Fourth Chapter

Educated Women Characters in the Epics and in Tagore
Education is a measurement of the civilization of a society. The more advanced is education, the higher is the civilization of a society. In the epic age, it can not be said there was an education system, but it was true that some women were educated. Of course, the women who were educated came from noble backgrounds. Those from low classes of society were denied from education. So the educated women were very limited in number and they were educated so that they could marry noble husbands. And the contents of education were the Vedas and religious rituals. No matter how much they were educated, they could never go out of zenanas. They were closely attached to their husbands and followed them to the end. They were far from having any awakening sense of women emancipation. So their social role was quite limited. In Tagorean time, it was quite different. A complete education system had been established. All the women from different social classes and backgrounds were likely to be educated and many of the educated women, with awakening sense, went out of household and came into society. Some of them became professional workers and even revolutionists or politicians. They appealed for emancipation and freedom of women. Educated women became pioneers of women movements. So we can say that in Tagorean time educated women became a intellectual class and a forceful group in society. Their social role was much more. That is why we see much more educated characters in his works and their images were more striking and moving.

4.1. Educated Women Characters in the Epics

In the Epic Age, education was imparted to girls before they got married. Ceremonial initiation into the Vedic studies was as common in the case of girls as it was in the case of boys. The initiation ceremony was followed by a period of discipline and education, which was regarded as very essential to secure a very suitable match. A maiden could succeed in her marriage only if she had been properly trained during the period of studentship. Women students were divided into two classes, Brahmacarinis and Sadyodvahas. The former were life long students of theology and philosophy; the latter used to pursue their studies till their marriage. During the eight or nine years that were thus available for study, they learnt by heart the Vedic hymns prescribed for the daily and periodical prayers and for those rituals and sacraments in which they had to take an active part after their marriage. There was ample evidence to show that, like men, women also
used to offer regularly their Vedic prayers, both mornings and evenings. When writing came into general vogue, girls were initiated into the three R’s as a matter of course. The cultivation of fine arts like music, dancing and painting was encouraged in the case of girls. Musical recitation of the Sama hymms was originally special function of ladies. Girls in ruling families used to receive some military and administrative training also.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are resplendent with the acts and achievements of a good many learned and qualified women.

The *Mahabharata*, naturally contains a far more elaborate account of the education and learning of women during the epic age. As in the case of women in other ages, here also the evidence regarding women’s right to education and learning was rather direct. That is, it is known from the case of a large number of learned women that women of those ages were given full facilities for all kinds of education. Kunti and Draupadi were very good instances of the incomparable strength of character, versatility and scholarship of women of ancient India. Draupadi was often characterized as a scholar and versed in religious lore. Vidula who inspired her defeated son to exert himself and conquer his enemies, stood out as a unique example of the unshakable courage and determination of Indian women. Her fiery words would ever rank amongst the greatest heroic utterances of women.

As during the Vedic age, so in the age of the *Mahabharata* also, women’s full right to naishtihika brahmacharya or a life of celibate asceticism, was recognized. Hence we meet with some prominent women ascetics here. The most celebrated of these was perhaps Sulabha, who, not finding a suitable husband, embraced a life of celibate studentship and roamed about alone from place to place in search of the highest truth, until she reached the court of king Janaka, a great scholar versed in the highest lore leading to salvation. Even such a celebrated scholar was compelled to recognize Sulabha’s deep learning after a thorough examination, and was taught by her. Shiva was another woman ascetic who studied all the Vedas and attained spiritual perfection. The daughter of Shandilya also embraced a life of celibate studentship and achieved the maximum perfection in asceticism. Not only those women who voluntarily chose a life of celibacy, but also some of those who entered the family life were versed in the knowledge of Brahman or the highest philosophical lore. In the *Hari-vamsha*, a learned woman, wife of Prabhasa, was...
described as a brahmavadin, an expounder of Brahman, attaining the highest perfection in yoga and embraced the life of a wandering mendicant. Gautami was also a knower of Brahman, which enabled her to give a learned discourse on the state after death, even when her only son died of snake-bite.

In the age of the Mahabharata, women also were permitted to enter the Vanaprastha Asram or retire to the forest for a life of austerity and meditation. For example, after the death of king Pandu, his grandmother Satyavati, with her two daughters-in-law, retired to a forest for practicing austerities and died there. After Krishna’s demise, too, Satyabhama and his other queens went to a forest and practiced severe penances. From the above, it is clear that during the age of the Mahabharata also, women were entitled to the highest brahmavidiya or philosophy of the Brahman, and as such to Upanayana, or initiation and brahmacharya, or Vedic studentship.

During the Mahabharata period, there were women versed not only in the highest philosophy but also in other branches of knowledge. Among the women members of the royal family, many were well grounded in politics and at the same time deeply religious in nature. Gandhari, the wife of the blind king Dhritarashtra, was perhaps the most celebrated woman in the epic age. Her saying, “Victory will lie on the side of the righteous” was immortal. When she refused to wish success even to her own son Duryodhana she was passed into a classic. She was described as very learned, intelligent, and well-versed in religious practices. We find Gandhari engaged in a learned political discussion with her son in the open court.

Instances are found in the Mahabharata from which we can gather that women of those days were taught arts such as dancing, singing and instrumental music. For example, Uttara, the daughter of king Virata, and her companions were taught these arts at home. Madhavi, the daughter of Yayati, was also an expert on music.

It has been shown above that in ancient times, teaching was residential not only for men but also for women. In the Mahabharata, though no direct evidence was available, it is evident that some specially gifted women, like Sulabha, did study in the homes of their spiritual preceptors. Others, of course, were taught at home, as was clear in the case of Draupadi and Uttara. Those whose fathers were teachers were naturally taught at home by them.
From the above brief account, it is clear that in the age of the *Mahabharata* also, due attention was paid to the education of women, as a result of which many women of those days were able to reach the highest level of academic perfection.

