

Bijan Bhattacharjee's *Nabannya*: An Epic Saga of Lost Men and Lost Times

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Abstract

Bijon Bhattacharjee's *Nabannya* was written as an outburst of angst seeing the multitude of deaths in the Great Famine of 1943, which pervaded some districts of West Bengal. More than a geographical catastrophe, it was the illegal hoarding of food grains and selling them in the Control that skyrocketed its prices in the villages. Aminpur was the worst hit as compounded with the Famine there was also a huge storm that destroyed their livelihood. The people had to come to Calcutta to beg for rice. In this play Bijan Bhattacharjee shows the logic of the Colonizers as well as the livelihood metamorphosis of the subaltern, the marginalised. With deft handling of the suffering of the people due to starvation, Bhattacharjee shows his Marxist leanings and speaks about social change and transformation. He skillfully used surreal frame as well as overdramatised realism to portray his characters. The play ends in a note of victory, with the collective consciousness of people being applauded. The play is a sordid story of love longing betrayal and destitution of Aminpur village in the wake of the famine of 1943.

Keywords: collective consciousness, surrealism, dialectics, logic of the coloniser, subaltern.

1.0 Introduction

'Nabannya' or New Harvest is a Bengali play written in 1944 and staged by IPTA (Indian Peoples' Theatre Association) played in the lead by the then renowned stage actor Sambhu Mitra. 'Nabannya' is a saga of love,

despair, hopelessness and emptiness, all intertwined intricately. It represents a timeless repertoire of men who loved and lost, of catastrophes waiting to happen, both external and internal, of lurking con men and forced prostitution, and the indomitable spirit of people who fought and died for the ideology they held close to their hearts. 'Nabannya' is an epic tale of courage, rebellion, and the zeal that only humans have- to fight against all odds- to fight till the very end.

Written by Bijan Bhattacharjee who himself witnessed the Great Bengal Famine in 1943, 'Nabannya' revolves around the life and times of farmers living in the catastrophe stricken villages of Midnapur, rechristened as Aminpur in the play. He creates a rich tapestry of the lives of people, people dying of starvation, malnutrition and disease, yet uncompromising in their demeanor.

Unlike the earlier playwrights like Sisir Kumar Bhaduri or Rabindranath Tagore, 'Nabannya' is not hero centered and unilateral in character. It is multilayered and operates at different timezones and spaces at the same time. As a sharp move away from its contemporary plays, Nabannya pivots around collective coexistence as well as collective progress of the society, with realistic sets, makeup, dialogue delivery and characterization. Whereas Rabindranath's dance drama 'Raktakarabi',

‘Chitrangada’ were based on Romance, Hedonism, and a deep stirring of the aesthetic self, Nabannya questioned the basic necessities of life. It is this Realism impinged upon each and every character of the play, be it Pradhan Samaddar, the lead actor, or Kunja his brother or Radhika, his sister in law played so aptly by the late Shobha Sen or the dialogues depicting the destitution that the farmers were facing due to acute crisis of foodgrains, to the constant wailing of famished half naked souls on the streets of Calcutta crying “ *Bhaat Daao*” or “ give me rice to eat” adds a strange dimension to the play, unlike anything seen or heard before. Each scene written by Bhattacharjee is complete by itself as well as is like a chain to continuity, of semblence and rhyhtm.

Though the play has been criticised from many quarters, especially by noted critic Hiran Kumar Sanyalⁱ, who alleged that Nabannya was filled with inconsistencies and the weakest scene is the climax during the last scene, lacking any sound logic, yet it can be said that Nabannya touched a milestone in Bengali Theater that was never dared to be traversed by any other playwright of Bhattacharjee’s stature and elan. It was this so called ‘lack of logic’ⁱⁱ in the final scene that created a new chapter in stage plays during the time. In an interview in later years, Bijan Bhattacharjee himself said that while writing the play, he was goaded by an inner desire to sketch the pains and despairs of the farmers who were being subjected

to such destitution. 2 million people were killed due to starvation. The streets of Calcutta were piled up with dead bodies waiting to be cremated. Sadly no body dared to cremate such huge number of people dying every day, men, women, children, there were thousands of them either dead or waiting to be dead, under trees, on streets, in front of the langarkhana.

