

# Great Expectations and the Ballad of the Road: Simple Annals of the Poor

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**Abstract:** Charles Dickens (1802-1870), the quintessential Victorian author has depicted various recurrent social evils of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England. In *Great Expectations* particularly, he has shown how the poor orphan young boy Pip, deeply unhappy with his wretched domestic life, aspires for a better life and position in the society by any means. Though in a different way, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (1896-1950), one of the luminaries of Bengali literature and an eminent early 20<sup>th</sup> century writer, has also exhibited the struggle of the orphan young adolescent Apu picturing the domestic and social realities of the Bengali rural and urban society of the 1920s and 1930s in his well-known back to back novels *The Ballad of the Road* (Pather Panchali) and its sequel *The Unvanquished* (Aparajito). Both these novelists have simultaneously portrayed the outward impoverished life of common class people, and the layered sensibility and human emotions in them, especially in the thoroughly growing ordinary child characters like Pip, Apu and others. They have also made poverty a character itself, a condition that represents the stark realities of life of the then English and Bengali societies respectively. But at the same time, they seem to be far different from each other in dealing with poverty and their attitudes to life and reality. Therefore, this comparative study aims to critically analyse these novels and explore how differently these authors have conveyed their ideology of 'realism'.

**Keywords:** domestic reality, social reality, poverty, struggle, misery, aspiration, disillusion

## Introduction

Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay's *The Ballad of the Road* stand as two of the most enduring novels of all times even though written in two different social backdrops in two different times. Both of these novelists spin their timeless tales with exhaustive depiction of contemporary domestic and social realities and the life of people from various sections of the society. The novels portray the poignant sketches of poverty in the Victorian rural England and the 1920s and 1930s Bengal reflecting the fragility between the poor's illusion and reality. The story of 'Great Expectations' evolves from a lower class blacksmith family where the central character

Pip is raised by his sister Mrs. Joe Gargery and his brother-in-law Mr. Joe Gargery. The story develops through Pip's nurturing of his dreams and expectations throughout the phases of his transition as he struggles for a better life and social status. On the other hand, 'The Ballad of the Road', as a replica of the rural Bengal, is a meticulously artistic narrative picturing the predicament of a destitute Brahmin family headed by Harihar Ray. The poverty-stricken Ray family in their ancestral village of Nischindipur consists of Harihar Ray, his wife Sarbajaya, his son Apu and daughter Durga and his crippled sister Indir Thakrun. The striving of Harihar and Sarbajaya to meet the family ends, their search for a new life in the hope of a better future, the playful immaculate childhood of Apu and Durga and their responses to social happenings happen to be the staple material to fabricate the story of the novel. The story of their family struggle progresses from 'The Ballad of the Road' and continues to the next novel as Apu gets older. Apu is the central character here and his entrance into the real life misery, misfortune and struggle is delicately narrated in the second book 'The Unvanquished' (*Aparajito*). The similarity and dissimilarity in the cycle of events in both these novels, and the authors' treatment of domestic and social realities provide ample scope to determine the type of their realist stance in literature.

## Mr. Joe's turbulent Childhood Life

Pip lives with his sister Mrs. Joe since the death of his parents and now works as an apprentice to his brother in law Mr. Joe in his smithy. Mr. Joe's account of his past family history with Pip states that he did not have a pleasant childhood life as his father was a drunkard who used to hammer away at his mother when overtook with drink. When his father's inebriation exceeded limit of tolerance, she would run away from his callous father taking him with her. She used to go out for work to provide for their survival and for Joe's schooling. But being a poor blacksmith 'good in his heart', Joe's father could not stay alone for long parting from them, and took them back home again. For Joe, this rift and reunion 'were

a drawback on his learning.’ After coming home, Joe had to assist his father with his work in the forge due to which his schooling stopped for good. Shortly after, his father passed away leaving the whole family behind on Joe. The family was in such a bad economic condition that Joe could not even paste his self-written epitaph on his father’s tombstone only because ‘poetry costs money’. But Joe was not a young man to give up so easily, and so he shouldered all the family responsibilities. Moreover, looking after his already ailing mother and bearing the medical expenditure were simply an addition to his misery. Joe’s blue eyes turned a little watery when he says, “all the money that could be spared were wanted for my mother. She were in a poor elth, and quite broke. She weren’t long of following, poor soul, and her share of peace comes round at last.” (Dickens, 1993, p. 40) Even though his family’s wage earner now, Mr. Joe still is not free from the stings of reality as he frets over his wife’s snapping manner of talking to him saying that this woman is ‘given to government’, and that she treats both of them in a bullying and domineering manner as if she were a ‘Mogul’. In short, Mr. Joe’s life as a child was shaken with parental unhappiness, as a young adolescent confronted with economic struggle, and now as a husband is under constant corporal oppression of his wife. Dickens has depicted a realistic picture of the poor working class whose life is a perpetual struggle against the odds of life. The life of Mr. Joe is a faithful embodiment of that ceaseless struggle against poverty and domestic realities.

