

Chapter – 2
Novels of Tagore : A Study of the Source Texts

Chapter – 2

Novels of Tagore : A Study of the Source Texts

The Bangla novel in its proper sense, came into existence by the middle of the nineteenth century. It was initiated by Pearychand Mitra (1814 – 1883) who invariably used the pen name Tekchand Thakur. His first and the most representative novel *Alaler Ghorer Dulal* may be considered as the first specimen of original novel in Bangla. It narrates the tragic career of the elder son of an elderly man, who had made money but lacked proper education and good sense. Getting inspiration from Mitra's tale Kaliprasanna Sinha (1840 – 1876) wrote some satirical sketches of the Calcutta life in his *Hutum Pachar Naksha*. But the real starting point of Bangla novel was 1865, the year when *Durgeshnandini*, the first Bangla novel of Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1834 – 94) appeared. A born story-teller, Bankimchandra took the heart of Bengal by storm. His other well known novels are *Kapalkundala* (1866), *Mrinalini* (1869), *Vishabriksha* (1873), *Chandrasekhar* (1877), *Rajani* (1877), *Krishnakanter Will* (1878), *Rajsingha* (1881), *Anandamath* (1882) and *Sitaram* (1886). As Bhabani Bhattacharya says :

“The novels he wrote have been justifiably called epoch making and less justifiably modern” (Bhattacharya, 1961 : 96).

The appeal of his novels was soundly based on Bengali people's increasingly strong desire to read about themselves, to have literature that depicted their daily life as they knew it.

Under the impact of the powerful influence of Bankimchandra, a whole class of novelists appeared in Bangla Literature. They more or less relayed Bankimchandra's manner and craftsmanship in their work. But Rabindranath Tagore was different. Taking the cue from the period pieces of Bankimchandra, he started writing Bangla novel and developed it to a great height by writing fourteen novels in all. They are – *Karuna* (1877, incomplete novel), *Bauthakuranir Hat* (1883), *Rajarshi* (1887), *Chokher Bali* (1903), *Naukadubi* (1906), *Prajapathir Nirbanda* (1908), *Gora* (1909), *Chaturanga* (1915), *Ghore Baire* (1916), *Jogayog* (1929), *Sesher Kabita* (1929), *Dui Bon* (1933), *Malancha* (1934) and *Char Adhyay* (1934).

In his early years Tagore yielded to the prevailing mood and wrote three novels. Being fascinated by Bankimchandra's novel *Durgeshnandini* and Biharilal's romantic poems, Tagore wrote his first novel *Karuna* in 1877 while his age was only sixteen. So long Tagore was alive he did not publish the novel *Karuna* nor did he place it in any of his complete volume as he considered it an incomplete novel of his early life. It was only after his death the novel was published by Visva- Bharati marking it as an 'incomplete novel of Tagore'. The next two novels of Tagore *Bauthakuranir Hat* (1883) and *Rajarshi* (1887) have their plots taken from the history of the seventeenth century Bengal. The cue of the plot of *Buthakuranir Hat* was taken from Rameshchandra Ghose's *Bhangadhip Parajaya*, but it is more a domestic novel than historical. The plot of *Rajarshi* was taken from the history of Tipperah. The conflict between head and heart, thought and feeling, intellect and emotion is the main note of the two novels. The influence

of Bankimchandra is seen more in *Bauthakuranir Hat* and less in *Rajarshi*. However, Tagore was undoubtedly an inborn genius, his strong individuality asserted itself and after several years break from fiction writing, he found an appropriate medium in the short story. The years 1894 – 95 were remarkable for a large output of short stories which rank even today as some of the best in the Bangla language. Then he returned to longer fiction but with a remarkable difference.