In the *Adi-kanda* or first section of the *Ramayana*, we find a beautiful verse depicting the gracious qualities of the women of Ayodhya (Ch. 6). Befitting the reign of a worthy king, women too, were given full opportunities for education of various kinds. That women too, like men, were entitled to *Upanayana* or initiation and *Brahmacharya* was proved right, they enjoyed taking part in various Vedic rites and utter the Vedic *mantras*. Thus unmarried girls, considered to be epitomes of purity and perfection, were chosen for the signal honor of welcoming Rama on his return to Ayodhya from the forest, and giving him the purificatory bath first. Sita was described as performing the *Sandhya* or offering daily Vedic prayers. Sita was capable of not only relating stories but also quoting didactic verses in support of her argument that it was not proper for ascetics to wield weapons and also to expound the ideal of wifely fidelity. That is why, when Hanuman could not find her in Lanka after a long search, he decided to wait for her on the banks of a river where she was sure that Sita would turn up for offering her daily Vedic prayers. Tara, the wife of Vali, was another instance of a learned woman well versed in the Vedic lore. When Vali went to fight with his brother Sugriva, Tara performed sacrifice to secure his victory. Tara’s statement to Bali evinced her familiarity with the theories of polity and in talking to Laksmana she referred to the experiences of Visvamitra. Draupadi, Damayanti, Savitri, Sakuntala, Sita, Kunti, Kausalya and Gandhari were not ignorant at all. They could cite from the Vedas and even the Upanishadas. Kausalya also was found to perform holy sacrifices. When Rama went to take leave for her before going to the forest, he found her offering oblations to fire along with the utterance of appropriate *mantras*. Kaikeyi took the recourse to history of the Ikshvaku dynasty to justify the banishment of Rama. Thus, in the *Ramayana*, instances are not rare of women performing sacrifices and uttering *mantras* even on their own right. In the *Ramayana*, we also find some instances of ascetic women engaged in the duty, teaching and preaching of the highest truth. For example, Shramani, the disciple of Matanga, with her hermitage on the Pampa lake, was described as wearing barks and matted locks, having reached the highest point of ascetic perfection, and being honored by great ascetics.
In the epics, the educated women were of course from loyal and other noble backgrounds. Their number was small. However they did not form a group of female intellectuals. Their concerns did not include the status of women. They were limited by the time.

4.2. Educated Women Characters in Tagore

In age of Tagore, the education system was greatly different from that of the epic age. Education went thoroughly out of homes. Women were not taught any more by their preceptors. They entered into different levels of education from primary schools to universities. Only some of them learned theology, philosophy of brahman and Vedic lore. Women who, like those of the epic age, had a life of celibate asceticism or retired to the forest for a life of austerity and meditation were, much less in numbers. Most of them learned other branches of knowledge in science and literature. Some outstanding women became bachelors or even masters. Some even went abroad to study. They had more freedom in political life and they even took part in academic and political debates. Educated women during the Tagoran age were quite different from those of the epic age.

Tagore, through his works, made great efforts to focus on educated women because only they are aware of women's position in the society and they represent the trends of female emancipation. In China there is a saying: "Half of the man is woman. Woman is half of the world". Educated women are the main force of woman emancipation. Without them, no change in women's position or progress of society is possible. It is possible for them to struggle for equal position with men only when they are equally educated. The greatness of Tagore lies in his reflecting his age and even going ahead of his age. Tagore was the first writer in modern India who brought his women out of the kitchens and bedrooms and into the parlors where they argued with men and exchanged ideas while still remaining very feminine. These women who were brought out of kitchens and bedrooms were, of course, educated women. So from women characters in the epics to those in Tagore's works was a leap forward.

In Tagore's works, there are about 30 educated women characters that is about two third of the total women characters in the epics. They are awakened women. They were aware of women's inferior positions in family and society. They struggled for their equal rights to men. Some of them were rebels against traditional conventions and herald of
women emancipation.

Tagore through his works tried to have the educated woman recognized as a human being and as a human beings women were entitled to freedom of thought and person. Some of his ideas were ahead of the times. A woman must not only feel her individuality but should also strive to mould her fate through her own efforts instead of passively waiting for destiny to unfold itself. Sabla in the Mahua asked her creator why she should not have the right to determine her fortune. Lolita in the Gora was a rebel against submission to authority in any form. Mrinal in the Strir Patra (Wife's Letter) was the first harbinger of women's liberty in India. She was extraordinarily beautiful, educated, intelligent and poetic, she was married from a deserted village to a rich family in Calcutta. Her husband was selfish, unsympathetic, indifferent and inhumane. Mrinal could not live with such a husband and broke out of the family. "I will never again return to your house...Mirabai is a woman like me. Her fetters are not light either, but she does not need to die in order to live... I too shall live. At last I live." She was even prepared to give up the assured comfort of life to protect her individuality.

The most powerful women are those who speak of the future and who forge a new personality for women. Achira, in the Sesh Katha written in 1940 was the granddaughter of a retired Principal, Dr. Anil Sarkar. Nabin Madhav Sen Gupta, an erstwhile revolutionary and a noted scientist, fell in love with her and she too felt much attracted towards him. The scientist offered to marry her but she declined saying that the marriage would detract him from his whole-hearted devotion to research work. She condemned love as a blind passion that was specially intensified in the environment of the primeval forest. Saudamini in Badnam written in 1941, was the wife of a police officer, but she was in league with the revolutionaries. She loved her husband no doubt but her love for the nation was much greater. Kalyani, in the Woman Unknown written in 1914, was the beautiful, educated and high-spirited daughter of a doctor. She was married to Anupam, a master's student. On the very day of wedding, her father rejected the marriage because of the groom's uncle who took the dowry jewelery to a good smith to test its purity. Later on the pilgrim train, Anupam encountered her and was greatly impressed by her beauty, manner and high-spirited patriotism. Then he went to see her in Kanpur defying his uncle's orders and ignoring his mother's commands. He implored her with two folded
hands. But Kalyani said, "I'm not going to marry". After the fiasco of her marriage, she
dedicated herself to the education to her motherland—the education of girls. Amiya in
The Unapproved Story written in 1925, was a fostered Kahar girl. In university she
became an activist of Non-Cooperation Movement and dedicated herself to the
orphanage.