In this scheme of things, his first reaction was to write out his angst, to let the intellectual section of the society feel the pain these people were going through. He had to write something as fast as he could do that the play could be staged. And this perhaps, this seething desire to expose the devastation of Aminpur to the minds of the learned intellectuals of Bengal that the climax seems to be bereft of any logic. In contemporary plays like “ Jabanbandi” or ‘witness’ all climaxes were based upon some kind of dramatic understanding, some logic on which the entire plot and characterisation is based. But in Nabannya, tangents have been drawn in different directions, shuffling between Calcutta and Aminpur, between hope and despair, between self centeredness and sacrifice. The plot of the play is so absurdly all encompassing in terms of human emotions, that the climax may seem to be a tad dull for the audience as it lacks the crescendo which was built up around it earlier.

1.1 Nabannya: The Muted Voice of the Subaltern

Nabannya is said to have hit the thinking Bengalis in the hardest way. Most of the audience who came to see the play were aghast at seeing the sheer multitude of people loitering around the Calcutta lanes and by lanes for want of food! And these beggars were once affluent farmers living in unity and harmony in Aminpur. Somehow the staging, dialogues and set planning was able to stir up the nascent guilt of the intelligentsia, and Nabannya was said to have been house-full every single day, re staged again in 1948 by Bahurupee theatre.

There are many disjunctures in the narrative pattern of Nabannya which actually makes it unique from the rest of the contemporary plays showed during the times. On one hand, it harped on Gross Realism to the extent that in the 4th scene, when Makhan (grandson of Pradhan Samaddar) dies gradually out of starvation, the entire scene was based on real life situation and gross, raw emotion of a father (Niranjan) witnessing the death of their only son of starvation, day by day, breath by breath. Soon after, the play moves on to metaphorical characters, who appear from nowhere and disrupt the natural unfolding/continuity of the play, and reflect the turmoil of the times. The characterization of Judhisthir (the Marxist/ Communist leader who goes around Aminpur in disguise and is the main ideologue on whose thoughts the entire idea of protest and

rebellion is based) is Utopian in nature, as we see him in the 1st scene of the play and then again much later. The audience is left wondering what happened to Judhisthir when the military opened fire on the innocent villagers of Aminpur, and why is he so conspicuously absent when the villagers who had migrated to Calcutta in search of food grains, ultimately return and vow to work in cooperative farming. Many Scholars have likened Bijan Bhattacharjee's Nabannya to Shakespearean plays- a play within a play, where along with realistic characters, there were also present metaphorical actors, lurking in and out of scenes, moving lucidly between sets and incidents.

In fact , the famine of 1943 came with so many implications that it was a jolt for the elitist people of erstwhile Calcutta- the pervasiveness of the times was such that its depiction turned a new leaf in the sphere of stage drama. Nabannya broke all the rules of the book. Bijan Bhattacharjee impinged this lack or incoherence of logic within the thinking intellectual, in such a kind of urgency, that the very rawness of the scenes like Makhan's death, dog and human eating from the same dustbin, a fox biting off parts of the body of a half dead starved man under a tree, are engraved in his brain forever. Unlike Sisir Bhaduri, this lack of finesse helped to dawn upon a reality which could not be compromised upon.

Every scene in Nabannya depicts an eerie kind of voyeurism, blatant exhibitionism that could only be a part of the subaltern tales. And this brings us to another disjuncture in the play, where there are multiple layers of meanings interwoven into the dialogues of the characters. In a stark differentiation, this actually brought the theory of the core and the periphery to the forefront. And the impact on the intellectuals was immediate. Cutting into the play scene by scene, we witness this play of polysemy created by Bhattacharjee. Right from the first scene, the audience gets to see the irreversible changes brought about by the Famine in the Life of Pradhan Samaddar and other members of Aminpur. By sheer dialogue delivery we are reverted to some incident in the past that Pradhan keeps harping upon.