With *Chokher Bali* (1903) Tagore set up a new literary genre in Bangla, the realistic novel in which story values are based not simply on the mechanical complexities of plot structure but on characterization and psychological content. This was surely the earliest work of its kind in Bangla language and perhaps in any Indian language. The novel *Chokher Bali* was serialized in the Bangla periodical *Bangadarshan* from 1902 to 1903. It was published as a book in 1903. Its story is set somewhere around the second half of the nineteenth century. Although widow remarriage had been legalized by 1856, social taboos were very much against it among the Hindu elite. At the same time, the custom of child marriage coupled with low life expectancies ensured that many women would be widowed at an early age. It is the question of the sexuality of the young widow, officially purged through religiosity and practically lurks inside that forms the staple of the novel. There was nothing new in depicting an affair with a widow as Bankimchandra Chatterjee had already done it in his 1873 novel *Bishabriksha*. But the newness of *Chokher Bali* lies in its treatment of the subject and in the minute attention to the working of the mind of the characters. It belongs to ‘the literature of the new age’

which seeks 'to reveal the secrets of the heart' as Tagore himself claims in his preface to *Chokher Bali*.

In Bankimchandra's *Bishabriksha*, Nagendra's wife Suryamukhi leaves home when he marries Kundanandini, a young widow. When Suryamukhi comes back to the household, Kundanandini consumes poison and dies. Here Bankimchandra through authorial intrusion reminds the readers of the ill consequences that follow from widow re-marriage. By contrast, Tagore in his *Chokher Bali* unfolds the plot through psychological interplay between the characters. Authorial intrusions are very much limited here. Binodini, a passionate young widow, overthrows the social norms of widowhood to make direct appeal to the man she loves, and this results in a chain of events that throws into turmoil the internal as well as external world of the characters. However, the emotions of the characters and their psychological turmoil become the central pole of the novel :

When Binodini tells Behari ..., 'I may be bad, or wrong, but do try to see things from my point of view just this once and understand me', it might as well be an appeal that Tagore is making to the readers of his day (Ganguly, 2003:xi).

Thus in Tagore's hand we find the shift of emphasis from the external actions to the internal psyche of the characters.

The story of the novel is very simple. It centres round the problem of human relationship and shows us the fire of passions that burns inside the well to do Bengali middle class home of the time, without flame or smoke being visible to the outside eye. The six main characters in the novel are Rajlaxmi, the fond mother

devoted and jealous; Mahendra, the pampered, vain and self centered son; Asha, the simple untutored wife; Annapurna, the pious aunt; Bihari, the virtuous, noble and loyal friend; and Binodini, the full blooded young, beautiful and attractive widow in whose frustrations, sufferings and rebellion the author's response to the orthodox Hindu customs of the society of the time is summed up. As Krishna Kripalini says :

Her (Binodini's) tragedy is a lasting shame to the Hindu conscience (Kripalini, 2001 : vi).

Binodini, a beautiful, talented and well educated girl, could not get a husband because her parents had spent the little they had for her education and could not save enough for her dowry. Moreover, an unmarried girl over twelve years was a social disgrace to a respectable Hindu family of the time. So she was married off to a poor, sickly nobody and soon became an widow. Conscious of her beauty, youthful glamour, talent and education, Binodini rebelled against orthodox rituals and tried to assert her right to love and live a fulfilling life. On the other hand, Rajlaxmi, being jealous of the excessive emotional attachment of her lifelong pampered son with his newly married wife Asha, brought Binodini to the family. It is this Binodini whose hands in marriage was rejected by Mahendra and also by his friend Bihari. Binodini, the radiantly beautiful young widow avidly watches the intense amorous life of the newly married couple, and her mounting sexual and mental frustrations explode in seeking revenge for her misfortunes. It leads to a chain of events and conflicts. Mahendra expresses his love for Binodini and elopes with her, thus, throwing into disarray the reputation and peace of the family. But

Binodini does not allow Mahendra to consume her sexually and with her turmoiling innerself begs the hand of Bihari whom she really loves. Again when Bihari proposes her to marry, she turns down his offer of marriage, gives the money she had to Bihari, renounces her earthly life and goes to *Kashi* with Annapurna to live the pious life of a widow, purged off all desires. She retreats from the contest in the end, not because she is crushed but because she disdains a victory achieved at such sordid cost :

Orthodox society in Tagore's time still disapproved of widow remarriage, in spite of the Widow Remarriage Act, which legitimized it. Some readers feel that *Chokher Bali* should have ended with Binodini's marriage to Bihari. The novel, however, suggests another reason for Binodini's rejection of Bihari: Knowing her reputation to be tainted by her association with Mahendra, she is unwilling to let the social stigma affect Bihari (Chakravarty, 2003 : Introduction).