### **Pip’s Unhappy Domestic Life**

The painful events and wretched conditions pertaining to Joe’s childhood life and those of Pip are indicative of their miserable childhood life. “*Great Expectations*, like most of Dickens’ novels, does not begin with a description of the perfect bliss of childhood, the period when the world and the self are identified, and the parents are seen as benign gods whose care and whose overlooking judgement protect and justify the child.” (Miller, 1970, p. 251) Fear and feeling of insecurity always lark in Pip’s mind making him a ‘morally timid’ helpless child. The early years of Pip’s life are fraught with wretchedness, misery and suffering even if the family is not steeped in extreme poverty now. His sister, Mrs. Gargery is a stern, nagging and overbearing woman who treats him most roughly completely disregarding the effects of her ill-treatment on an impressionable mind. She constantly scolds and rebukes Pip, sometimes coming down heavily on him for minor lapses or no lapses at all. Every now and

then, she, always in a sarcastic manner, reminds him of the great sacrifice she has made in upbringing him ‘by hand.’ An orphan at a very tender age, Pip never gets the selfless motherly love, care and sympathy from his sister; even he is denied the simplest privilege as a member of the family, and it is evident when pip says, “I was never allowed a candle to light me to bed,” (Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 1993, p. 11) The pitiable plight and predicament of Pip’s life under the cruel heartlessness and ‘rampage’ of Mrs. Joe compels him to say, “As to me, I think my sister must have some general idea that I was a young offender whom an Accoucheur Policeman had taken up (on my birthday) and delivered over to her, to be dealt with according to the outraged majesty of the law. I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born, in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality,...” (Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 1993 , p. 19) Pip grows in such an unsympathetic and abusive domestic environment that he becomes the target of adverse remarks even by most of the family friends.

Because of her sister’s ‘capricious and violent coercion’, Pip has never been content with the pitiful life he leads in this family. Besides his assistance to Joe, Pip is also favoured with the employment of frightening birds or picking up stones or doing any such job. Pip is doubtful about getting any right on the little money he earns through these toilsome jobs as he says, “a money-box was kept on the kitchen mantelshelf, into which I was publicly made known that all my earnings were dropped. I have an impression that they were to be contributed eventually towards the liquidation of the National Debt, but I know I had no hope of any personal participation in the treasure.” (Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 1993 , pp. 36-37) It seems without beating around the bush that Mrs. Joe capitalises on Pip’s earning and exploits his labour depriving him of his logical right to the money. This is most unbecoming and ironical on her part that Mrs. Joe, who is supposed to offer her love and affection to this orphan boy, is using him for her own monetary gains. Amid all these, Pip attends at an evening school run by Mr. Woptle’s great aunt where he begins to learn to read, write, and do elementary sums of arithmetic with the help of Biddy, an orphan girl like Pip. But it is easily predictable that Pip’s expectations will never flourish here, and his future prospect of being a gentle man will remain a far cry.

### **Domestic Reality in these Novels**

All these unfortunate and sad happenings that Mr. Joe and Pip experience in their respective families during

the early years of their life are the best representations of domestic reality as they actuate the life of poor common class people of the 19th century England. *Great Expectations* presents a vivid picture of a poor working class rural England family and its members, which actually testifies that “it does have aspects of domestic realism- which by 1860 was characteristic of Dickens’s contemporaries such as Thackeray, Eliot, and Trollope-” (Bloom, 2005 , p. 13) Similarly, *The Ballad of the Road* depicts a moving and realistic picture of an impoverished rural Bengal family. “The difficulties of rearing the children and dissension in Sarbojaya-Indir household with deficit – all are presented in this book as done in a novel dealing with reality.” (Chattopadhaya, 2006, p. 200) The novel opens with the sub-title ‘Ballai Balai’ which tells of Harihar’s strained financial status and the background story of his far related maternal sister Indir Thakrun and his ancestors in and around Nischindipur. Harihar’s living in a shabby house in the north most part of the village, his meagre negligible income from his inherited property and the obeisance money from his Brahminship are all testimonial to his omnipresent economic indigence. In such a family, a seventy five year-old woman like Indir Thakrun is an unwelcome presence always at the harsh verbal assault of the household mistress Sarbojaya. The most painful irony is that Indir Thakrun has become a burden in the household which had once been maintained and taken care of by this old lady in Harihar’s absence for years. “To keep watch the household, she passed her days in extreme hardship starving and running from door to door to appease her hunger.” (Bandopadhaya, 2009 , p. 17) Mentally offended by Sarbojaya’s harsh and humiliating remarks, Indir Thakrun left the house several times but every time came back afterwards. One day, the wizened old woman makes the fatal mistake in buying some cheap local fruits at two paisa without Sarbojaya’s consent. She flares up in exasperating rage, because ‘two paisa’ is too much an amount for Sarbojaya and her poverty-ridden family to pay for a trifling cause. So, Indir Thakrun leaves the house again and takes refuge at many houses one after another for a few months. At last, she decides to come back at the request of Durga. But Sarbojaya’s heartless rigidity towards Indir Thakrun went so far this time that she denied her entry paying no heed to her repeated supplication. Eventually, she died a helpless death that day.

