



Heroines in the Novels of Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay; as Epitomes of “Masculine Femininity”.

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Abstract: “Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: like a compass needle, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman. Always.” -Khalid Hosseini (A Thousand Splendid Suns). Years of questioning and reforming, yet women are the ‘second sex’. The society particularly measures their brilliance, through their ability of tolerance and submission to patriarchal norms. The women in novels of Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, showcases the liveliness of feminine grace while confronting the masculine authority of identity, freedom and individuality. Their zeal is to build a character that can sacrifice for love as well as fight for autonomy. As Virginia Woolf’s theory of ‘Androgyny’ suggest that a person possess both feminine and masculine characteristics, out of which one is highlighted through social manufacturing. Women are formed neurologically to have feminine instincts that are later strengthened by social culturing, however skeptical, this cannot define their social role. Instances demand them to prove their masculine characteristics to pave their own dispossessions and harmonious realization of their true personality in a modern society. The Heroines of both Tagore and Chattopadhyay excels as non-conformists, enlightened New Woman with their rebellious and out rightly demonstration of latent desires and aspirations. The article invests Tagore’s and Chattopadhyay’s Humanitarian approach towards the ‘New Women’. Instead of idealizing, they present them as complex individuals dealing with the more complex realities of the world both inner and outer, and their despondent life, to seek emotional and psychological independence. The indignation against vague and deceptive notion of ‘femininity’, meticulous culturing of ideology that kept women out of margins, are essentialized through these characters. The article specifically focuses on two young widows, doubly marginalized, fabricating a personality that debunks the shortcomings of social status quo, morality and tradition, building a modern female consciousness.

Index Terms - New Women, Fallen Women, Modernity, Individuality, Femininity, social customs, enlightenment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Discrepancy of Widowhood: Tagore’s Binodini (Chokher Bali) and Chattopadhyay’s Savitri (Charitraheen)

The Nineteenth-century Bengali Literature highlighted the idea of child marriage system, social condition of widows, dignity and sacrifice, body politics and double marginalization, role of women in a patriarchal society, superstition and orthodox conservative belief system. Widowhood was synonymous with abandonment and deprivation, with discipline and sacrifices, widows treated as untouchables ending with a retreat from the social life. These women can never be part of the mainstream society. Lack of a husband or any Male consolidate forces them to live an amputated life. Though these two women were victims of similar circumstances, yet their defiance carves out their individuality. In a world of invisibility Binodini desires for recognition, emotional freedom, companionship, equality, a dignified position in Society, envisages her as a

Modern-women. Tagore doesn't bother to hide her negativities, flaws and shortcomings, rather made them natural and spontaneous. When Binodini learns that both Mahendra and Bihari rejected her and are inclined towards Ashalata whom she adjectivizes as "Nonir Putul" much inferior compared to Binodini's capabilities, "despicably insignificant in contrast to Binodini" (Tagore 47), her female ego is hurt. She tries to demean Asha by doing household chores with competency, gaining Mahendra's Mother's affection through her delicacy, showcasing her indefinable position as an implicit mistress of the house, even Mahendra and Bihari are spellbound by her intelligence and grace. However, her conjugal desires are aroused when she learns about Asha and Mahendra's love life. She envies the lifestyle that Asha enjoys, a loving husband, a certified position in the society, which Binodini later confronts as her own. "This room, this bed, (Mahendra), which now belonged to Asha, could have been rightfully hers, and Binodini never allowed herself to forget the loss" (Tagore, 49). Binodini acknowledges Mahendra as the culprit, the reason for her circumstances, and manipulates to bring him on knees, give him a taste of rejection amidst unbound desires. Binodini realizes her relationship with Mahendra is mere attraction influenced by her wounded pride and emotional refutation. Unlike Asha, Binodini is Literate not confined to domesticity, has a critical understanding of complex human relationships and conscience. She could sense the dissatisfaction in Mahendra's mother towards Asha and Mahendra's neglect of familial obligations, and uses it to secure her position. Where Binodini is still confined to domestic space, Savitri conquers the outer world. She tries to earn her living through hard work gaining financial authority, an unthinkable task by a widow during that period. The accusing fingers of society instantly raises upon her, a young widow working as a maid in a men's mess, concludes her as "Charitrahin" (Characterless). Let alone English education, women earning money was more disastrous for the inherited patriarchal traditions against Widows. Even Binodini could not travel without Mahendra, whereas Savitri is seen to be as an independent working widow, who could travel on her own. Through Savitri, Chattopadhyay juxtaposes the ideology of "fallen Women" as "New Women", and being a young widow comes with additional consequences. These women contested the boundaries of orthodox social customs and exasperating distortions of society born to cage women. They were maltreated and victims of situations they were never responsible for, nevertheless were forced a life of refugee, with no identity and ownership upon their own life. These women were seen as objects of lust. When Bipin babu urges Savitri to come with him, offering her ten thousand rupees, she refutes the money and walks away, which accentuates her great personality, dignity and self-esteem. Later Upendra praises this unusual characteristic of her as women of self-worth. She never accepted herself as an outcaste, a widow, rather exerts her agency through hard work, patience, sacrifice, and individuality. Savitri is sensible enough to understand her role and impress her love upon Satish. She claims her authority on Satish when he is sick and takes care of him. Chattopadhyay plays on the name Savitri, given that the society never accepted her as pure, a 'Sati-Savitri', yet she proved her outright profile through her unprecedented sensibility and intelligence. Chattopadhyay builds that sense of revolution where women can freely express her passion, and rightfully state her desires without effecting the calmness of her tone, delivering an assertion of individual profanity. Their acerbic humour and pellucid arguments against the traditional norms distinct them as women of characteristics.

Conclusion: Tagore and Chattopadhyay's in-depth attachment to Human consciousness enables them to showcase the subtleties of cerebral cognizance. These female characters emerge in atrocities and emerge out with advocacy. Both Bimala and Savitri takeover their fatality and vulnerability without losing themselves, rather these adversities act as catalyst to their transformed masculine attitude. Their journey from "fallen women" to "New Women", engages with high moral values and self-esteem, characteristic of an enlightened modern women. They assimilate and comprehend the ways of life, refashioning themselves as avatar of 'Masculine Femininity'.

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