
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Voice of Liberty and Protest: Exploring Binodini's Identity Crisis, Power and Self-discovery in Tagore's Chokher Bali (*A Grain of Sand*)

Abdullah AL Mamun

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jashore University of Science and Technology

Corresponding Author: Abdullah AL Mamun, E-mail: engh.almamun@just.edu.bd

| ABSTRACT

The cultural icon and trail blazer of Bengali Renaissance Rabindranath Tagore has experimented successfully upon some great female protagonists in his fiction who have managed to carve a niche for themselves in world literature. A master artist, he has also depicted with his dexterously professional brushstrokes a host of highly progressive and brave female identities with a strong voice of protest against all prejudices of the contemporary backward and prejudiced Hindu communities as well as against all conservative forces of fate and society. Tagore has portrayed extremely meticulously some female voices, attributing them to the strength of motherhood, the beauty of the beloved, and the strong power of womanhood, allowing them to develop their own individual status and identity in a stereotypical, male dominated, and patriarchal Bengali society. This paper undertakes to explore Binodini, a finely crafted character in the Novel '*Chokher Bali*' by Tagore, who battles over her identity breaks a fresh ground for her own, and emerges as an uncompromisingly assertive woman with a voice and brand of her own. It explores that she is not terrified by the severity of the male gaze or trodden down by the repression of the male centric society in her journey through liberty and blossoms an individual very sure of herself by breaking the image of the traditional Indian womanhood.

| KEYWORDS

Identity, stereotypes, womanhood, individual, feminism, psychoanalysis etc.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 October 2024

PUBLISHED: 19 October 2024

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2024.7.10.23

1. Introduction

Hailed as the cultural icon and the undisputed pioneer in modern South Asian literary studies, Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate poet's art, creativity, and literary genius have gone far beyond the scene of Bengali literary heritage to the West and across the world, across many cultures. Tagore exercised a perennial and permanent impact on the contemporary scholarly pursuit in South Asia, in particular, and his works have exerted a remarkable hold on the world literary heritage in many genres, the most popular of which is his prose. Tagore's short stories explore extensively the rural Bengali culture and family life, superstitions and human behavior, their conflicts of ideas and religious bias, love and marriage, and the simplest everyday events. Out of those scenes of everyday life in rural Bengal in the late 19th century, we notice many significant changes and developments touching upon contemporary historical, socio-political, and cultural issues. Tagore is essentially modern in his attitude and approach to life, but he very dexterously presented in all his works the essential conflicts between the age-old socio-cultural prejudices and the rise of a class of people self-enlightened and educated in the Western scholarship that refused to follow the hackneyed social customs and stereotypes. Tagore's short stories are teeming with free performing life like characters. Quite a great number of papers have been written so far about the dominating female characters struggling to establish their individual voices and identities against backgrounds utterly hostile to them. However, my paper will also be looking at how Tagore reaffirms and recognizes the indomitably progressive and unrelentingly daunting and assertive female voices in some of his works and how these women exemplify their spirit of revolt in the spirit of creating a human bonding of equal social rights as well as social justice. Many of these leading fictional, universal figures represent rationally independent individuals, and the stories of their successes or failures

in their desperate journeys are cornerstones to the contemporary debates of feminist thinking and criticism, as well as in South Asian literature.

The women in Tagore's works are multifarious in terms of their nature and personality. The trailblazing female protagonists that I will critically explore are from some of his novels such as 'Ghore Baire' (Home and the World), 'Relationships' and 'Chokher Bali'-'The grain of Sand' with critical emphasis on the latter. The highly spirited and free flowing individual women in these works have transcended their local peripheral boundary and attained a universal status through the power of their voices and self-willed, independent choices of their own pursuits. I will also try to present a comparative analysis of these invincible female protagonists of Bengali literature featuring in Tagore's literary canvas with those in the literary works in the West. In the wake of the creative wave of the Bengali literary renaissance in the twentieth century, new trends overpowered the social, moral, and psychological ambience affecting the thoughts and ideas of the time.

