

Women as Prisoners of Patriarchy: A Study Through Rabindranath Tagore's Chokher Bali

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to decode the dualities in characteristics and the versatilities of Tagore's women owing to their relevance till date. The paper highlights the indifference of the patriarchal society which oppresses women even after their differences. The paper also highlights issues of women illiteracy, child marriage and explores the consequences of extramarital affair.

The translated version of *Chokher Bali* by Krishna Kripalani has been studied for developing the paper. The paper explores the eccentric ideas and role of women as the most significant transformation factor within the social dimensions through chapters two and three. The second chapter discusses Ashalata and Binodini as polar opposites, representing the former as the conventional Indians woman and the later as a protest against the prevalence. The third chapter decodes their similarities in sufferings, and the indifference of a society, that ensures uniformity of injustice to both of Tagore's women despite of their differences.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchy, Women, Suffering, Antithesis, Protest, Indifference

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature, has always been a reflection, of the social set ups and the reactions to actions of the society. Literature of no age has been spared from the shackles of influences from the society. The writers provided the room for the layman to comprehend the puzzles of the society. Their role in influencing and transforming the lives of the people is integral. Tagore is such an unparalleled persona in the Indian literature, whose writings are valuable documents of societal changes and reactions to the larger circle including gender, nation and politics. This Bengali polymath reshaped the Bengali literature, arts and music with his farsighted and eccentric ideas in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The 19th and 20th centuries were an active ground for social reformation. Amidst the colonial domination the turbulence of the age and people's effort to lessen the Whiteman's burden was addressed by many eminent writers of the age. Unfortunately, centuries apart their vision is yet to be accomplished completely. They realized the potential of women as the most significant transformative factor within the social dimensions. Historically, the statuses of women were inferior and subdued by the male domination. With religion and traditions as facade women were confined to the four walls of the house. Any deviation from this practice was considered delinquent. Men always escaped from the social repudiation while women suffer from a lasting damage to their reputation. Intellectuals of the age fought against this gross inequality. The intellectuals realized that to free themselves from the chains of colonial domination, social reformation is inevitable. They also advocated that no country could ever make significant progress in civilization whose females were sunk in ignorance. Tagore has an appreciable

command in portrayal of the complexity of relationships and of human characters. The works are just as powerful and thought provoking in today's time as it was a century ago. From Ashlatato Binodini, to Rajalaxmi to Annapurna, Tagore's women are still relevant. Long before feminism became a catchphrase, Tagore stood for women portraying them as liberated through his writings. Despite India progressing in leaps and bounds in various sectors, gender bias still prevails in a form or another and even the apex of the hierarchy is not spared. Though written in the 1900s his stories surpassed the boundaries of time. His women questioned the society, its rules and the roots of their restrictions. They were fearless in their journey of liberation. His women questioned patriarchy and broke the shackles of the orthodox society. Centuries apart the women in India face discrimination in almost all spheres of the society. Thus, Tagore and his women are still relevant.

Women across the globe are compared to flowers, butterflies, and doves for their love, beauty, and purity. Many writers have penned down several lines admiring the heart, soul, and even the body of women. But in the real scenario, especially in India, woman is always bound with the chains of orthodox social norms in an utter patriarchal society. The reformers have done a lot towards the empowerment of the woman in terms of education, widow remarriage, equal job opportunities and many more, but social acceptance of women, who dare to differ, who define her role, choose her life and rule her heart is very slim. One would think that, what if a woman acts the way the society wants her to. Will she then not be a subject to agony and torment? Shall she be treated differently from the one who is led by her own choice? Can she then be destined to a future that would favor her? Can distinct characteristics create equally different consequences?

Society creates literature. It may be described as the mirror of the society. If literature expresses social sympathies, naturally it is bound to exercise some positive influence on human mind and attitude. Society reacts to literature in a living way. It rouses feelings and enthusiasm for welfare. Tagore's different experiences in western countries, perception, knowledge, and political experiences and generosity reshaped and reacted against the oppression of women in the patriarchal society of his time. As a thinker, Tagore believed that a country can reach the peak of success with the development of women. So, he gave priority to women in society and played an important role as a social reformer through his literary works.

