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"No, Let It Be": A Psychological Study of Female Interiority, Desire, and Self-Assertion Across Novels, Stories, and Plays of Tagore

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Abstract: The literary works of Rabindranath Tagore have long been read in terms of his idealised heroines, the self-sacrificing Chitra, the transcendental Nandini, the radiant Sumitra, the compassionate Aparna, the devotional Srimati, and the introspective Prakriti; these women sacrifice themselves for love, family, nation, devotion, etc. In this paper, I propose a counter-reading, an investigation of an equivalent, less acclaimed and psychologically more complex group of Tagorean women: Binodini (*Chokher Bali*), Charulata (*Nastanirh*), Mrinal (*Strir Patra*), Bimala (*Ghare Baire*), Mrinmoyee (*Samapti*), and Giribala. These womenfolk are not willing to give themselves up to men, ideals, and institutions. In its place, they claim themselves, insist on emotional and intellectual recognition, bargain desire on their conditions and, in the face of rejection, prefer to leave rather than to dissipate. The paper, based on object-relations theory of Winnicott, Horney, Gilligan's feminist psychology, and postcolonial discourse of gender, contends that Tagore engaged in a long-term literary experimentation of what would later be theorised by Abraham Maslow as self-actualisation, a need of human personhood to be acknowledged as not a function but a self. The paper also argues that Tagore himself is ambivalent about these women; his somewhat hesitant regret at the conclusion of Chokher Bali, his structured portrayal of Bimla's harassment, has shown not misogyny but rather the tension of a writer whose imagination exceeded his historical time. This is a contribution to Tagore studies, feminist literary criticism and psychology of literary character.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, female characters, psychological realism, self-actualisation, feminist literary criticism, Bengal Renaissance, Binodini, Charulata, Mrinal, Bimala, female interiority, colonial India, new woman.

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1. Introduction: The Nest That Was Always Already Broken

Rabindranath Tagore began his writing career in 1901 with the publication of the novella *Nastanirh -The Broken Nest,* in which he ended with two words, which are considered one of the most important words in the history of Bengali literature. When Bhupati, the husband, invites Charulata to accompany him to Mysore, she replies: “Na, thaak"-No, let it be. These two monosyllables are a sign of something that Tagore's critical tradition has found difficult to assimilate, that of a woman who opts to remain to self-willedly incomplete rather than extend a life of compromise. Charulata does not give herself away; she does not melt in love or duty; she does not practice the long-suffering chastity which was so-called feminine virtue of Bengali patriarchal culture. She simply declines it all, and now the nest is shattered, which she will not feign or regret, but rather try to mend it. This act, which deceptively seems modest, is yet a matter of great significance for the time. Certainly, it was an advent of the new wave, intending to open doors for new discussion and theories to be taken for study. While studying Tagore, literary criticism traditionally has given place to the women he idealises: the warrior-princess Chitra, who questions the necessity of love at the expense of selfhood; Nandini, who symbolises the spiritual struggle; and Sumitra, the devoted beloved. These are women who achieve greatness through denial. Not to run along with them, in the novels, in the short stories, in the home stories which constitute the most psychologically complete portion of his prose fiction, is yet another type of woman. Binodini is not within the boundaries imposed on her; Mrinal refuses the suffocating norms of domestic confinement; Mrinmoyee is not within the confines of expectations of submissive womanhood; Bimala chooses her own path despite

conflicting loyalties; and Giribala reinvents herself by transforming pain and rejection into selfhood and independence. These are not self-sacrificing women; they are women who find it, at great expense, and refuse to relinquish it. These women need to be read in an intellectual context that is necessarily interdisciplinary. A powerful work by Partha Chatterjee on the women's question in colonial nationalism creates the structural fix in which Tagore's fiction exists: nationalism discourse resolved the contradiction of modernity by marking the home as a space of the spirituality of Indian authenticity, and the outer world of politics, economics, and reason as a male province (Chatterjee 120). Within this paradigm, a woman who declines her maternal role is not only personally challenging but culturally subversive. The idea of the subaltern who cannot speak developed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak provides a complementary frame: the self-insisting women in Tagore are silenced again and again by the discourses that have led her to speech; the end of her stories is withdrawal, exile, or renunciation, which restores the social order she has broken (Spivak 271-313). But more importantly, they talk first. These women may be psychologically explained in terms of the concept of the search for glory by Karen Horney, the aspirations towards realisation of an idealised self in the environment that cannot legitimise it (Horney 23), and in terms of the hierarchy of needs developed by Abraham Maslow, in particular, his definition of self-actualisation as the ultimate human need. The fact that moral developmental psychology has been systematically devaluing the relational and self-protective ethics of women further clarifies why Tagore's non-sacrificial women have been labelled morally defective (as selfish) when, in fact, they are a more complex psychological and humanly truthful mode of being (Gilligan 18). The paper discusses six such characters in Tagore's fiction: Binodini in *Chokher Bali* (1903), Charulata in *Nastanirh* (1901), Mrinal in *Strir Patra* (1914), Bimala in *Ghare Baire* (1916), Mrinmoyee in the story of the same name, and Giribala. It claims that these characters form a consistent literary-psychological undertaking: the continuing effort of Tagore to give expression, out of a patriarchal

literary tradition and a colonial social environment, to the entire inner world of women who are refusing the role ascribed to them. Throughout the paper, close reading of primary works, critical academic work and the use of psychological models, the paper presents what it argues to be a psychology of Tagorean self-assertion.

2. Binodini and the Erotics of Selfhood: Desire as Ontological Claim

The main character of *Chokher Bali* (1903), Binodini, is the most psychologically developed woman (and the most controversial) in Tagore's literary cosmos. One of Tagore's most crucial critics, Krishna Kripalani, has proclaimed her the most convincing, vital and full-blooded of all female creation by Tagore (Kripalani 187). This was agreed by Niharranjan Ray, who said that she has given colour and life to the story from one end to the other end (Ray 186). The unapologetic character of her desire is what makes Binodini so arresting and what has, in one way or another, rendered her hard to fit into the moralistic critics. Binodini is a widow, and widowhood was a trait more than a state known for asceticism, social invisibility, sexual death, and institutional erasure, in the social grammar of late nineteenth-century Bengal. Forbidden widows' desires listed in the novel are drinking tea, smelling of fried fish, putting on ornaments, and playing conjugal desires (Prerna). Binodini declines all the prohibitions. Even the name is not meaningless: in Bengali, Binodini means pleasure-loving and sensuous. This name did not occur to Tagore by chance. The issue of Binodini as self cannot be discussed outside the issue of Binodini as desire, not sexual desire, although it exists and it is significant, but desire in the most general ontological sense: the desire to be recognised, to be significant, to be in the world in the appropriate ratio of intelligence and beauty. In this regard, her psychology is a perfect fit with what D. W. Winnicott theorised as the true self, that is, the true inner world of life that needs to be preserved against an environment that requires the compliance of the false self (Winnicott 140-152). The machinations of Binodini, her control over Mahendra, her ruthlessness in chasing Bihari: these are not the

workings of a villainess, but of a real self struggling to live in a world that is set up to destroy it.

Tagore himself was all too conscious of this. His well-known comment, which he made about the story, is an incredible authorial confession: I regret the end of the story. The fact that *Chokher Bali* ends with Binodini returning to Kashi (Varanasi) instead of getting married to Bihari is what modern observers have called a compromise to social conservatism that had restricted the ethical and emotional richness of the novel, resolving things in such a manner that betrayed the uncompromised realism he had otherwise accomplished (Quora). This imagination of Tagore, that is, in other words, understood what of his historical moment might not be sanctioned: that Binodini should not be renounced, but fulfilled. Her parting words: "I will pray that I have you in my next rebirth, in this life I hope no more, I have deserved no more, I have caused much misery", are her submissiveness to the moral reckoning of the patriarchal, and are at the same time a protest of Tagore against that moral reckoning. She submits to the judgment of a society that has wronged her and, in that way, demonstrates the iniquitousness of that judgment.

> Binodini is not ready to accept her brutal destiny but wants to carve a niche through her individuality in a male-dominated world. She is a victim of circumstances, but never lets victimisation overpower her. (Raj Prerna, *The Dynamics of Binodini's Character)*

The psychological accomplishment of the novel is its breaking down of the traditional gendered gaze. According to one scholar, Tagore managed to redefine the gender gaze associated with Mahendra, Bihari, and replace it with that of Binodini, who was a helpless widow and yet clever enough to demand her rights and even defend herself (Nasrin). Where the women desire by the traditional Indian fiction of the time was made either invisible or contaminated, Tagore makes the female desire central to the story and cannot be punished by the narrative alone. The astuteness of Binodini, her recognition of her personal value, her demand to be treated as a higher being than as some unfortunate social type: these are what

Maslow would refer to as a claim to self-actualisation. When Tagore finally refused her, its full accomplishment is the extent not of his failure but of the historical forces which limited even the radical imagination of his own genius.

3. **Charulata and the Epistemology of Longing: The Woman Who Reads.** Published two years later than *Chokher Bali*, *Nastanirh* (1901) illustrates a parallel yet separate psychological case. Charulata-Charu-is not a widow; not openly defiant. She is, Tagore said, "a woman who never ceased to live, to flower like the flower that did not bring any fruit, not as a need, but ornament in the middle of her carefree, long days and nights". (Tagore, *Nastanirh)* The metaphor is killingly accurate: Bhupati, her husband, a journalist, has turned his wife into a mere ornament: beautiful, accomplished, completely forgotten. Any other wife, Tagore observes ironically, would have quarrelled with her husband, and played a few scenes, the idiosyncrasy of conjugal politics all the more curious and threatening, rising above and breaking through all thresholds and frontiers of domesticity. Charulata fails to do this. She reads, writes, and she waits till somebody takes notice. When Amal, a young man of literary taste, the cousin of Bhupati, arrives, it is not so much a romantic affair, but it turns out to be such. It is an epistemological event: Amal is the first in the world of Charu to look at her as an intelligent being and not a decoration. Their friendship thrives, which Tagore nurtures with great care, on mutual intellectual and aesthetic interest: books, poetry, and the mutual daydreaming of a garden. Amal was the only one who had her work at his service in her whole household; it was a voluntary labour that gave life to her heart, fulfilled the unspoken inner longings (Tagore, *Nastanirh*). The word "innermost" is crucial. Charu wants not merely Amal, but the state of being desired as a mind--the state which her marriage has systematically deprived her of. There is a potential biographical layer in *Nastanirh*, as scholars have pointed out: it has been hypothesised that the novella was inspired by Tagore's relationship with his sister-in-law Kadambari Devi, who killed herself soon after Tagore remarried, which cut off their intellectual closeness (Wikipedia,

Nastanirh). At any rate, whether this biographical interpretation is valid or not, it throws light upon the psychological gravity of the situation in which Tagore himself was involved. The desire of Charu is not brought out as frailty, but as the logical outcome of the supernatural powers in the face of supernatural restraint. The most psychologically sounding scene of the novel is when Bhupati understands that his marriage had cracks and Tagore gives his devastating marital analysis: "a man did not have to strive to obtain his claim on his wife, a wife was a pole star, a self-luminescent light, which could not be blown out by any wind, which did not require fuel to burn brighter". (Tagore, *Nastanirh*) Here is the summary of what the psychology of object relations would call the cardinal failure of Bhupati: he has not perceived Charu as a subject but as a concrete object in his world, which is characterised by her role. His failure is not cruelty, but worse still, he is an indifferent person who is indifferent to interiority. And Charu, after all, is unforgiving. Her well-known last Na, thaak is a show of not sadness but of pride. She will not have herself carried away like a piece of furniture to Mysore.

The adaptation of Charulata, a film by Satyajit Ray, published in 1964, was able to identify this quality right at the very start, granting it cinematic expression through the outstanding performance of Madhabi Mukherjee, whose eyes can convey more than spoken words (Breakthrough). Ray called *Nastanirh* the most intimate work of Tagore and did not see much reason to be surprised that it was apparently an extremely risky topic due to the illegal affair (qtd. in Breakthrough). What Ray perceived, and what so many critics have been unwilling to admit, is that the story of Charu is not about adultery, but the entitlement of an intelligent woman to be noticed.

4. Mrinal and the Epistolary Declaration: Writing as the First Act of Freedom.

When the insurrection of Charulata is told in two monosyllables, that of Mrinal is performed most naturally with the literary statement of personality: the letter. *Strir Patra* (*The Wife's Letter*, 1914) is in the form of a long epistle written by Mrinal when she had gone to the shores of Puri on a rare

pilgrimage outside the house of her husband and addresses him, the letter, which is also her first letter to him and also a declaration that she would never go to the house again. It is, as Shyamali Dasgupta notes in Rupkatha Journal, a liberation of the confining vidhinishedha that limited the lives of women such as her, and iconoclastic in its challenge to patriarchal norms (Dasgupta). It is more than any other Tagorean text to predict those formal and thematic strategies that would be termed subsequently as the écriture féminine: writing as a mode of self-constitution, the letter as a technology of selfhood. The history of the psyche that Mrinal re-creates in her letter is a history of systematic negation. She was married off at the age of twelve because she was beautiful, and fifteen years in a family which practiced valuing appearances and found her intelligence a nuisance. When her husband questions her about why she reads, he ignores the practice: “What will come out of your reading books? Will you have such titles as Raichand and Premchand”? (Tagore, *Strir Patra,* qtd. in FII). Her mother, being raised on the same patriarchal thinking, had always been concerned with her daughter about her intelligence: "Mother used to worry all the time about my intelligence, she believed that it was a curse to me" (Tagore, qtd. in FII). The mind of a woman is not a property in this household but a liability, a departure from the aesthetic and practical role of her sex. What triggers the awakening of Mrinal is not her misery but that of Bindu, an orphan girl who is taken into the house and is hurriedly getting married to an insane man, and consequently, she commits suicide. The mechanism matters: it is not, after all, that it is the pain of Mrinal that makes her compliance break, but that she witnesses the destruction of another woman in the hands of the same system. This is psychologically acute: it is sometimes more convenient to renounce injustice on behalf of another than on behalf of oneself. The act of death is finished when Mohammed Kaosar Ahmed states that the deconstruction of the gender of Mrinal has been done, i.e. the dismantling of the ideological scaffolding that has made her obedient (Ahmed 58).

> Women felt ashamed even to feel sad . . . If it was the destiny of women to suffer at the hands of society, then it was better to let them wallow in neglect; love or caring merely increased the pain caused by neglect. *(Tagore's Strir Patra,* trans. Dasgupta)

One of the most subtly radical gestures in South Asian literary history, however, is the last one made by Mrinal, as she signs the letter not by her married name (Mejo Bou) or marital status (wife), but by her own name, Mrinal. The simplest unit of selfhood is a name. To sign oneself is to resist the refusal of personhood to relational functioning. As Ahmed notes, self-naming is a clear indication of Mrinal denying the realm of home and assuming the autonomy of her subjecthood (Ahmed 64). At the beach in Puri, Mrinal identifies with Queen Mirabai, who had left her domestic life to be independent in spirituality. This analogy is essential: Mrinal does not just abandon her husband, but she puts her abandonment into a practice of transcendence in women that restores it to a different status than abandonment. Her leaving is not a loss but an emancipation, a jubilated celebration, in Tagore's own account framing, of being alive, also a protest against evils committed on women by society.

5. Bimala and the Tragedy of Awakening: Agency in the Nationalist Trap.

The case involving Bimala, the heroine of *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*, 1916), is the politically and psychologically most complicated in the gallery of self-asserting women of Tagore. E. M. Forster notoriously dismissed the novel as a flirtation at a boarding-house, which is a misrepresentation of its formal elegance as well as its feminist aspects (Forster, qtd. in Scribd). Actually, *Ghare Baire* is the longest meditation on the weaponisation of female desire by Tagore: how the Swadeshi nationalist movement, instead of liberating women, provided them an alternative form of captivity: the replacement of one man (husband) by another man (charismatic leader), and also mobilised their desire as a source of masculine political energy.

The formal excellence of the novel is remarkable: three first-person narrators--Bimala, her husband Nikhil, and the Swadeshi leader Sandip--have

contrasting accounts of the same events, which create what one critical assessment defines as the type of psychological realism to expose not only what characters do but also why they act in ways they do and why their moralities do not always conform (Reflections). The narration of Bimala is the most significant one: it is the account of a woman who passes out of the andar mahal (inner courtyard, the place of women) into the world, and finds out the world is more unsafe and intoxicating than the andar mahal in its protective isolation.

The novel starts with Bimala as a woman who internalised the patriarchal script to the fullest extent. It is her heart, which must worship to love, and she tells (Tagore, Ghare Baire, qtd. in Women of Attic). Her identity is built by her devotion: she picks dust off the feet of her husband; she is created to make him happy. Nikhil, ironically, declines this setup-he desires a wife who is his peer, not his servant- and it is his enlightened demand of her freedom that sets the psychological stage of her ruin. He says to her: "I wish that you should meet me, and I meet you, in the outside world. Our exchange in the outside world goes on". (Tagore, Ghare Baire, qtd. in Redalyc) This is a truly radical thing to say, to a husband in colonial Bengal; it is, also, in the moment, something that Bimala is not yet ready to accept.

The political theme in this novel is the manipulation of Bimala by Sandip. He makes her a goddess-"I will merely make Bimala one with my country", and uses what Partha Chatterjee recognises as the nationalist figure of the nation-as-goddess, a discourse that, by making the country an enslaved woman, makes her dependent on the intervention of the active man to save her from her enslaved situation (Chatterjee 130; *Women of Attic*). It is not Sandip who seduces Bimala, but the feeling of being perceived as important that finally gave her a role, told that she matters, that she is the future. Feminist interpretation of the awakening of Bimala needs to be dialectic in the sense that her aspiration towards agency is both sincere and worthy; the means by which she applies it, the political project of Sandip, is a sham and a self-destructing one. Tagore is demonstrating, with unmatched accuracy, how valid female desire can be hijacked

by patriarchal systems that, in fact, reinvent subjugation into liberation.

It is this very thing that makes Bimala unlike the idealised women discussed by Tagore; she makes the wrong decision, with justifiable reasons, and bears the consequences. It is not that she is punished because she wants; it is that her wants take a particular form, which is to believe a man who uses the language of liberation as an instrument of personal aggrandisement. The feminist criticism levelled at the novel is not that Bimala is erroneous in her desire to escape from the andar mahal into the world, but that the world as constructed presents her with only two options of male power. This criticism of Sandip by Tagore, however, extends to a criticism of any liberation movement, nationalist, feminist, or otherwise, which replaces charismatic authority with real self-determination.

6. **Mrinmoyee and Giribala: The Wild Child and the Self-Made Woman.**

Both the last two characters of this work symbolise, in highly disparate ways, the most unrestricted expressions of female self-aggression in the fiction of Tagore. The main hero of *Samapti* (1893), Mrinmoyee, is the portrait of Tagore of irreducible wildness: a young woman who, on the one hand, refuses to become what marriage requires of her, and on the other, refuses to do this at all, on principle. “When I follow the rules, then I can be a good housewife; otherwise, I am a girl of the world” (Tagore, *Samapti*, qtd. in JETIR). This is a statement, made unapologetically, which is noteworthy in any literary tradition; in late-nineteenth-century Bengal, it is astonishing. It is not a bad marriage or a bad husband that Mrinmoyee rebels against; it is the institution of marriage, the requirement that she alter her nature to suit a social position that she never agreed to be in.

Her bhadralok, an intellectual named Apurba, falls in love with her wildness, and then, the very first thing after their marriage, he starts to desire to tame her. The psychology of it is marvellous: that which drew him is that which must be killed. The opposition of Mrinmoyee is not ideological but somatic; she does not comply; it is her body that opposes it. She is cruel to her mother-in-law, she

does not pay attention to the love of her husband and continues to be a tomboy. It is not the nature of Mrinmoyee that changes, but her decision: she does accept her husband later, but most importantly, she does it when she wants it and herself, and not in her husband's time (JETIR). The most important thing is what she says: consent, not submission. The reconciliation is not the domestication of wildness, but the extrapolation of wildness into the marital space, a relationship in which the terms are those of equality, not of woman to man.

The question Mrinmoyee asks: “Not all the rules are right.--Did anybody ever attempt to discover what I like”? One of the most radical and simple in the fiction of Tagore is the one of the simple ones, which he quotes in JETIR: You like me, and I should follow all the rules" (Tagore, Samapti, qtd. in JETIR). It strikes at the very epistemological basis of patriarchal marriage: the institution is made to suit the male preference, not the female one. It is the decision of the husband; the decision of the wife. It is almost literally inconceivable to anyone that anyone should consider asking what the woman likes, in the social logic of the era. Mrinmoyee believes it, and cries it out, and awaits a response. The argument by Carol Gilligan that moral growth of women follows other paths than that of men, and that the theory of care and relationship, rather than the theory of abstract justice, are at the core of women's moral growth, has, in the statement of Mrinmoyee, a pre-theoretical literary parallel: Mrinmoyee is not opposed to care; she is insisting on care being reciprocal (Gilligan 74) Giribala, on the other hand, is the consequence of female self-assertion within a more barbaric social setting. Her husband abuses her, stealing her jewellery and leaving her with a theatre actress. The traditional Tagorean and even traditional Indian answer to this state of affairs would be resigned perseverance, perhaps ultimate reconciliation, definitely no exodus out of the domestic domain. Giribala does quite the opposite; she visits the theatre when her husband betrays her. She does not just sit back at home and mourn about her predicament, but rediscovers herself as an actress in a successful play, Mandira Devi (FII). As her

husband comes back, with the very actress that he left her to, it is to discover that his wife has outdone them both. The victory of Giribala is not a romantic one but a professional one; her re-creation is not with another man but with herself and her own abilities and efforts.

The narrative of Giribala plays out long before its theorisation by feminist economists, the condition of female liberation, which is economic independence. She not only became self-reliant but also attained a social status and regained her pride in society (Prerna and Singh). The unspoken message is that women did not have to rely on men, either emotionally, economically, or socially, and the reinvention of self, as painful as it was, was not only possible but perhaps even better than the one that the patriarchal marriage had dictated her to be. Tagore does not romanticise this: the victory of Giribala is filled with the solitude of self-made individuals. But it is made out to be hers.

7. **Tagore, Ambivalence and Its Importance: The Author Who Remored his own Endings.**

One of the common remarks of the critical discourse on Tagore's portrayal of self-asserting women is that either he or the situations he creates ultimately bring them a kind of punishment which seems to neutralise the radical potential of their earlier pronouncements. Binodini goes back to Kashi; Bimala is mortified and functionally brought back to the home of her husband; even the liberation of Mrinal is imbued with the solitude of eternal exile. It is this tendency that has made Tagore a subject of the accusation of a kind of narrative conservatism: he brings the issue of female liberation into the picture, and swamps it. It is not futile to charge. But it misunderstands the meaning of Tagore himself, saying that he is displeased with his resolutions.

When Tagore says that he regrets the end of *Chokher Bali*, he does not simply mean that it is a personal regret; instead, it is an indication that there is a more significant structural tension in his work. In one of the analyses, the disappointment that Tagore shows in the closing of *Chokher Bali* is caused by the conflict between the unyielding psychological examination of desire, jealousy and agency in the novel and the resolution of moral reconciliation and social restoration in the ending. Tagore wished to give endings to all his self-asserting women that

should be in proportion to their interiority, and was hampered by the social and editorial facts of his readership to do so. This ambivalence in itself is psychologically and historically important. It situates Tagore within a lineage of male authors - Ibsen with Nora, Flaubert with Emma Bovary, Hardy with Tess and Sue Bridehead, who created women whose desires were more than the social structures could accommodate them, and whose narrative resolutions, consequently, bear the burden of historical injustice instead of authorial judgment. In *A Doll's House* (1879), Ibsen rejects the pathetic ending when Nora abandons Helmer; in *The Stranger* (1882), Hardy convicts the society that had to murder Tess. The ruined endings of Tagore's Binodini of Kashi, Bimala of her chastened surrender, are part of the same tradition of social realism: what the society allows and not what the author approves is written. In his essay *Tagore and His India*, Amartya Sen recognises the key humanistic promise of Tagore as the belief that human beings are not members of societies and communities per se but are individuals, with their own claims to be known, and be known (Sen, The Argumentative Indian 99). This belief is the one that breathes life into Tagore's non-ideal women. They reject society; they reject its devaluation of their personhood to work. They are non-anti-social but non-anti-instrumental: they do not want to be used. And in this opposition, which Tagore himself testifies, they are not villains but pioneers. Women who had reached the self-consciousness which history could not then fit into.

8. Psychological Grammar of Tagorean Self-Assertion: A Synthesis

Throughout the characters discussed in this paper, a consistent psychological grammar can be shaped, which is peculiar to the literary-feminist project of Tagore, and is not similar to the ideal heroines of his plays, or the suffering women of the more traditional literature of the Bengal Renaissance. There are four main elements of this grammar.

The first is the acknowledgement of negation.

All of these assertive women by Tagore start with the inchoate realisation that she is being deprived of something fundamental, not material ease but

ontological acknowledgement. Charulata is aware that her husband has not laid his eyes on her. Mrinal is aware that her intelligence is viewed as a malady. Binodini is aware that her wants are sins and comes to realise at some point that she has only been a symbol, never as a person. It is the psychological basis of self-assertion, and the basis of it, you cannot resist what you cannot name.

Second, the revealing of a self-vehicle

To Charulata, it is literature and her love affair with Amal. To Mrinal, it is her letter, the very writing of it. In the case of Binodini, it is desire which is exercised as agency as opposed to being hidden as shame. In the case of Mrinmoyee, it is the denial of femininity. To Giribala, it is a professional work. It is in search of a way of being that is irreducibly hers that each woman finds a mode of being, a practice by which the true self (as understood by Winnicott) is provisionally encountered in a social world that is set up to deny it.

Third, structural resistance of social institutions

Tagore is constantly attuned to how marriage, widowhood, nationalism, and domesticity are these mechanisms of containment. His non-ideal women are not ideal in the sense that they are morally inferior, but in the sense that they do not want to be confined. When Krishna Kripalani writes that Binodini is signalling the creation of a new generation of liberated Indian women- not acquiescing to the mistreatment of their kind on any basis and insisting on their rights- she is not only referring to Binodini but the group to which she belongs: “women who have realised the injustice of their situation and will no longer accept its acceptance”. (Kripalani 188)

And fourth and most intricately, the unsolved residue

None of the self-asserting women of Tagore is self-actualised. The historical and social pressures against them are too strong; Tagore himself, in his own regrets, is not entirely ready, is not entirely capable of conceiving a social world in which their demands would be fulfilled. What they get in its place is less grandiose and less psychologically true, the articulation of the claim. Mrinal signs her

name. Charulata says, No! Binodini prefers Kashi to compromise. Giribala takes the stage. They are partial triumphs; they are true ones, too. They walk out of the world and out of the book, with the knowledge that something unfair happened.

9. Conclusion: The Persistence of "Na, Thaak"

Na, thaak, the no, let it be, of Charulata, is, it seems, such a tight squeezer of a statement, when analysed, of what this paper has been trying to demonstrate about Tagore's non-ideal women. The no is denial: the denial of compromise, of a relationship that has not passed the least test of recognition. The let it be is not resignation, but equanimity: a recognition of incompleteness which denies the false completeness of a restored but empty order. They make what may be called the psychology of the self-preserving woman who is in anger, destroys the relationship, and refuses to keep it in a condition that would harm her dignity. The non-ideal women of Tagore Binodini, Charulata, Mrinala, Bimala, Mrinmoyee, Giribala are non-ideal only in the sense that they are contrasted with an ideological ideal, the ideal of a self-sacrificing, nurturing, devotional woman who realises her own perfection in losing herself in the need of others. In comparison to that standard, they lack. But integrity is a kind of deficiency in reference to an unjust standard. What these women have in common is the unwillingness to lose the so-called real self: the living and developing core of one psychological being, which society pressures one to lose in favour of the so-called idealised self, which is rewarded by the institutions (Horney 155-157). The value of salvaging these women is very high.

- First, it makes Tagore a more complicated psychological realist than his status as a spiritual idealist has at times allowed.
- Second, it sets up a tradition of feminist-psychological literary representation in South Asian fiction, which, decades before the theoretical models that were later to be elaborated by Western feminist psychology and postcolonial feminist criticism, already exists.
- Third, it finds in these characters a model of female subjectivity that is neither the Western liberal individual nor the

submissive traditional woman, but a woman who insists on the right to her own interiority in the particular social and historical circumstances of colonial Bengal, and in the process lets the universality of that insistence shine through. Amartya Sen noted that Tagore would invite us to choose our options as conscious choices and not as default, custom, tradition, or authority choices (Sen, The Argumentative Indian 100). Mrinal makes a voluntary decision, and so does Charulata. In their various forms,

- There are no heroines of sacrifice, rather are conscious women who, during the act of their own assertion, were all too human in Tagore's fullest sense of the word- not idealised, not dissolved, not functional, but irreducibly, beautifully, and difficult to self.

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