Tagore has created some daring and endearing characters in some of his works. Binodini in Chokher Bali happens to be one of the most remarkably attractive characters in so many ways in the whole tradition of Bengali literature. Set against Ashalata, a naïve and childish character of the Novel, Binodini is probably a very successfully portrayed and experimented cast. She is versatile and combines both tradition and trend in her personality, a passion for life, and her bouncing, handsome womanliness despite being widowed untimely. Though superstition and backwardness in the strict Hindu societal custom never allow her the freedom of choice, expression, and the right to exploit their flamboyant youthful spirit, the white sari she wears is the most visible embodiment of her autonomous and stubborn nature. Yet her character unfolds slowly to charm and mesmerize the readers. Her enthralling manner of speech, her ability to keep pace with the trends of modern thinking, her captivating beauty, and her physical charms cast a tempestuous desire in the reader for her, though her unleashing of forbidden passion turned the society, family, and contemporary morality upside down. She is a very bold, unpretentious and lively young widow, a new modern and rebellious woman in Tagore's canvas trading on her own inimitable directions to life. Socially marginalized in the desert, the ascetic denial of the flesh, Binodini, the spirited youth rebels against such a harsh reality of her existence and shakes the very foundation of the religious sanctions on forced widowhood in the storyline of the novel.

Historically, Indian women in literature have always been portrayed as subjugated and marginalized identities incarcerated within the narrow domestic domain of patriarchal, social, and cultural confines. We notice that these women are trying to redefine their social status and existential position and struggle to break free from the impediments of stereotypical ideologies that refuse to recognize their choices and free will. Circumstances compel them to seek the support of their relatives or husbands or depend for their survival on the pity and charity of social institutions. They could also be found tortured within the depressing abyss of the domestic world. This paper seeks to identify and investigate elaborately the reasons and circumstances that led the deprived and celibate widow 'Binodini' to override social customs and challenge the rigid regulations imposed upon her by society. It also exposes the social and patriarchal conditions around which Binodini's life is woven intricately and how she rebels consciously against them.

In this connection, Tagore's New Woman image is to be understood, the catchphrase of which was first coined initially by Sarah Grand, the Irish Feminist Writer in 1914, in which she highlighted things wrong with the women's private walls of home and some remedial ways. Binodini in Tagore's "Chokher Bali", The Grain of Sand, is one of those path-breaking widow protagonists who push the limits imposed upon her by the male-dominated patriarchal society. Sally Ledger appropriately comments on the multiple levels of identity of the New Woman in *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin De Siecle*" and it strongly defines Binodini's character and personality-

"She was, variously, a feminist activist, as social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth century women's movement."

The private life of Binodini has become the center of torture and subjugation. In Tagore's literary works exploring the widows in the contexts of Indian household interiors find attention, and Chokher Bali explores extensively those subtle emotions and psychological dimensions which are the hallmark of Binodini's character and that Tagore does very artistically through many parallels and contrasts. The very core Indian belief is that a woman who enjoys unrestricted personal liberty will deviate from age-old traditions and responsibilities.

The widow used to be compelled to undergo strict monastic rituals due to the fact that she is regarded as unholy in the superstitious beliefs and cultures of Hindu society after her husband's death, and it was a custom that hailed the virtue of self-immolation (Become a Sati) to be pure with the body of the husband and that the widow living after her husband's death is inauspicious for her as per the religious logic of the time.. A widow used to be regarded as pure and virtuous if she would choose to self-immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre. In this way, she is graded as having the elevated status of Goddess Sati.

Binodini possesses immense potential for womanhood, and her youthful joys and natural instincts are all burnt around the brutal and inhuman customs of widowhood, which the novel exposes vividly.

The widow in the Indian context is defined in Wikipedia thus,

'Even if they did not commit suicide, Hindu widows were traditionally prohibited from remarrying. The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856, enacted in response to the campaign of the reformer Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, legalized widow remarriage and provided legal safeguards against loss of certain forms of inheritance for remarrying a Hindu widow, though, under the Act, the widow forsook any inheritance due her from her deceased husband.'

The status of widowhood for Hindus was accompanied by a body symbolism:

'The widow's head was shaved as part of her mourning. She could no longer wear a red dot (sindur) on her forehead and was forbidden to wear wedding jewellery. She was expected to walk barefoot.'