The introduction of such a heart-rending event at the outset of the novel and the portrayal of Sarbojaya’s stone-heartedness by Bibhutibhushan are not free of expostulation. Sunilkumar Chattopadhaya vehemently accuses Bibhutibhushan of

‘unnecessarily creating excessive pathos’ in Indir Thakrun’s death. But the novelist’s one of the most leading literary leitmotifs to paint reality in its real shade and colour provides him a logical ground to defend against such criticism. This is because Sarbojaya-Indir Thakrun scuffle is not an isolated and rare incident, but an epitome of the stark domestic reality that existed in the lower class Bengal families during the early 20th century. Spending extra money (two paisa, a very little amount) for buying fruits was a luxury to Sarbojaya who barely manages cheap dishes on everyday menu. Moreover, Indir Thakrun buys the fruits for which Apu and Durga wander about in the bushes to pluck or steal just to satisfy their tongue. The author narrates, “They could never eat any rich items since their birth. As they are newly born in this world, their tongues tender- they crave for various juices, especially sweet juices on earth. They don’t have the ability to buy variety of sweets and be satiated- from among the bounteous gifts of the world; the compassionate goddesses fill mere fruits and flowers in the bush with sweets from which these poor boys and girls get sweet juice.” (Bandopadhaya, The Ballad of the Road, 2009, p. 50) Therefore, the death incident is, by no means, an unnecessary creation of excessive pathos; it is a credible penetration of poverty prevailing in the then families of the rural Bengal.

### **Mrs. Joe and Sarbojaya as Victims of Reality**

The extent of selfishness and shrewishness in the characters of Mrs. Joe and Sarbojaya marks the unlikeness in the likeness, because there is enough at once of resemblance and of difference in the position, surroundings and circumstances which they have to confront with. Their practical nature and seldom cruel behaviour might be an effect of their perpetual fight against domestic reality. Family affluence is an alien word and condition to these ladies; poverty is an ever existing phenomenon for them to live with. Apart from Mrs. Joe’s cruel mistreatment of her husband and Pip, she is a petty ambitious worldly wise woman who seems to be very much concerned about her own as well as Pip’s future prospects. One day she brings good news for Pip and tells that this boy’s fortune may be made by his going to Miss Havisham who wants the boy to go to her house and play there. Her various comments in the first few chapters affirms her frustration and dissatisfaction with the present life and unwrap her fondest wish to be something more than what she is, ‘a blacksmith’s wife.’ But question arises on the degree of Mrs. Joe’s misbehaviour with Pip and that of Sarbojaya with Indir Thakrun. Despite her occasional physical assault, Mrs. Joe never tends to drive Pip out of the

house, but Sarbojaya commits this inhuman act only to get rid of the hunchbacked Indir Thakrun. Sarbojaya's action towards this old lady is completely unjustifiable on moral grounds, and also due to the fact that the absence of this old lady does not bring about any visible financial upgradation in their family. At the same time, both of them stand on the same footing in terms of redemption – Mrs. Joe moments before her death after being fatally wounded by Orlick seeks forgiveness from Mr. Joe and Pip, and Sarbojaya while working as a cooking servant in a rich family in Kashi after her husband's death sheds tears remembering her brutality to Indir Thakrun. In short, they are the embodiments of misfortune under the stark reality of their family. They are victims of harsh unbearable domestic reality.

### **Dickens and Bibhutibhushan as Realist Novelists**

Certainly Dickens and Bibhutibhushan are realist novelists in every sense of the term, because the picture of society depicted in these novels is by no means gratifying; it is a true representation of domestic and social realities prevalent in the societies of their respective times. According to Earnest Baker, realism has two meanings: firstly depicting things as they appear to be and, secondly, the art of making anything that may be imagined look real. He adds that an author may even make the impossible seem probable, and he goes on to say that Dickens has most of this second kind of realism. Moreover, Dickens uses the novel as a vehicle for the criticism of the society. *Great Expectations* and many of his novels such as *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Hard Times* show Dickens's censorious role as a novelist, because the picture of society depicted in his novels exposes many of the evils and abuses rampant in the Victorian society. But Dickens's novels are faithful tales of Victorian life and society without nature. Nature has never got an emphasis in the novels of Dickens; he is primarily concerned with showing the bleak society riddled with cruelty, greed, injustice and many other types of evils. That is why, his critical view of Victorian society as embodied in this novel might have been highly unflattering to his contemporaries. On the other hand, Bibhutibhushan's attitude to life differs to a great extent from that of Dickens and many of his contemporary novelists e.g. Sharatchandra Chattopadhyaya, Tarasankar Bandopadhyaya and others chiefly because "Bibhutibhushan has an inherent merit and tendency to depict the pleasure and pain of common people with the constant presence of nature." (Roychowdhuri, 1996, p. 58) Sharatchandra in his novel *Devdas* (1917) shows the sense of class consciousness as a

distinguishing reality between the social classes in the then feudal Bengal. The marital union between Devdas and Parboti does not happen because his father clings to his social position. The tragic story in this novel is the exposition of deep-rooted social strata of the time. The novel *Hansuli Banker Upakatha ([Folk Tales of the River Bend])* (1947) by Tarasankar Bandopadhyaya pictures the social life of the 'Kahar' community (the most neglected and disadvantaged class of the society) deeply ingrained in taboos, tradition and superstitious beliefs. Tarasankar's treatment of social realism clearly deviates from the typical social realism dealt by his contemporaries like Sharatchandra and Bibhutibhushan. He broke the poetic tradition in novels and took to writing prose with the world around them adding romance to human relationship. Both Dickens and Bibhutibhushan are realists in actual terms as both of them have opted for depictions of everyday and banal activities and experiences in their novels. But they are at the same time different from each other since Bibhutibhushan is not an ardent critic of the time like Dickens. There is a vivid picture of the social evils in *The Ballad of the Road*, but without intense criticism against them. Bibhutibhushan has romanticized nature and the events in this novel to some extent; his treatment of reality transcends from mere depiction to vision. His portrayal of characters, treatment of nature and his romantic attitude to life seem to be more like Wordsworthian than Dickensian; his central point of view is more of mystical type than of critical one. For this reason, Bibhuti's novels are less a critique of the age than a presentation of domestic and social reality with a mystic insight into nature and life.

