First Chapter

Wives in the Epics and in Tagore
Family is the basic unit of society. Whether in the epic era or in Tagorean era, it was the same. Tolstoy, the famous Russian writer said, “Every family has the same happiness, but has its different unhappiness”. Limited by the society itself, Valmiki and Vyasa could not reflected the wife characters from all the backgrounds and all the aspects accordingly. In the epics, although most wives described were from noble backgrounds, they also had their happiness and unhappiness. In Tagore, women from almost all the backgrounds were depicted. So their “unhappiness” was more different. The epics portrayed some wife characters of different natures while Tagore portrayed more aspects and more number of women characters, all of which reflected the whole status of his society.

1.1. Wives in the epics

In the epics, wives were first closest friends and companions of their husbands. Sita, Draupadi, Gandhari, Kunti, Kausalya and Savitri were all such women. But we can also say that wives were generally subordinate to their husbands. Wives were like shadows of their husbands. Most of them should not perform rites alone, they must do them together with their husbands. Their noblest duty was to be chaste. Chastity was the greatest virtue of the wife. Wives were like something which their husbands could dispose of at will. They were unduly suspected. They were regarded as deficient not only physically, but also emotionally. Sita, Draupadi, Sakuntala, Kausalya, Damayanti, Savitri, Kunti, Gandhari, Subhadra, Satyavati, and Usha were all such women. Lopamudra, followed her husband, Agastya, Gandhari followed her husband Dhrtarastra and retired to the forests. Yudhisthira lost Draupadi to Duryodhana at a game of dice. Ahalya, the wife of Sage Gautama, was lured by Indra. Gautama cursed Ahalya to lose her beauty. Jamadagni, knowing that his wife got greatly excited when she saw a couple flirting in the water, he thought that she had lost her chastity and ordered his son Parasurama to behead her. Rama suspected that his wife Sita was not chaste after he saved her from the Ravana. He exiled her to the forest. In the Epics, wives of different natures, dispositions and characters were depicted.

1.1.1 Sita—the paragon of women

Valmiki utilized all the excellences of his poetic genius, the heights of his imagination and the depth of his deep insights into the human nature in bringing out the ideal
feminine virtues of Sita, the heroine of his magnum opus, the *Ramayana*. The first insight the poet gave is of Sita’s deep love for Rama that no third person could gauge. It was manifest only in their own hearts. On the day of crowning Rama as a *yuvaraja*, Sita was very happy and ready to start with her husband for the ceremony. But Rama, instead of arriving in a big procession, came from his father’s palace barefooted and sullen and narrated the whole woeful tale. Instead of the crowning ceremony, he was exiled into the Dandaka forests for 14 years. He advised her to stay at home and serve his parents. She was not supposed to praise the merits of Rama in the presence of Bharata as the *yuvaraja* like Rama as persons in authority usually did not like other persons extolling before them. A normal woman would have been shocked at hearing this news. But Sita laughed at this advice and said that it was marked with levity and was entirely unbecoming in the mouth of a brave and gallant prince. She said, “It is the wife alone, Oh best of men, that shares whatever fortune might fall to her husband’s share. It is therefore whatever along with you I have been ordered to live in the forest.” She was very shrewd and intelligent. Thus her advocacy went unanswered by Rama. But Rama showed unwillingness to take her with him on account of various troubles and difficulties in the forest life. The forest, he said, were inhabited by several kinds of wild beasts. The roaring of the lions and the loud and harsh cries of tigers would frighten her. Wild elephants and bisons trampled there fearlessly. The forests were beset with big reptiles and very poisonous snakes. Mosquitoes and several insects made it hard to live there. Sita replied: “It does not belong to you to repair to the forest without taking me along with you. Be it the austerity of an ascetic, the forest or heaven, with you will I be everywhere.” “No toil shall I suffer on the way, as if lying on a bed of luxury, while following you in the footstep.” She was sobbing and tears started rolling down her cheeks, and still Rama was dissuading her from her determination to go with him. When Rama did not agree, she persisted with greater vigor and said: “O, Rama, conceiving with pleasure that your company is a heaven to me and your absence a hell. If you do not take me to the forest which I count free from all evils, surely I shall drink poison and never come under the influence of my