Binodini does not follow the widow ritual by shaving her hair, and both Tagore in text and Rituporno in creative cinematography allow her to have her flowing hair fall to its full length, which allows her to communicate more than meets the eye. Her long, wavy black hair sets a powerful metaphorical tone for herself and can captivate many male eyes with her otherwise white saree; a must monastic garment contrasting her celibate and austere existence. Her black hair holds an irresistible attraction to Mohendro, an expression that curbs the flamboyance in a widow's appearance. This is how Binodini is a powerful fictional character who revolts and claims her derided rights through her free-spirited spontaneity. She has access to the world of charms, and she casts an irresistible impression on the men around her. She becomes not only an object of Mahendra's desire but also both Behari's and Mahendra's emotional and intellectual respite as we read the novel. During the renaissance in Bengal, progressive reformers like Raja Ram Mohon Roy and Vidyasagar worked for widow remarriage and women's education and campaigned collectively for the elimination of savagery and barbarous practice of Sati- self-immolation on the pyre of the dead husband. They were radical iconoclasts in their attitudes and ideals about the emancipation and liberation of women of Bengal, particularly in the Hindu society, and advocated extensively the discriminatory aspects of gender, race and caste.

Binodini upholds Tagore's strong revolutionary stand and in this connection the quote is very appropriate by Tagore in his preface to the second edition of the novel,

"The literature of the new age seeks not to narrate a sequence of events, but to reveal the secrets of the heart. Such is the Narrative of Chokher Bali. (48)

Tagore, the iconoclast, the idealist and the humanist broke the stereotypical representation of women or Indian womanhood. The flamboyant characterization of Binodini in (Chokher Bali) and Bimala in (Ghore Baire) developing adulterous infatuation in diverse contexts allows them the freedom envisioned in the spirit of the time and Tagore transcends the conventional gender stereotype of women being the embodiment of piety' (Sumit 765). Both Binodini and Bimala were groomed within the virtues practiced in the household in their strong family upbringing. They both have developed their virtues only and know that a wife's life is dedicated to her husband" (Sumit 765) but break all the barriers of conventional morality and unleashes their adulterous infatuation towards men. Such a spirit of liberty, self-expression, and rising above the patriarchal household subordination marks Binodini as an embodiment of the changed woman, overriding the laws and boundaries of the rooted private virtues of the household. Her flamboyant youth, strong physical passion, and zest for erotic pleasures are contrasted exquisitely with the virtues a responsible woman requires, and she is presented as an expert in the art of household management who organizes things in order and exerts full control over the household chores. She is, therefore, a fantastic combination of both Apollonian and the Dionysian image. She is a hard-working and indispensable woman who sets up the household in an organic way and knows the art of household maintenance. She is also a boisterous woman left to rot in the deadly custom of immolating on the pyre of the unbreakable social laws elaborately set for widows.

Published at the beginning of the twentieth century, the novel Chokher Bali (Grain of Sand) marks the social condition of Bengal as undergoing change and modernization. The story revolves around the married couple Mahendra and Ahsa and the widow Binodini, who captures our central focus. Mahendra, out of a sense of possessiveness over his friend Bihari, marries Ashalata, a naïve and simple girl, though the marriage was initially planned to be between Bihari and Asha, but Mahendra having seen Asha renewed his interest in Asha that he earlier refused. So, making a choice out of a sense of pride and possession created a psychological and ideological conflict that surfaced between these two childhood friends' private, public, and professional encounters throughout the novel. Asha and Mahendra happily married were found steeped in their conjugal dalliance and mirth, a fact which made Rajlakkhi, Mahendra's mother, feel utterly neglected and embittered. At this critical moment, Binodini, the widow, makes her way into the household, as Rajlakkhi brings her to take care of her. Asha and Binodini, over the course of time,

have become very intimate friends, and one calls the other one's grain of sand the irritant in the eye. Asha desperately wants to introduce Binodini to Mahendra but she is unable to foresee the catastrophic consequences that are going to soon befall her. Binodini and Mahendra eventually came in close contact with each other and got deeply engaged in an adulterous relationship, unleashing what is called their forbidden passion. Binodini picks up a long conversation with Asha about their newly married romances and plunges further deep into the details of their love with a piercing inclination, which, in a way, satisfies her strong psychosexual passion for a fulfilling relationship. She spends hours in conversations with Asha about Mahendra to revitalize her subconscious desire and give a sense of pleasure to her dormant physical instinct. A femme fatale, as she would be called in such a context, she exudes an inexplicable charm with her beauty and boisterous youth, an unflinching and undying image which might be left aside for the socially controversial role she is called upon to play. As Tagore puts it,

"A famished Binodini drank up the details of the new bride's new found romance like a drunkard swigging at a bottle. Her ears reddened as she listened and her blood fairly simmered in her veins." (Guha 41)

In their carefree play of imagination within the house, Binodini drinks deep the touches of Mahendra's and Asha's passionate escapades of love, and her body is flushed with the fire of desire. Tagore further puts her psychosexual torments and a dormant yearning for sexual satisfaction in psychoanalytical perspectives,

"As she read it over and over again her eyes began to burn like the desert sands at noon and her breadth became as fiery as the desert winds. Her mind was awhirl with thoughts of Mahendra, Asha and their passionate romances" (Guha 32)

On the other hand, the portrait of Asha is depicted in the most desirable but traditional light, very much in the image of a celebrated, homegrown, typical, obedient Indian woman. She is an extremely devoted wife growing up with the virtues of an ideal Hindu woman /bride that keeps her awake at all times at the beck and call of her husband. Her body and spirit are solely committed to the satisfaction, wellbeing, and happiness of her husband. She is somewhat a product schooled in the century old traditional virtues of womanhood. Tagore presents a very pleasant image of her devotion to worship her idol with flowers. Her naiveté and innocence against the maturity and experience of Binodini appear in sharp contrasts.

"After a spurt of rain the skyline of Kolkata was awash with moonlight on the horizon. Asha had gathered rain drenched bakul flowers from the garden, she now sat with her head bent, weaving them into a garland" (Guha 35)

"The two of them were lost in whispered tales- Binding's face became flushed and her breath quickened. She always asked eager questions and got the tiniest details, heard the same stories over and over again and once they were told, she took recourse to her imagination and asked, "What if things happened like this or that?" (Guha 41)

We can explore the Freudian analysis of this therapeutic approach of investigating the conscious and the unconscious elements in the mind, bringing about repressed emotions into the conscious mind. In the technique of dream interpretation and psychological association of those repressed emotions, Binodini's sexuality and the development of her personality are built. Tagore's despairing plunge into her psychopathological and psychosexual abyss is the most interesting facet of the narrative of the novel. Like Shakespeare, he plunges further and further into the depths of the subconscious and subterranean recesses of her mind and explores the motives and intricacies of her character. She is the dominating widow ruling over the readers' perceptions of a changed individual. The quote below echoes Freud's Id, the uncoordinated instincts and drives of Binodini's psyche toward satisfying her unfulfilled desire,

"Actually only Binodini knew the taste of this spice, but in her life the vegetables were missing from the curry. The blood flamed in her veins; wherever she glanced, her eyes showered sparks of burning embers: „Such a happy household, such a loving husband-I could have made it a home fit for royalty and turned them into my devoted slave..... But in my place rules this child of a girl, this infantile doll!" (43)

This is how complicated and intricate are the ways of her personality against which the subdued and meek Asha's innocence and piety are a foil. Binodini is the kind of woman Mahendra dreams for his emotional and intellectual compatibility, which he misses in the childish manners and ways of Asha. There is a perpetual foreboding throughout the novel that Binodini, the young widow's burning handsome womanliness, might set the house on fire.

It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality, what little we know of it we have learned from our study of the dreamwork and of course the construction of neurotic symptoms and most of that is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations.

..It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle.

Radha Chakravarty remarks quite appropriately, and that justifies the young widow's severe psychosexual and subjugated social conditions,

"Though order is restored at the end of the novel and the estranged couple (Mahendra and Ashalata) is reunited, the narrative leaves exposed the inadequacies and contradictions inherent in the patriarchal ideals of conjugal love and feminine virtue"

Asha's character is also creating complexities in the novel when she is the victim of the adulterous relationship between Mahendra and Binodini and then she strongly pushes and provokes Mahendra to the closest physical proximity. Asha, as we read the novel, appears to us in a way that she does not fit into the domestic image of a woman since her knowledge of the domestic chores is extremely limited and virtually nothing. She does not even fit into the modern and progressive image of what Tagore wishes to delineate through Binodini.

Asha undergoes severe mental and spiritual sufferings and goes to Kashi both in search of some spiritual peace and in utter grief of her emotional distance and separation from Mahendra. She grows remarkably powerful and strong in her character and position in the climax of the novel and develops a high sense of self, prestige, and honour. She tends to rebel against her status as a woman deserving honour and treatment, not quite the trend in the patriarchal stronghold of Mahendra's family. But she also undergoes a sea change in her opinions and attitude to life after all the humiliation and estrangement. As Sumit Sharma remarks,

"From the day when man, refusing to recognize the efflorescence of life and establishing ideals to his own convenience instead, and following those ideals tried to create the woman, seeds of rebellion were sown in the heart of woman since then....Since that day when she is denied the true potential of womanhood she has also been denying man his complete manhood, as a form of revenge."

Women's concerns reverberate in most of the novels of Tagore, but the predicaments associated with the life of a widow or widowhood are critical and pay particular attention. Such complexities are elaborately displayed in different manifestations of Binodini's iconoclastic character. (Sumit 772). Dipesh Chakrabarty remarks,

The widow, denied voice and desire, represent the ultimate level of sub-alternity within the domestic sphere. (60)

Ashalata stands as the quintessence of innocence, obedience, and devotion to Behari, who happened to, to his utter dismay; sacrifice Asha to Mahendra by way of the bonding of marriage. He always shows respect and a protective instinct for her, which Mahendra and Binodini don't quite appreciate in him. Behari feels like an outsider in the house as he occasionally visits and is indecently treated by Mahendra. He feels his romantic dalliance with Asha is being interfered with by Behari. Binodini has a strong impulse of desire and expectation from both these male protagonists, and such obvious display of romance and affection from them for Asha becomes intolerable, which makes her grow jealous and feel more passionate. Asha becomes an eyesore to her, whetting her intoxication for desire and love even more since she possesses an equally charismatic physical charm and beauty. However, her appearance in the house from this point onward is that of a destroyer of their romance. Binodini grows revengeful, having protested against her fate to maintain a forced life of austerity, being a young widow with a strong zest for a fulfilling life that would complete her womanhood and satisfy her natural biological necessity. Here is how her retaliatory impulse is captured,

'Since Mahendra wished to marry Asha, Binodini had to be exiled to the wilderness of Barsat and married off to an uncouth ape. Since his Highness Beharibabu couldn't bear to see tears in dear Asa's eyes, Binodini must keep her shoulders ready for her to weep on. Just once Binodini wanted to smite this Mahendra, this Behari down to the dust at her feet and make them understand the difference between Asha and Binodini! Her helplessness at the injustice of fate..... burned like wildfire inside Binodini..... Her soul became combative.' (83-84)

In the above analysis of Binodini's inner turmoil and her rebellious and revengeful spirit, Tagore delves deep into her character and allows her to find her own independent space to explore herself without curbing her strong feminine expression that comes instinctively in its way. She desperately and boldly fights for her own space and identity against the dominating social structure that remains dumb and dogmatic against widowhood. Consequently, what we notice is that Mahendra's irrational projection of romance and love proves to be inadmissible and offensive in the conservative and traditional moral values of Hindu households and this conflict gives way to bitterness in the regulation and discipline of the household. This overt manifestation of their conjugal romance disregarded and dismantled the delicate household fabric of Rajlakkhi, Mahendra's widowed mother, who holds strongly

the stringent values of the austere ethical sanctions associated with widowhood. She decides to leave the house outrageously, seeing her own commanding voice in her household falling out and offended. This sudden decision on her part leaves them on their own without herself as the elderly overseer, the guardian. It will also pave the way for both of them to realize their follies values, and obligations of the family in the course of time when their romantic intoxication of dalliance will give way to prudence and reason.

Binodini becomes Asha's moral and spiritual companion, taking care of her psychological development as a fully grown woman. While Binodini plays her role of helping her learn the empowerment she requires to achieve to stand on her own personality, she loses herself to Mahendra, making it obvious that there is a gulf of difference between Asha and Binodini and the triangle confuses and confounds Mahendra by paving the way for him to rediscover his fleeting male chauvinistic disposition.