In the opening scene of the play, Pradhan keeps on reiterating the names of his two sons Sripati and Bhupati and time and again we come across these two names, sometimes in the form of lament, and again as an expression of anger. This creates a sort of dramatic tension in the minds of the audience who wonder what has happened to them. It is only in the second scene that we get to understand that the military that was patrolling Aminpur village had shot them down. In this parlance, it is necessary to point out that the villagers had blatantly violated the hoarding of food grains in the cities there by creating an acute shortage in

the villages. This was multiplied by the middlemen who started selling off food grains to other places creating an acute shortage of rice in the villages adjoining West Bengal. The cumulating effect resulted in a famine in 1943. Taking advantage of both the situations, there rose some touts/conmen in the cities, who started buying foodgrains from the farmers at minimal prices and hoarded them in godowns. The shortage of food reached such limits that the villagers had to sell off their lands, houses, utensils and ultimately their children. The fate of the subaltern is echoed in the lines of Bijon Bhattacharjee's Nabannya, where he shows how a starving mother sells off her child for some meager amount just to get some food.

1.2 Nabannya: Colonial Logic vs. the Colonized

While writing the play Nabannya, Bhattachajee did not stick to prevalent norms, as pointed out by critics, rather he used a very fluid approach. The play gradually unfolds in front of the eyes of the audience, he has no premonition about what is to happen next. It seems as if the author of the play and the audience are sitting together in rapt attention. Many critics point out that this stark and untamed form of play writing has its roots to the Marxist moorings of Bhattacharjee who had strong connections with the Communist Party. It is again this particular temperament that makes

him draw the portraits of the colonizer as well as the colonized, interacting together but within their predesigned roles in the play.

By the use of metaphorical, imaginary imagery, Bhattacharjee gets into the skin of the eternal marginalized people of the society, their pains, desperations and destitution. In one particular scene (Scene 2) he shows us by the interactions of his characters how the Police as well as the middlemen has resorted to hoarding food grains, creating acute scarcity, and skyrocketing of prices. The scene opens with a dilapidated mud hut, with most of its belongings having been sold out to buy rice. The only leftover remaining in the '*Kolshi*' was not enough for the whole family to survive for a day. Centered around this issue, Radhika tells Kunja (her husband) in an annoying tone that this is the last grains of rice left. She says “ *e kotai sabal chhilo, kato kore rekhe dichilam, tao galo*”. This leads to an altercation between Kunja and Radhika and ultimately there is a huge fallout between them. In this scene, Bhattacharjee very skillfully shows how the innocent farmers were being victimized by the black marketers, multiplied hundred folds by the Famine. Here, the hoarder of rice is acting as the colonizer and the farmers are the colonized. In later scenes, we see a face to face interaction between them.

In another scene, we see the interactions between two colonized

characters interacting with each other. Very vividly Bhattacharjee plays with his characters, making them lip dialogues in such a way that the erstwhile intellectual society was moved beyond tears. Not only does Nabannya show the colonizer's ill designs, it also shows the empathy between the collective consciences of the subaltern souls. As Dayal (another victim of starvation and Pradhan Samaddar's neighbor) comes to Kunja to ask for some rice, the dialogues between the two shows the hopelessness, anxiety and deprivation of the masses in the face of Famine and black-marketing juxtaposed together. Dayal tells Kunja that he has already sold off all the land he has. He has sold off his utensils and other household items. He is now a pauper, a beggar who has come to Pradhan's doorstep to beg for rice. He tells Kunja that 'Rangar Maa' (his wife) has not eaten and has fallen sick due to hunger for the last 2 days. Pradhan's condition is not much better too. He says, "*Ak mutho chaal er jonnyo tor Dayal da ta naa holey ki ai raj darey darey ghure beray!*"