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34 ibid. p. 87.
enemies.”35 She told Kausalya respectfully that she would never swerve from her duty, as the light never departs from the sun, and would not fail to respect her husband. She followed Rama insistently into the forest. When Marica the Raksasa, plotting with Ravana, assumed the shape of a beautiful deer, Sita could not resist its temptation. The disguised Raksasa captivated her heart. She wanted Rama to kill the animal for its beautiful skin. And he told Lakshmana to remain with Sita with vigilance in their asylum. Pierced by the peerless shaft from Rama, Marica renounced his deer form, resumed his Raksasa lineament and took Lakshmana away from Sita, and then began to cry in the voice of Rama. “Ah, Sita! Ah Laksmana!” Hearing that cry in the forest resembling her husband’s voice Sita asked Laksmana to immediately go out and save Rama who was crying in the forest. Remembering the behest of Rama, Laksmana did not go, though accosted by Sita. Extremely mortified, Sita spoke to Laksmana, “Oh son of Sumitra, you are an enemy of Rama, in the garb of brother. You did not proceed for the relief of your brother who had been reduced to such a plight...Surely being under the influence of lust for me you did not follow Raghava! For this you did welcome Rama’s disaster; you have no affection for him. For this it is that you did sit here without anxiety not seeing the highly effulgent Rama. Rama, following whom you have repaired to this forest, being in danger, of what avail is life to me?”36 Sita spoke in tears, like to a deer, Laksmana spoke to her, “... no one can defeat Rania. There is none who can do away with Rama in battle...Sooner shall your husband return killing the best of deer. It is neither his voice nor one sent by any deity. It is but an illusion of that Marica....You have been left to my charge by the high-souled Rama— I therefore do not dare leave you behind.”37 Being thus addressed by Laksmana, her eyes were reddened with ire, and she spoke the harsh words to the truthful Laksmana, “O cruel one! O you the destroyer of our line! It is a disgrace to you that you wished to protect me (killing Rama). Me think, this mighty disaster of Rama is welcome to you, or else why should you see this, speak thus. It is not a wonder that an evil desire lurks in you who are a hypocrite and a cruel hearted enemy. Verily are you a monster of wickedness, that Rama repairing to the woods, you have been lust for me,
following him alone... How shall I desire another man after serving the lotus-eyed Rama of dark blue hue as my husband?"\(^{38}\) Hearing these brazen words of Sita, capable of making one’s down stand on end, the self-controlled Laksmana with joined hands spoke to her saying, “You are a very Goddess to me, I therefore dare not answer you....Truly am I incapable of putting up with these words of yours. They have pierced through both of my ears like a heated Naraca...I do always obey my superior’s commands. Your destruction is near at hand that you suspect me, being influenced by this womanish nature. I shall go where Rama is."\(^{39}\) Being thus accosted by Laksmana Sita bathed in tears replied, “Without Rama, O Laksmana, I shall drink virulent poison, enter fire or dive into the Godavari. I shall destroy this body either by hanging or by falling down from the top of a high object. I shall never be able to touch another man but Rama.”\(^{40}\)

When Laksmana left for the woods to save Rama and Sita was left alone, Ravana, availing of this opportunity came before Sita assuming the looks of a mendicant, seeing her the ten-headed demon was pierced with the shaft of passion. He spoke highly of her. Seeing him come under the guise of a twice-born one, Sita worshipped him with diverse articles necessary for serving a guest. Soon Ravana turned back to his ferocious countenance. He lured Sita with blandishments. But Sita was highly engraved, passing by him, replied, “I am a dependant of Rama, who is incapable of being shaken, like to a vast ocean, and resembling Mahendra in effulgence...You shall not be able to touch me like the rays of the sun. O, you wretched Rakṣasa, when you have desired to steal away Rama’s beloved spouse, surely do you see these trees before you as made of gold. Do you wish to swim across an ocean, having a rock tied to your neck? You did wish to get at the sun and moon, to bind a flaming fire with a piece of cloth and walk through iron-spikes, as you have wished to come by the worthy spouse of Rama...Even if you did steal me, that mighty archer Rama, gifted with the prowess of the lord celestials, living, surely shall die, like to a gnat sucking clarified butter.”\(^{41}\) She further denounced the Rakṣasa, “One can breathe on this earth carrying away Indra’s wife, Śacī—but stealing me, the wife of Rama, no body shall be able to live in peace.