Bouthan you cannot leave. you must take it upon yourself to safeguard this simple, innocent girl, at all times. If you leave her and go, I don't see a way out. You are divine---- it is your responsibility to protect the helpless girl..... (99)

Behari even goes on to confess all his sins, saying that he misunderstood Binodini and held her previously responsible for envying Asha's happiness. This self-renouncing idealistic man seems to play with his humility and the politics of language and tries to convince Binodini, who is pretending to leave the house. Does Behari foresee Asha's doom in the hands of Mahendra due to her natural simplicity amidst the full grown and mature Binodini around in the form of a poison tree between the two? His vision of women is too idealistic, like his attitude to the nation, and it hardly realizes the concrete manifestations of Binodini's social helplessness towards the end of the novel. We have already seen in the novel as we compare Asha, the meek, innocent, and immature bride who is neither fit for proper household maintenance nor fit for any intellectual company in Mahindra's perception. However, once mesmerizing Asha has become monotonous, and the more mature and attractive Binodini appears to him an ideal of perfection (Tiwari 52)

The art of Tagore's characterization of Binodini lies in the fact that he allows her the full free space to explore her potential as a natural human being prone to limitations and reach her own conclusions through moral and psychological trials and tribulations. Anchal Tiwari puts it nicely,

"She loves to enjoy tempting men's hearts towards her beauty and charms. Binodini is not a symbolic abstraction, an embodiment of morality or correctness rather she takes delight in sinning. She does not want to sacrifice herself for the sake of dead inscriptions written in sacred texts. Binodini was aware of her sacred widowhood, but strikingly she was not content in acknowledging that is the wish of God for her, rather she was angry over the injustice of the Almighty, who decided such an unbecoming fortune for her."(Tiwari 53)

Binodini has gone many steps ahead by denouncing the world of love and affection and sex for a predilection for an otherwise otherworldly life of celibacy and strict monastic life of self-restraint and self-abnegation, the kind of life imposed on a widow, but this time, she has lost all her hopes in the moral order of the patriarchal Hindu society where the male patriarchs are allowed to enjoy the romantic companionship of a young widow but unable to recognize her in their society by freeing her from the social stigma the widow suffers with the respect and human rights she deserves.

Such double standard in the patriarchal attitude changes even Asha, who is a changed woman now with an emotional estrangement and sufferings away from Mahendra, who once was her devout deity. She is filled with disgust and distaste, having lost her interest in the Mahendra he sees now coming from Binodini's clutches and touches of love. Such an act of betrayal is offensive to her faith in conjugal love.

Today Asha immersed her deity and let go of her devotion to Binodini's oceans muddied by sin..... Binodini's Mahendra was like a strange man for Asha, or something even worse---even with a stranger she wouldn't feel such terrible shame. She simply couldn't bring herself to enter the room. (Guha 213)

Even seeing her photograph with Mahendra hanging on the wall,

She wanted to cover it, tear it off the wall and take it away. She began to curse herself for not noticing it earlier; she should have thrown it away. (Guha 213)

A fully mature, sadder, and wiser Asha now begins to judge the corrupted ways of her once dotting husband and silently rebels against his persistence in Binodini's passion. She finds his presence unacceptably disturbing to her new moral growth and

imagination. She feels ashamed of her husband's fall from grace and angrily responds to him, showing utter disparagement in the conversation.

"There is something I have to say---I will finish saying it and I'll leave. Behari Thakurpo

needs to be told about mother's illness. Perhaps not medical lessons but you can surely take lessons on caring for your mother." (Guha 224)

Such responses very resolute and straightforward with a strong sense of confidence in her being gave Mahendra a jolt and the moment Asha left, Mahendra perceived his total defeat. Because he never imagined that Asha would be capable of reprimanding him like this. (Guha 225)