4.2.1 Labanya—An educated girl of dignity, self-respect, independence, sympathy, a
thorough realist

Farewell, My Friend (Farewell Song) written in 1928 was a testament of love and
beauty. It was a love story revolving round Labanya and Amit Rai, an affluent Oxford-
educated briefless barrister of Calcutta. The characters of Sobhanlal and Ketaki help in
the development of the slight story content. The main interest of the story lied in the
psychological transformation that took place in Labanya and Amit as a result of their love
entanglement. The action of the story began with a motor collision when Amit’s car
dashed against Labanya’s. This chance collision soon developed into friendship and love.
Sobhanlal, an old student of Labanya’s father loved her secretly. But he failed to win her
favor. Later she responded to the love of Amit. She, however, realized that Amit being a
poet could not share the responsibilities of married life. In spite of her misgivings
regarding the success of their marriage, Labanya gave her consent for the betrothal. The
story took a sudden turn when Kataki, Amit’s earlier heart-throb, arrived in Shillong.
With marriage of Amit and Ketaki, the story came to an abrupt end. Then Labanya
decided to marry Sobhanlal and informed Amit about this. Labanya was the only
daughter of Abinash Dutta, the principal of a college in western India. She was very tall
and slim, with a lustrous brown complex and large dark eyes. Her voice was like that of a
boy. Her beauty was like the early morning with no delusive mistiness about it. She was
interested in the study of literature and history. With her good looks and simplicity, she
charmed Amit by her countenance radiant with the light of intellect at their first meeting.
In her face he saw a vision of serenity, born not of emotional self-complacency, but of
profound poise of a calm and balance mind. She was over-conscious of her dignity and
self-respect and did not feel least hesitation in having long walks with Amit in the lonely
forest. With a few days of their introduction, Amit took Labanya’s hand and pressed it
admiringly. Labanya made no attempt to get it released. A new pattern of social mode
came into vogue in the decade following the first World War.

The outstanding trait of her character was her sense of dignity and self-respect. She did not tolerate anyone who tried to humiliate her. She came to know about the accusation of Sobhanlal's father that Abanish Dutta was trying to trap his son to marry Labanya. Later, when Sobhanlal visited her house seeking for guidance of her father in his research, she accused Sobhanlal thus: "Why do you come to this house?...Do you know what your father said about your coming here? Aren't you ashamed of humiliating me?"  

Another trait of her character was her sturdy spirit of independence. Such sturdy independent spirit of an unmarried girl was seldom witnessed in any preceding period. When her father wished to remarry a widow at the age of 47, she felt, mistakenly, that, he might now consider her a burden. So, after his marriage, she decided to leave the house and earn her livelihood. Yogamaya, a rich widow, appointed Labanya as the tutoress of her daughter. She refused to accept her father's savings and told him: "I have taken this resolve so that our relation never deteriorates. Don't worry, Baba! Grant me your blessings, always, that I may find the way to happiness."  

Labanya was a thorough and thorough realist. She did not get carried away even in matters of love. She had the rare gift of being able to read the mind of men. When Amit Rai proposed to her, she was not delighted. She knew that her marriage with him would not be a success. She knew that Amit was much more poetic, romantic than realistic. She was sure that what he loved was her idealized image. She frankly told him the reasons for declining his hand: "Your tastes and intellect are far superior to mine, Mita. On our journey together, I may one day go far from behind; then you will never come back to call me...I beseech you not to ask for my hand in marriage...In your innermost heart, you consider marriage to be what you would call vulgar."  

This merely indicated that a new consciousness had grown among educated girls who hankered after equality with their partners in every sphere of life. She apprehended that she might be called upon to sacrifice her individuality with a view to pleasing her husband.

Amit was astonished at Labanya's reasoning: "Labanya wants to see everything clearly,

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280 Tagore, Farewell Soing, tr. Radha Chakravaty, p.35.
281 Ibid. p.36.
by the light of her intellect. She can’t forget herself even at moments when people would naturally wish to forget themselves.  

Yogamaya, the employer and guardian of Labanya, pleaded with her to marry Amit. But she remained firm in her resolve and told her the real reason for refusing the hand of Amit. She was afraid that she would have to sacrifice her individuality to please her husband. "...The tragedy of love occurs whenever people fail to accept their mutual independence, when they impose their will unjustly on others, when they imagine that we can change people, re-create them to suit our own desires."  

She told Yogamaya that she was to Amit nothing but a source of inspiration for his poetry. She had a firm conviction that the true fulfillment of love lay not in union, but in freedom. With this conviction she was sympathetic and generous towards Ketaki, her rival. She was not overpowered by jealousy when she came to know Amit’s previous engagement with Ketaki. She told Amit: “When a person had completely surrendered herself to you, why didn’t you cherish her as your own? For some reason, you slackened your rip on her before she felt the pressure of sundry of other grasping hands, transforming her very image. It is because she lost your love one day that she set about decorating herself in ways that would appeal to others.”  

Another significant trait of Labanya was her sympathy. Instead of trying to tighten her hold on Amit, she told him that he alone was responsible for the sad transformation of Ketaki into Kettee of today. No other heroine had been so generous and sympathetic to the rival for her lover’s affection. She made the unusual request to Amit to take Ketaki for a trip to Cherapunji. 

The novel ended abruptly with Ami’s marriage to Ketaki. He distinguished between the two lovers she had. His love with Ketaki was indeed based on love, but it was like water in a pitcher, to be collected daily, and used up everyday. While his love for Labanya remained a lake, its waters not to be carried home, but that meant for his consciousness to swim in.

Labanya decided to marry Sobhanlal, bidding farewell to Amit through a poem:

"Nothing have you lost.

282 Ibid. p. 67.
283 Ibid. p.71.
284 Ibid. p.74.

235
Of moral clay I’m made; if you saw in me.

An image eternal, then let it be

Worshipped at dusk."

Here we have to answer a question: Why was there no emotional struggle or upheaval involved in their farewell to each other? Amit was too romantic and narcissistic, and too poetical. Labanya was realistic. The love of Amit and Labanya was not deep-rooted. They were more in love with love than with each other. As Labanya believed, Amit was in quest of whatever would quench his fancy’s thirst. If his mind wore, if the words failed him, she, the commonplace girl who was not his creation would be exposed in that void.

Amit’s Calcutta set suddenly descended upon Shillong and this development had the effect of wrenching them from their dream world by bringing them into contact with reality that they had seemingly ignored.

Among the modern heroines of Tagore, Labanya was the first to take a post-graduate degree and earn her livelihood. Tagore pointed out in the novel that with the development of education and modernization of society, the problems of women had multiplied and ‘nothing remains simply any longer’. The modern, educated women were conscious of the change. Hence, while selecting their life partners, great discretion is exercised by them regarding mental compatibility.