The end of the story of *Chokher Bali* appears to some readers of the present day as not being in full accord with the realism of the plot and Tagore himself was not unaware of it. But it could not have been made otherwise. Any other end to Binodini's career would have given unwarrantedly the rudest shock even to the most advanced readers of the day, and Tagore was no believer in shock tactics and had never attempted to be outrageously original. In *Chokher Bali* Tagore's concern with the problems of human personality and its relationship with forces outside, his

interest in detailed psychological analysis of the inner consciousness, did much to determine the future course of Bangla novel.

In his next novel *Gora*, Tagore appears as truly the great innovator, the founding father of what for more than a century was to be the main tradition of Bangla novel. *Gora* was first serialized in the Bangla monthly literary magazine *Prabashi* from 1907 to 1909 and appeared as a book in 1909. It is the author's effort to analyse the significance of Indian nationalism as it is related to the clash between the old and the new, between rigid orthodoxy and free enquiry. Gora, the central character of the novel, is an Irish foundling, raised by a kind Brahmin woman after his parents' death in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. He knows nothing about his origin and grows up a fanatic proponent of Hindu orthodoxy in its most reactionary form. The discovery, after creating havoc in the lives of several close friends, that he was born neither Indian nor Hindu and is thus totally outcaste, makes him reverse his views so that he becomes an exemplar of Tagore's ideal, the universal man.

A good part of the novel *Gora* is filled with polemics. But considering its time of composition the polemics in *Gora* seems inevitable. The partition of Bengal in 1905 was a historical event. It stirred the national consciousness of the country and gave rise to the first great political movement in India on a mass scale. It also brought about an intellectual ferment which resulted in a great awakening of the nationalistic spirit of India. Tagore had a leading role in the Swadeshi Movement, and helped to establish national schools and colleges and to organize co-operative societies. As the backdrop to all these activities, several social and political essays

and addresses came from Tagore. And here one can understand the polemical pre-occupation of the novel. However, the novel has its assured place in literature as a creative writing. Its real importance lies not in its polemics and politics but in its projection of ideas – temporary as well as permanent, contemporary as well as timeless. Two important questions that occupied the thoughts of the intelligentsia of Bengal of the period were the Hindu – Brahma controversy and the need for political freedom. While portraying the characters in the novel, Tagore freely exposes whatever was ridiculous not only in the orthodoxy of old Hindus but also in the orthodoxy of the new ‘enlightened’ Brahmas. Such controversy between the new and the old is a recurrent theme forever in the world in different spheres, time and place. In this context the stern satire in the novel *Gora* is of eternal interest.

Gora, the main character of the novel, is created by Tagore with great sympathy. With an intellectual brilliance and strong idealism, Gora is intensely patriotic and a staunch Hindu orthodox. But he is not a religious fanaticist. The key to his ideology lies in the fact that he identifies religious orthodoxy with patriotic resistance to the foreign rule. He enthusiastically resolves to vindicate Hinduism with all its old beliefs and even superstitions as he believes from the core of his heart that Hindu culture is the only Indian culture. He becomes a champion of orthodox Hinduism in ways undreamt by his liberal friend Binoy, foster father and mother Krishnadaya and Anandamayi. At the back of all this there is a strong irony that haunts the readers throughout the unfolding of the story. The readers know the deep secret, what Gora does not know, that he is neither a Hindu nor an Indian but an Englishman by birth.

Gora's romantic attachment to Sucharita, a Brahma girl, offers a further source of irony in the plot. It reaches its height when Gora refuses to participate in the marriage of his closest friend Binoy, just because the bride is a Brahma. By this act he denies himself the love of Sucharita, a Brahma girl, whom he really loves. As Sucharita is on the point of being given in marriage to an widower, the long expected denouement comes suddenly. Gora's foster father Krishnadayal is plagued by old-age ailment and becomes extremely orthodox. In order to stop the sacrilege of his funeral being performed by a born non-Hindu, he suddenly discloses to Gora his real parentage. This is the turning point in the plot of the novel. In a single moment the foundation on which Gora developed his deep faith and ideology, crumbles into dust. By one single stroke his own parents robbed him of all that he is – his religion, his culture, his parentage, his nationality and his God. He finds himself terribly lonely. But nothing can rob him of his mother's love, of Binoy's friendship, of liberal Brahma Paresh Babu's good will and of Sucharita's love. He rushes forward to give the message to them that he has become a new man. Being released from the self created imprisonment of Hindu orthodoxy, Gora breaks into the outburst :

Today I am Bharatiya. Within me there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu or Muslim or Krishtan. Today all the castes of Bharat are my caste, whatever everybody eats is my food (Tagore, 2006 : 475).