Chokher Bali is an avant-garde work by Tagore and was first published serially in *The Bangadarshan*, a Bengali literary magazine in 1903. Tagore in a note written subsequent to the original publication claimed it to be an unprecedented piece of writing in the context of Bengali literature exploring the complexities of human psyche. Also, *Chokher Bali* appears to be his first full length novel. The lifestyle depicted and the other instances in the novel are peculiar to the end of the nineteenth century. Despite the reformist movements and rigorous efforts by nationalists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar the plight of widows remained appalling and awful. Although remarriage of widows, were legally accepted the social acceptance was yet to be achieved. *Chokher Bali* is often referred to as India's first modern novel. Tagore explores the physical and mental deprivations of young widows through the character of Binodini.

Chokher Bali narrates the story of a wealthy Zamindari family. Rajalakshmi is in charge of the mansion and she is the widowed wife of a well-established Zamindar. Her son, Mahindra is the male protagonist and he is her only concern, the apple of her eye. The affinity between Mahindra and Rajalakshmi is much deeper than the normal mother and son kinship. Mahindra had an easy life devoid of any difficulties and his world revolved around his mother. He even disagreed to marry as he feels it would

create gap between them. Though she pretends to get worried about the dismissal of marriage proposals, inwardly she feels much contented with the love of her son. However, she had to think about the marriage of her son. She fixed his marriage with her friend Harimati's daughter Binodini. Binodini is well educated and a foreign tutored her. This was very rare those times. Mahindra hated to be controlled and at the last moment he rebelled against the marriage and the marriage was called off. Though Rajalakshmi forced Bihari, the devoted friend of Mahindra to marry Binodini he too rejected the proposal. A harried Rajalakshmi finally located a distant nephew of hers and Binodini was married off to him. This marriage did not last as her husband died of enlarged spleen. After rejecting many proposals, he agreed to meet his aunt Annapurna's niece. They went to see the girl for Bihari but Mahindra liked her in the first sight itself. He asked Bihari to back off and he wanted to marry her. This caused intense resentment from his mother. Ironically, he was least bothered by her resentment and got married to Ashalatha. The equation between Mahindra and his mother worsens as he was besotted with his wife. Rajalakshmi vented her frustration on Annapurna and engaged Asha in household chores as a way to distance her son from his wife. Asha entered the household as an inept and timid orphan who was unsure of everything happening around her. Mahindra was very much offended with the actions of his mother and decided to get Asha educated. The blooming love between the newly married couple imbalanced the peace in the household. Feeling alienated Rajalakshmi heads towards her village accompanied by Bihari. They were taken care after by Binodini. Rajalakshmi comes back to Calcutta with Binodini. Binodini was very envious of Asha. She befriended and started playing dubious games of attraction and romance. Mahindra, at first seemed that he was not interested in Binodini, since he had not seen her or met her. However, Binodini became an enigma for him. As soon as her beauty, humor, wit, and aptness in household works are exposed in front of Mahindra, he started taking interest in her. Binodini seemed to be a complete woman who could easily meet needs of household, his intellectual demands as well as his emotional and physical demands too. In comparison to Asha, Binodini seemed to be an ideal companion for Mahindra. Binodini was envious of Asha as she was dear to both men- Mahindra and Bihari. She wanted to make Asha suffer for this. However, Bihari's feelings for Asha were of genuine care and affection. Mahindra started behaving indifferently and started an affair with Binodini. Asha was left heartbroken. Realizing the self-obsession of Mahindra, Binodini decided to leave him and proposes Bihari for marriage. He rejects her initially and later agrees to marry her. She noticed that Bihari is very tough man to deal with and he was not prone to her temptations. Realizing his folly Mahindra returns home and asks for forgiveness from his wife and mother. The novel ends by Binodini's decline to Bihari's proposal to marry her.

