonai Ekti Nadi* by Jhareswar Chattopadhyay, *Andha Nadir Upakhan* by Sachin Das, *Gahin Gang* by Sadhan Chattopadhyay, etc.

At the end we have seen that Tarabdi has sent three men to rape Shindhu out of revenge. They raped Shindhu and murdered her. After a couple of days in struggle they had succeed to accumulate a good number of fishes amidst the storm. Horen was searching for Shindhu but could not find her. Tarabdi's comrades has murdered and raped pregnant Shindhu. The infertile Shindhu was so happy to be united with Zainuddin. She asked him to take her away. But Zainuddin declined. Shindhu asked him that he will not find her after returning and destiny accompanies her. They buried her body in the muddy puddles. According to Spivak Subaltern is gender oriented.

She chiefly concentrates on the third world women as subaltern. In Spivak's view the colonial power and the petroleum society have doubly dominated the women of the Third World. Her complete study of the practice of 'Sati' or widow papa turn the volume up immolation demonstrates how we men as several turns have lost their voices She said: If the in the context of colonial production the Saberton has no history and cannot speak, the subtle turn as female is even more deeply in shadow. Horen was out of his senses after seeing Sindhu's dead body. At last, he murdered Tarabdi to venge upon his wife's death. Subalternity is an is an actual condition of subordination air condition that plays the colonial power. As David Ludden in the introduction to the reading *Subaltern Studies: Critical History Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia States* (Ludden, David,2001): First and foremost, the new substance of subalternity emerged only on the underside of a rigid theoretical barrier between 'elite' and 'subaltern' which resembles a concrete slab separating upper and lower space in a two store 1 y building. This hard dichotomy alienated subalternity from social histories that include more than two stories or page move among them; and not only histories rendered through the lens of class analysis, because Subaltern social mobility disappeared along with class differentiation. Secondly because subaltern politics was confined theoretically to the lower storey, it could not threaten a political structure. These alienated subalternity from political histories of popular movements and groups from organized transformative politics in the past and in the present. The writer has depicted the religious beliefs so strong. Ratan and Zainuddin converses over religion. They conclude that there are rewards for good and punishment for evils whatever religion they might belong to. Its only conscience that is the greatest judge. To keep humanity is not the easy job. Ratan confesses that the Muslims are the greatest cook after having the meal at Zainuddin's house. The religious beliefs are portrayed strongly but skilfully author has expressed his concern that the evil like Tarabdi delivers his full prayer continuously. Author's view on practicing religion and act according to religion is not the same thing. Tarabdi is spiritual yet he takes interest which is prohibited in Islam. On the other hand, he has no compassion towards his own community. Characters like Kanai who has accompanied Zainuddin and Haren for a long time betrayed him by unfolding the secrets of Zainuddin. Characters like Ratan and Tarini has compassion towards the subalterns. They consider the fisherfolk as their own. The fiction *Ilish Marir Char* by Abdul Jabbar is a piece of excellent literary art that has portrayed the characters drawn from practical experiences. The adversity to earn the livelihood for the fisherfolk is mainly attributed to natural forces. Nature itself is portrayed as the hindrance for the survival of the fisherfolk. The characters like Sakina, Shindhu and Laxmi are full of feminine essence. Characters like Tarabdi are the representative of the elite society who are chained with class system. The representative of the fisherfolk Zainuddin and Haren are embodied with the attributes like honesty and hard worker. Characters like Tarini represents humanity in contrast to the demon Tarabdi. Ratan is the representative of the young educated hunk of the society who can take a small step to rub the class differences. Hence, the fiction by *Ilish Marir Char* is the masterpiece of Abdul Jabbar which represents the Bangladeshi Bengali literature to the world as an embodiment of the portrayal of the sufferings of the fisherfolk as well as the subalterns in true sense.

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