Replying to this, Pradhan says that after a lot of fights and misgivings, he has been able to procure 2 quintals of rice in lieu of copper utensils in his house. Out of that rice he lends some to Dayal. Nabannya shows this camaraderie between Pradhan and Dayal, both subalterns and belonging to the lowest rungs of the social ladder. Bijon Bhattacharjee, like an artist possessed, paints empathy amidst hopelessness and imminent death, thereby not only establishing the inherent collective consciousness of the

marginalized, but also the question of their existence in reference to the colonizer..

1.3 Nabannya: The Philosophical and the Surreal

The play moves forth and backwards at times even without the audience sometimes understanding it. As Nabannya represents Realism in its depiction of the catastrophe that has dawned upon Aminpur and the family of Pradhan Samaddar, as like all plays of such genre, it also has a philosophical side to it, amounting at times to the surreal. This surreality can be compared to Satyajit Raysⁱⁱⁱ ‘Nayak’, where he shows a fluid movement between reality and dream, as the protagonist of the film Arindam undergoes bouts of flashbacks, dreams, imagination and hallucination, all interplayed together in quick semblance. Likewise, Nabannya at times uplifts itself to a dream in transit, with the sets showing an eerie kind of picture, leaving a lot to the imagination of the audience. The imminent gunshots in the background, that Bhattacharjee cleverly executed with the sound of bamboos, the collective crescendo of “ *Bolo Hari, Hari bol*”(words uttered by Hindus in front of the death pyre), hushed and muted voices, the sound of wailing women and children all add to this surreality in Nabannya. There are 3 tangents of thought playing at the same time in the beginning of the play- first,

Historicities and Political Passion, secondly, from a macro level of the Nation it focuses on one single family, that of Pradhan Samaddar. In actuality, Pradhan's family becomes the microcosm of all families devastated by the Great Famine of 1943. Bijon Bhattacharjee uses semiology here where one family becomes the index of the suffering of an entire village. Thirdly, he portrays the more personalized emotions of each individual within the Samaddar family, the conflicts, internal equations and contradictions. It is in depicting the dynamics on all possible planes that Nabannya truly becomes an epic. The false encounter of Sripati and Bhupati (the two sons of Pradhan Samaddar) by the military, the distant wailing of Panchanani (an old wailing woman in Aminpur) when the police raid the village, the cry of “ *Bhaat Dao* ” (give me some rice) echo in the ears of the audience much after the play ends. In fact the last words of Panchanani on hearing that the menfolk have fled to the jungles with their families, and that the women were susceptible to physical harassment by the police made her scream “ *egiye jaa, tora egiye jaa* ” (go forward, go forward) just before she is killed by a bullet resonates in the minds of the audience for a long time.

1.4 Historicities and Social Contradictions: Nabannya as the face of Deprivation

In fact, the crux of the play lies in the disillusionment of the people with the emerging Nationalism, as they witnessed internal conflicts within the Congress Party, where each had their own gain to seek in the name of earning freedom for the Nation. Perhaps they realized that “the quarrel between Imperialism^{iv} and the upper classes of Indian society is a quarrel over the booty” as said by historian Ardhendu Bandopadhyay. The Quit India Movement too lost out on its zeal after some time with the rise of the question of communalism in the background. With the influx of “Kaalo bajaaris”(black marketeers) , Mahajans, Paikars, the common mass was completely at a loss. It was during this time of rapid uncertainty that Nabannya was born. So was “Aagun” and “Jobanbandi”.

“ Aamar antor jwoley gache re Kunja...amar antor jwoley gache....!”