2. ASHALATA AND BINODINI: AN EPITOME OF ANTITHESIS.

Tagore has shown a remarkable understanding of female minds and gave enough space to women and their lives in his work. Just like Ram Mohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Tagore advocated the emancipation of women through his novels, essays and poems. In order to study their problems closely he made them the protagonist of his works.

Unconventionally, he portrayed his women as iconoclasts who defiantly resisted social and familial norms laid down by the conservative society. His women were progressive and provided a fresh perspective to the minds already filled with the traditional Indian values. Though written about a century ago today's reader would connect with them as his works are timeless. His critical and creative texts engage extensively with the question of space and subjectivity of woman in the nascent emerging nation.

In his essay 'Nationalism' he pointed out that the dominance over women by men was the cause of many injustices and exploitations.

The contribution of women to the progress of men has always been disregarded. Women live under an obscure existence for centuries and confined inside the four walls of the household. Tagore brought to the attention of the society some of the issues concerning women including the plight of widows in the joint families who are economically exploited and prevented from remarrying, the struggle of the modern educated young women for equality and freedom in the male dominated conservative society. In an era like this he creates two distinct women character in his most acclaimed novel *Chokher Bali*, and puts them on the face of society and raises blunt questions that society has never felt concerned about answering. He has molded two women of Indian society, one, who's pleasing all the conditions set by patriarchal society while the other breaking away from all shackles. And thus, both the heroines are raised in a way that they seemingly serve the purpose of being each other's antithesis.

Binodini - "the most real, convincing and full-blooded. In her frustrations and suffering is summed up in the author's ironic acceptance of the orthodox Hindu family of the day" (Kripalani, 1959 Introduction) was a convent educated woman who was deprived of all the pleasures of life being a widow. As puts Krishna Kripalani, "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 save enough for the dowry...she is married off to a poor sickly nobody who dies soon after, leaving her stranded in an unsympathetic village." (Tagore, 6) Binodini was the representation of those widowed women of the early 19th century whose desires were crushed after the death of their husbands.

Ashalata, on the other hand, represented the girls who at a young age were lured by their parents to marry following the structures of a patriarchal society that sealed the fate of girls with marriage. She, as it's been said "having been brought up as orphan and made to feel she had no rights, Asha had developed a complex which made her unduly shy before strangers." (Tagore, 34) Ashalata was an illiterate naive woman who was subjected to subjugation after marriage. Though both of them had disparate personalities yet both of them were two sides of the same coin. Both were victims of stereotypical norms of 19th century Bengali society which prevented a widow from getting remarried and shunned a young girl's freedom by forcing her into marriage.

The culmination of their friendship emerges from the need to fulfil both of their unfulfilled accomplishments and desires. Binodini is everything that Ashalata is not while Ashalata had everything which Binodini didn't have. Ashalata being illiterate always wanted to be guided by the light of education like Binodini, while Binodini being a widow yearned to enjoy the marital bliss that Ashalata had. The thirst of their parched souls was momentarily quenched in a relationship of reciprocity disguised as friendship. Kripalani unbiasedly manifests how both these opposites needed each other in the translated text, "When this paragon of beauty and virtue made herself the first advance to court of affection, the young inexperienced Asha was overwhelmed with joy and responded with all her heart. Like the magician's tree, their friendship took root, sprouted and blossomed forth, all in a day...Asha was in sore need of a friend. Love's festivity is incomplete if the lovers have no companions to feed on vicarious thrills. Binodini, starved of love, listened to the young bride's experiences..." (Tagore, 35)

The parallels between the educated and the uneducated were reflected through Ashalata and Binodini's relationship. Education for Binodini became a weapon with which she manipulated Ashalata as she envied her blooming marital life. Illiteracy for Ashalata made her an object of suppression as she was easily gullible, devoid of any ability to judge between right and wrong. Binodini's education allowed her

to defy the traditional norms of society, while Ashalata's illiteracy suppressed her voice making her dependent on the male patriarch of her life.