In other words, Gora begins to speak the language of Tagore's many hymns to the nation :

His country is no longer a fortress of ancient faith to be defended against foreign and internal enemies, but the perennial India of the confluence of nations and nationalities, creeds and communities, and a mystic unity in its manifold diversities. It is a joyous temple from where he welcomes the world (Chatterjee, 2005 : 195).

The political motif of *Gora* repeats itself in a different way in the novel *Ghore Baire*. It was serialized in the Bangla monthly literary magazine *Sabuj Patra* (1915 – 16), edited by Pramatha Choudhury and came out as a book in 1916. The partition of Bengal and its consequent national awakening form the backdrop of the novel. Some of the unfortunate aspects of the national movement like the angry intolerance, the racial and religious hatred leading to communal disharmony and terrorism, and the un-thought acceptance of a rigid line of action draw condemnation from the poet's heart of Tagore and we see its expression in the novel.

The time mentioned in the novel is the first decade of the nineteenth century, when the intellectual Bengal was embroiled in the *Swadeshi* Movement. The level of popular enthusiasm at that time spread far and wide into the interiors of the province of Bengal. The *Swadeshi Andolon* was disseminated through a large mass of open and underground literature, handbills, manifesto, posters and news letter, which throw light on the character as well as the organizational strength of the revolution. The novel *Ghore Baire* contains the documents and detailed description of the movement. Sensible men were then concerned deeply with the progressive movement. In several fields like economic independence of

the country, education of the women, avoidance of the traditional grooves of antiquated thought and seeking freedom from social and domestic tyranny. The new notions about sex from the 'West' including sex psychology had just arrived. The hero Nikhilesh loves his country, likes his people and adores his wife. He is a supporter of *Swadeshi* but is against indiscriminately boycotting everything foreign and he opposes violence in any form. He gives his wife freedom from conjugal surveillance so that she may understand the real nature of love and assess its true value. He hates to think that Bimala, his wife, is obliged to make love to him as her inviolable duty. Sandip, a mock freedom fighter does not hesitate to exploit this opportunity. He being the friend of Nikhilesh gradually entered into the bedroom of Bimala and tried to hypnotize her. But at last she saves herself from the poison claws of Sandip.

Bimala stands as a link between the two forms of patriotism represented by Nikhilesh and Sandip. Nikhil's patriotism is progressive and humane which Tagore advocates, while Sandip's patriotism is more dazzling but aggressive and narrow. Bimala's personality incorporates the contesting selves of the two protagonists and becomes the battle field on which the two forms of patriotism fights for supremacy. In this inner battle Nikhil's form of patriotism eventually wins, but at enormous social and personal cost :

He (Nikhil) wants to draw the marginalized into the mainstream because of his commitment to the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. His unstudied, undocumented historiography takes into account "the corruptibility of nationalism". It challenges even

demolishes fanatical nationalism, and posits man as a global citizen, to use simplified contemporary idiom. In spite of not having a good head for business, Nikhil attributes the real cause of poverty in his estates to man-made conditions rather than to inclemency of nature or birth, and thus in many ways anticipates future theories in Economics. In 'Raja Praja' Tagore had idealized the visionary human being as one who, like Nikhil, reflects the spirit of that universal man who, despite his subjective turmoils, searches for and tries to protect a unified and singular truth (Sen, 2004 : xii).

Amulya, an idealistic young student, with whom Bimala has a special affectionate relationship, works closely with Sandip and as a result finds out quite early Sandip's instrumental concept of patriotism. Caught between his affection and respect for Bimala and his awareness of what Sandip is, Amulya turns out to be the real victim. His death at the end of the story fore shadows Tagore's anxiety about the nature of the violence let loose by nationalism. The riot that kills many innocent lives like Amulya and injures many thoughtful patriots like Nikhilesh is set off by the ruin that poor Muslim traders face due to the nationalist attempts to boycott foreign goods immediately and unconditionally. Tagore through the events of the novel suggests that such violence is the inevitable corollary of Sandip's form of nationalism.