(my soul has been burnt) are the words with which the first scene starts, with Old Pradhan Samaddar wailing and beating his bosom time and again. Delved deeper, we get to understand the historical and the social conditions that have led him to utter these words. And it is here that Nabannya assumes the cult of a classic, in its portrayal of starvation and suffering of people. He takes his story from the village to Calcutta, where the Pradhan Family migrate, unable to feed the members. By these lines Pradhan Samaddar tries to depict how the state sponsored Police and military were trying to curb the rebellion by the farmers, who protested

against money laundering and illegal hoarding of food grains by some of the businessmen. It is well known that the time when the play was written, West Bengal was reeling under the Great Famine of 1943. 2 million people died during this time. However, the irony lies in the fact that compounded to the Famine, there was a huge black-marketing of food-grains going on creating panic and rising prices in the marketplace. The worst to be hit was the farmers. In protest, they stopped selling rice to the Government and burnt down their own godowns. In retaliation, the government resorted to military aggression in the villages, killing many in encounters. Pradhan Samaddar had lost both his sons in it, and throughout the play we see how Pradhan is never able to get over the death of his two sons and behaves incoherently at times. Nabannya reflects the deadly face of the administration. And no better words to reflect the hard times that the villagers were going through than the words spoken by Samaddar.

In the second instance we see how the Samaddar family (used here as a microcosm of all people of Aminpur) who have further lost their last source of sustenance (their hut) in the storm migrate to the city, in search of food. They unanimously decide that they will beg on the streets of Calcutta. In the words of Pradhan “ *pothe neme danrabar o tor soilo na re Kunja, poth i ghor e uthe elo*” (we did not even have the time to beg in

the streets, the streets have themselves come up to us!). These lines show how emptiness pervaded the air of the city, with hundreds of people dying of hunger daily. After this, Bhattacharjee paints some pictures of Poverty, suffering and starvation. Needless to say, many scholars say that the play depicted these scenes so ravenously that the nudity, the dull pain of people half dead, staring into emptiness assumed the beauty of a poem in his hands!

The Fourth and Fifth scenes in Nabannyo show in gritty details every minute frame how the Samaddar family were losing one member after another to Death, due to starvation. Their bodies reduced to half skeletons by now, the only way to survive was to eat herbs collected from the weeds near the ponds. The storm had swept away most parts of the village, with many people having already died. Only a few households were still hanging on. Nabannya becomes a cult play in that it shows how the Eternal Human Spirit loses everything yet does not yield itself in the face of Death. Makhan (Pradhan's grandson) dies without food, having starved for 5 days. Pradhan cries out, “ *Aami bhulbona je sudhu na khete peye chheleta morey galo. Amake keu bholate parbena!*” Scene after scene Nabannyo shows in horrifying details how people were suffering even to the extent of selling their bodies^v, their children just for some grains of rice.

After this Bijon Bhattacharjee introduces the land shark and tout Haaru Dutta. In this scene he perpetuates the eternal dichotomy of the farmers, who are forced to sell off their lands in lieu of food grains. The second half of the play shows how the Samaddar family is exploited to sell off their land by force, and they have to settle in the streets of Calcutta to beg for food. In coaxing Pradhan Samaddar to sell his land, Haaru Datta says “ *soja shirdanra ta tahole eibar to dekhi ettukhani bekiye ditey hoy, beta chhotoloker ato boro spordha!*”(if you do not sell your land I have to bend your spinal chord, you lecherous low caste!) Nabannya shows how the marginalised actually have no voice, perpetually dominated by the moneyed classes, their deprivation often assuming sky limits.

This picture of deprivation is worsened when we see in the next scene how the impoverished people thronging the streets of Calcutta become a spectacle to see, a commodity for exhibition by the newspaper reporters, covering the Famine situation in the city. The suffering of the poor people begging for some food becomes a butt of ridicule, as Bhattacharjee introduces two reporters who bribe the women as well as Pradhan Samaddar to click his disorderly and famished semi skeletal frame. The play at this point almost reduces itself to a scathing sarcasm of the times. The climax is reached when one of the reporters see Radhika and claim

her impoverished state as a “ fine model”. After clicking the picture, he says “ *Bhikhari logon sab bazaar khola chale jao* ” (all you beggars go towards Bajarkhola for food). With a deft handling Nabannya portrays how a happy farmer family is gradually reduced to a beggar^{vi} in the city.