Tagore was always in favor of women's education and their liberation. In *Chokher Bali*, Tagore draws parallels between the educated and the uneducated through Asha and Binodini. Binodini's character, despite its shades of grey, is refreshing as she does not accept her fate, and attempts to seek what she feels she deserves. Binodini is reluctant to fit into the role of a lonely widow and is unwilling to forego her sexual and emotional desires. She is smart and educated and strives to be more than just an inauspicious widow. Towards the end of the story, Binodini retreats to living in women's shelters and bringing about as much change as she can to improve the condition of women. Binodini highlights the importance of education when she says, "... if I had been uneducated, like other widows, I would have been able to easily endure the society's negligence." (Tagore, 83) Binodini represents a new female subjectivity whom western education transforms into a woman with her own heart and mind, and is not tied to traditional customs. Through, Binodini and Asha, Tagore shows the importance of education. There is an imbalance in power due to an imbalance in education between the educated and uneducated characters.

In comparison to Binodini, Asha is a little, meek and uneducated girl who is an orphan and lived with her uncle. Annapurna, her mashima is her well-wisher and she wanted Bihari to marry Asha. It is her simplicity that makes Bihari to fall in love with her at first sight. But at last moment Mahindra snatches Asha's hand from Bihari and marries her. She is too young to perform her daughter-in-law's duty, hence household chores were a great task for Asha and prove herself a good home-maker in her mother-in-law Rajlaxmi's eye. Mahindra showers his love and affection on Asha. Seeing Mahindra's over indulgence with Asha, Rajlaxmi could not bear it and she, leaves for her village with Bihari.

Ashalata's life eventually acted as a foil to Binodini's new phase of life. While Ashalata's marriage was on the verge of being broken, Binodini's new phase of life progressed with Mahindra. Ashalata's illiteracy was the driving force behind Mahindra's adulterous relationship with Binodini originating from those letters which Binodini wrote to Mahindra at Asha's request, and Mahindra knowing Asha's incapability to weave such articulate words, realizing it was her Bali who wrote for her. The intellectual compatibility between Binodini and Mahindra that germinated their adulterous relationship also highlighted how lack of education turned Asha into an object of exploitation at the hands of her husband. Tagore draws parallels between the educated and the uneducated through Asha and Binodini. Binodini is likewise left without any financial provision but is left with education which allows and helps her with the liberty of free-thinking. She, represents a new female subjectivity whose western education transforms her into a woman with her own heart and mind. One who isn't bound with traditional customs. Binodini to an extent had that sense of differentiating between right and wrong.

Tagore structured the story in such a way that all the decisions by Binodini seem rational and all her desires appear to be natural. Society has restricted her to live in a specific way and she's liberated to mold her life in accordance with her needs and desire. He designs two dichotomies of society indeed, on one hand the naïve and amateur Ashalata and on the other hand tactful and accomplished Binodini. In the very own words of Kripalani, "Binodini was everything that Asha was not." (Tagore, 57) Tagore through these two women plays with the human psyche in general. The presence of dichotomies between both women and their subsequent consequences has been put by Tagore in a way that's very human.

After leaving the home by Rajlaxmi, Asha could not manage the house. Rajlaxmi takes Binodini with her to her home. She is a perfect home-maker and does all household chores very neatly and responsibly hence becomes the star of Rajlaxmi's eye. Rajlaxmi deliberately praises her each and every time so that Asha would listen and can improve herself. Binodini's acts towards Asha was not deliberate but impulsive. Earlier she is rejected by Mahindra hence she has come his place to take revenge from him. She takes command over Mahindra's house and shows herself as a perfect home-maker to him. As Binodini is expert in her work so does not hesitate to do any work and give order to servants. She is perfect in cooking, nursing and managing the home. With her beauty and intelligence, she wins admiration of all the people in the house including Asha. She leaves no room for her:

“When she first saw, she was so overawed by her beauty and grace and the piercing intelligence of her eyes that she lacked the courage to make, an effort towards better acquaintance. She was further impressed when she noticed how free and easy were Binodini's ways with Rajalakshmi...the more Asha watched Binodini the more inferior she felt to her and thus kept away from her.” (Tagore, 43)

While the bond of Ashalata and Binodini traversed from Bali to Choker Bali (eyesore) it can be deduced that the impact both of these women had on each other is an indispensable part of the experiences they gathered from life. While Binodini and Mahindra's betrayal helped Ashalata to discover her self-dignity and individuality, Binodini blinded by her lustful desires finally realized the harm her presence as a widow inflicted on the lives of the people she loved (Bihari, Mahindra and Asha) and therefore she embraced solitude leaving for Kashi in the quest of inner-peace or salvation.

Tagore successfully intertwined the two feminine characters Binodini and Ashalata, one antithesis of the other, as a symbol of women's emancipation, highlighting the importance of education through Ashalata and condemning the unjust customs that confined the widows to a mournful colorless life through Binodini.

Tagore delves into the unnarrated ordeals and the bloodless battles taking place inside the minds of Asha and Binodini. One was everything that the other was not and another had everything that the later was hunger of. Tagore, by presenting his two distinct women, shows us the change in their minds as both become aware of their respective drawbacks. It is their dualities that led them to befriend each other and at the same time becomes the reason for one getting insecure of the other, owing to incurable losses faced of both the women. Tagore emphasizes on how patriarchy takes advantage of their dualities, defines and redefines various rules restraining these women and traps in both gradually.

3. CROSSING PATHS IN SUFFERINGS

3.1. SUFFERINGS OF BINODINI:

Tagore made Binodini full-blooded young, educated, attractive and beautiful. He attacked the orthodox Hindu customs of the society of the time through Binodini's sufferings, frustrations, and rebellion. In this context Krishna Kripalani says, “Her (Binodini's) tragedy is a lasting shame to the Hindu conscience.” (Kripalani, 2001: vi) The passionate young widow Binodini as a new woman of Tagore did not care the social customs of widow hood and she made a direct appeal to the man she loved. She threw an open challenge to the existing society which forced the young widows to be restricted in every sphere of life. The outward world of the characters played an important role to cause the internal turmoil. The psychological agitation was the main focus of the novel. According to Swagato Ganguly:

“When Binodini tells Behari ..., I shall 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: ix).

Tagore could shake the orthodox society of his time through his heroine Binodini, the beautiful, talented and well-educated girl. Binodini’s parents could not save enough for her dowry and had spent the little in her marriage. As a result, she could not get a husband she deserved. To a respectable Hindu family of Tagore’s time an unmarried girl of over twelve years was a social disgrace. Therefore, she was married to a poor and sickly person and she soon became a widow at an early age. That was very shocking to Tagore who was conscious of her (Binodini) beauty, youthful glamour, talent, and education. Tagore felt that Binodini deserved more than what she got. Binodini was deprived of in the society. Forbidden desires of widows described in the novel are having tea, inhaling the aroma of fried fish as they can’t eat fish, donning ornaments, having conjugal desires – all of these are condemnable acts. Aware of her beauty and talent, Binodini wants a happy life and dignified position in society. Mahindra’s rejection and her marriage with a person who- “was congenitally afflicted with an enlarged spleen, and it was this enlarged sleep that precipitated his untimely exit from this world, almost immediately after the marriage” (Tagore, 33), hurts her pride.