The novel introduced a new style in prose and a new form in Bangla fiction. The story is a total departure from the traditional form. It is in the form of

personal memoranda and diaries of the three main characters, which form the triangle of contest. There is the calm and perfectly balanced Nikhilesh, watching the current events with eyes that look beneath the the surface; the impassioned political worker Sandip, ego-centric and devoid of scruples, and between the two stands Nikhil's young wife, Bimala, a helpless moth, bespelled and drawn by the dazzling sparks of the false patriot Sandip. Bhabani Bhattacharya draws a beautiful conclusion about the novel *Ghore Baire* :

This work has an added interest as a memorable milestone : here the poet in Tagore who, in *Gora* a decade earlier, had surrendered his claims to the novelist, recovers every inch of the lost ground. He not only dominates over the novelist but, once in a while, hustles his rival out of the scene. The reader may at first have a fretful feeling that, with the superb rhetoric, the glittering ornamentation of the language, the 'poet' has been slowing the pace of the story and dimming the characters under his own shadow. But in a while the sheer beauty of language has an overwhelming effect. Dissatisfaction goes; the critical voice is shamed. And at the end of it one hates to think that the book could have been other than what it is, a poet's novel (Bhattacharya, 1961:99).

The novel *Chaturanga* was first appeared as four independent short stories namely *Jyathamashay*, *Sachish*, *Damini* and *Sribilash* in the pages of Bangla literary magazine *Sabujpatra* edited by Pramatha Choudhury in 1915. It was published as a novel in 1916, where Sribilash as the story teller collected the total

story from his own diary. The novel has its four parts. In the first part the central figure is Jagmahan Mallik who never believed in the existence of God but believes in the service of humanity. His younger brother Harimohan and his son Purandar, though believed in God, were greedy and narrow minded. But the second son of Harimohan, Sachish, was nourished by the doctrines of his uncle Jogmahan. One day he brought an unfortunate pregnant girl, Nanibala, and Jogmahan gave her shelter in his own residence. Later it was detected that Purandar, who seduced her earlier, raped her again causing the birth of a dead child. Purandar, a selfish coward, refused to take her as his wife. Sachish tried to save the life of the innocent victimized woman by marrying her in a civil court. But Nani committed suicide to end her life. In the second, third and fourth parts of the novel Tagore presents the tragedy of Sribilash, Sachish and Damini. The novel ends with a pessimistic mood. The terrible carnal appetite of Purandar which kills young Nanibala, the incurable disease of Damini, the suicide of Nabin's wife, and the boldness of Jogmahan make us feel, in their vivid detail, Tagore's intense conviction that every particular event of human life has a profound importance. Through the characters like Jogmahan and Sachish, Tagore symbolically conveys that service to humanity is another form of worship.

All the characters depicted by Tagore in *Chaturanga* are amazingly alive. Among his male characters Jogmahan is more dynamic and life-like. His female characters in the novel are still more convincingly alive. Nanibala is far more swept by her instinctive life than Sachish. In comparison to Nanibala, Sachish seems like a barren waste land. Another woman character in the novel is Damini

who came to Sachish like a cloud in the desert sky. The strength of her love to Sribilash and the soberness of her outlook make her really an impressive figure among Tagore's women. Love plays a vital and dominant role in her character but it could not give strength to her life for long. She married Sachish and surrendered to him, but cruel fate was awaiting her. After only one year of her marriage she eternally parted from her husband.

The novel *Chaturanga*, though minor in comparison to *Gora* and *Chokher Bali*, remains a characteristic work of Tagore dealing with the life in crowded Kolkata with a vivid description of the place and its social environment. The characters are presented as creatures of circumstances and the novelist demonstrated the development of human soul under the tyranny of circumstances:

... the novel spans almost half a century of life and thought in Bengal. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, the original to my mind of the Uncle, and his campaigns, the Guru and the cross currents of personal religious movements at the turn of the century, the long struggle for the recognition of a widow's right to remarry and order her own destiny, the stormy figure of Vevekananda who lighted up the Indian sky and disturbed complacency, Nivedita and her account of the cave, Damini, unique to Bengal and nowhere else, and Sribilash who learnt to rid himself of self-pity : they certainly represent Bengal of the first half of Tagore's life. It was perhaps an inner compulsion to chronicle this half-century that urged Tagore to surpass even himself and gave the novel its

insinuating economy, its sweep, plasticity and power of image, its intensely contemporary yet timeless theme (Mitra, 1961:viii).