### **Poverty and Exploitation in Bibhuti's Novels**

Bibhutibhushan's captivating delineation of the central characters blighted with poverty make *The Ballad of the Road* "an age-old sweet and pitiable domestic tale of sorrows and happiness, hopes and despair of a couple and their progeny" (Roychowdhuri, 3rd Edition, Bibhutibhushan: Mind and Art, 1996, p. 83) As a matter of fact, Bibhutibhushan has made poverty the protagonist of the novel through his vivacious portrayal of it. Set in a Bengali village far off the main cultural artery, the novel calmly demonstrates the fragility of Harihar's serene illusion as he dreams of becoming a feted writer and poet. But the harsh financial reality obstructs him, so he must set aside this fantasy and work as a bookkeeper for the local landlord Annoda Ray in Nischindipur. Poverty and reality make him so much a meek man that he is easily exploited- he cannot even muster the courage to ask his employer

for overdue wages despite his family having little food and his house being badly in need of repairs. As Harihar slaves for a pittance, occasionally moonlighting to carry out religious ceremonies, his wife Sarbojaya struggles to provide her two rambunctious kids with their minimum requirements except her palpable motherly warmth. Apart from the depiction of domestic reality, Bibhutibhushan, like a socially concerned writer, has shown some glimpses of social anomalies in this novel for which various characters suffer. Annoda Ray does money-lending business and refuses to give the key of the house where grains are stored back to the poor widow of Tomrez who died a few days ago leaving his debt to him unpaid. After paying five taka from the debt, the helpless widow requests Annoda to give her the key so that she can feed her kids, but he remains indifferent to her beseeching and confiscates the store house. Annoda Ray is such a greedy man that he even wants to misappropriate his brother's property who has been settled in the west since a long time. Thus, the novelist, though not like a social reformer or social commentator, presents the greed for money and property, prevalent in the rural Bengal feudal society, through the character of Annoda Ray. This incident also echoes the inhuman tyranny and exploitation of money lenders which Manik Bandopadhyaya (1908-1956) vividly shows in his novel *The Boatman of Padma* (Padma Nadir Majhi) published in 1936. Unlike Bibhutibhushan's, the novel is a severe criticism of the cruel nexus of corruption and exploitation perpetrated by the elite money lending bourgeois class against the underprivileged and impoverished marginalised class of fishermen.

### **Painful Events Portrayed by Bibhutibhushan**

A terrible dilemma between the ideals and aspirations of the Harihar family and their basic needs has been vividly portrayed by Bibhutibhushan. In this connection, the nature of aspirations of Sarbojaya and Mrs. Joe is, to a certain extent, akin to each other's as they pin their hopes on Harihar and Pip respectively for their family or monetary prospects. Sarbojaya's hopes entirely revolve around Harihar and Durga until their death while Mrs. Joe's on Pip until she loses memory before her sad demise. In *The Ballad of the Road*, the author writes, "When Harihar first returned from Kashi, everyone used to talk about his bright future, no one in this area came with such learning. The fame of his learning was on the tip of everyone's tongue, everyone used to say, he is going to make something this time. Sarbojaya also used to think that they would offer him (Harihar) a good job soon (Her idea about 'they' who give good jobs was

as vague as the foggy sea). But months after months, years after years passed by, no horseman with silver thread cloth came with an appointment letter at midnight, or no Arabian Nights giant flew with a diamond castle and replaced their shabby cottage with it, rather the condition of the cottage was declining day by day, yet she didn't lose heart. Every time Harihar returns from away home, he raises optimism in such a way as if better days were about to come. But what happened?.." (Bandopadhyaya, *The Ballad of the Road*, 2009, p. 120) Not only this, Sarbojaya is also hopeful of her daughter Durga's marriage to Nirendra who comes to Nischindipur for a settlement of his father's property which has been in his uncle Annoda Ray's possession for a long time. The basis of her hope lies in the fact that Nirendra develops a liking towards Durga after a few casual exchanges of conversation with her. Getting no news from Nirendra after he leaves Nischindipur, Sarbojaya now repeatedly presses her husband to send a letter for the fourth time to Rajeshwar Babu, Nirendra's father to learn about the latest developments. But her hope ends in despair as no response comes so far from the other party.

In the meantime, due to the scarcity of finding work locally, Harihar travels to nearby cities in order to earn the money that will be required to repair their already derelict house. During his absence, he seldom writes and sends money, and the family slides further into poverty, despair and misfortune. Sarbojaya grows increasingly lonely and embittered as her struggle multiply in managing the family with no cash left. In the meantime, Durga develops malaria after getting soaked for dancing and playing for a long time in one Monsoon downpour. With poor medical care available, her fever continues and eventually on a night of incessant rain and gusty winds, she dies a heart-wrenching pathetic death. Durga dies with her unfulfilled desire to see the railway and steam train- a desire for which little Durga and Apu walked a long distance through the grassy field on the false pretext of searching out the lost calf, but came back without seeing them as it was too far away from home for them then to go. This heart-piercing shock ultimately leads Harihar to pack up from Nischindipur and set out for Vanaras in search of a new life there. With the migration, Apu's dream of seeing the train comes true, but without his dear sister and best companion Durga who, in her death bed, does not even forget to urge Apu to show her the train once she comes round. Everything shattered in the ancestral village, hope seems to be their only anchor to carry life on, and Apu's true journey of life begins from this point of the story. "After Durga's death, with its grief and want in

Harihar-Sarbojaya household the question of leaving Nischindipur quite naturally comes in the forefront. Durga's death makes Harihar-Sarbojaya and at some points Apu empty and cry with the sorrows of losing her. But here in this part, Apu is born again and his new journey of life is on. In the novel, Apu is not intellectually conscious of the new birth and the journey; it was in his sub-conscious or unconscious state of mind." (Chattopadhyaya, 2nd Edition, Bibhutibhusan: Life and Literature, 2006, p. 204)

Before Apu leaves for Kashi, he is simply a child, young enough to perceive the inner meaning of life and reality. But he always strives for something good e.g. wants to study at school for which he is admitted to the local school run by Proshonnaya Gurumahashaya beside his grocery, inquires about what books are inside his father's metal box, writes stories and poetry at tender age. On the contrary, Pip lacks the sublimity of intentions as well as expectations. Many events of their life bring them closer to and at the same time take them far away from each other because of the disparity in their outlooks, hopes, aspirations, expectations, struggles and despair of life. Apu's real journey of life begins in *Akrur Sanbad*, the third part of *The Ballad of the Road and* continues to *The Unvanquished (Oporajito)*, a sequel to the novel which tells "the story of his adolescence in Kashi—a story of his first struggle of life. This struggle lies in and outside Apu – with poverty outside and with himself inside ... In a word, Apu enters the life of reality in *Akrur Sanbad*." (Chattopadhyaya, 2nd Edition, Bibhutibhusan: Life and Literature, 2006, p. 205) *The Ballad of the Road* and *The Unvanquished* penetrate various social evils and provide ample instances and illustrations making them social documents of the time. On the other hand, "in the world of *Great Expectations*, the pressure of the personal, and its relationship to the human lot, so strongly guided Dickens's imagination that social issues become contributory elements rather than bogs and blockages" (Golden, 1992, p. 164)

### Depiction of Class Consciousness and Child Abuse

The implicit mention of class distinction prevalent among the comparatively solvent and the upper class people of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengal proves that Bibhutibhusan is well aware of this social phenomenon. While Sarbojaya is adamant about Durga's supposed marriage with Nirendra, Harihar reminds her of the family distinction between his and Rajeshwar Babu's. A few months after Durga dies, Harihar's late brother Nilmoni Ray's widow comes to Nischindipur for survey purpose of their property and

stays at the well-off Bhuban Mukharjee's house. This lady owns a handsome amount of ten thousand taka and her eldest son Suresh studies at a school in Calcutta because of their financial ability. Sarbojaya tries to develop an intimacy with her sister-in-law from the very beginning she arrives here, but she always maintains a visible distance with the Harihar family only because of her superior social status. She does not even let her kids Atoshi and Sunil to mix with the local uneducated and uncultured children lest her kids should get spoilt with them. Bhuban Mukharjee's conduct with the Harihar family is also like that of the widow as "there is no behavioural difference between Bhuban Mukharjee and Sunil's mother: because Bhuban Mukharjee has money, but he never considers Sarbojaya a human." (Bandopadhyaya, *The Ballad of the Road*, 2009, p. 133) Inborn impracticable, Harihar's prospect remains the same as before, because no notable financial upliftment comes in his family after he settles in Kashi. Their struggle for a better life is far from being over since Harihar dies of fever leaving the family responsibilities on Sarbojaya.

Soon after his death, Sarbojaya takes up the job of a cook in a rich family little bit off Kashi where her laborious struggle for survival continues anyhow. Several incidents during their stay in that family clearly indicate the severe sense of class distinction between the poor domestic working class and the rich master class. On the days of the marriage ceremony of Baro Babu's (head of the family) daughter, Apu digests lots of humiliating remarks as a reminder of his being the son of a cooking servant. Besides, Baro Babu does not like the little boys of the family to play with the low class Apu; he even whips Apu when he is found guilty of a scuffle with Ramen, Tebu and others while trying to play with them. The physical assault by Baro Babu and the verbal abusive remarks by the male servant Girish Sarkar and the Manager of the house are reminders of violence against children which Dickens shows more minutely in *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*. Sarbojaya and Apu cannot but tolerate all these contempts, insults, and humiliating slights as they have nowhere to go, nobody to look after them. In the midst of all these, Apu's only solace is his mother and the heart-felt friendly cordiality of Lila, daughter of the Baro Babu family. The novel concludes with Sarbojaya's making up of mind to leave this hellish place and the toilsome job for something better though they do not know exactly where to go. At last, in chapter 1 of *The Unvanquished*, a sudden surprise comes to them with the letter sent by Sarbojaya's far-related uncle Bhubotaron Chakrobarty who invites them to live and settle at his own home in

Monshapota since all his kinsmen have died and none is left to take care of the house. Their joy knows no bounds as they are about to have a home which they can at least feel of their own.

Rife with many memorable characters, these two novels of Dickens and Bibhutibhusan are the token of their tremendous ability to dive deep into the psyche of Pip and Apu unleashing the inner working of their minds. Both of them show, though not in an equal degree, how much Pip and Apu feels uneasy and ashamed of their social position. While in Kashi, Apu concocts a story to his local friends about their having a big house in their native village and also in Kashi, their coming here in Kashi for an air change, his father having a prestigious job and also landlordship (*Jamindari*). Here also, Bibhutibhusan has so very subtly and tactfully shows the intensity of class consciousness of which even an adolescent boy is aware. Similarly, various factors function as instruments behind Pip's over eagerness to alter his social status as well as destiny. As far as history is concerned, Victorian society was dominated and ruled by a tightly woven system of class distinctions where everything was determined by personal, familial, social and financial status. This very trend of the society provides Dickens the subject matter to gently satirise the class system of his era, and to make a point about its capricious nature. Dickens was well aware of the notions of what constitutes a 'gentleman.' One of the reasons Dickens chose, in fact to write the book was to redress the imbalance he felt he had created in the earlier creation of the 'gentleman' Copperfield and his snobbery towards the lads with whom he was compelled to work in the factory to which he had been consigned; Dickens had suffered a similar fate as a child and never spoke of it though he never forgot it. "No novelist before Dickens had treated the lower middle class on such broad lines or in so frank a way. He studies them not as a detached, superior kind of observer, but as one on their own level; a sympathy, an immediate community of impressions, and, as it were, an instinctive fraternity, thus impregnate his study." (Cazamian, 1964 , p. 1130) Estella's cold indifference towards Pip and her 'disdain' of his social class work as a catalyst which aggravates Pip's aspiration to improve and upgrade his social position and status. Infact, "through Estella, Pip's emotional predicament assumes its explicitly social dimension. She awakens in him the first desperate longings for the gentility that will bring nothing but further discontent with it, a false ideal based on fortune and prospects." (Herst, 1990 , p. 130) He wants desperately to become a gentleman and tries to forget the shamefully-defining part of his past lower class

life. Quite sad a matter that all his cherished expectations come into a painful disillusion; he is crushed emotionally and psychologically with the pathetic discovery of his real benefactor, with Estella's marriage to the upper class lout Drummle – marriage of that Estella whom he thinks to be meant for him only. Dickens here faithfully paints the poor class's great expectations to be ended in utter failure and disgrace in a class ridden society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England where one's social status defines everything. "Pip's predicament is representative of a social class in the act of emergence from primitive origins. He needs civilization because he is so acutely aware ... of its opposite, and consequently he overvalues it." (Gilmour, 1981 , pp. 137-138)

### **Pip and Apu's Fight against Stark Reality**

Pip and Apu's childhood life is strikingly similar as both of them lose their homes and find their abode in the houses that do not belong to them in the real sense of the term. Although they entirely rely on their family elders during their childhood years, their juvenile period until they reach adulthood marks a sharp contrast between them so far as the life they lead throughout this period is concerned. Only an adolescent, Apu starts instituting his Brahminship to help his mother run the family while Pip, after his visit to Miss Havisham's Satis house, is sunk in the dream of becoming a gentleman as he falls in love at first sight with Estella, Miss Havisham's adopted daughter. Apu's thirst for education and knowledge, and maybe for something more is clearly visible since his very childhood when he secretly reads the books from his father's box, requests his father to bring new books for him, writes stories at a tender age. Now even as an orphan, he presses his mother to go to the nearby school in the village of Arolboa for education. Apart from this, Apu makes his way forward as he gets a five taka scholarship after he impresses the Inspector during his visit to the school and stands first in the district in the board examination. Thus, Apu is set to face the realities of life on his own in every sense as he prepares to study at Dewanpur Govt. Model Institution parting from his mother for the first time. On the contrary, Pip's obsession for becoming a gentleman does not necessarily mean to get proper education and thus become a self-reliant gentleman. In his London life, he relies wholly on the generous sponsorship of an unknown benefactor whom he thinks to be Mrs. Havisham. This sudden change of Pip's fortune apparently appears to be pleasant, but ultimately leads to more despair and delusion. Because he finally discovers that his real benefactor is the criminal outlaw Magwitch whom he helps with some

food and a file at the very outset of the novel to escape his arrest from the police.