In Indian society widowhood is greatest bane and scourge. Thus, for no fault of hers, she is targeted by the society and torture and suffering is assigned to her by the society. A widow is inauspicious for the society, her presence is considered as ominous, is indicative of premonition, everybody looks down upon her and ignores her. So, Tagore made Binodini as rebellious against orthodox rituals and tries to assert her right to love and live a fulfilling life. In the novel we see that Rajalakshmi, the jealous mother brought Binodini (after being widow) to the as she could not tolerate her lifelong pampered son Mahindra’s excessive emotional attachment with his newly married wife Asha. Binodini whose hands in marriage was rejected by Mahindra and also by his friend Bihari observed the deep romantic life of the newly married couple which tormented her mounting sexual and mental frustrations as a widow. So, she started seeking revenge for misfortunes and deprivations:

“The chilly-and-spice part of love was all that Binodini could taste. The main dish was outside her reach. Her nerves tingled as though scorched by a flame. Her nerves tingled as though scorched by a flame. Her eyes shot sparks of fire. ‘This happiness, this passionate adore of the husband was my due and should have been mine,’ she said to herself.” (Tagore, 37)

With the passage of time and a chain of events and conflicts Mahindra expressed his love for Binodini and eloped with her, that disgraced the reputation and disturbed the peace of the respected family. It was Binodini’s discretion that compelled her not to be consumed sexually by Mahindra. She with her confused inner self prayed the hand of Bihari whom she really loved. But it was the fact that Binodini refused Bihari’s offer of marriage because of the orthodox society of Tagore’s time. Instead, she offered money she had to Bihari and gave up her early life and went to Kashi to live the pious life of a widow. Purging off all desires she withdrew herself from the contest in the end. She considered that a victory gained in such an immoral and dishonest way was disdainful. Radha Chakravarty in her “Introduction” in Rabindranath Tagore (2003) mentioned:

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 his reputation to be tainted by her association with Mahindra, she is unwilling to let the social stigma affect Bihari. (Chakravarty, 2003: Introduction)

Bihari and Binodini have not come close to each other in a spur of the moment. They have come to understand each other since Dum-Dum picnic and come closer slowly, as a result of Mahindra's act of omission and commission. With passage of time Binodini and Bihari realize that they are in love with each other. Bihari wants to get married to her but she with a spirit of self-abnegation does not want to get married to him and says, "Then let these words be my reward. I want nothing more than what you have just affirmed. If I took more it would not last. Religion and society would never tolerate it... The very thought is shameful, I am a widow and, besides, a woman in disgrace..." (Tagore, 277).

It was not Binodini, rather the chains of patriarchy that shaped her end ultimately. Even when Tagore infused a rebel inside her, she was no exception, when it came to sufferings. Even when she knew what she is, she should not be, she was still forced by the society to live a life like that only. Being educated, extraordinarily beautiful, being a "Sarvagunasampanna" didn't help her escape the prison of patriarchy. Although, it's believed that she was the reason behind the destruction of Asha's conjugal life. But many fail to understand that, what she herself was going through. Had patriarchy been a bit liberal towards her, she would have never been this way. She loved Asha the most, but what she did was a product of the sufferings she herself has been through. She was never allowed to choose, to live a life of her own, as a result turned rebellious and gradually bore hatred. But if one would study the psychology of her mind, one would feel deep down how broken and lonely she was. She was blamed for her blunder, but was never given a chance to explain her ordeal. She was never even understood. It was the hunger of love and care that this patriarchal society denied her for being a widow, made her suffer eternally.

3.2. SUFFERINGS OF ASHALATA:

On contrary to the rebellious and accomplished character of Binodini, stands Asha, an unpretentious and timid girl who is an orphan and unaware of the complexities of relationships. She is extremely devoted to her husband Mahindra. She was an immature woman, a girl child who didn't know calamity until it was right in front of her. Mahindra's mother Rajalakshmi was overprotective for her son and she felt jealousy for her own daughter-in-law Asha. Through the character of Rajalakshmi one could inhale patriarchy, how it was so typically centered around men only and never cared for women. She was in fact, symbolic of the typical mother figure who would conceal her son's blunders by every means. Asha, represents the woman of the new generation. She is more of an adolescent at heart than a mature and clever woman. Her lack of education has been a major cause why, she was unable to recognize the betrayal of Binodini. Mahindra, her husband, searches for friendship and love in his marriage but Asha only considers him as a god who deserves to be worshipped and cherished.