In technique and execution *Chaturanga* is incomparable and in a sense, it is one of the most compact and neat works of fiction in the language. Here the problem is not merely external. It is the difficulty that a person finds when he or she is faced with emotional crisis and seeks equilibrium in minds and spirit. Here Tagore is clear as to the inevitability of the power of human emotion which twist men around the designs they plan for their own lives. From this novel it appears that 'character' is simply a state in a man's environment, but it is a state peculiar by itself and so its influence is far reaching.

Shesher Kabita was written by Tagore at Bangalore in 1928 and it was published in 1929. This novel again presents a new technique in story telling, where verses help the prose narration. In form and matter *Shesher Kabita* comes close to poetry. Its modern setting, its playful mocking tone, its challenging style, its brilliant sparkling wit of the dialogues, its peculiar denouement showing the fulfillment of love not in union but in separation and also the author's trick of introducing himself as the butt of the central character Amit's merciless criticism – all these generated a new taste among the readers of Bangla novel. However Krishna Kripalini observes :

Some admirers even acclaimed it (*Shesher Kabita*) as the author's best novel; but the enthusiasm of the young, and specially the modern young, must be accepted with considerable caution. The novel is undoubtedly brilliant and entertaining, but to regard it as

better than *Gora* or *The Home and the World* is to prefer cleverness to genius. However, literary values can never be absolute. To each the pleasure of his choice (Kripalini, 2000 : vii).

The novel *Shesher Kabita* presents the love story of Amit and Labanya. Here, the author shows that love in its basic form is above any need for physical consummation. It is pointed out that a man may love one woman as wife and another as beloved :

Amit's love for Labanya proves incompatible with the lifestyle and expectations of his own urban social milieu. A chastened and subdued Katy Mitter, who reverts to her earlier self as Ketaki, seems to him a more suitable partner for his everyday existence. But he continues to hunger for the ideal of romantic love, which resists containment within the boundaries of the mundane and the social. Labanya remains in Amit's heart as an image of this elusive ideal, while Ketaki becomes the spouse who will share with him the burdens of the workaday world (Chakravarty, 2005:xxi).

Shesher Kabita also fictionalized the contemporary debate between Tagore's admirers and detractors. By the time the novel was written, Tagore was attacked by the 'modernists' in Bengal. They regarded his upanishadic doctrines of good and evil as making up the symphony of the universe as obsolete. They criticized his philosophy of art as too mystical and inadequate to account for the modern disillusionment that would deny the ultimate goodness of the universe. With their emphasis on the forbidding presence of evil in life, they found

Rabindranath's equation of beauty and truth an empty platitude and his theory of art all too obfuscating or hard to understand. In *Sesher Kabita* Rabindranath deplored the modernists' valorization of the ugly and the repulsive as the only reality. The emphasis in modern fictions on suffering and evil, and its challenge to theories privileging beauty and the good as both substance and end of any form of literature, may it be novel or drama, result for Rabindranath from a biased understanding of the nature of reality. By presenting the character of Amit and his self professed character under the pseudonym Nibaran Chakrabarty, Tagore expressed his feeling that the 'modernists' have not acquired the detachment to separate the aesthetic from the biological plane of existence.