Pip's stay in London to become a gentle man compels us to look back to the political and economic history of Great Britain during Victorian period. With large scale industrialisation, an influx of wealth as a result of British colonial expansion, and socioeconomic prospects, London turned into the golden gate of opportunity and prosperity where many Victorians were changing their lot. The sudden social and economic progress in England inspired men born into servitude, hard labour, or poverty in rural areas to come to the city of London and make their own fortune. The same may be the case with Pip who, with his intense love for Estella, is influenced by this tide of the time, and holds his great expectations with a view to becoming a distinguished gentleman. But the problem is that Pip wishes to be great for his own welfare and satisfaction, not for the good cause of others; his fault is "asking more from life than, under the limitations imposed by one's nature, station or the general conditions of existence, one can reasonably expect. The habit of holding great, but unrealistic expectations of life is the source of wrong and evil... in *Great expectations*." (Axton, 1972, p. 279) Truly speaking, Pip's longing for changing his social status depending on the money that is not earned by a legal means and his obsession for getting Estella as his own better half symbolize the emptiness of unrealistic dreams and expectations among the poor youth of the time, whose every move was driven by such fantasies.

But socio-economic and political reality in the colonised 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengal is much more different from that of the coloniser Victorian Great Britain due to many reasons. As far as the mass of the population were concerned, the British imperial rule in India brought a few significant changes in the rural society of Bengal over the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The British educational effort, economic and social developments were very limited as a result of which people particularly from rural areas had to struggle a lot to make their potential economic fortune. Education was no less than a luxury to most of the rural backward people who had to live barely from hand to mouth depending on their ancestral and traditional means of living. Bibhutibhushan, unlike a stark realist and an ardent and vehement critic of the time, vividly portrays the miserable condition of the individuals and calmly demonstrates his deep interpretation of human life with a sympathetic attitude to the deprived individuals of the rural Bengal. "During the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the post-World War I Bengal, when uncertain

society is torn with conflicts, doubts and decadence, when no mentionable value and dignity of human life was being dealt with in the literary arts, Bibhutibhushan consoled human hearts with new and virtuous spirit of human life through his short stories and novels." (Roychowdhuri, 3rd Edition "Bibhutibhushan: Mind and Art, 1996, p. 47) If Pip's great expectations are despicable vice on his part, Apu's longing for and efforts into educating himself are an appreciative virtue. Therefore, Bibhutibhushan's Apu trilogy spreads the true gospel of life which teaches man not to give up but to hang on in reaching his goals amid the sea of sorrows, difficulties and uncertainties.

Although Apu becomes a bit extravagant in spending his scholarship money and sometimes borrowing money from his inmates in the hostel during his Dewanpur school life, he is in no way lavish and snobbish, and grows further as a taintless promising young adult. Before he leaves for Calcutta to study at college, the author narrates the feeling of the Headmaster of that school on the sparkling qualities of his amiable personality: "He (the Headmaster) hasn't ever come in close contact with such a boy in his thirty years of teaching- a thoughtful, visionary boy, a helpless destitute! Though a little foolish and unforeseeing- but generous, naive, innocent, thirsting for knowledge and inquisitive." (Bandopadhyaya, The Unvanquished. Best Novels of Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyaya, 2008, pp. 168-169) On the other hand, Pip becomes increasingly obnoxious as a character as he increases in wealth and status. In his strive for personal growth and being a gentleman, Pip, in the words of G. K. Chesterton (G. K. Chesterton, 1989, p. 383) and Humphrey House (House, The Dickens World, 1942, p. 156) has become a 'snob' with the dirty money of Magwitch. Moreover, as Pip's love for Estella increases, his snobbery becomes more intense; he is self-obsessively influenced by wealth and any symbol of wealth. Connotating self-worth and admiralty with polished manners, clothes and beauty, intellect and speech, Pip finds pity in everything that was a part of his childhood years, and looks down upon those deemed unfit by him as if he hadn't been there himself: "I knew it was Joe, by his clumsy manner of coming upstairs- his state boots being always too big for him and by the time it took him to read the names on the other floors in the course of his ascent ... 'Joe, how are you, Joe?' 'Pip, how AIR you, Pip?'" (Dickens, Great Expectations, 1993, p. 191) His snobbishness goes so far that Pip even wishes to keep Joe away by paying money to avoid 'considerable disturbance, some mortification, and a keen sense of incongruity.' Dickens has shown the corrupting



influence of money in the Victorian society of huge expectations through the urban snobbery of Pip with the charity of Magwitch whose money cannot but distort the moral values of Pip, because “Magwitch is no benevolent idealist whose goodness may regenerate society; he is also a power lover, a snob, whose spacious generosity all but corrupts Pip.” (House, 1955 , p. 217)