4.2.2. **Ela**—known for her beauty, intelligence and independent thinking, the bravest of all the heroines drawn by Tagore

The *Four Chapters* written in 1934 was set in the terrorist movement of the early 20th century in Bengal. Ela was the daughter of a professor of psychology. She was noted for her beauty, intelligence and independent thinking. By the time she got her master’s degree, she lost both the parents. For some time she stayed in her uncle’s house and engaged herself in research. It was in her uncle’s house that she met Indranath, the revolutionary leader and asked him to give her some work to do. He put her in charge of a Girls High School started by him in Calcutta. While acceding to her request he said, “The only promise I ask of you is never to become entangled in any social relationship. You are not for society, but for your country alone.” To this Ela simply replied “I

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285 Ibid.
286 Ibid. p. 12.
promise"—not realizing that this very promise would prevent the fulfillment of her love in future. Ela remained in the revolutionary camp of Indranath for five years. In her second year she met Atin and fell in love with him. But because of the promise she had given to Indranath, she refrained from marrying Atin. Later, realizing the true nature of the activities of the party, she felt that she was a misfit in that organization. She was aware that her love for Atin was greater than her love for the party. Ela was a brave and outspoken person. She told the much-venerated and dreaded Indranath point-blank: "You have done me a grievous wrong!" Again, towards the end of the story when Atin told Ela that he had been commissioned by the party chief to kill her, she was not unnerved. In fact, she entreated Atin, "Kill me, Ontu, kill me with your own hands. I couldn’t wish for a happier end." When Atin wanted to make her death painless by administering anesthesia, she told him, "Is it chloroform you have? Throw it away. I am not a coward. Let me die awake in your arms. Let our last kiss be eternal. Ontu, my Ontu." Apart from courage, the other outstanding trait of her character was the frank exhibition of her passionate love for Atin. She was not capable of false modesty and told Atin about her experience of love at first sight: "Haven’t I told you often enough, you greedy boy, how I had been gazing and gazing at you from my corner of the third class deck, regardless of whether any body was watching me or not? That was a most wonderful experience of life-long intimacy felt at first sight." In the final scene of the novel, on learning that Atin was to kill her, she kissed him and bared her bosom and asked him to kiss her. She laid bare her passionate love for him in these memorable words: "Am I not yours, wholly yours, even in death? Take me. Don’t let their unclean hands touch my body, for this body belongs to you." Clasping Atin to her, Ela went on, "Ontu, my Ontu, my king, my god! I’ve not to this day been able to show you how much I love you. By this love I charge you—kill me, kill me!" Ela was the bravest of all the heroines drawn by Tagore. No other heroine of Tagore was so out-spoken and analytical as Ela.

4.2.3. Sucharita, the woman who heralded the age of the modern women.

Sucharita, in the Gora written in 1910, heralded the age of the modern women who

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287 Ibid. p. 86.
288 Ibid. p.30.
289 Ibid. p.86.
290 Ibid
refused to sit idly at home. She was eager to serve the country and the people. She was the precursor of Bimala (The Home and the World), Ela (Four Chapters) Sarala (The Gardens), who showed practical awareness and interest in the Freedom movement of the country. Sucharita surpassed the other heroines of Tagore in her keen perception, critical judgment, and the liberal outlook. She was necessary for the growth of Gora’s personality and his self-realization. Because of her, he realized that women too have a role to play in the uplift of the country. Sucharita, originally named Radha Rani, was the daughter of Ramshara Haldar of Dacca. She had lost her parents. She and her brother, Satish were brought up by Poresh Babu who was a close friend of her father. She was sweet-tempered, charming, calm, quiet and pure. As Gora observed, she was a woman of exceptionally keen sight. Unlike most girls of her age, Sucharita was wise and mentally matured. As Haran remarked, her mind was unusually developed for her age. Gora was attracted by her keen intellect, sincerity of purpose and sympathetic understanding. Binoy regarded her as the incarnation of grace. Sucharita’s liberal education began after her acquaintance of Gora and Binoy. For the first time she came into contact with people outside her Brahmo community. Her discussions with Gora and his view on religion and his love for the country impressed her. As a result she was unable to tolerate the narrow sectarian outlook and arrogant behavior of Haran, who was regarded in the Brahmo circles as the would-be-fiancé of Sucharita. She used to respect Haran and help him in his activities of the Samaj, but after meeting Gora she refused to marry him. Unlike Hemnalini of The Wreck, Sucharita was skilled in household arts and management. She had an eye for beauty and cleanliness. She was a source of comfort and solace to Anandamoyi when Gora was away in the jail. Binoy found her a good company and affectionately excelled her didi. To Lolita she was a friend, philosopher and guide. She had the highest regard for Poresh Babu, her godfather, benefactor, friend and guide. She showed great concern for his welfare than his own daughters. She could not accept that any one was superior to him in knowledge, not tolerate anyone who did not respect him. As the novelist said, she was part of Poresh Babu’s life and without her even his worship of God seemed incomplete. He felt that his life was uplifted by her tender affection for him. Sucharita, in turn, sought the support and guidance of Poresh Babu in moments of crisis of her life. Sucharita’s engagement with Gora had a stamp of divinity and special
purpose for which destiny led her in a mysterious way. Deep in her heart, she felt that, her relationship with Gora was no ordinary relationship of the opposite sexes. Her love was not a love at first sight. Rather, it was a love born and bred of severe conflict, both internal and external. In the beginning, she found Gora orthodox, superstitious and arrogant. But she sympathized when she heard him speak with great conviction, faith and courage about the motherland and its people. She was hurt by his indifference to her. In the course of time she understood him. His voice and every movement of his body, showed her his strength, his conviction, his patriotism and his abundant valiantness. She did not share his religious views. Gora attacked the Brahmo ideals she stood for. But every successive onslaught against her ideals had made her feel fascinated all the more. She was so free from the narrow sectarian outlook that she encouraged the marriage between Lolita and Binoy. Poresh Babu appreciated her broad outlook and stated that sectarianism was a thing which made people entirely forget the simple and obvious truth that man was a man. Gora’s arrest marked a turning point in her life. Her mental conflict subsided and the fascination for Gora was strengthened. He became a martyr for a noble cause. So strong were her love and devotion for him that she did not hesitate to snub Haran Babu when time came. Her loyalty for the Samaj and regard for Poresh Babu did not stand in the way of her love for Gora. Infected by Gora’s patriotism, she was prepared to sacrifice everything for the sake of the country. She was so confident as to feel that even a powerful personality like Gora had "to come back to me, he will have to get rid of the last trace of hesitation and shyness. No matter how great and powerful a man may be, he is need of me."\(^{291}\) Her role resembled that of Damini, the heroine of *Chaturanga*. Both were responsible for making their respective heroes attain their life’s quest. In the beginning, Gora wondered why there was not "the least trace of the immodest forwardness which he had always associated with educated girls"\(^{292}\) in Sucharita. She unfolded to him a new aspect of reality. He derived an intellectual pleasure while he discussed or argues with her. He, too, like Sucharita, underwent a mental conflict, but of a different kind. The conflict was between the normal human urge for love and the loftier ideals of patriotism. But the two were reconciled when he discovered that Sucharita was