Amit is drawn as an amusing picture of an ultra-modern Bengali intellectual whose Oxford education has induced in him a superiority complex and a craze for conscious originality which result in a deliberate and frivolous contrariness to all accepted opinion and convention. Amit is a self-indulgent '*bhadralok*' of his time, with lots of money and even more time at his disposal, forever waxing poetic under a pseudonym, Nibaran Chakrabarty. Merely to attract public attention he derides the canonical writers, valorizes unknown ones and puts forward contrary opinion in matters of food, dress, choice of friends, love, marriage and social interactions. His aggressive self-complacency, however, receives a shock when as a result of an accidental meeting he falls in love with, and wins in return the heart of Labanya, a highly educated girl of fine sensibility and deep feelings. This love being more or less genuine and different from his previous experience of coquetry, releases his own submerged depth of sincerity, which he

finds hard to adjust to the habits of sophistry. The struggle makes him a curious pathetic figure. Labanya is a haven of peace and stability against Amit's restlessly bohemian spirit. She rightly senses that their world would never meet. Her arguments against marrying Amit is quite clear. She realizes that Amit has merely built an ideal image of her and will be disillusioned by discovering through marriage the very ordinary real person underneath. Amit being an 'eternal fugitive' leaves his narrative incomplete. He cares too much about what people of his class would think and feels ashamed of the love and companionship he has found in Labanya. Amit makes a companionate marriage with Ketaki, and Labanya weds Subanlal but their love becomes more precious, beautiful and eternal:

Amit builds an insular little nest with Ketaki, while he claims he had traversed the skies with Labanya. His love for Ketaki, he explains in another metaphor, is like water in a pitcher that is used up everyday, whereas his love for Labanya is like a lake, underscoring the contrast between that which is constrained-by-time-and-space and the unfettered and eternal, once again. Having designated their relationship with an abstract beauty and truth, however, they are reduced to the "never, never canst thou kiss" predicament of Keats' lovers in 'The Grecian Urn' (Sen, 2005 : 179).

The theme of the novel *Shesher Kabita* is akin to his next two novels *Dui Bon* (1933) and *Malancha* (1934), where Tagore attempted to draw the two forms of love of man : love to his wife and love to his beloved and there is no inherent

contradiction between the two forms of love. Though the main theme of these three novels are akin to each other, each is a work of art exquisite in its own individual fashion. In *Naukadubi* (1906) Tagore delineated socio psychological tension through Ramesh – Hemnalini. The novel proves the creative power of Tagore. The power to tell a story, the power to make characters alive and a certain balanced plot-development have made the novel a representation of real life. The novel *Jogayog* (1929) is purely domestic. In it we see the conflict between the ideologies and sensibilities of a family mellowed with culture. Here we also observe the coarseness and animal greed of an ordinary man, who had amassed enormous wealth by his tenacity and fortune. The protagonist of the novel Kumudini is caught between her traditional notion of duty to her mechanical selfish husband and her desire to be with her sick brother. The novel ends with Kumu's discovery of her pregnancy which compels her to go back to her heartless husband who is possessed with wealth only. The biological entrapment of women is thus highlighted in the novel in those pre-feminist days.

The theme of Tagore's last novel *Char Adhyay* (1934) is some what similar to his earlier two novels *Gora* and *Ghore Baire* in the sense that all these are political novels. In *Gora* the problem is political – psychological, in *Ghore Baire* it is political – sociological, while in *Char Adhyay* it is political – ethical. In *Char Adhyay* Tagore attempted to analyse the real motives and values of the revolutionary activities of violence in Bengal that followed the Non-Co-operation Movement. Tagore himself says, 'the whole story is against the terrorism of the state'. (Das, 1996 : 20) Tagore's deep sympathy for the independent movement

and his admiration for the young men and women who sacrificed themselves for the cause of independence, has found glorious expression in this novel. It is important to note here that the novelist Tagore of *Gora* and the poet Tagore in *Ghore Baire* and *Sesher Kabita* are not in conflict in the pages of *Char Adhyay*. Here, 'they have agreed to share the materials in hand equitably' (Bhattacharya, 1961 : 101).