Depending on a handsome amount of money every month, Pip lives an extravagant, lavish and fashionable life in London whereas Apu has to undergo untold miseries and hurdles in order to survive in Calcutta. When Pip enjoys his time in clubs with his friends, Apu has to teach others as a tutor and do a laborious part time job in a printing press to manage his educational expenses. When Pip resides in a comfortable apartment with his friend Herbert Pocket and becomes a man in debt for his over benevolence to others, Apu has to sleep in unhealthy mess with many others and runs here and there to ensure decent meals. Apu even cannot continue his education at B.A level due to want of money, but it is not clear how much education Pip gets with the money and from his upper class lifestyle. The extent of Apu’s excruciating strife, struggle and suffering is easily perceived when the author writes, “All those sufferings! During the day, he eats only fried rice of half an *anna* and the free water from Calcutta Corporation taps. Even then only a part of the stomach is filled! But when he comes out of the classes in the college in the afternoon, he is so hungry, feels dizzy as if a thousand wasps attacked his stomach.” (Bandopadhaya, *The Unvanquished: Best Novels of Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhaya*, 2008, p. 192) In his childhood life in *The Ballad of the Road*, Apu never come across this sort of hardships under the parental care, shade and shelter of his father and mother. He enjoys an ecstatic childhood with no notion of the real world; even after his father’s death, his mother tries her best to feed him two meals digesting all the contempts and humiliations, and supports him with the little savings she has. As a widow, she weaves the bright tapestry of her son’s glorious future in those grey days of misery, struggle and helplessness. Even after that Apu’s life in Calcutta is threatened with so many challenges and uncertainties on several occasions. Apu is shaken by all his misfortunes but never subdued; he moves on with full spirit and eagerness to search for the true meaning of life. Therefore, “In *The Unvanquished*, the sequel to *The Ballad of the Road*, we find the far-stretching struggle for life; it is the saga of, and search for, life and light. To live is to dream, for we exist in our physical body but live in our spirit. The dream enshrined in *The Ballad of the*

*Road* is that of a youth, quiet and untroubled. But the dream of *The Vanquished* is beset at every step with obstacles and frustration. ... They give us the story of the aspiration and fulfillment of happy healthy men.” (Chattopadhaya, 1st Edition, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhaya, 1994 , p. 40)

Pip and Apu stand on two different poles in their personal relationship with female characters. Pip’s obsessive love for Estella is linked up with sexuality and economics whereas Apu remains free of this type of stigma. The construction of Pip and Estella’s relationship by means of these issues proves that in the novels of Dickens Pip’s relationship with Estella “is not something between two persons, concerning itself with what the two persons are; it is concerned with impersonal things- with class, with status, with habits, occupations, gestures, and language standard in a particular social milieu.” (Dabney, 1967 , p. 134) While describing his thoughts upon his and Estella’s first kiss, Pip, using words with economic overtones recalls, “I felt that the kiss was given to the coarse common boy as a piece of money might have been, and that it was worth nothing.” (Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 1993 , p. 80) Pip compares Estella’s kiss to the coldness of money but concurrently evaluates the value of the kiss. Creating a link between economics and sexuality, Pip defines the theme which will overshadow his and Estella’s relationship, morally because “capital is identified with and as a too-fascinating passion, as much as it is hailed or condemned as the means by which such passions are stilled.” (Nunokawa, 1994 , p. 123) From this moment onwards, Pip’s romantic and passionate feelings for Estella commingle with his desire for wealth and gentility; he cannot separate the sexual act of kissing from the economic distance between Estella and him. Pip considers Estella as the avenue to this wealth and objectifies into a gift Miss Havisham will bestow on him.

But Apu never hankers after any personal relationship with the girls he comes in contact throughout the story of the novels. Because of his financial difficulties in Dewanpur, the Headmaster manages a lodging house tutorship in the family of a nearby government official where he has to teach Nirmola, a beautiful adolescent girl. Apu could have developed an intimate personal affair with that girl, but he leaves Dewanpur to study further in Calcutta. Though Apu retains a special feeling for his adolescent friend Lila who is now a beautiful lady and studies at a college like him, he never shares it with her. He maintains a very polished friendly relation with her and remains a well-wisher and

friend of her ever after. Therefore, the craving of Pip and Apu are two different goals oriented; one strives for material prosperity depending on charity and the other struggles to continue his education fighting against the odds of life. Apu's journey of life continues further as he is truly an unvanquished industrious youth who never concedes defeat to the realities of life, but Pip becomes savagely disillusioned throughout the course of the story as he discovers that his reasons for wanting everything he has ever wanted are based upon false assumptions. Moreover, Pip's "dissatisfaction grows as he becomes conscious of the aimlessness and wastefulness, the sheer emptiness, of his life as gentleman, a life consisting of foolish expenditure, debt, and 'the finches of the Grove'." (Herst, *The Dickens Hero: Selfhood and Alienation in the Dickens World*, 1990, p. 132) Pip's unrealistic hopes and expectations leads him to undesirable traits which teaches him the hard way that the grass is not always greener on the other side and that he must be content with what he has.

### Conclusion

Both Dickens and Bibhutibhushan have made these two novels simple but true stories of the poor portraying the prevailing domestic and social realities of their respective times. Dickens has brilliantly shown the inherent aspiration of an orphan adolescent who wishes to rise to a respectable social position by any means. At the same time, the purpose of *Great Expectations* is to warn the British individuals and society against the failure of the Victorian fairy-tale identity and call for a renewed search for moral values transcendent of social class and material possession. Furthermore, Dickens's depiction of reality in the Victorian society deviates from realism to social satire as he paints the lower class to embody a relatively high moral ground and rejects the false values, ideals and pretentiousness of the upper class. Unlike Dickens, Bibhutibhushan, like a romantic realist, paints a true picture of life and society of his time without bitterly criticising the prevailing social evils. *The Ballad of the Road* and *The Unvanquished* do not only deal with society or the individuals living in society; rather more particularly it concerns about poverty, a condition that makes a psychological probing of the human condition in a certain society. The novels are a story of struggle and triumph under conditions of poverty and devastating personal losses. They also find the core of universal truths and human feelings while telling their plaintive tales in a culturally, socio-economically and politically specific context.

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