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Female Protagonists in Tagore's Novels the Wreck, the Home and the World, Chokher Bali and Char Adhyay: A Study

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Abstract

This paper, which is meant to be a critical discourse on 'Women characters in Tagore's novel, I would like to bring home a very vital issue as far as the chemistry of man-woman relationship is concerned. This is their symbiotic relationship. There is no doubt that, in his novels of radical self-quest and self-cultivation, Tagore intends to present life as a process of development, which educates us through design, providential agency, or planned causation. The greatest emphasis is attributed to the metamorphosis and development, unfolding the protagonists' (Mostly female protagonists') life in stages until the author's purpose is worked out to a more or less logical conclusion.

Keywords: Women, symbiotic, metamorphosis, development, relationship

The classic example of the dynamic process of growth and the consequent formation of identity is Kamala in *The Wreck (Noukadubi)*. Her Bildung manifests itself to successful orientation to her consolidated social roles as Ramesh's "child-bride, young beloved and would-be mother of his progeny. Ramesh established within his heart the image of 'Kalyani' his child-bride as his would-be beloved" (RR, Vol.8, Naukadubi, 504). She employs religion as a potential mechanism and redemptive agency which crowns her with a sense of self-worth. The shaping, deepening and perfecting of Kamala's domestic role is in tune with the salvation and vindication of her life itself, motivating her growth in Bildung within the textualised space of household culture. The ripening of inner powers, so long latent within kamala's person, vents itself in her mounting independence in personal choice and her penchant for carving out for herself a distinctive identity as mistress of her personal world. She develops considerable proficiency in money-management, becomes a proficient reader, and attains social graces. With this comes her great capability for 'Dama' (Restraint), 'Dana' (Charity) and 'Daya' (Compassion), which asserts her emotional emancipation and her identity.

I think the most significant point in the female protagonists' passage towards growth and development through Bildung process recorded in the Tagorian novels occurs during Binodini's sojourn in a 'secluded villa on the banks of the Jamuna' in *Chokher Bali*.

During Binodini's exile, in the villa, she is unforeseeably over-powered with an aversion to sensuality. Seclusion and disillusionment might have effected it to a certain measure, but more importantly, it is welled up from a chastened and sharpened moral judgement that perceives extravagant sensuality as a destroyer of moral virtue. What emerges from this is not necessarily a morbid sense of despair, but commitment to austerity, detachment and quiet resignation to her destiny in life. The narrator defines this incredible transformation in Binodini: "Binodini could have easily acquired and reigned supreme over Mahendra's wealth, leading a life of indolence and glory. Yet, when she could have claimed ownership of all this wealth, she turned away from all this opulence and seemed to embrace a life of strict asceticism. Rabindranath is supposed to have implemented the Upanishadic theme of self-luminosity, which brings about in Binodini's case spiritual ascendancy over spiritual lust.

The "Swadeshi" agitation, which Tagore employs as the socio-political backdrop of his novel, *The Home and the World (Ghare Baire)*, is necessary because it is only through such a Nation-wide upsurge that an English educated Bengali wife like Bimala can suddenly tear herself from the moorings of a cosy, sheltered, domestic life and float adrift in the high tides of political stir.

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Sandip, a diabolic champion of greed and destruction, an embodiment of the Machiavellian wiles and of the Nietzschean "Will to Power"; rouses a chafing tempest in Bimala's life as soon as he moves across their threshold. Mesmerized by Sandip's seemingly impetuous vitality, vigorous masculinity and self-styled "Swadesh", Bimala undervalues Nikhilesh, a gentle, erudite and caring husband as a thin figure. Her burning devotion to her country is bungled up with her attraction for a pseudo-patriotic Sandip, who flatters her as an incarnation of "Shakti". As if identifying Bimala with the Nation, he cries out: "Hail the beloved! Hail the enchanting one! (Mohini)". Bimala is bogged down into the delusion that she is the centre of everything that is happening in the country.

Bimala's participation in the Nationalist movement does not affirm her emancipation, but actually increases her dependence upon the two men and leads her to be torn by conflicting ideals her devotion to her husband and domestic life (The Home) and her enamourment, although effervescent, towards the ominously aggrandising personality of Sandip and perverted Nationalism (The World). A shattering disillusionment overshadows her with an appalling discovery that behind the sparkle of Sandip's magnetism, there is a slime of deviousness, cowardice and avarice. She recoils in disgust.

Another factor that leads to Bimala's 'liberation' from the shackle of her irrational enchantment with the unscrupulous Sandip, is young Amulya, a bright and idealistic Swadeshi agitator. This innocent youth lays bare to Bimala the very negative sides of Sandip's teachings and in general the narrow perverted destructive Nationalist upsurge. Bimala moves back to her centre, but by then disaster has been done to her husband and 'Home'.

Char Adhyay, by Tagore is a political novel, written against the tempestuous background, when armed insurgencies against the British tyranny intensified. Many women participated in the revolutionary politics and armed struggles right up to the August movement of 1942 and even at the later phases of India's fight for liberation. The female protagonist in this novel, Ela is a somewhat exceptional figure in the Bengali society of her day - a twenty year old - unmarried and independent woman. Eventually, Ela gets in touch with Indranath, the leader of a secret revolutionary party as well as with Atin, a partisan. She gets affiliated with the party. Ela certainly does not play any major role in politics, violent or non-violent. Sandip in *The Home and the World* (Ghare Baire) at least pretends to solicit Bimala's suggestions regarding political matters. Indranath tells Ela, that it is her role to inspire the men in the party. The inspiration does not seem very deep, since the latter orders her death. All in all, Ela does not appear to be very representative of an era in which all branches of politics were teeming with vigorous participation of women, in Bengal and India in general.

Bimala and a generation later, Ela, perhaps epitomizes the Bengali women, stepping into modernity identified with mass politics. However, Bimala is held back and is perhaps ultimately saved by the ties of an elite joint family. Ela has no ties or responsibilities except what she creates for herself. Her destiny culminates to an apocalypse, since Atin is sent by Indranath to kill her on mere suspicion that she might turn out to be a renegade. Anyway, the novel ends with a question mark, leaving us in the dark of what really happens to Ela and Atin.

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