Cut to the streets of Calcutta, we see a rich mans wedding is taking place in a palatial house. And then we see Kunja and Radhika wading through the wasted food in the dustbins, trying to take some home. Beside Kunja there are a number of street dogs waiting for the same food from the dustbin. On one side of the frame, we see Pradhan Samaddar wailing his hands up and shouting for a little rice. Suddenly, we hear Kunja crying out loud, his hands bleeding profusely, having snatched some food away from the clutches of a dog. In a painful semblance, Bhattacharjee shows how man and dog were fighting for the same food out on the Calcutta streets. Pradhan shouts out at the wedding guests “ *Aar kato chechabo babu duto bhaat er jonnye! Antor ki tomader sab pashaan hoye gache babu!*” (how long do you want me to keep begging for a little food! Are your souls transformed into stone!)

1.5 Cultural Aesthetics and Nabannya: Dramatization of Reality

Nabannyo is a treat to read- Bijon Bhattacharjee like a master skills man

weaves magic in this play. All the scenes are self sufficient in their own way, yet the incidents are linked to each other by a common bond of emotion. Each scene rises to a crescendo of passion, dramatization, and overwhelming emotions. The use of abstractions within the play connect historicities with daily lives of people- from the universal to the local. Emotions, raw and savage rule the hearts of most of its characters, people who are fuming in anger, resentment and ultimately hopelessness and despair. The script of Nabannya often resembles “ pre- Brecht epic type drama” where history blurs the characters and upholds the entire drama to a new high. The pendulum moves forward and backward in time, between personal and collective consciousness, between reality and the surreal. This complexity gains momentum in Bijon Bhatattacharjee’s other plays as well like “ *Debigarjan*” as well as “ *Garbhobati Janani*”

Adhering to true Marxist ideology, Nabannya has an underlying tone parallel to the gradual unfolding of the drama- that of Social Transformation and Social Change. In the initial scenes we see the impending Famine in the village of Aminpur and how it is gradually eating up the last vestiges of humanity. It vividly points out the underlying tensions of classless, the marginalized- the “ objectivization of human existence, , means making mans senses human as well as creating human senses corresponding to the vast richness of human and natural

life”. in a theoretical and practical wayIt then goes on to speak about military raids and false encounters in the village. Driven by angst and disgust, the villagers burn down rice godowns but still do not relent to the overpowering arm twisting strategies of the administration. Subsequently due to lack of food grains the people are forced to beg on the streets of Calcutta. The women are subjected to exploitation by the touts trying to lead them to prostitution.

However, Nabannya also brings a ray of hope in the last scene, where it seems that everything is not lost. It is the perpetual Revolutionary Romantic in Bijon Bhattacharjee that makes him rise above all negative situations and spring a ray of hope. In the climax we see that the storm in Aminpur has receded, and the Pradhan Family, reunited again in the streets of Calcutta head back to their native place. After discussions with all the village members (the few people who are still alive) they decide that irrespective of class creed and religion, they will practice cooperative farming where everyone will take turns to work in the fields. This message as put forth by Bhattacharjee is that collective consciousness is definite to bring about social change some day. People who are marginalized, who are never part of the mainstream life, can bring about a cohesive change only if they choose to fight against repression and exploitation by the stem in union.

It is this Revolutionary Romanticism that forms the subliminal message throughout Nabannya, and we find a lot of resemblance with Ibsen, Chekov and Gorky's Naturalism. The play lashes out to all values that have a Victorian Bourgeois character, and establishes the supremacy of the subaltern in the climax. Frame by frame, dialogue by dialogue, Bhattacharjee paints a collage of Calcutta, and this on-your-facer reality whiplashes the intellectual section of the society to a great extent.