A curious fact about Tagore is that the end he reached always became the point of new beginning. What he says in the opening line of the first poem of his *Song Offerings*, "Thou hast made me endless, such is Thy pleasure", appears to be Tagore's discovery of himself and a testament to his own ever youthfulness. The English *Gitanjali* series of poems, which gave him a world reputation, could well have been an end but *Balaka* followed and again *Balaka* became paralleled by the poems of the last decade of his life. So also in fiction *Chokher Bali*, 'the literature of the new age' was followed by the great height of *Gora*, which was again rivaled by *Shesher Kabita*, a novel of complete contrast in manner. Each novel grows in its own individual mould different from what has preceded it or comes afterward. As a novelist Rabindranath advocated the free and unbridled expression of states of mind. But he could not accept the view that self expression is the final goal of novel. The inevitable and imperative urge of a novel is to achieve togetherness. Tagore did not write fictions for self, but for all humanity. He himself says in his essay *What is Art ?* :

For man, as well for animals, it is necessary to give expression to feelings of pleasure and displeasure, fear, anger and love. In

animals, these emotional expressions have gone little beyond their bounds of usefulness. But in man, though they still have roots in their original purposes, they have spread their branches far and wide in the infinite sky high above their soil. Man has a fund of emotional energy which is not all occupied with his self preservation. This surplus seeks its outlet in the creation of Art, for man's civilization is built upon his surplus (Tagore, 1996 : 351–52).

A novel of Tagore becomes completely our own when it comes within the range of our emotions. His novels become a part of our personality with our love and hatred, pleasure and pain, fear and wonder. Tagore did not accept fictions as imitation of the external world. To him a novel is the response of the creative human soul to the call of the real. It is not an imitation of external reality but a response to that reality. He argues that the truth of literature does not depend upon its power to reflect reality but its power to distinguish truth from facts. Facts can be proved and verified, measured and catalogued. Truth is the principle that upholds the facts and links them. Facts are fragmentary and isolated. Their greater unity is revealed in truth. Needless to say, what is applicable to Tagore's poetry is also applicable to his novels. His novels are not merely concerned with ordinary men and women from the humble walks of life. In many of his novels there is an undercurrent of faint tragic note. But it is not tragic in the accepted sense of the term. It is a note of regret arising out of a sense of frustration and fatality that follows from a deeper understanding of life. Bhabani Bhattacharya rightly says:

The evocation of youthful love until its intensity is an agony too hard for the spirit to bear – that is a recurrent theme in several Tagore stories; and at that level love's fulfillment is in tragedy alone. Tragedy cannot but have the last word. Here is an idea that challenges language. The words needed for the nuances of feeling in terms that carry communication are, indeed, a severe test for any language, and passing through the test language recreates itself (Bhattacharya, 1961 : 99).

Works Cited :

- Bhattacharya, Bhabani. 1961. "Tagore As A Novelist", in *Rabindranath Tagore : A Cnetenary Volume*. New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi.
- Chakravarty, Radha. 2003. "Introduction", in Rabindranath Tagore. trans. Radha Chakravarty. *Chokher Bali*. New Delhi : Shrishti Publishers & Distributors.
- 2005. "Introduction", in Rabindranath Tagore, trans. Radha Chakravarty. *Shesher Kabita*. New Delhi : Shrishti Publishers & Distributors.
- Chatterjee, Kalyan. 2005. "Gora : Tagore's Paradoxical Self" in *Indian Literature*, Vol. 227, May – June 2005 (ed.) Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee. New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi.
- Das, Sisir Kumar (ed.) 1996. *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol.- II. New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi.
- Ganguly, Swagoto. 2003. "Introduction", in Rabindranath Tagore, trans. Sreejata Guha. *A Grain of Sand : Chokher Bali*, New Delhi : Penguin Books India.
- Kripalini, Krishna. 2001 (1959). "Translator's Foreword", in Rabindranath Tagore, trans. Krishna Kripalini. *Binodini*. New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi.
- 2000 (1956). "Translator's Note", in Rabindranath Tagore, trans. Krishna Kripalini. *Farewell My Friend*. Mumbai: Jaica Publishing House.
- Mitra, Asok. 2005 (1963). "Translator's Note", in Rabindranath Tagore, trans. Asok Mitra. *Chaturanga*. New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi.
- Sen, Nivedita. 2005. "Book Review", in Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee (ed.) *Indian Literature*. Vol. 230, Nov. – Dec. 2005. New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi.

----- 2004. "Introduction", in Rabindranath Tagore, trans. Nivedita Sen. *The Home and the World*. New Delhi : Shrishti Publishers & Distributors.

Tagore, Rabindranath. 2006 (1997). trans. Sujit Mukherjee. *Gora*. New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi.

----- 1996. "Personality", in Sisir Kumar Das (ed.) *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore Vol-II*, New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi.