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IDEOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION OF CREATIVE AND ALIENATED LABOR IN  
*RUPABORIR PALAS*, AN ASSAMESE NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

The social world is a complex of so many social processes; similarly the textual world of fiction also is a complex of a number of story-threads representing those processes. The social processes, determining one another, give rise to the over-determined social reality. Likewise the story-lines or threads also determine one another and give rise to an over-determined textual reality. To grasp the over-determined social reality or to organize the over-determined textual reality one needs a point of entry that is arbitrary, incomplete and ideologically chosen. *Rupaborir Palas*, an Assamese novel, also has a number of story-threads. One such story-thread is chosen as the point of entry or the main thread that organizes maximum number of other threads. A different point of entry would have made *Rupaborir Palas* a different novel. This choice is ideological. Further, *Rupaborir Palas*, displays a Marxian imagination in the beginning through depiction of class-expropriation, but as the novel makes its progress the Marxian imagination progressively evaporates and gives way to a kind of liberal imagination.

**Keywords:** Over-determined, point of entry, alienated, creative, labor, Miya

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**Introduction: The Marxian Imagination, Over-determined Reality and the Point of Entry:**

Julian Markels talks about “a Marxian imagination” in his book *The Marxian Imagination*. As Lionel Trilling in his book *The Liberal Imagination* defines “the liberal imagination” as a primal act of imagination of variousness and possibility, of a general enlargement and freedom and rational direction of human life, Markels also defines its counterpart, the Marxian imagination, as a primal act of imagination “of the enlargement of life and freedom specifically promised by the abolition of class, when class is understood as an over-determined process of appropriating and distributing surplus labor without consulting those who perform the labor.” (*The Marxian Imagination*, pp 12)

“Resnick and Wolf argue that the dense web of over-determination among social processes can never be comprehensively analyzed and that Marxism, like all other theories, must choose for its analysis a *point of entry* (italics mine) which is necessarily incomplete and thus necessarily partisan – the concept of class as expropriation.” (*ibid*, pp 20)

As the social world is a complex of so many social processes, the textual world of fiction also is a complex of so many story-lines or threads representing those processes. The social processes determine one another and thus generate the over-determined social reality and in similar ways the story-lines or threads also determine one another and thus generate representation of such over-determined textual reality.

As society is a complex of innumerable social processes, the fictional text also is a complex of a number of story-lines or threads that represent those processes. The social processes give rise to the over-determined social reality through determining one another and likewise the story-lines or threads also give rise to the over-determined textual reality through determining one another. To grasp the social reality or to organize the text one needs a point of entry that is arbitrary, incomplete and ideologically chosen.

*Rupaborir Palas*, an Assamese novel has a number of story-threads and it could have chosen any one of them as its points of entry, but one particular thread is chosen as the point of entry or the main thread discarding or suppressing all other threads or potential points of entry. A different point of entry would have made it quite a different novel. Any single thread is related to or determines or gets determined by, a few other threads; but the main thread weaves, determines, and gets determined by, maximum number of threads and, therefore, it is the point of entry of the novel.

### **Over-determined Reality and Point of Entry in *Rupaborir Palas***

Similarly, the over-determined reality represented by *Rupaborir Palas* also has a number of threads: 1) the migration of Miyas to Assam, their settlement here and their gradual assimilation into the Assamese society, 2) the struggle of the Miya people to settle in Assam and to assimilate into the Assamese society and the conflict there from, 3) love-quadrilateral and the problems thereof, 4) involvement of the Miyas into the question of the creation of Pakistan, 5) impact of the second world war on a backward region of Assam mainly inhabited by the Miyas, 6) landlordism in East Bengal and the class struggle it entails, 7) famine in Bengal and the human tragedy, 8) the survival and class-promotion of the fittest Miya through creative labor etc. Let us examine them one by one.

1. The leading critics agree that the novel is about *the migration of Miyas to Assam, their settlement there and their gradual assimilation into the Assamese society*. It looks like that. Babar's father Johur Miya is a tenant under the famous but atrocious landlord Mohammad Modabbir Habib Kibriya Choudhury. Johur is cruelly whipped for his failure to catch fishes of the size of the landlord's expectation. Such atrocities leave Babar's juvenile mind deeply wounded and revolting while his father accepts it as his natural lot. Later, during a cultural function organized by the landlord's son Mojammil Choudhury, Mojammil and one of his friends drag Mariyam and Sofica for the satisfaction of their carnal desire. Babar and his friend, Jafar, strike at Mojammil's head and rescue the girls. Subsequently, Babar and Jafar have to flee and begin an uncertain journey. On their way they come upon the household of Osman Ali Sikdar Dewani who sympathetically takes care of them, helps them with money and unites them with a band of people who are on their way to Assam. Babar and Jafar also accompany these people among whom a little girl, Muslima, and her father, are assisted by them. Babar arrives in the unfamiliar Assam and starts to work as a servant in the household of Sarif, the kind village-elder of Rupabori, a village in the present district of Nagaon. Sarif advises Babar to learn Assamese and mix up with the local people, an advice Babar punctually obeys. Sarif, content with Babar's honesty and industry, gives away one *bigha* of land to Babar. The Second World War comes. Babar, an honest young man, retains his honesty but makes plenty of money as contractor who supplies certain materials to the militaries. Throughout he is helpful to others, particularly to teacher Girin, a freedom fighter. Sarif wants to marry off his daughter Rani to the now-rich Babar, who hesitates owing to his memory of Mariyam, but cannot decline the offer as Sarif's love and support enables him to become what he is now. Incidentally he meets Muslima and her father who are in deep economic crisis. A love-like affair grows between them. Babar makes a tour of Kolkata where the famine was in full swing. Suddenly, among the bony beggars he finds a few people from his native village and surprisingly Mariyam is also among them. Babar helps them to some extent and brings Mariyam and an old man whom he calls

“uncle” to Assam. Ultimately, Babar marries Rani after which Sarif dies. Incidentally Babar gets involved in politics and, with almost no knowledge of politics, becomes a local leader of Muslim League which is defeated by Congress in the election. Mariyam and Muslima love Babar, cherish the impossible wish to get him as their own but don’t want to disturb his settled family life. Babar too loves them but fear of sin and his sense of responsibility for Rani prevent him from making love with them. Babar’s family gets expanded with the birth of a son and a girl, named Keteki. Keteki gets education, learns Assamese, becomes an Assamese writer and feels oneness with her people. The novel ends with a scene where Babar and Muslima in a deep, dark, late night went to the house of Kamran, a villainous rival of Babar, who once set fire to Babar’s house, and who turns very sick and poor now. Stealthily Babar and Muslima go to his house and keep a sack of rice and some paddy plants in the verandah. On their way back, rain drizzles and Babar plants a few paddy plants on Kamran’s field that the rain turns muddy now.

Does this storyline suggest that *the migration of Miyas to Assam, their settlement here and their gradual assimilation into the Assamese society* is the point of entry or the organizing principle? We don’t think it does. First, Babar’s migration does not symbolize the migration of Miyas to Assam as migration began long ago. Babar came to Assam around 1936 but Sarif, Imran etc. came to Assam much before. The novel reports that Sarif came forty years ago. Babar is simply an addition to the already settled community. The majority of Miyas migrated to Assam as per the British colonial policy of collecting revenues from land by settling farming people in uninhabited and uncultivated land. The cause of Babar’s migration is different. Atrocities of the landlords are a cause, but not the only one. Babar is industrious no doubt. But success comes to him very smoothly, all odds are somehow evened. But this is not the common story of all Miyas. Common Miyas undergo a very tortuous life struggle. Muslima’s family is an example in the novel and thousands of such families are there in actual history. So, Babar is not a true representative of the Miyas whose struggle of life is both hard and harsh. He is an exception but not the rule. Secondly, *the migration of Miyas to Assam, their settlement here and their gradual assimilation into the Assamese society* cannot encompass storylines like the impact of the famine, the impact of the world war, Babar’s relations with the three women etc.

2. Similar is the case with another potential point of entry, that is, *the struggle of the Miya people to settle in Assam and to assimilate into the Assamese society and the conflict there from*. True, the line system is mentioned a few times and true, Nilakanta Chakravorty won’t sell land to the Mymensinghians. These are random information occupying much little space in the novel and making no impact at all in the development of the plot. Further, the Miyas like Sarif, Imran, Mubarak etc. settled at Rupabori and assimilated into the local society much before than Babar does. Primarily his story is one of smooth coexistence, and not of conflict. He is in good terms with Girin and his family, he buys land from a Lalung man, he is assisted and befriended by Kumud Kachari, his contractor friends are Bhumidhar Sharma and Harihar Sharma, he gains support from Bhadiya Koch and Kameswar, other friends of him include Bhubon and Moti. Thus, there is not much of a struggle and a conflict left for Babar. Moreover, the little trace of conflict mentioned above cannot organize a number of materials vital to the story like the Bengal famine, the second world war, Babar-Kamran rivalry etc.
3. What about *the love-quadrilateral and the problems thereof*? Is it the organizing principle for all threads of the plot? That there was an unexpressed love affair between Babar and Mariyam is very conspicuous. Their companions teased them about this. Mariyam’s uncle, her guardian, also ponders about their possible marriage. Babar rescued her from Mojammil and fled from Bengal to Assam. Later, he met her in Kolkata among beggars. They conversed in a hotel room like lovers. Babar took her to Assam and kept her with him. The novel offers ample evidence that both love each other but their love cannot get fulfilled. Babar cannot violate his promise to marry Rani and Mariyam doesn’t want to unite herself with her lover Babar as she considers her body to be polluted and derogate. After narrating to Babar how she lost her virginity in a hotel during the famine she says, “If I remained a good girl, I would not leave you to marry Rani.” (*Rupaborir Palas*, pp 299) In his second tour to Pakistan one-night Babar slept

with Mariyam and made love, though, probably, refrained from sex. Whenever they are left to each other they talk like failed lovers and both feel the pang of sorrow.

On his way to Assam Babar met Muslima and her father and helped little Muslima to carry her luggage. After many years, when he is an established farmer and contractor, he again meets her and her father, and they are in deep economic distress. Their attractions towards each other is obvious and later, after her father's death, when Bojlu wants to marry her to Golam Rosul, a middle-aged man who has already married twice, she declines, begs Babar's support and guardianship and ultimately comes to live with Babar. Many a time she makes clear statement of her love towards Babar. Once Babar makes love with her but, again, refrains from sex. Both of them feel the pangs of incomplete love. Muslima clearly suggests that she is in deep love with Babar, "Contractors know money only, and they don't know the heart." (*ibid*, pp 228)

Babar feels conscience-stricken at the thoughts of Mariyam and Muslima. He wonders, "After I marry the village-elder's daughter, where will Mariyam go, where will she stay? How will she live?" (*ibid*, pp 201) But this potential conflict is resolved in a simple way. Babar says, "Let Allah do as he wants to." (*ibid*, pp 202) Babar appreciates Mariyam's sorrow, anger, revenge against herself. He doesn't want to grieve her with talks of his marriage with Rani. That Babar wants to evade the central question is as clear as broad daylight. It's alright that talks will grieve, but won't the grief of the actual marriage which will take Babar away forever be bitter than the talk? The potential conflict of love melts into the icy water of easy, callous acceptance of "the practical situation". Mariyam would not marry Babar even if he wants to: Babar says to himself "(I) cannot pay back Mariyam's love. I have married Rani. Despite absence of any obstacle, I cannot marry Mariyam. If I want to marry her, she won't agree to marry me – I know." (*ibid*, pp 334) Further, Muslima also won't create any disturbance in the way of Babar's happiness. But Muslima declares, "My life was of no use for anyone...But I loved you." (*ibid*, pp 407) "Babar remains speechless. He felt a causeless pain in his heart. He feels he is guilty before this girl." (*ibid*, pp 407) Babar says, "I had to marry Rani. There was no way to disobey the village-elder. Love of the poor is meaningless." (*ibid*, pp 407) It is a verbal irony that actually it is poor Muslima whose love is meaningless! It is for Babar that these tragic women characters suffer celibacy, but they are content with their closeness to Babar. They, through struggle and sacrifice, create Babar as a lover, but their "love's labor's lost". Babar, their product is not theirs, but someone else's. Their lot is the lot of a worker in the capitalist mode of production. Babar has the sense of guilt for Mariyam, but his internal conflict fades away with low degree of uneasiness and high degree of adjustment and acceptance of the situation. (*ibid*, pp 252-253)

This love-story occupies much of the space of the plot. It is interwoven with a number of other threads like the famine, Babar's contract during the war, landlordism in East Bengal etc. But it cannot determine or interweave threads like involvement of the Miyas into the question of the creation of Pakistan, Muslim League politics of Babar, Miya-Assamese conflict etc. Therefore, like the others discussed above this too cannot serve as the point of entry of the novel.

4. Then is the point of entry *the involvement of Miyas into the question of the creation of Pakistan*? The Miyas of Rupabori discuss the issue of Pakistan without sufficient knowledge about the issue but their opinions are divided and they tend to support what the Dewans and Matabbars say about it. Babar doesn't understand the idea of Pakistan. He says to Girin Borah, "Sir, I neither understand nor want those things. I am a farmer; I want land for farming. Where there is land for farming is my country, my Pakistan, my Hindustan." (*ibid*, pp 241) Muslim League, not all Muslims, wanted Pakistan and inclusion of Assam into it. Babar says, "I am neither Congress, nor Muslim League. I am a farmer; I will live through farming." (*ibid*, pp 249) Yet, incidentally, he becomes a member and local leader of the League and campaigns in its favor in the election. His wife Rani thinks that Pakistan would solve the problem of their unacceptance by the locals. Babar would support Pakistan if it ends landlordism and allows him to till the soil. In the election the League candidate loses and the Congress candidate wins for whom Babar's rival Kamran campaigned. Babar gets disappointed when Assam is not included in Pakistan but

disapproves of the riots for Pakistan. Later he realizes that “Even seven Pakistans cannot bring back the people died of hunger.” (*ibid*, pp 324) and no real change is ushered in by the birth of Pakistan. He says to himself, “What if only Muslims live? What if only Hindus live? Say that there won’t be any poor in Pakistan.” (*ibid*, pp 321) “Earlier our people thought that the Hindus kept the Muslims poor.... Now they have understood that it is the rich who has kept people poor.” (*ibid*, pp 323) Babar and Mariyam make visits to Pakistan and come back. They decide to live in Assam. The police administration is in search of Pakistanis hiding in Assam and Babar is once arrested and beaten as he is charged of keeping Pakistani fugitives as laborers. A sizable part of the novel presents the problem of Pakistan but till the twenty seventh chapter, which is halfway of the novel, Pakistan remains unmentioned. Further this thread can not necessarily weave other threads like the oppressive landlordism in Bengal from where Babar flees, Babar’s assimilation into the Assamese society, the famine in Bengal, the impact of the war that turns Babar rich etc. It, therefore, cannot be considered as the point of entry.

5. One more candidate for the point of entry is *impact of the Second World War on a backward region of Assam mainly inhabited by the Miyas*. Most of the characters don’t have sufficient information about the war. A few enlightened characters like teacher Mubarak, freedom-fighter Girin Borah etc. have ideas about the war. Representatives of the Government teach the rural folk to “grow more food” and help the army of the Allies. Girin Borah tells Babar not to occupy land without proper official permissions and suggests that the Indians need not help the British in this war. Babar cannot understand what Borah says, but eventually becomes a contractor who supplies materials to the militaries. This makes Babar a very rich man which is one important cause why Sarif, the village-elder, wants to marry Rani off to him. The war debases many– Jabbar, who supplies wine and women to the militaries, is an example. The war, however evil, uplifts Babar’s fortune. It was an opportunity for Babar to make money which helps him to become a big landowner, to earn importance in the society, to marry Sarif’s daughter and Mubarak’s sister Rani, to help people in distress. Indirectly, it distances Babar from Mariyam and Muslima. “Wealth accumulates and men decay” – Gray says. Babar’s accumulation of wealth also deprives him of true, human love. But this thread influences Babar-Mariyam and Babar-Muslima love stories only indirectly, and slightly determines Babar’s journey to famine-trodden Kolkata just by making him capable of spending money. But, Miya’s settlement in Assam, Miya-Assamese conflicts, landlordism in East Bengal etc. are far away from this thread and therefore this cannot be considered the point of entry.
6. *Landlordism in East Bengal and the class struggle it entails* had the potential for becoming the point of entry or the organizing thread for all other threads. In Chapter Five the novel presents a general picture of how and why the Miyas migrated to Assam. British colonial policy for collecting more revenues and oppression of landlordism are presented as the basic causes behind this migration. The hero, Babar, also runs away from Sonapara, East Bengal, as a consequence of this oppressive landlordism. Obviously, Babar’s conflict with Habib Kibriya Choudhury and his son Mojjamil Choudhury cannot be considered as “class-struggle”. True, he is angry to their physical torture imposed on his father and he strikes Mojjamil in order to rescue Mariyam from his grasp. Yet, his fight is limited to the individual level, he doesn’t organize others to continue struggle against appropriation of landlordism. Further, his protest is not against the half-feudal system of appropriation but against its too conspicuous forms of torture. The hero, Babar, is not an exponent of class-struggle for another reason: he flees the battle-field and comes to a place where his opponents are absent. With his flight, the novel changes its direction – as the story moves from East Bengal to Assam cruel landlordism is replaced by “benevolent” Dewani/Rayatwari system, condition of alienated labor gives way to the condition of creative labor at least for Babar.

Whatever happens in Assam is only indirectly related to the cruelty of landlordism in East Bengal as it sends Babar away from his native place. That there is an unfillable gap in Babar-Mariyam love-affair, that Babar met Muslima on his way to Assam and later in Assam also, that Babar met Sarif and thrived because of this meeting, that he became very rich becoming a war-contractor, that he had to marry

Rani – a marriage which left Mariyam's and Muslima's desires unfulfilled – all these threads are future consequences of that departure of Babar which was caused by the cruelty of landlordism. Yet landlordism does not directly cause or influence all these simply because the subsequent events could easily have taken any other course.

Further, the Bengal famine that threatened the very existence of Babar's villagers including Mariyam and compelled Mariyam to lose her virginity for which she gives up the dream of marrying Babar; the war that opens up vistas of opportunity for Babar to achieve affluence that not only enables but also "compels" him to marry Rani; the gradual assimilation of Babar and other Miyas into the local, Assamese society – all these threads cannot be controlled or organized or determined by the thread described as *landlordism in East Bengal and the class struggle it entails*. So, it cannot be the point of entry.

7. Another thread which we need to examine is *famine in Bengal and the human tragedy*. For giving the plot of the story of Babar its particular shape the "famine in Bengal" is essential. This famine devastates his village in East Bengal either killing or making rootless almost all his villagers and family members. That Babar has none in that village now ensures Babar's continued and permanent stay in Assam. Further, the famine compels Mariyam to lose virginity in exchange of money as she finds no alternative to satisfy hunger of hers and her companions'. Because of this deep tragedy Mariyam considers her body derogate and herself inappropriate for Babar. Or, she would not let Babar marry Rani: "If I remained a good girl, I would not leave you to marry Rani." (*ibid*, pp 299) Thus the famine drives Mariyam away from Babar and smoothens the path of his marriage with Rani which further augments his establishment in the society as son-in-law of the village-elder and brother-in-law of teacher Mubarak. But this also cannot be the point of entry or organizing principle as it is much distanced from other threads like Babar's class-upgradation with the help and support of Sarif, the impact of the second world war and grasp of the opportunity unleashed by the war, assimilation of Babar and other Miyas into the Assamese society etc.
8. Then what is the organizing principle or the point of entry or the main thread that weaves and interweaves all other threads and thus presents the over-determined reality the novel represents? I think it is *the survival and class-promotion of the fittest Miya through creative labor*. The first part of the novel presents a graphic picture of the cruel system of appropriation that landlordism upholds. The chilly wintry night is appropriately chosen to vivify the sufferings of people under landlordism; the reality of their poverty becomes conspicuous in this cold late night of winter as they are almost bereft of cloth – this lack of garments could not have such impact in summer. Babar's father Johur's back is whipped for his failure to collect fishes of the length of the landlord's imagination and he is called a "traitor". Babar, the adolescent boy, does not protest before the landlord but he is angry to what happens and not in a mood to humbly accept such torture and insult. Later, when Mojammil and his friend try to violate the modesty of Mariyam and Sofica, Babar and his friend Jafar, strike them with sticks and run away. Babar and Jafar, out of fear of severe punishment, run away to Assam. Thus, it is seen that Babar, unlike his humble father who accepts torture as ordained by Allah, has sufficient anger against the oppressive system. This anger, the element of protest and also the prudence for fleeing are the keys to Babar's survival and future class-upgradation. Or, he, like others, would have perished first in landlordism and then in the famine. Yet Babar's survival is not guaranteed by his act of fleeing. He becomes what he becomes only because the socio-economic condition of Rupabori greatly differs from that of Sonapara. Dewani and/or Rayatwari system of Rupabori is better and more humane than landlordism of Sonapara. Of course, in this regard, the novel deviates from the historical fact. Dewani and/or Rayatwari system was not that benevolent as it is shown in the novel. Fazal Ali Ahmed in an essay "Char-Chaporir Dewani-Tantra" included in his book *Char-Chapribasi Prokritote Asomiya* says, "For ages a cruel administrative system, that is, Dewani system or Matabbar system, which is another name of feudalism, has been operating in these char-chapori areas." (pp 26) The novel is almost silent about the cruelty and oppression of the Dewani system. Only one Dewan, Imran, is mentioned as cruel,

quarrelsome, selfish, unpopular and oppressive and he is presented to us only in two pages of this four-hundred-page long novel. But the other two Dewans – Dewan Osmani and Dewan Sarif – appear as compassionate human beings. It is Dewan Osmani's help that enables the fugitive Babar and Jafor to come to Assam and it is Sarif's compassion for Babar that he could build his life. Sarif doesn't oppress Babar as a servant but donates one bigha of land to him. Not only that, Sarif gives away land to other servants as well. Despite the Dewani system that continues the general condition of alienated labor, the exceptional Dewan Sarif's compassion and magnanimity creates a specifically narrow circle of condition of creative labor particularly for Babar. Sarif allows Babar to have means of production, to own the product of his own labor and to shift from his serfdom or bonded laborer's status to that of war contractor and supplier. Not only that, he marries off his daughter to Babar, his former servant. Thus, Sarif is exceptional Dewan, Babar is exceptional Miya, Babar-Rani marriage is an exceptional one. It appears that in the novel exception is the rule.

Babar not only survives but also thrives with the support of Dewan Sarif. But this support is mainly caused by Babar's honesty, humility and industry. The angry adolescent of Sonapara, East Bengal, turns into a humble, peaceful youth of Rupabori, Assam. Both these contradictory attitudes enable him to adjust and respond to the specific conditions of both the places. An attitude of anger and rejection was required to escape the stranglehold of oppressive landlordism and that of humble acceptance is necessary for coping with the "benevolent" Dewani system.

Historically, the Dewani system is not that benevolent and its condition of labor is also not that of creative labor, but the novel exaggerates its benevolence simply to establish its thesis of *survival of the fittest Miya through individual industry and creative labor*. True, it is not as cruel as landlordism in East Bengal, but at the same time it doesn't uphold a system of creative labor as well. Sarif and Babar are exceptional examples of creative labor; but they don't suggest a system of creative labor. The broad-hearted Sarif donates one piece of land to each of his seventeen servants/farm-laborers, but Babar, his beneficiary, doesn't take his cue from Sarif in this regard and doesn't give away his land among his laborers. He even appropriates the labor of Mariyam and Muslima and gives nothing in return. Thus, for Mariyam, for Muslima and her father Jalal who is the cook in Ibrahim's hotel, for the laborers engaged by Babar, Kamran etc. labor is always alienated, their product is not theirs. Only Sarif and Babar reap what they sow. Their creative labor, therefore, doesn't indicate any system or condition of creative labor.

Though not systemic, yet this exceptionally individual creative labor not only upgrades the class status of Sarif and Babar but also builds for them a well-accomplished life. Their children further better their class status. Sarif's son Mubarak, B.A. in Economics, becomes a high school teacher apart from inheriting his father's property and Babar's daughter Keteki, who appears in B.A. final examination, becomes a poet and writer in Assamese.

The novel clearly marks the distinction between Sarif's creative labor and the alienated labor in landlordism – "Whatever Sarif, the village-elder, does, he does it for himself and enjoys the fruits himself. Here, one doesn't depend on the mercy of any landlord." (*ibid*, pp 84) Added to this lack of the condition of landlordism is Sarif's individual industriousness – "How much Sarif the village-elder toils – ah! He is one but his work is equal to that of ten men." (*ibid*, pp 84) The novel identifies individual industry as the key to economic success. For example, the villagers of Pabhomari, a *Koivarta* village, are very poor. Babar thinks, "How can their economic condition be good? In order to make it good, they must toil." (*ibid*, pp 115) Even Babar himself is Sarif's favorite simply because he is industrious. He reflects upon the poverty of people in the Lalung village, "Their men are very lazy. The women do everything from planting and gleaning to weaving and cutting. How can their economic condition be good?" (*ibid*, pp 115) Thus individual worth, not the system, is primary to one's economic progress. And no mistake, this is the ideological stance of the middle-class bourgeois.

But it is equally clear that Sarif enriches his life in the absence of any cruel appropriation imposed by any condition of alienated labor. That doesn't mean that he puts an end to the condition of alienated labor and creates a condition or system of creative labor. He indeed gives away a part of his land among his laborers but

this distribution of means of production doesn't establish any "right" for the laborers; they are simply beneficiaries of the "broad-hearted" Sarif who appropriates their surplus labor, owns the products of their labor and thereby thrives. Their ownership of the means of production depends entirely on Sarif's choice.

But this exceptional Dewan generates sufficient scope or opportunity of creative labor for Babar, the industrious, which he befittingly grabs. He not only gives Babar a piece of land, or occasionally puts his bullocks and buffalos in Babar's service, but also allows him to contract and supply for the militaries which is impossible under landlordism or under the system of bonded labor. Babar's products and income is entirely his. Thus, for Babar, his labor is creative. Babar, turned into rich, follows the footsteps of Sarif in helping people in distress. The novel presents plenty of incidents where Babar extends financial help and other support to others. In Kolkata he helps his villagers including Mariyam, brings Mariyam and an old man to Assam, brings Muslima to his house, gives money to Girin Borah's wife a number of times, donates food to many during the season of poor harvest, and finally gives Kamran, his enemy, sack and plants of rice. But unlike Sarif, Babar doesn't give any piece of land to any of his laborers, even to Mariyam and Muslima. Babar appropriates the surplus labor of not only the unnamed laborers but also of Mariyam and Muslima. "Apart from his own men engaged for farming, uncle and Mariyam also labor heart and soul in his farming." (*ibid*, pp 252) But, "Rani doesn't go to the agricultural field. It's not necessary too, she has no particular knowledge about the farming works." (*ibid*, pp 254) During Rani's first pregnancy, "Mariyam takes care of Rani day and night." (*ibid*, pp 259) When Babar gets deeply involved into the election campaigning, "He forgets his household, forgets his farming, he even finds no time to take note of the pregnant Rani. Mariyam takes on herself all these responsibilities." (*ibid*, pp 264) "When Babar is not around, Mariyam was Rani's keeper, friend, guard, and guardian." (*ibid*, pp 301) Rani says to Babar about Muslima, "Don't send her away even after her marriage – if it takes place. She is very good at work." (*ibid*, pp 363) And when Babar's old house was burnt to ashes by miscreants engaged by Kamran, he needs to build a new house: "Rani, with her boy, stays for a few days in the house of her brother. Babar, together with Mariyam and Muslima, prepares for building the new house." (*ibid*, pp 413) But it is all Babar's and to some extent Rani's; Mariyam and Muslima are simply their beneficiaries. Here it may be noted that woman's household work doesn't make them owners or mistresses of the property. Even the novel, in its form, succumbs to the patriarchal ideology in softly dismissing their agony and ending the novel in a comic note of happy ending and making the patriarchal master appear great. The labor of Mariyam and Muslima remains concealed and latent in Babar's property but they are not the owners. Babar, therefore, can become angry with Mariyam and order her to get out, "Babar, as in snubbing, shouts with a rude voice, 'Shut up! What does it matter to you if we have quarrels (between Rani and him)? Get out –'" (*ibid*, pp 290) Later he repents and brings Mariyam back but the incident unmistakably shows his unquestionable authority in the household which Mariyam and Muslima cannot claim. Thus, though Babar's own labor is creative to a large extent, he himself is the appropriator of alienated labor of others.

Babar's survival and thriving are rooted in his ability for adaptation. We have seen how he properly adjusted his emotions to the opposite circumstances of Sonapara and Rupabori – angry in one, humble in the other. It has also been noticed how he properly utilizes the scope of creative labor generated by Sarif's magnanimity, how he grabs the opportunity of the world war to earn money through military contract despite the counter-suggestion of Girin Borah whom he respects much. Girin Borah, the idealist freedom fighter, who does not swerve from his ideology of opposing the British and maintaining distance from the war, gets ruined. The irony is that Babar who does not understand such ideology and contrary to Borah's advice makes money through war-contract, helps Borah's family both before and after his death. "The war spoils not only Jabbar, but also many boys and girls of towns and villages." (*ibid*, pp 137) But Babar is successful in both making money and retaining honesty.

In the question of love and marriage Babar's adaptability is exemplary. He loves Mariyam and Muslima, makes love with them, would not marry them, would marry Rani whom he didn't love before marriage as "there was no way to disobey the village-elder" (*ibid*, pp 407) He says to Muslima, "Love of the poor is meaningless" (*ibid*, pp 407) which ironically suggests that love of a poor girl like Muslima is meaningless. Babar improves his status through marriage with Rani but feels, and shows that he feels the sufferings of Mariyam and Muslima and thus continues to get their unrequited but unconditional love. Muslima says to herself, "He neither brought me



closer nor sent me away"! (*ibid*, pp 390) and this ambivalence of Babar is helpful in managing the complicity of the situation. Before marriage with Rani, he could have changed his mind and marry Mariyam, but he said to himself, "Let Allah do as he wants to." (*ibid*, pp 202) Thus, Babar's sympathy, support, love, restraint, dutifulness satisfies in varying degrees all three women who love him; he, thanks to his personality, manages to avoid any unwelcome conflict among his beloveds and successfully retains all of them.

Mariyam's love for Babar is absolute. She considers her body to be polluted and so she regards herself unfit for being Babar's wife. She says, "If I remained a good girl, I would not leave you to marry Rani." (*ibid*, pp 299) Yet, she would not marry Babar even if he wants to and would not come in the way of Babar's happiness. "Mariyam never tries to be equal to Rani, or to snatch away Rani's share of love from Babar." (*ibid*, pp 253) But when she sleeps with Babar in her house at her village in East Pakistan, she lovingly hugs him and says, "You have Rani. She always sleeps beside you. I have none. I can also get someone to sleep beside me, but I won't. I haven't done that so far. I haven't allowed anyone except you to be close to my body. My mind doesn't allow." (*ibid*, pp 328-329) Thus, Mariyam's love is beyond any selfish, "practical" calculation. So is Muslima's. Muslima could have married Golam Rosul. She says, "He is a good man. I would not have declined from marrying him if he had gone himself. He was taken by Bojlu.... Bojlu wanted to sell me and he wanted to buy me." (*ibid*, pp 226) Muslima thus refrains from being a commodity and continues to love Babar unconditionally. When Babar says, "If I arrange your marriage?" she whispers, "But, I have loved none but you." (*ibid*, pp 407) Babar's explanation, "I had to marry Rani. There was no way to disobey the village-elder" (*ibid*, pp 407) falls flat before such high ideals of love of Mariyam and Muslima. Because of such ideal, they like Girin Borah, could not adapt to the situation and could not achieve material success, but Babar, the compromising lover, is perfect in his adaptation to the circumstances and so he thrives and they go down.

Thus Babar, unlike most other Miya men and women, adapts to a variety of circumstances for which he undertakes a series of acceptances and rejections that may cause for him emotional troubles but always contributes to the building of his life as a successful Miya in Assam. He leaves his family and village, maintains ambivalent relationships with Mariyam and Muslima whom he loves but would not marry, respects Girin Borah yet disobeying his advice supplies for the militaries, obeys Sarif and marries Rani without love but remains her dutiful husband, learns Assamese, mixes up with Assamese people and so on and so forth.

### Findings

The over-determined reality represented by the text of *Rupaborir Palas* is presented with a particular point of entry or a master-thread or an organizing principle. There are a number of story-threads in it and any one of them could be chosen as the master-thread or the point of entry. Choice of a different thread as the point of entry would have made quite a different novel. For example, *Rupaborir Palas* could have chosen *subjugation of women in patriarchies like landlordism and Dewani system* and then it would have been a feminist novel. Such potential points of entry are suppressed or marginalized which is an ideological act. It has been shown that the point of entry of *Rupaborir Palas* is *the survival and class-promotion of the fittest Miya through creative labor* – which is motivated by a bourgeois middle class ideology. It is a variant of *survival of the fittest* – a thesis so dear to the middle class. Further, *Rupaborir Palas* displays a Marxian imagination of class-expropriation in its first part but as the novel progresses the questions of class and expropriation gradually melts into air and other concerns get the better of them and replace them – Marxian imagination giving way to a kind of liberal imagination. The novel depicts the efficacy of creative labor but doesn't portray a condition of creative labor or struggle for such a condition. Creative labor remains largely the hero's individual affair.

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