\(^{291}\) Tagore, *Gora*, p.359.

\(^{292}\) Ibid. p.101.
the manifestation of all that was sweet and pure, loving and virtuous in the homes of his motherland. Had he not met Sucharita, his perception of India would have been imperfect. He who was a bigot till then, now understood the people outside his community, like Sucharita and Poresh Babu. So we could agree with Nihanranjan Ray when he said, "It is Sucharita again who administers the necessary dose of liberalism to his too narrow ideals and brings him towards the path of universal love and harmony." The union of Gora and Sucharita was the union of tradition and modernity. It stood for universal love which knew no barriers of caste, community, race and nation. A comparison of Lolita and Sucharita helped us to understand the latter better. Lolita was an extrovert bubbling with energy and enthusiasm while Sucharita was an introvert with great strength of character. Lolita could never be patient and accept defeat. Sucharita had patience and the power to endurance and preferred a life of peace and contentment. Despite their differences, Lolita and Sucharita were intimate friends and reminded us of Jane and Elizabeth of Pride and Prejudice. Both were devoted to Poresh Babu and guided by him. Both emulated Gora. Sucharita revolted against the tyranny of her aunt who tried to make her married to Lalaish, her brother-in-law. She rejected Haran Babu when he tried to dominate with his Brahmo fanaticism. Sucharita was a hidden rebel whereas Lolita was an open rebel and Sucharita was no less revolutionary than Lolita. Sucharita combined in herself the best of tradition and modernity. Like Hemnalini of The Wreck, she had not been Anglicized by western education. Both had the ideal traditional woman's devotion, loyalty and sympathetic understanding of their lovers and Sucharita was further developed than Hemnalini. Sucharita with her liberal outlook, critical faculty and sympathetic understanding as all the qualities was likely to become another Anandamoyi. Anandamoyi's adoption of Gora was responsible for the change in her and Sucharita's love for him transformed her character. Sucharita in her youth might have been like Sucharita, without her Western education. Tagore seemed to point out that a new type of womanhood had emerged as a result of Western education and changes in the socio-economic set-up.

4.2.4.Sissy and Lissy—— Two modern educated girls

293 Ray, Niharranjn, Indian Literature, p. 175, Vol.4.
In *Farewell Song*, we have two modern and fashionable girls—Sissy and Lissy. They were sisters of Amit. They were like the latest merchandise in the market, carefully packaged from head to toe according to the reigning vogue, high heeled shoes, low-cut lace-trimmed jacket revealing necklaces of coral and ambers, sari draped aslant, wrapped tightly around the body. They walked with a tripping gait, speaking in loud voices, and modulated their peals of shrill laughter. Head tilted slightly, they glanced obliquely upward with a faint smile; they knew the art of a meaningful look. Every now and then, they fluttered a pink silk fan close to their cheeks, and perched on the arm of their male friends’ chairs, they rapped their admirers with the fan in feigned protest against the men’s feigned impertinence. But compared with Ketaki Mitra, Sissy is somewhat traditional. She was still at an in-between stage. She had not yet attained the highest degree, but was readily earning double promotions. In her peals of laughter, excessive cheerfulness and non-stop chatter, there was a constant, bubbling vivacity, highly prized by her admirers. In literary account of adolescent Radha, her manners seemed sometimes mature, sometimes naïve; the same was true of Sissy, as well. Her high-heeled shoes were the victory-gate signaling entry into the new era, but in her knot of uncut hair remained traces to the old order. The lower edge of her sari was draped a few inches too high, but in their extent of exposure, her upper garments still conformed to the bounds of modesty. She wore gloves habitually, for no particular reason, yet she still sported balas-thick bangles-on both wrists instead of one. Smoking a cigarette no longer made her dizzy, but she still had a strong addiction to chewing *paan*, betel leaf. She didn’t mind having pickles and mango papad sent to her, camouflaged in biscuit tins; given the choice between Christmas plum-pudding and the *pitha* served at the *Poush*-festival, she had a slight preference for the latter. Though trained by a white dancer, she demurred at ballroom dancing.

4.2.5. **Ketaki Mitra—The only example of Anglicized woman**

In the *Farewell Song*, Ketaki Mitra was the only example of Anglicized woman, a delightful creation of Tagore. She was the good friend of Sissy, Amit’s sister and the sister of Naren Mitter, a very rich man who had lived a long time in Europe and was a friend of Amit Rai. She was Amit’s first lover during his stay at Oxford. Amit was engaged to her when she was 18. But even after an engagement of seven years the
marriage failed to take place. On hearing about Amit's impending marriage, Ketaki rushed to Shillong. Tagore gave a dear picture of Ketaki in words full of irony and devastating wit: "Her deportment is refined, thrice-distilled in her own elder brother's etiquette factory; it contains the pungent essence of British aristocracy. She has arrogantly scissored the ordinary Bengali woman's pride in her long tresses, shedding her hair-knot like a tadpole's tail, with the new convert's eagerness to imitate. The natural fairness of her countenance is enameled with layers of paint." In the gallery of Tagore's women, Ketaki was the only example of an Anglicized woman. Though outwardly Westernized, Ketaki had not lost her innate charm. Once her marriage took place she regained her former natural poise and laughter.

4.2.6. Pushpamala—The educated girl who exposed the hypocrisy of guru

In the drama Muktir Upay (The Way to Deliverance) written in 1938, Pushpamala was a distant cousin of Haimabati, the Fakir's wife. She had obtained a first class in her M.A. Examinations in Sanskrit. Freed from the prison house of college to see life at first hand, endless was her curiosity. She examined amusing occurrences in many ways, sometimes from outside and sometimes on the stage itself. She was enjoying herself immensely. She had access to every party of the village and was loved by one and all. Amused at the Fakir's deluded state she adroitly exposed the hypocrisy of his adored Guru who asked Fakir to frequently extort money from his wife Haimabati for offering it to him.

4.2.7. Amiya,—A revolutionist

Some educated women became revolutionaries. Amiya in The Rejected Story (Namanjur Galpa) written in 1925, was born by her aunt's husband with a young low-caste maidservant. Her aunt brought her into the house and raised her. She became a college student. The irresistible impulse to non-cooperation had ousted her college studies; in front of a crowd her heart no longer missed a beat as she stood up to speak; and she even went to the house of strangers collecting subscriptions for a destitute women's home. Finally she consecrated herself to the non-cooperation movement.

4.2.8. Lolita—Rebel against tyranny and oppression far ahead of her age

Lolita in Gora written in 1910, may be called the real heroine. Her courage, confidence, and the energy made her prominent among Tagore's heroines. She surpassed her predecessors like Binodini, Hemnalini and Sucharita in her liberal outlook, sharp
intelligence, keen insight and integrity. She was far ahead of her age. She excelled the other social rebels like Binding and Ammine in her temperament of revolt and anticipated the modern woman who rebelled against all sorts of tyranny and oppression by at least a generation. She was the harbinger of women’s liberation and feminist movements of the 20th century. Tagore forewarned people that the days of women of the Sita and Savitri image were numbered and that women like Lolita were ready to come of the portals of tradition and orthodox and would not allow themselves to be oppressed by the male dominated society. Besides asserting their quality with men, they were eager to serve the people and take an active part in the progress of the country. Lolita, the second daughter of Poresh Babu and Barodasundari, was the opposite of her elder sister Labonya in her appearance and in her dress, outlook and behavior. She was taller, darker, and slimmer than her sisters, Labonya and Leela. She was deeply attached to Sucharita and loved her more than her own sisters, Labonya and Leela. Of all the sisters; she was the least influenced by their mother. Like Sucharita, she was more attached to her father and influenced by him. Though devoid of good looks and fair complexion, she had charm and dignity. Her mother was very concerned about her marriage as she was not a beauty. It was only Poresh Babu who sought the beauty of her soul and recognized her sterling qualities and individuality. Lolita was an individualist, a lover of freedom and an upholder of truth. She not only asserted her individuality at any cost but also expected others to do so. She told Sucharita that God had not given them intelligence to expound other people’s ideas, and a mouth simply to repeat other people’s phrases. Hence she could not tolerate any one who allowed others to dominate. She ridiculed Binoy for being a shadow of Gora and echoing his opinions. She admired her father who allowed differences of opinion and never imposed his ideas on others. She found the same thing in Suchatita too. Protest was her medium of expression. She never took defeat in her stride and did not believe in doing things by halves. Life to her was a practical reality. Constraints like womanhood, tradition and religion could not bind her spirit of individualism and free thinking. Her love for Binoy was neither ‘love at first sight’ nor born out of the conflicts and search for her own mind, as in the case of Sucharita. Her love was a rare type of love in a self-willed girl. In the formative period of her love, the main attention was focused to make Binoy to assert his individuality and free himself
from the dominance of Gora. She confessed this fact to Sucharita. She provoked Binoy to do certain things against the wishes of Gora. And for this purpose she asked him to take her and her sisters to the circus and take part in the play to be staged before the magistrate. At this stage, she was not aware of her love for Binoy and made no attempt to attract his attention. The second stage of her development began with the drama rehearsal, in which Binoy too took part, along with Lolita and her sisters. Lolita was astonished at Binoy’s skill in reciting poetry and his proficiency in English. At first she thought that Binoy would not accept a role in the play for fear of displeasing Gora. Next, she believed that he was poor in acting and they would have to prompt him. But to her dismay, Binoy proved her wrong on both counts. His assertion of individuality and skill in recitation of English poetry bewildered her for a moment. Very soon she began to like him, which in the third stage was transformed into love. The third stage began with her steamer journey to Calcutta along with Binoy, after the episode in the magistrate’s bungalow. This incident coincided with Gora’s arrest. Influenced by Gora’s ideal of patriotism and spirit of nationalism she could not tolerate the unjustified arrest of Gora by the magistrate, in whose house they were enacting a play. Therefore she decided not to take part in the play and also asked Binoy not to allow himself to be persuaded by anybody. Her patriotism was as that of Gora. She told Sucharita that she could not utter a single word even if she bit her tongue till the blood flew. Apprehensive about being persuaded to take part in the play by her mother or others, she decided to turn to Calcutta on the steamer on which Binoy was already going. This was not a pre-planned action on her part to meet Binoy. It was nothing to do with her love for him, but it was a sheer protest against racial discrimination of the British towards the Indians. It revealed, for the first time, the dawn of political consciousness among Indian women. This action showed Lolita’s great regard for Gora and his influence on her. It also helped Lolita and Binoy to understand each other better and become closer to each other. Unfortunately, Lolita never realized the consequences of her impulsive action and soon became the target of wagging tongues. The steamer incident, however, helped Binoy realize the fact that Lolita was superior to him in the independence of her intellect. Through this courageous act of Lolita, Binoy saw the vision of true womanhood in the light of her glory. Binoy was elated and proud when Lolita stood by him on the deck, leaving all her people in the hour.
of her trouble, reposing great confidence in him. He felt that his very life was fulfilled. He remembered well how many times he had displeased Gora, to appear to be bold and individualistic to win Lolita’s favor. His love for Lolita was conflict between love and friendship. He sincerely acknowledged to himself how Lolita was responsible for the change in his personality. He recollected “how often had he failed to be his own true self for fear of displeasing Gora should think him weak, and then had deceived himself by subtle argument into the belief that Gora’s view was his own!” The shy, reticent mild, orthodox Binoy, who was a shadow of Gora, was transformed into a bold, independent and sophisticated man by the influence of Lolita’s love and guidance. And Lolita’s acquaintance with Gora and Binoy made her a great rebel and a staunch patriot. The love and marriage episode of Binoy and Lolita helped the novelist depict the Brahmao-Hindu conflict of his time. Binoy’s marriage was not a sacrifice of his friendship with Gora for the sake of Lolita and his love. It was true, as Binoy said to Gora, a great purpose had been fulfilled by his marriage and it was not a breach in his friendship. Lolita, who had no respect for orthodox woman, made an exception in the case of Anandamoyi and had great regard for her. She reminded Binoy that he had to call on Anandamoyi and console her after the arrest of Gora. Later, she, too, paid her visit. The moment she saw Anandamoyi, all her false notions about orthodox women were dispelled. She felt very small beside noble Anadamoyi. Her calm and compassionate face brought peace to her. After getting intimately acquainted with Anandamoyi, she realized where Gora got his strength from. Poresh was more concerned with Lolita than his other daughters. He was worried about how this fiery, rebellious, self-willed and outspoken woman would thrive in the world. He was afraid that she might not be popular, but was confident that she would on no account become a hypocrite. He supported her action when she walked out of the magistrate’s bungalow. He readily consented to her marriage with Binoy even at the risk of excommunication by the Samaj. Lolita inherited her father’s non-sectarian outlook, rational thinking and will-power, but she excelled him in courage. Their intimacy reminded us of that of Hemmalini and, her father, Anada Babu of The Wreck. Lolita had the highest regard for her father. She did not spare any one who tried to belittle

294 Tagore, Gora, p.182.
her father. She was influenced by Binoy's non-sectarian and liberal look, patriotism and spirit of nationalism, and could not tolerate the fanatic arrogant and dominating behavior of Panu Babu. She snubbed him severely and kept him at a distance. She plainly told him: "We have put up with your superior airs long enough, but let me tell you that if you want to land it over father, not a soul in this house will stand it, --not even the servants! Our father is much greater even than what you can imagine yourself to be." Lolita was far more advanced than Sucharita in one respect. She did not consider religion an obstacle to marry Binoy. She found that there was no need for Binoy's initiation paper procured from Binoy by her mother. Sucharita, however, felt just the opposite. Lolita believed: "It can never be necessary for a man to cut off all connection with his religion, his beliefs, or his society, no matter of what nature they may be, in order to be united with other men." Hearing Lolita's advanced views on religion, Anamdamoyi felt as though she was given a new life. In this aspect of propounding universal love Lolita was close to Anamdamoyi. She did not believe in the traditional division of duties between men and women. She wanted to serve the people by teaching and started a school, but the Brahmo-Hindu conflicts stood in her way. She wished to take part in the national movement and involved herself in the uplift of the country. She asked Sucharita: "Because we have been born girls, are we to wear our hearts out within the four walls of our home? Are we never to be of any use to the world?" Tagore presented his vision of the future womanhood through Lolita who was ready to step out of her home, to take part in the national movement, side by side with men. Besides, he visualized through her, the shape of things to come, like love-marriage and career women and equality of the sexes.

4.2.9. Hemnalini— The first educated woman in Tagore, a true representative of the newly emerging class of emancipated woman of the early 20th century who heralded the new age of liberated and progressive women who were free from the prevailing traditional notions and superstitions

Hemnalini in The Wreck was the first educated young lady to be drawn in the novels of Tagore. In her character there was hardly any trace of haughtiness or wildness which in

295 Tagore, Gora, p.164.
296 Ibid. p.305.
297 Ibid. p.226.
the orthodox Hindu society were imagined to be the characteristic features of highly educated ladies. She lost her mother at the age of three. She was brought up with great care and affection by her father, Annad Babu who was looked upon by her as friend, guide and monitor. She never went out of her house alone. She did not take any part in public activities. As she is described to have appeared at the First Arts Examination when the story begins, she must have been seventeen or eighteen years of age. In the orthodox Hindu society it was unusual for a girl of such an age to remain unmarried. But in the Brahmo Samaj some girls remained unmarried for a much longer period. She fell in love with Ramesh who was the tenant of a neighboring house. They used to meet at the tea table in the presence of her father and sometimes of her brother Jogendra and his friend Akshoy. She took upon herself the task of teaching music to Ramesh, but the lessons appeared to have been imparted mostly in the presence of Annada Babu. Her teaching, however, could not improve the knowledge of Ramesh. She took the initiative in suggesting that Ramesh should go to visit the Marble Rocks and the Narmada at Jub bulbore along with her and Annada Babu. It was proposed that Ramesh should marry Hemnalini within a week or so and then take the trip to Jubbalpore. Ramesh, however, had to get the marriage postponed even when the invitation letters had been issued. He did not know what to do with Kamala. He had sent her to the school boarding but she came back to his house on account of the vacation. Akshoy discovered the fact and Ramesh fled away with Kamala without giving any intimation to Hemnalini. Akshoy and Jogendra tried to prove to Hemnalini that Ramesh was guilty of deceiving her. But she stoutly refused to sit in judgment over him till she had heard Ramesh’s explanation. When Jogendra asked her, “Have we nothing to do with the man who was going to marry you?” She replied: “I said nothing about the marriage. Break the engagement or not just as you think fit; but you needn’t try to break my resolution”298. She did not question the authority of his guardians to break off the engagement but she gave clear indication to the effect that she could not banish Ramesh from her heart. Jogendra made her study of English novels responsible for her conduct. He told his father in her presence: “It comes of letting girls read English novels. Hem’s idea is that as Ramesh had deserted her she

298 Tagore, The Wreck, p.115
must be broken-hearted; so she has settled down to make a parade of breaking her heart."299 He advised her to save the family prestige as well as the life of their father by consenting to marry some decent fellow and thus ending the melodrama. Such gabbles at Jogendra stabbed her like a knife. She retorted: "Have I ever said that I renounce the world and shall never marry? If dad orders me to marry anyone I shall do as he tells me. Wait till I disobey him before you talk about melodrama."300 This showed that she was a spirited girl but she did not want to deviate from the age-long custom of the guardians setting the marriage of girls. They did not take her into confidence but settle amongst themselves to get her married to Nalinaksha. They took her to his lecture at the Brahmo Samaj. She was highly impressed by his conversation and high ideals. She gave up taking fish and meat under his influence. She went to Banaras with her father, because Nalinaksha was living there with his mother. When she became quite familiar with them, Kashemankari one day told her: "At your age you should be enjoying life thoroughly; you should be thinking of clothes and amusements instead of religion."301 She asked Hemnalini to give up fasting and abstinence. Hemnalini could not banish Ramesh altogether from her heart even when she got a complete account of his entanglement with Kamala. But she considered it a work of piety to serve a man like Nalinaksha as wife. She, therefore, prayed fervently to God, "Release me, I pray thee, from these earthly ties. Let them be severed once for all. I desire nothing more, only that I may live at peace in this Thy world!"