"Asha had implicit faith on her husband. Although she knew that it would not be easy for her, for various reasons, to learn to read and to write at her age, yet she felt that it was her bounden duty to carry out her husband's wishes." (Tagore, 17)

She is incapable in providing him the enjoyments of true marital life. The emptiness in their relationship is heightened due to their dissimilarity in age and education. Through her Tagore emphasizes on the need of education for women. Had she been a bit clever she could have sensed the wrongs that were happening under her nose. Had she been educated enough she would not have depended on others so much. Tagore challenges and lashes on the face of patriarchy with the character of Asha. She shows the failure of patriarchy in application of its own terms and condition. In a typical patriarchal society,

women were naturally deprived of basic amenities like education itself. "If education is a tool for human development and if education is the birth-right of a human-being, I do not understand how we can deprive the women from education." (Tagore's European Diary. 1881) Education generally provides a human being a sphere to think freely, Asha lacked the ability to think freely and choose accordingly.

Asha was the sole married woman in the novel, who despite of being an orphan is married in a well-off family unlike Binodini. But her tender age proves to be a disadvantage for her as neither does she become a perfect companion her husband nor does she prove, to be a good daughter in law. Whereas, Binodini exceeds her in every way and thus, Asha proves to be a counterfoil of Binodini. Though from the beginning Asha is shown as an immature and simple woman but later she proves everyone wrong by taking charge of her life and the household. At first when Mahindra tries to educate her to suit his liking, she is unable to learn much but with the disappearance of Mahindra not only does she educate herself but also becomes a nurturer of the house. She was an ordinary woman no more; in her terrible grief, she seemed to have attained the maturity of the female ascetics described in the Puranas. Tagore describes her as the naive child woman:

"Raised as an orphan since she was a child, Asha grew into an introvert. By nature, she was always too nervous of being scorned by others. When Binodini with her impeccable good looks and flaming youth, appeared in their home, Asha was too diffident to get to know her." (Tagore, 46)

This hesitance of Asha had affected her badly. She couldn't recognize the plotting and advances of Binodini towards her husband. Through the character of Asha, Tagore depicts the stereotyped female subjectivity. Her type of naïve and all forgiving saint like women are preferred by men more than women who question them. Brought up as an orphan, she was unaware of many realities of life. Being married to Mahindra, and his love was like a realized dream for her. However, it was short lived. She was groomed to be the perfect daughter-in-law after her marriage. Even after the adultery of her husband she forgave as that was what the society demanded. It didn't consider the adultery of her husband as a sin. Though it looks unconvincing it was the reality of women of her age. They were forced to accept their husbands no matter what they did and were forced to stay in the marriage. First Bihari came to see her as a suitor and suddenly when Mahindra got enchanted her, he told Bihari to not to go ahead with his plan to Asha, rather should leave her for his own sake. Women in patriarchal societies are treated as commodities having no freewill and this incident is evident of that. She is thus used by everyone starting from the female to male characters of the novel. Asha must depend on the men in her life, first her uncle and then her husband due to being uneducated and an orphan teen who knows nothing of the world.

A typical patriarchal concept of taking the blame of husband on one's own head is also evident in an all accepting Asha. Even after the revelation of her husband's extramarital affair with Binodini, she blames herself for not being capable enough to love his husband instead of realizing the fact that it is not her but Mahindra who is at fault. Even Asha's dressing and grooming were all meant for Mahindra only. Towards the end she stops beautifying herself because she was no more of use for Mahindra. Patriarchy has shaped Asha in such a way that even her own body was not hers. She was infused with the typical patriarchal idea that anything a woman does is centered around men only.