The portrayal of Binodini in the novel as a rebellious young widow, as well as Binodini featuring on the screen, has great artistic, intellectual, and experimental significance. Binodini protests against the traditional image of typical Indian womanhood both in print and on screen. She feels ignored and marginalized dangerously, which left a severely debilitating impact on the household. Rituporno Ghosh's experiment with the character of Binodini sees both subjective and objective manifestations on screen. She undergoes various conflicts, and her gender is also conflicted on the screen. She is the one who is bent on maintaining monastic austerity with her white saree, yet she revolutionizes her character with her unstoppable charm and boldness, blocking her feminine desires to find natural expression. She becomes a subjugated widow, and she realizes her liberated individual will. Ghosh emancipates her new progressive and vocal role by allowing her a far greater cinematic space to liberate her body and spirit of performance with full expressive detail, thereby making her appear very subjective, assertive, determined, and worthy of dignity that she is denied in print. Ghosh carefully broadens her cinematic space and performance from the moral stigma attached to the household suffocation to explore her expressions breathlessly and carefreely, a fact that recognizes her character more endearingly rather than excites the reader or viewer for subversive criticism.

Chandrava Chakbarty remarks,

'This is a new position of empowerment and self-actualization that the Indian woman in the twenty first century also needs to explore and consolidate.'(107)

In portraying Characters such as Binodini, Kumudini, Ashalata, or Hoimonti, Tagore sides with their roles of emancipated women with newly understood gender and social roles far removed from their stereotyped patriarchal confinements. While exploring their revolutionary potentials, he develops them as remarkable individuals, provoking thoughts and imagination of the twenty first century scholarship over the contemporary discourse of social and intellectual liberty of women. Tagore allows them to reach a certain state of moral and spiritual ripeness and maturity by representing their individual stance, who now speak of their desire and feelings against the perpetual evils of society. Binodini's strong declaration as an individual who deserves recognition cannot be missed,

'Why all the indifference? I am not a piece of furniture, I am a person, I'm a woman!' (Guha 50)

Tagore, in portraying the character of Binodini's self-willed stance and her strong subjective position deviates from all stereotypical connotations associated with womanhood and bothers to break the binaries between men and women. Binodini's discovery as a woman with a far greater awareness of her roles in society is a rewarding experience for the reader to reinvent the position of women in contemporary society. Binodini can now reject the marriage proposal of Behari since she found him wavering once and probably unfit to take responsibility above social stigma and taboo. The parting words of Binodini at the end of the novel deserve attention,

'Didi, so you are leaving?'

'Yes my sister, it's time for me to leave. Once, in the past, you had loved me ---now in times of joy, set aside a bit of that love for me, my friend----and forget everything else.'(Guha 287)

She finds peace by ensuring harmony and embracing the vast limitless world to play her far greater roles for the welfare of humanity. The climax in the novel results in reuniting the relationships that were turned upside down. The final remark by Tagore in his essay 'Woman and Home' will conclude my paper,

What I have felt in the woman of India is the consciousness of this ideal –their simple faith in the sanctity of devotion lighted by love which is held to be divine. True womanliness is regarded in our country as the saintliness in love. (311)

References

- [1] Butler, J (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Taylor and Francis.
- [2] Chakravarty, R. (2016). *Novelist Tagore: Gender and Modernity in Selected Texts*. Routledge.
- [3] Chakravarty, C (2013). Relocating Tagore's Binodini: New Spaces of Representation in Rituparno Ghosh's Chokher Bali." *IAFOR Journal of Literature & Librarianship*, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.22492/ijl.2.1.07>. Accessed 26 Aug. 2019.
- [4] Ledger, S (1997). *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*. Manchester University Press.
- [5] Sharma, S (2015). The Gender Question in Tagore: A Study of the Home and the World and Chokher Bali. *International Journal of Research*. 757–772. Accessed 2015.
- [6] Tagore, R. (2015). "Woman and Home". *Tagore and the Feminine: A Journey in Translations*. Edited by Malashri Lal, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. 309–13.
- [7] Tagore, R. (2003). *A Grain of Sand: Chokher Bali*. Translated by Serejata Guha, Penguin Books India.
- [8] Tagore, R. (2012). *Choker Bali*. Translated by Radha Chakravarty, Random House.
- [9] Tiwari, A. (2016). Chokher Bali: A Collage of Diverse Paradigms of Love and Sexuality. *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*. 52–55.
- [10] "Widow." *Wikipedia*, 12 June (2023). en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Widow. Accessed 15 June