



A Study Of The Female Protagonists In The Work Of Rabindranath Tagore

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ABSTRACT :

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. Binodini embarks onto the path of vengeance , asserting her right to be loved despite being a widow . As they say, "It never rains but it pours" ; the death of her better half must not be confused with a mere bereavement. It was an upheaval that turned the life of Binodini upside down. Bloodied but unbowed, she refuses to succumb and cater to the expectations that the society has from a typical widow. Her sindoor may have to be wiped off; she may have her jewelleries snatched away, but her desires cannot not be suppressed

. On the contrary, she gives her desire full rein to such an extent that she doesn't think twice before falling head over heels for Mahendra , who is already married to Ashalata.

This paper concerns with the extramarital affair , Binodini's friendship with Ashalata , maltreatment of widows in the late 19th century. Additionally, this paper touches upon other female protagonists in the work of Rabindranath Tagore. Through a meticulous analysis of Key characters, like , Binodini, Mahendra , and Ashalata, it explores themes of desire, societal expectations , and betrayal.

INTRODUCTION :

Mahendra, who is studying medicine, is tied to his mother's apron strings and looks up to his aunt , Annapurna. Although he is unwilling to marry anyone, Mahendra's mother has been hearing wedding bells . She asks him to marry the daughter of a distant acquaintance , Binodini , whom he jilts; subsequently, he ties the knot with Ashalata , an ill-lettered teenage girl who is 8 years Mahendra's Junior ,

Binodini , an irresistibly pulchritudinous woman whom Mahendra rejects , goes on to marry elsewhere. Alas and alack, her halycon days don't last long . Soon after walking down the aisle , her spouse shuffles off the mortal coil. The unfortunate bereavement robs her of her freedom to doll herself up , bejewel herself, relegating her to the life of a quintessential widow . However, being someone who is fortunate enough to have been to a convent school, she refuses to play a damsel in distress. She does not let society brush aside her longings and desires. After constant pestering, she enters the abode of Mahendra. She developed an amicable rapport with Ashalata, who got her to speak to Mahendra. They confabulate oftentimes , go out , and have a whale of a time together. However, as jealousy sets in , the friendliness morphs into acrimony. The halycon days of their married life don't last long either, for the shrewd Binodini comes into the picture. Binodini brims over with jealousy seeing the couple enjoying itself. She can't resign herself to the fact that somebody who claims a higher ground is confined to being attired in a white saree , with nobody to dote on or care about her , whilst Ashalata, whom she considers out of her league is enjoying a blissful life . The more she tries to conquer her desires, the more they conquer her . As the desire gets the best of her, friends turn foes. Mahendra's mother happens to loathe

Ashalata. As Binodini's mental and sexual frustrations take over , she capitalizes on the unfriendly relationship, descending to a path of revenge and manipulation and bamboozling her way into their blissful married life. In the end, as Rajlakshmi departed her life , it springs to Binodini's mind that she should leave for Kashi and embrace widowhood , albeit grudgingly.

BINODINI AND ASHALATA

The themes of Tagore's novels primarily centres around child marriage, women's emancipation via education, and the socio-political conditions that prevailed contemporarily, and Chokher Bali epitomizes such novels .

Binodini represents the women who were grieving the death of their husbands whilst Ashalata represents the girls who were married off at a young age following the structures of a patriarchal society, thereby clipping their wings.

Binodini , in spite of being a convent educated woman, is robbed of all the pleasures. She is leading a colourless life after the death of her husband . Ashalaata, onn the other hand, is a naive and illiterate girl who is subjugated by her husband . Although the two characters are a far cry from each other,

both of them are two sides of the same coin. Both are victimised by stereotypical norms that prevailed in the contemporary society, which didn't allow a widow to marry again and clip a young girl's wings by marrying her off.

The relationship they share emanates from their needs to fulfill the desires that have remained unfulfilled. Binodini has everything that Ashalata wants, whereas the latter possesses everything that the former dreams of. Ashalata, who couldn't go to school always wants to enjoy being looked up to as an educated woman, whilst Binodini yearns to enjoy the blissful marital life of Ashalata. Their thirst is quenched by a relationship of mutuality behind the facade of the apparent amicable rapport.

