

RESEARCH ARTICLE



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SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE – A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a review of Social Consciousness in the select novels of Rabindranath Tagore namely – Binodini, The wreck, The Home and the world, and Elder sister. Most of the Tagore novels deal with life of the middle class family and often with the position of not yet emancipated Indian woman in a patriarchal society. A woman is the builder and moulder of nations destiny. He showed the growth of women with the passage of time through his heroines. The protagonist of the novels are portrayed as acquiescent, tolerant and broadminded. Majority of them are economically and emotionally dependent on men as a daughter, wife and mother. Tagore also has surveyed the requirement of schooling and freedom to Indian women. The paper has the modest aim of analyzing the specificities of the social- consciousness as manifested in the selected novels of Tagore.

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941) the versatile personality of India literary scholar is considered as the Rishi, the Gurudev and Maharshi. He was a poet, dramatist, actor, producer, musician, painter, an educationist, reformer, philosopher, prophet, novelist, story writer and acritic of life and literature. Tagore was a rare and great personality. He was a scholar, freedom fighter, writer and painter and above all a humble man. His contributions to Indian Literature were immense.

He won a cultural reformer and polymath who modernized Bengali art by repudiating strictures binding it to Indian classical forms.

Tagore was a committed anti-colonialist. He had a deep understanding of the world at large. Tagore is a precious guide. He held that promoting one's own culture and approving the cultures of others could be one and the same attitude. He was a member of the elite but Tagore did not have elitist views on education. He wrote, I believe that all human problems find their fundamental solution in

education, poverty, pestilence communal fights and industrial backwardness make our path narrow and perilous owing to the meagreness of education.

Broadly speaking of all the novels of Tagore, available in English translation *Binodini*, *The Wreck*, *The Home and the World* are as stimulating as they are thought provoking, demanding a close study.

DISCUSSION

"*Binodini*" is one of Rabindranath Tagore's most remarkable novels which is originally published in Bengali is known as *chokhar Bali* (lit, Eye Sore) in 1902. It is the first modern novel in Bengali and also in Indian literature. The story centers round the problem of human relationship and tells of what happens behind the staid façade of a well-to-do, middle class Bengali home of the period, where a widowed mother lives with her only son on whom she does. *Binodini* directly deals with the contemporary culture and social history.

There are only six characters in the novel. Of all women characters created by Tagore in his many novels, *Binodini* is the most real, convincing and full-blooded. A young and attractive widow who rebels against the social justice which deprives her of her woman's right to love and happiness. More sinned against than sinning, she is the real heroine of the story and one of the most authentic characters in Tagore's fiction.

A beautiful talented and well educated girl cannot get a husband because the parents have spent what little they had on her education and could not have enough for the dowry. In *Panic* – Since an unmarried girl over twelve years of age is a social disgrace to a respectable Hindu family of the day- She is married off to a poor and sickly nobody who dies soon after, leaving her stranded in a unsympathetic village. Conscious of beauty and wit she rebels against the unjust privations of a bleak and humiliated existence to which as a widow she is disdains a victory achieved at too sordid a cost. Her tragedy is a lasting shame to the Hindu conscience.

A careful scrutiny of his novels reveals two concurrent ideas of special significance to his countrymen. One is the upanishad ideal of a universal man, the enlightened soul, not the materialistic robot of a mechanical civilization; the other is the image of woman, symbolizing the

sensitivity and energy of prakriti, the universal Mother, certainly not the sensual nymph of a hedonistic society. These are the two basic ideas of the Indian national consciousness that Tagore presents in his novels against the contemporary background of hatred and violence, vice and superstition.

The second which I have chosen for dispassion is *The Wreck*, the wreck is thematically fantastic and fatalistic, as the story is mainly based on the chance meeting of Ramesh and Kamala after the boat tragedy, utterly ignorant of their true relationship. This is one of the Tagore's light and detached social fantasies – perhaps chief characters recall to *Noë's* mind. Hardy's tragedies, though the latter are much better in their style and thematic development and the final catastrophe. Compared even with his own novels, *The Wreck* is loose in construction, melodramatic rather than natural or real. Ramesh is so weak and vacillating that he sounds artificial. But barring Ramesh, the rest are quite convincing: Akshya is sophisticated and middlesome – a common type; Nalinaksha is an honest idealist with a firm will and subtle understanding – "a solemn stick" as he calls himself half jocularly and half seriously: Hemanalini is perhaps the feminine version of Nalinaksha strong willed and bold both in her utterances and actions. But the most impressive character in the novels is Kamala, with her girlish simplicity in the beginning and with her sensitive and mature behaviour in the end symbolizing this characteristic features of a sensitive Hindu wife. The entire story is based on the unfortunate wreck in the Padma river when Ramesh and Nalinaksha cross it with their respective brides. Accident is the starting point of the Novel; the element of chance plays a great role in the development of the plot and a fatalistic faith drives on the characters. It may be justifiably said, therefore, that *The Wreck* is Tagore's fancy child involving no serious moral issue of national importance.

The third novel what I have chosen for presentation is "*The Home and The World*". It deals with Tagore's virtuosity as a novelist is clearly discernible. The 'dramatic personae' are Sandip, Nikhil and Bimala. *The Home is the World* to Bimala until Sandip makes his disturbing appearance with

his aggressive informality. Nikhil winks at the familiarity of Sandip and Bimala chiefly owing to his innate large-heartedness and cultivated idealism. Sandip and Nikhil are ideologically poles apart; the former is an aggressive and unscrupulous nationalist while the latter is a non-violent humanist. He disagrees with Sandip on the ideal of Nation-god. A juggler of words, Sandip succeeds, however, in winning the sympathies of Bimala whom he acclaims as the symbol of shakti that is Mother India. Bimala is temporarily swayed by the maddening cry of 'Bande Mataram' and robs her own house, like a cunning thief for the sake of the so called National cause. Nikhil is prepared to set her free; but soon wisdom dawns on Bimala and she detests wholeheartedly the filthy means of Sandip to worship the Mother. His greed and lust, masqueraded and paraded as nationalism, are extremely repulsive to Bimala now.

The ultimate aim of this novel is what Tagore himself declares in one of his lectures in "Japan With the growth of the power the cult of self – worship of the nation grows in ascendancy; and the individual willingly allows the nation to take donkey rides upon his back and there happens the anomaly which must have such disastrous effects that individual worships with all sacrifices a god which is morally much inferior to himself..." And Nikhil being the main protagonist in this novel reflects the same extra national ideas, opposing the "organized selfishness of nationalism."

Nikhi humanistic philosophy comes in conflict with the pseudo-nationalism of Sandip. Bimala is doubtless a symbol of shakti or primordial energy, but Sandip's exploitation of the same is fraught with disastrous consequences – as is suggested in fact, by the communal riots at the end of the novel. And Tagore's emphasis is always on the creative aspects of energy.

Thus, in the ultimate review, the novels of Tagore are but the artistic transfiguration of the vital values of Indian culture and social consciousness with a universal import. While his "The Home and the world" is the unquestionable testament of his faith in the composite and humanistic character of Indian culture.

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