4.2.10. Shortcomings of educated women under Tagore's pen

Meanwhile, Tagore was frank and sincere enough to point out their shortcomings in their efforts to strive for their equality and emancipation. Sometimes they were not politically mature and they were prone to come to extremity and the life itself made them aware and return to normal way. In The End of Progress written in 1941, in the Calcutta University, the girls and boys mixed about rather freely. They used to celebrate Sarasvati puja with so much splendor that there would be a dearth of marigolds in the markets. The Sarasvati puja was the best occasion for the young girls and boys to show their passions.

\[299\] Ibid. p.129.
\[300\] Ibid. p. 226.
\[301\] Ibid. p. 294.
Amidst all this a society was formed all at once which threatened to ruin their free association. Suriti was the leader of the society. She named it *The Society for the Advancement of Women*. Due to her presence of mind, an anti-male revolt brewed. As if men belonged to a degenerate class. Associating with them was also stopped. Their behavior was considered abominable. The society had a slogan—Boys were less intelligent than girls. They took anything boys did for them as insults. For them to apply make-up was a shame. A few girls among them showed signs of rebellion and they began to say, "To prevent boys and girls from associating freely is contrary to modern practice. That men should respect girls in particular, should offer them chairs, pick up their handkerchiefs, is how it should be." Why should Suriti call it an insult? There was a time when girls were merely attendants, slaves. Now, men came and sang in praise of the girls—this devotion we would not forgo. Salina, in particular, did not like these insipid classes. She associated initiatively with the most naughty and most intelligent boy Nihar who always made mischief with Suriti. She financed Nihar to study in an English-medium college in Darjeeling together with her where she soon died of double pneumonia. And Nihar came back to the hostel in Calcutta. Nihar suddenly got famous for his excellent French welcome address that astonished the guest, an expert on Ancient Indian philosophy from the Sorbonne. After this no one could disregard Nihar. The college resounded to the sound of 'Hihar-da', 'Nihat-da'. The first rule of the society for the advancement of women did not hold good any more. They had given up wearing colorful clothes to beguile men. The first one to break his rule was Suriti. She would have been grateful to get a pretext to make a sacrifice to do Nihar a service. She herself deleted her own name from the society for advancement. Suriti's passion gradually started becoming unbearable. At one time she had somehow or the other given a hint of their marriage. Then she started helping him substantially from her pocket money. This showed that any one could not do against human nature. And Suriti went from extremity that was against the human nature.

To say is one thing, but to do it is another. In *The Patriot* written in 1928, Kalika, Girindra's wife was a patriot. Her opinions on most subjects reached their terminus. Once, when she had been vigorously engaged in picketing against British cloth in Burrabazar, the awe-struck members of her party in a fit of excessive admiration gave her
the name, *Dhruva-vrata*, the woman of unwavering vows. She had a tenacity of mind which never allowed her to let go the thing it had in its clutches. She somewhat forced her husband to wear Khadar. But she failed. So she said, "I am ashamed to go out with you." Her mind was like a mountain stream, that boisterously went round and round a rock, pushing against it in a vain effect to make it flow with its own current. "Your protest against caste," she explained, "is only confined to your mouth. We, on the contrary, carry it out in practice by imposing a uniformly white cover over all color distinctions." Once driving on the streets they found that an old municipal sweeper of their district was being beaten. He had just taken his afternoon bath and was carrying a bucket of clean water in his right hand with a broom under his arm. Dressed in a check-patterned vest, with carefully combed hair still wet, he was walking home, holding his seven-year-old grandson by his left hand, when accidentally he came in touch with somebody of high caste, which gave rise to the man's violent outburst. The boy was piteously imploring every body not to hurt his grandfather, and the old man himself with joint hands uplifted, was asking forgiveness for his unintentional offence. Tears were streaming from his frightened eyes, and blood was smeared across his gray beard. The sight was intolerable to Girindra, the husband. He decided at once to take up the sweeper in their car. Noticing his restlessness, Kalika the wife guessed what was in his mind. Gripping his arm, she whispered, "What are you doing? Don't you see he is a sweeper?" The husband said, "He may be a sweeper, but those people have no right to beat him in this brutal manner." "It's his own fault," Kalika answered, "Would it have hurt his dignity, if he had avoided the middle of the road?" The husband said, "Anyway, I am going to take him into my car."

"Then I leave your car this moment," retorted Kalika angrily, "I refuse to travel with a sweeper." Here Kalika's practical doing is far from what she said.

In the epics, educated women could not be called intellectuals because they learnt mainly for desired match and religious rituals. Their knowledge was limited. They were of two types: wives and *rishi* maidens. The former were much more than the latter. They were not only wives of royal families and *rishi* maidens, but also wives of non-secular wives like celestial and *raksas*. Their number was small and they were far from forming an intellectual group or class. Tagore made great efforts to focus on educated women because they were pioneers of women movements and Tagore saw from them some hope.
of women emancipation and they heralded a new time to come. They strove to mould their own fates instead of accepting them passively. We know such women like Mrinal, Lolita and Sabla. They spoke of the future and forged a new personality for women. Here Achira declined love of a scientist for some reason that marriage would detract him from his whole-hearted devotion to research work. Saudamini’s love for her nation was greater than that for her husband. Kelyani devoted herself to education of women. Aniya became an activist of non-cooperation movement. Labanya kept her dignity, self-respect and independence. Hemnalini and Sucharita heralded a emerging age of the liberated and progressive women. Ella was known for her independent thinking and was the bravest of all the heroines Tagore created. Sissy, Lissy, Ketaki and Pushpamala were modern educated women. Amiya became a revolutionist. Lolita was a rebel against tyranny and oppression far ahead of her time. At the same time, Tagore found out their shortcomings: politically immature, disagreeable between words and behaviors and so on. But from every word of his works we know that Tagore liked educated characters of his time and he cherished great hope to them.