For Binodini, education becomes a weapon which she uses to manipulate her beloved pal for the happy life she is leading turns Binodini green with envy. Illiteracy for Ashalata turns her into an object of suppression as she is gullible, bereft of the ability to tell right and wrong apart. Binodini's literacy lets her to iconoclastically break the norms that society has established, whilst Ashalata's illiteracy suppresses her voice, with her spouse controlling her. Ashalata's life eventually turns a new chapter in the life of Binodini. Whilst the destruction of Asha's marriage is on the horizon, the new chapter of Binodini's life begins, thanks to Mahin.

Ashalata's illiteracy is the reason why Mahin indulges into adultery. The adultery emanates from the letters which Binodini writes to Mahin after being requested by Asha. Aware of the inability of her wife to write so skillfully, Mahin realizes it is written by her friend. The closeness between Binodini and Mahin germinates the adultery. Moreover, it emphasizes that the dearth of education can cause a woman to be exploited by her husband.

The camaraderie that the two characters have turns to Choker Bali (eyesore) from Bali; it can be concluded that they both influence each other. While Mahin's betrayal helps Ashalata realise the importance of self-dignity and individuality, Binodini blinded by her lustful desires finally realizes that her presence is wreaking havoc on the lives of the people she dotes on (Bihari, Mahin and Asha); therefore she embraces solitude leaving for Kashi in the search of salvation.

BINODINI AND THE WOMEN IN TAGORE'S FAMILY

Binodini might be a mere figment of Tagore's imagination; however, she bears a resemblance to a plethora of women who Tagore had in his life.

One such woman was Jnanadanandini Tagore, whose spouse was Tagore's elder brother, Satyendranath Tagore.

Isn't it quite uncalled for for a woman to be confined to the status of someone's better half or sister when she earned her place in the Sun? She was the first fashion designer from Bengal, and it is thanks to her that chemise jackets and blouses were all the rage in Bengal. Into the bargain, the feminist icon challenged the status quo by leading a multitude of cultural innovations, influencing women's empowerment in the 19th century.

Another such feminist icon hailing from the family of Tagore was Sunayani Devi, who was his niece. A writer and social activist, she was certainly not satisfied with her identity as a niece of Tagore. So, like Jnanadanandini Tagore, she earned her own spurs. Being one of the earliest painters from Bengal, she used her artform to highlight inhumane issues such as child marriage and dowry. Her paintings depicted both mythological and domestic scenes, some of which were inspired by Patachitra. Some of her famous paintings include Milk Maids, Satir Dehatyag and Sadhika.

Tagore's Binodini showcased her iconoclasm by challenging the status quo, Sunayani Devi's iconoclasm stands out in her paintings, primarily in her depiction of female empowerment. This theme of women's empowerment is reflected in her painting titled "Milkmaids". The painting

depicts three women who are holding hands. The elongated eyes that look at each other show the tremendous sense of camaraderie they share.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIVES AND STRUGGLES OF OTHER FEMALE PROTAGONISTS

CHARULATA FROM NASTANIRH

Charulata never ceases to fascinate me. In the beginning, she is portrayed to be docile and homely. She possesses tremendous beauty and wealth into the bargain. Alas and alack, she chose to marry a man who is years her senior. Additionally, not only does he trivialise her passion, but he also remains snowed under with his work, thereby not getting time to hobnob with his own wife. She finds herself on the horns of a dilemma when she starts feeling alienated. Her loneliness and predilection for art bring her closer to Amal, who is her spouse's cousin. Searching for love and companionship, she finishes up falling head over heels for him.

In the end, her marriage breaks up. When her husband pursues her to new beginnings, she retaliates. Charulata presumably best exemplifies how society limits women's potential to home, with stereotypical mindset vandalising her ambitions.