According to Somnath Lahiri^{vii} in “ Queues of Death in Calcutta” (Peoples War, 5th September 1943, pp.1-4, *Janajuddhyo*) he narrates an incident “ *ekhane Gosai er haate bazaar e ekti anoshon klisto chhele koekdin dhore porey chilo. Onahaar e se norachora korar khamota hariye felechilo. Ratre akta khekshiyal ese tar daan paa er paata tar ardhekta khable niye chole jaaye. Se aaro koekdin okhane ardhomrito abostay okhanei porey thake.*” (a starved man was found here near Gosai Haat. He had lost all ability to move due to starvation. At night, a sly fox came and ate away part of his right limb. He remained in this condition for some more time. Nobody came to his rescue) This was the immediate trigger that Bhattacharjee speaks about in his interview regarding the scripting of Nabannya. Conversations heard about in the marketplace, newspaper clippings, skyrocketing prices of food grains in control, all

made him write this play. He tries to get the audience immersed in the tragedy of Aminpur by the repeated dialogues of Pradhan Samaddar, thereby creating a kind of transcendental experience. Added to that is the heart rending “ *Fyan Daa* ” (give me some rice starch to drink) by women carrying starved children in their laps in the streets of Calcutta. The very rawness of the emotion is perhaps what has been dubbed by the creator as a “ poetry of moments”.

1.6 Nabannya as a Product of the Dialectics of the Times

By the apt use of dialogues, Bijon Bhattacharjee captures the dialectics of the Famine ridden villagers of Aminpur. Each stanza resonates with an eerie suffocating silence, an emptiness in the body language of its protagonists that was never seen in his earlier plays. The first Scene or the opening scene as usual starts with gunshots (actually bamboo cracking sound was used), creating an imminent fear in the minds of the audience. However, it does not move towards a climax in the end as supposed to be, but interestingly each scene has its own rising action, climax, falling action and then denouncement. For example, the rising action is seen when Panchanoni falls to the ground after being hit by a bullet she keeps on urging her fellow villagers to go ahead and face the military head on. ‘ Egiye ja Egiye ja’ or go forward gives rise to a situation where we

expect to see a pitched battle. However, instead of battle we are actually exposed to the inner battle going on in the mind of Pradhan Samaddar, an elderly villager honored and revered by everyone in the village. He repeatedly laments ‘... Amar Sripati Bhupati..’ after his two sons were killed in military encounter. Finally the denouncement comes as the Samaddar family runs for cover elsewhere and the scene ends.

In the second scene, we get to see the dishevelled condition of Pradhan Samaddar’s hut. The last food grains had been taken out from the jar and cooked. No one in the house knew what they would eat the next day. In this way , Nabannya builds up an unfathomable anxiety in the minds of the audience. Pradhan does not have a single penny in hand and decides to sell off the household utensils to buy 20 kgs of rice. The acute and desperate condition of the Samaddar family creates internal tensions and conflicts in all the other members of the family who fight with each other on silly pretexts. This is a way to expose the vulnerability and insecure condition of the menfolk of the family. The scene ends with no conclusion as such and the audience are left to construct their own reality. Bhattacharjee uses very consciously a lot of pauses and gaps in the dialogues to show the confused state of mind the people of Aminpur were in.

The third scene draws closer to the actual tragedy- death due to starvation,

as the villagers die of starvation and malnutrition one by one. The scene opens with Pradhan Samaddar's neighbor Dayal coming to their household to beg for some rice to feed his ailing wife (Ranga er maa) who was starving since days. However, before he could leave a devastating storm struck the village and nearly one third of the village drowned in flood water. Ranga s mother was flown away by the incessant flood. The actions, structure and intersubjectivity of the narration all bring out the dialectics of the times.

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