Even the woman she assumed her friend stabbed her at back and with non-other than her own husband. They jointly destroyed the innocence in Asha and made her suffer too without any fault. Even after Mahindra deceived her, she was still forced to live with her as she was pregnant by then and again this society won't allow her to leave her husband even if the husband commits bunches of blunders. Even if she knew that her husband was not the same any more, she still has to accept living with him for the sake

of this patriarchal society who doesn't even count a man's mistake. And thus, she is caged there forever because that's what patriarchy expects her to do. It was she who suffered the most even after accepting what patriarchy throws on her unflinchingly. She is woman who never questioned anything rather was schooled to be the typical Indian woman who accepts things as they're without questioning further. Even when she obeyed every rule that was laid in front of her, she still was unable to escape the sufferings which she had to face in this patriarchal world.

4. CONCLUSION

Chokher Bali is an outcome of immense sensitivity on the part of the novelist, Rabindranath Tagore, who was interested in documentation of human psychology in his novels. Tagore could no longer take delight in dead metaphors of idealism, at a time when he perceived that the whole world around him was rapidly changing. Written during the phase of cultural transition, the novel presents the divergence as well as the convergence to two women. Tagore, in *Chokher Bali* also, like in his other novels portrays human beings in the light of their idiosyncrasies, peculiarities, experiments and follies.

Considering women and their problems in general, in this novel, one can sense the overwhelming presence of patriarchy in shaping the ends of both these women. Although patriarchy lays certain rules for women, it still contradicts itself, as women under every condition had to suffer because of patriarchal influences ultimately. Taking into consideration the lives and experiences of Asha and Binodini, who are just each other's opposite, when it came to suffering both had to repay in equal amount. Even if they are two completely distinct roads, still they cross their paths in suffering and injustices generated by society. They had to bear the everlasting pain even if they are hesitant to do so. The society is the ultimate influence in both of their lives.

Binodini craved for love, since the very beginning, which she never found for being a widow. Mahindra was never her love, rather he was just a fluctuation whom she was attracted to. And finally, when she found her long quested love, Bihari, she has to leave him forever as the remarriage of a widow is unacceptable in the eyes of this patriarchal society. She had to suppress her heart and listen to the commands of her mind which was regulated by patriarchal norms. She could not choose happiness even when it was at her doorstep.

Asha's case too is no different, she was also a woman who was never taught or even led to think and take her life decisions by her own will. Married off to a man who himself is skeptical of his own feelings, her life too is pushed into skepticism. She is that product of this patriarchal society who is always in the effort of pleasing everyone around. Starting from her uncle to husband to mother-in-law. She always tried to reshape herself as per everyone else's need and liking. Her destiny was never shaped by her own actions rather she was held a destiny shaped by others. She is an example of the women who are perpetual puppets in the hands of others. She was even forced to live with a man who entertained an extramarital affair behind her back, even when her heart was not ready to accept him.

Although the nature and circumstances of both the women are way different than each other, the way they are made puppets and played by the patriarchal society is where both characters converge. Both of them were never understood nor given a chance to act freely. Their lives were centered around those men only whom they have seen or known. Being caged in that small world both of them assumed that to be their entire world and those men to be the sole male descendants on earth who can love them and care for them. Both have been blamed for mistakes they did not commit solely. Asha was blamed for not being able to manage the house while Binodini was blamed for burning down a house without flame.

But the least that anyone was concerned about was that both these women are human after all who too had their own free will. Patriarchal norms never cared whether she's naïve or clever, married or widow, orphan or tormented.

No variations find room inside patriarchal lenses in general as it ensures uniformity of injustice. Women may yell, react, choke, wail rebel or succumb, but in the long run are bound to do what this patriarchal society wants them to do. They are pushed to put on the fetters and bow down in front of patriarchy as Asha and Binodini did. Even when they wanted the other way around, they had to go the way that patriarchy paved for them. Patriarchy is that prison which only allows its prisoners a life imprisonment. The lives of Asha and Binodini concretize the fact that how different the circumstances may be but when it comes to injustice and suffering, patriarchy has never any woman aside. May it be Asha the illiterate, naïve and all accepting woman or Binodini, the educated, clever and rebellious woman, everyone has to do things in accordance to patriarchal conveniences and its predefined norms.

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