MRINAL FROM STREER PATRA

Mrinal is married off into an upper-class zamindar family. Hailing from the countryside, she is often ridiculed, for she is unable to accustom herself; she has resigned herself to it. Her humdrum life undergoes a dramatic change, for Bindu comes into the picture.

Bindu is her sister-in-law's young widowed cousin, who has fled the abode of her in-laws after constant humiliation and violence. Mrinal rubbing shoulders with Bindu is disliked by her in-laws. Subsequently, she starts taking a stand for her, her family cannot come to terms with it.

They angrily marries Bindu off to a mentally challenged person. She flees petrified but gives in to societal pressure and returns back.

Mrinal attempts to rescue Bindu again, but it is too little, too late. Bindu has committed suicide. Mrinal relinquishes her marital life, leaving behind a letter, which she wrote to her husband. In the letter, she mentions her woes of patriarchal customs and the blind eye of her elite-educated husband.

Giribala from Maanbhajan

Giribala is another lonely housewife whose spouse stoops to violence, takes her jewellery away and decides to elope with his love interest, Labongo, who is a theatre actor. Her search for her husband leads her to a theatre. She feels that the theatre is her cup of tea, instilling into her a desire to become an actor.

After having been stabbed in the back, she does not simply sit at home, weeping buckets and pinning the blame onto her fate. Instead, she proceeds to become Mandira Devi, an actress of a play that turns out to be successful. Labongo returns with Giribala's husband only to discover that she has been replaced by another actress, who is Giribala, leaving them gobsmacked. Whilst Gopinath is left exasperated, for he is still labouring under the misapprehension that she is a mere object that he owns, Latika regrets digging her own grave by preferring a man to her career. The beautiful heroine signifies that a woman's desire to make it big can overpower her dependency on her patriarch. Moreover, she is capable enough of earning their own name under the sun.

HEMNALINI FROM NAUKADOobi

Hemnalini is another intriguing character. Sadly, the person she loves marries someone else. Hemnalini vehemently rejects a man. Kamala is another fascinating character in the story. As soon as she discovers who she has been referring to as her husband is not her husband. She makes a decision to leave him and find the man she actually married. Eventually, she takes the plunge and steps out. In this story, Tagore portrays women as courageous enough to muster up courage to raise their voice against what they think is wrong and break the glass ceiling.

MRIGNOYONEE FROM KANKAL

Taking a stroll down the memory lane, Mrignoyonee, a ghost shares with a stranger a story explaining how she died. After the death of her abusive spouse, she goes on to move in with her brother. Subsequently, she falls for Doctor babu. Discovering that he is marrying somebody else soon, she bumps him off and kills herself afterwards.

Although Mrignoyonee's narration is narcissistic and satirical, it alludes to the trials and tribulations of being a widow. Tagore looks down upon the limitations that widows are confined to. Additionally, a lot of them used to resort to committing suicide, unfortunately.

CONCLUSION :

The project on the study of female protagonists in the works of Ravindra Nath Tagore has provided a meticulous insight into the portrayal of women in Tagore's literature. By analysing the characters like Binodini, Charulata, Mrinal, Hemnalini, and Kalyani, the project delves into the trials and tribulations of their lives and the constraints within which the patriarchal society confines them, clipping their wings.

The guidance of Prof. Kumkum Ray and the supervision of Dr. Aayushee Garg has played a pivotal role in shaping the project and ensuring it is handed in on time. Their expertise and support were instrumentally important in navigating through the research process and interpreting the nuances of Tagore's female characters.

Moreover, the project acknowledges the contribution of the faculty at Amity School of Languages for their guidance, their frequent supervision, and provision of necessary nuggets of information. Their support was pivotal in facilitating the research and analysis required for a comprehensive study of female protagonists in Tagore's works.

In conclusion, the project's multifaceted nature of female characters in Tagore's literature and highlights the societal issues and gender dynamics prevalent contemporarily. It lays emphasis on the importance of understanding and appreciating the complexities of women's experiences as portrayed in literary works, contributing to a deeper appreciation of Tagore's unavoidable contribution to Indian literature.

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