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\(^{38}\) Ibid. p.93.
\(^{39}\) Ibid. p. 94.
\(^{40}\) Ibid. p. 94.
Insulting me none shall escape the hands of death even if he drinks the nectar." The ten-headed Raksasa held Sita and clasped her and ascended into his celestial car. Sita in the air shouted and invoked the deities in the forest to tell her husband of her being stolen away. When for the sake of Sita, Jatayu was fatally wounded by Ravana, Sita began lamenting, clasping with her hands. Jatayu was crushed and fallen on the ground by the vehemence of Ravana's prowess. Her fiery ornaments began to fall to the earth with sounds. Carried away by Ravana, Sita, not finding any defender, saw five big monkeys stationed on the top of a hill. In the hope that they might convey the intelligence to Rama, Sita flung off into their midst her gold—gleaming silken sheet, and elegant ornaments. When in Lanka Ravana said, "Sport with me. I am your slave ever obedient to you", Sita told him, "O, Ravana, you may be incapable of being slain either by the gods or the Asuras, yet having roused the high hostility of Rama, you will not be able to liberate your life. Your days are numbered. ...Do you either bind or destroy this body deprived of sensation. This body will I not protect, nor yet this life, O, Ravana." To know whereabouts of Sita, Hanuman entered the Asoka woods and sought for Sita hiding himself on the top of a tree. He saw Ravana luring and tempting Sita and how Sita furiously rejected all such advances from the demon king. Criticizing bitterly, she screamed, "Like to a sinner unworthy of praying for final emancipation, it does not behoove you to come by me. Devoted to one husband I shall never perpetrate such an iniquitous act...I should not live with you since I am another's wife and chaste...With the wealth or riches, you shall not be able to tempt me. As the rays of the sun belong to him, so I am Raghava's only." Then the other Raksasa by turn pursued, enticed and menaced her with reproaches rough and rude as one of them said, "Do you turn back from Rama—your desire shall never be satisfied. And so long as your youth does not fade, do you pass your days happily, O you having inebriate eyes with the lord of Rakasas, in picturesque gardens, and mountain forest. Do you take Ravana, the lord of the Rakasas, for your husband, and thousands of females shall be placed at your service. If you do not follow it

41 Ibid. p.100.
42 Ibid. p. 102.
43 Ibid. p.118.
44 Ibid. p. 119.
we shall all instantly banquet you." Against this Sita said, "What you have all said and which is against human usage and vicious, does not find place in my mind. A woman cannot be the wife of a Raksasa. Eat me up if you will, I will never follow your words. Poor or deprived of kingdom, he who is my husband, is my preceptor. I am ever devoted to him, like Suvarcała to the sun." Expecting that Rama was coming to save her, she said, "Along with Laksmana, Rama shall soon reduce Lanka to this plight. And observed by them the enemy shall not live for a moment." She preferred death to life, "Death is preferable to me than life since I have been separated from the high-souled heroic Rama, of unblemished character and the slayer of foes." Trijata, one of the Raksasis who was sympathetic to Sita told Ravana, "I had a terrible dream last night and in that dream I foresaw the overthrow of the Raksasa race and the conquest of her husband. . . . No more rough words therefore; do you console the lady and humbly pray her to forgive you. Foosoth, from Raghava shall proceed the mighty disaster of the Raksasas. If Maithili, the daughter of the king Janaka, be pleased with you, you might be saved from the mighty disaster." Two months would pass away in no time and Sita would suffer the pain of death. She would be killed by Ravana. She desired to do away speedily with her being by means of poison or a sharp weapon. But there was no one in the city of Raksasas who would bring her the poison or weapon. She even thought of hanging herself with her braid. Hanuman heard from the beginning to the end the bewailing of Sita, the story to Trijata’s dream and the threats of the Raksasis. Hanuman thought if he did not console Sita of comely stature, she would renounce her life. And he had to take the message from Sita to Rama. He began to tell her the story of Rama including his incorporation with Sugriva, which made her to get rid of the doubt and made her mind worked up with rapture. He gave a precious ring with Rama’s name engraved on it, given by Rama and brought as a token to increase her confidence. To rescue Sita out of Lanka, Hanuman asked her to ride on his back so that he could carry her away. But Sita didn’t

46 Ibid. Sundara-Kanda, p.76, Section 24.
48 Ibid. Sundara-Kanda, p.79, Section 26.
49 Ibid. p.81.
50 Ibid. Sundara-Kanda, p.90, Section 27.
like willingly to touch any body’s person but Rama. For Hanuman to take a message to Rama, she told the story that a crow tore her breast and out of mercy, Rama saved the bird albeit worthy of being killed. She gave Hanuman a gem as a sign which Rama should certainly recognize.

Entering the city of Lanka with Vibhisana’s permission, Hanuman, again permitted, entered the Vrks Vatika. He told Sita that Ravana had been slain by Rama, helped by Vibhisana and accompanied by the monkeys and Laksmana. Sita was speechless for sometime. She forgave, out of pity, all these she-servants of Ravana, who used to torture her at the command of Ravana. She wished to see Rama even without bathing. Hearing of arrival of her wife who had lived long in the abode of the Raksasas, Raghava, had a simultaneous bout of anger, delight and depression. He asked Sita to leave behind the palanquin and come to him on foot. As if hiding herself in her own passion in shame, Sita approached her husband. Beholding his beloved spouse near him and afraid of popular ignominy his heart was broken. He told Sita, “I have suspected your character; you therefore standing before me, are distressing to me like to a lamp before one who is subject to an eye-disease... You were taken by Ravana on his lap, beheld by him with sinful eyes, how can I take you back, bring disgrace upon my great family?... I have got no attachment for you— go wherever you wish.” Sita, trembling like a creeper torn by the trunk of an elephant, began to weep profusely. She told Rama, “Why did you, O hero, like a common man addressing an ordinary woman, make me these, harsh and unbecoming words painful to ears? O you of long arms, I am not what you have taken me to be. Do you believe me—I do swear by my own character. O lord, though my person was touched by another, it was not in my power; nor was it a willful act of mine; accident is to blame in this” To show her chastity, she asked Rama, “Make a funeral pyre for me, O Saumitri. That is the only remedy for this disaster. Being thus branded with an unfounded stigma I do not like to keep my life. To adopt the proper course for me who had been renounced by my disaffected husband I shall enter this.” And understanding Rama’s intention by gestures and at his command the powerful Saumitri prepared a funeral pyre. Thereupon circumambulating Rama, holding her head down, Sita

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51 Ibid. Yuddha-Kanda, p.351, Section 115.
52 Ibid. p.352, Section 116.
approached the fire as she said, “As my heart has never gone away from Rama, may you protect me, O fire, the witness of the people.” Yama, Varuna, Siva, Brahma came to condemn Rama, saying, “O lord, you are the preserver of all the worlds and the foremost of the wise, why did you neglect Sita entering into fire? Why did you not understand yourself the foremost of the celestials? ... Why did you neglect Vaidehi like an ordinary man?” The God of fire rose up and carrying on his lap Sita gave her to Rama. When they went back to Ayodhya, Rama was crowned. The citizens spoke unpleasant things about him and Sita, “Ravana did forcibly place Sita on his lap; how can then Rama enjoy delight in her company? Having taken her to the city of Lanka, Ravana did keep her in the Ashoka forest and Sita was brought under the control of the Raksasa. Still Rama has not been worked up with hatred by Sita. From now we shall break the bad conduct of our wives—for the subjects always tread the footsteps of their king.” Being afraid of calumny of the citizens, Rama ordered Laksmana to take pregnant Sita with a chariot to the hermitage of the ascetics ever engaged in pious actions on the pretext of satisfying her desire as she was in her full-term pregnancy. Hearing the ruthless words of Laksmana, Sita was greatly sorry, fell down on the earth. She said to Laksmana, “Tell Rama that the citizens have vilified me.” Valmiki came to Sita and consoled her and took her to his hermitage. In the hermitage of Valmiki, she gave birth to the twin, Kusa and Lava. Valmiki took Kusa and Lava to Rama’s Asvamedha sacrifice where Kusa and Lava sung the poem of the Ramayana in the assembly and Rama listened to it. He understood from the story that Kusa and Lava were his sons. He ordered Valmiki to communicate to the ascetics that if Sita was sinless and had led a pure life in the forest and let Sita give proof of purity by the ascetic’s permission and swear before the assembly in the morning of the next day. The great ascetics Valmiki addressed Rama, saying, “O son of Dasaratha, in fear of calumny, you did renounce her near my hermitage, albeit Sita is pure and follows the way of morality... These irrepressible twin brothers are your sons. I now swear before you, that if this Maithili is found touched by any sin I shall not reap the fruit of my

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53 Ibid. p.352, Section 116.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid. Uttar-Kanda, p. 142, Section 44.
56 Ibid. p.149, Section 48.
ascetic observances extending over many thousand years.” There upon beholding all people assembled there, Sita came with folded palms and said, “I have never thought of any other person in my mind but Rama, by the strength of this virtue let the goddess Vasundhara give me room.” From inside the earth a celestial and excellent throne rose up. Having stretched out her arms and taken Maithili, the goddess earth welcomed her and placed her on the throne. And while seated on the throne she was covered with the continued showers of celestial flowers.

From the above we can see the excellent qualities of Sita as a historical and traditional model in morality. The first insight the poet gives is of Sita’s deep love for Rama, which no third person could gauge. She experienced three great ordeals for her love to Rama. The first is her following Rama to the exile to the forest; the second is her being kidnapped by Ravana and the last is that she was gossiped by the citizens of Ayodhya. Sita is regarded as the leading and foremost personality of the fair sex, a model housewife, maintaining the unity and amity of the family.

1.1.2. Draupadi—Perfect but revengeful wife, the embodiment of courage, fortitude, sense and sensibility, and even pride and prejudice

Much like Sita, we have the same heroine Draupadi in the Mahabharata. She was the daughter of Drupada, the King of Panchala, sister of Dhrtadyumna and the wife of the Pandavas. She emerged from the dais of the Yaga-fire. Immediately a voice from heavens was heard saying thus: “This Sumadhyama (a girl in her blossoming youth) would work on the side of God and will cause terror to the Kauravas” When she grew to the age of marriage, her father, the King Drupada held a Svayamvara which the Pandavas attended after they had escaped from the lacquer palace. Dhrupada had placed a mighty steel bow in the marriage hall. When all the distinguished guests were seated in the marriage hall, the king announced that his daughter would be given in marriage to the one who bent the steel bow and with it shot a steel arrow, through the central aperture of a revolving disc, at a target placed above. It was Arjuna, the third brother of the Pandavas who rose and meditating strung the bow with ease and hit the target. Draupadi then put the garland on Arjuna’s neck and accepting him as her husband went with him and stayed that night at

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57 Ibid. p. 228, Section 97.
58 Ibid. p. 229, Section 97.
the house of the potter. The joy knew no bounds when the king Drupada knew that his son-in-law was none other than the celebrated Arjuna. The Pandavas then took Draupadi to their home in Kanaka and as soon as Kuntidevi heard the footsteps of her sons outside she asked from inside to share that day’s alms among themselves, not actually knowing that it was a bride that had been brought by them. Thus Draupadi became the consort of the five Pandava brothers. Duryodhana, son of Dhrtarastra, the blind brother of Pandu, the late father of the Pandavas, challenged Yudhisthira, the eldest of the Pandavas to a game of dice. Yudhisthira lost all and in the end in the despair pledged Draupadi and lost her as well. Immediately Duryodhana asked Vidura, their uncle, to bring Draupadi to his palace and make her serve as a maid. Vidura did not consent to that. Then Duryodhana asked Pratikami, his suta to bring her. While entering the palace of Draupadi, Pratikami was as timid as a dog about to enter the cage of a lion. He informed Draupadi of his mission. Draupadi sent him back and then Duryodhana sent another messenger. Draupadi went with him to the court of the Kauravas. As soon as Dussasana saw Draupadi he jumped at her and caught hold of her hair and dragged her to the center of the assembly. While Dussasana was dragging her she told him in piteous tones, “I am in my monthly period and I have only the upper garment on me. Please do not take me to the assembly.” Dussasana was not moved by these pleadings and he continued to drag her. Bhima could not hold himself calm against this atrocity any longer and in a roar of wrath he abused Yudhisthira for pledging Draupadi thus and losing her. Arjuna however remonstrated gently with Bhima. Then to the consternation of all, Dussasana started his shameful work of pulling Draupadi’s robes to strip her all of the clothes. All earthly aid having failed, Draupadi in utter helplessness implored divine mercy and succor. Then a miracle occurred. In vain did Dussasana toil to pull the garments completely and make her naked. As he pulled off each, fresh garments were seen to come from somewhere and cover her nudity. Dussasana retired from his work exhausted and disappointed. Then Karna ordered that the Draupadi should be sent to the palace of Duryodhana as a maid. Hearing this Dussasana once again started dragging her. Draupadi wept. Bhima roared in fury and said that if his brother, Yudhisthira, gave him permission he would at that instant smash the Kauravas to death just like a lion killing his prey. However Bhima and Drona interfered and pacified him. Duryodhana stood up andstriking his right thigh with his right hand
challenge Bhima to a fight. Bhima did not like Duryodhana exhibiting his naked thigh in
front of Draupadi and an angry Bhima declared that he would in a battle break
Duryodhana’s thigh with his mace. Dhrtarastra came to the scene and pacified both of
them and turning to Draupadi asked her to name any boon she wanted from him.
Draupadi said: “In order that my son, Pradivindhya, should not be called ‘Dasaputra’
(son of a servant), his father Yudhisthira should be released from his servitude.”59 The
boon was granted. Then she requested that all the other Pandavas should be set free. That
was also allowed. Dhrtarastra then asked her to name a third boon. Draupadi said that all
kshatriya women were entitled to two boons and took a vow that her hair which was let
loose by the hand tainted by the wicked Dussasana would be tied properly only by a hand
tainted by the blood of Dussasana. After that in strict obedience to the conditions of the
wager the Pandavas started for the forest with Draupadi to spend 12 years in the forests
and one-year incognito. When they were in exile Draupadi consoled Yudhisthira with her
soothing words. While the Pandavas were living in the Badarik asrama waiting for the
return of Arjuna who had gone on a year’s pilgrimage, Draupadi was carried away by
Jatasura and after she was rescued from Jatasura and then along with her husband, she
dwelt in the hermitage of Arstisena. Once Durvasa with his disciples came to the forest as
the guests of the Pandavas. They came late and Draupadi had taken her food already. The
Aksayapatra (the never-empty pot) could not be invoked to produce anything that day
and Draupadi was greatly agitated and worried. She prayed to Krishna for succor and
Krishna also coming hungry searched in the pot for something to eat and finding a bit of
spinach sticking to the sides of the pot grabbed it with avidity and ate it. The guests felt
as if they had enjoyed a sumptuous feast and left the place well pleased. After their 12
years’ of exile in the forest the time for living in disguise for a year came and Draupadi
with Yudhisthira and his brothers spent that period in the palace of king Virata. Each
assumed a new name and accepted different types of service under the king. Draupadi
took the name of Sairandhri and served as a companion and an attendant to the princess.
One day Kicaka, the mighty brother-in-law of the king, tried to molest Draupadi and
Bhimasena killed him. It was at the time when the incognito life was coming to an end

that the Kaurava army headed by Duryodhana carried away the cattle of king Virata. The king was absent from the palace at that time and the prince, Uttara, had no guts to go and attack the Kauravas army. It was Draupadi who then suggested sending of Bhrannala of the palace (Arjuna) to serve as charioteer of Uttara. The 13 years’ of life in exile and incognito came to an end. But the Kauravas were not prepared to give half of the kingdom to the Pandavas. The differences between them increased and it led to a great war. Krishna agreed to go as a messenger to the court of Dhrtarasra and asked for the share of the Pandavas. Before leaving he asked each of the Pandavas what he should say at the court of Dhrtarasra. Draupadi then approached Krishna in private and said that she desired a war to defeat the Kauravas. She then reminded Krishna of the vow taken by Bhimasena that he would tie her hair with his hands smeared with blood from the thighs of Dussasana. Finally the great war broke out. Many warriors on both sides were killed. When Abhimanyu was killed, Subhadra wept bitterly and Draupadi who went to console her fainted. Krishna revived her. Draupadi asked Bhimasena to bring to her the inborn jewel on the head of Asavatthama, son of Drona. She wanted to take revenge on him for killing her brother Dhrstadyumna. After a fierce 18-day battle the Kauravas were defeated and their tribe annihilated. The Pandavas took hold of Hastinapura and Draupadi was one among those who persuaded Yudhisthira to take charge of the administration of the state. Yudhisthira performed an Asvamedha Yajna and Draupadi gave presents to Chitraganda and Ulupi who were present at the function then. After the Asvamedha, Draupadi lived in Hastinapura serving Kunti and Gandhari alike for a long time. It was at that time that Dhrtarasra, Gandhari and Kunti went to the forests and Draupadi expressed her desire to go along with them to help them out. But they did not allow her to do so. While the Pandavas were living in Hastinapura as the rulers eminent rishis from different parts of the country visited them and some of the Siddhas (realized souls) among them saw Draupadi as the goddess Mahalaksmi herself. At the fag end of their lives the Pandavas crowned Pariksit as the King of Hastinapura and started on their Mahaparasthana. They traveled for long through the Himalayas and reached Mahameru. At that time Draupadi fell down and dead. Then Bhimasena asked Yudhisthira why without any particular ailment Draupadi died, Yudhisthira replied that it was because she showed her great interest in Arjuna. The Pandavas walked on and all of them except
Yudhisthira died on the way one by one. Even before Yudhisthira entered Svarga Draupadi and the four brothers had reached there.60

Draupadi, through the *Mahabharata*, was the embodiment of courage, fortitude, sense and sensibility, and even pride and prejudice. In a sense she was the central figure of the great epic. In short, she was a veritable goddess in human form. As a wife, Draupadi became the ideal mistress of the household when Yudhisthira was installed as king of Indraprastha (modern Delhi) on the bank of the Yamuna. Mercy and the solicitude for the poor and the distressed were not the only traits in the character of Draupadi. She was a woman possessing courage and a sense of dignity.

Draupadi’s discourse on the duties and responsibilities of the wife on this occasion was one of the important chapters of the *Mahabharata*.

The stay of the Pandava brothers with Draupadi, during the 13th year of their banishment, at the house of Virata, the king of the Matsya country, was perhaps the greatest penance of their life.

She had certain limitation in her character—-and who has not? —which prevented her from achieving what she desired. But in spite of her failings, Draupadi remained a unique type of woman, not merely a fond and devoted wife, but a true helpmate and partner in life’s affairs. She was a good housewife, wise counselor, dear company and beloved pupil in the cultivation of the fine arts. She was the very embodiment of *Sri* or good fortune in the house of the Pandavas. She was occasionally subject to moods of indignation, no doubt, but the loftiness of her soul, her unfailing courage in the face of disasters, her spirit of self-sacrifice, and above all, her moral earnestness and spiritual integrity have shed a luster on the ideals of womanhood in ancient India.

1.1.3. Gandhari— A wife of devotion and mother of righteousness

Gandhari in the *Mahabharata* was different from Kausalya in her righteousness. She was the wife of Dhrtrarastra, and the daughter of King Subala of the land of Gandhara. She became a devotee of Siva even from her childhood. Siva became pleased with her and blessed her saying that she would bear a hundred sons. Bhismma came to know this and he planned to get her married to Dhrtrarastra. One day he sent a messenger to Subala

making a proposal. Subala knew that Dhraratra was born blind but considering his lineage and the powerful alliance it would make, consented to the proposal. Sakuni, brother of Gandhari, then by the order of his father, took Gandhari to Hastinapura and Dhraratra accepted her as his wife. Gandhari obeying his father's instructions without a demur accepted her husband with such devotion that she made herself a blind tying a silk shawl around her eyes. Once Vyasa came to her exhausted with hunger and thirst. Gandhari appeased his hunger and thirst with tasty food. Vyasa was immensely pleased and he also blessed her and said she would bear a hundred sons. Very soon she became pregnant. But even after two years she did not deliver, while Kunti, wife of Pandu, gave birth to a son. Grief stricken, she hit hardly on her womb secretly and then a great mass of flesh came out. Then Vyasa appeared before her and advised her to cut the lump of flesh into a hundred pieces and deposit one each in a jar of ghee. Vyasa himself cut it into pieces. Gandhari expressed her desire to have a girl also. Vyasa cut it into hundred and one pieces and put them in hundred and one jars of ghee. In due time, the jars broke and a hundred sons and a daughter came out of them. The daughter was named Dussala. Dhraratra got another son named Yuyutsu. When the Kuruksetra War was over the sons of Gandhari and their followers were killed. Dhraratra suggested that the Pandavas visit Gandhari and pay homage to her. The Pandavas therefore, went and stood before Gandhari very respectfully. Vengeance boiled in her heart and her body shivered. Gandhari was about to curse the Pandavas when Vyasa, intervened, saying, "Gandhari, don't you remember you said that the victory would lie on the side of the righteous in this war? Your words are not wasted. The Pandavas won the battle because right was on their side. So why should you get agitated?" Gandhari became calm on these words and she admitted that the end of the Kuru dynasty came because of the mistakes of Duryodhana, Karna and Dussasana. She therefore, treated the Pandavas as her own sons. Following the instructions of Dhraratra, the Pandavas approached and bowed before Gandhari. She covered her face with a cloth and wept, tears rolling down her cheeks. When Dharmaputra went to touch her feet the latter saw through her veil on her face the foot-nails of Dharmaputra. A few drops of the lachrymal water fell on the foot-nails of Dharmaputra.

making them turn blue instantly. At the end of the battle the aggrieved Gandhari went to Kuruksetra together with Krishna and other relatives. Seeing mighty kings on the Kaurava side lying dead like huge trees lying truncated, Gandhari burst into tears. She knew that Krishna was at the root of all this. Embittered she looked at Krishna and cursed him, “Ho, Krishna, thirty-six years from this day you will lose your sons, ministers, friends and relatives. You will become a lone walker in the forest and be killed by trickery.”

It was because of this curse that the Yadav tribe perished and Krishna was struck by the arrow of a hunter bringing his life to an end. After the great Kuruksetra battle heartbroken Dhrtarastra and Gandhari accompanied by Kunti, Vidura and Sanjaya went to the forests to spend the rest of their life. Many people and the Pandavas accompanied them up to the Ganges and there near the asrama of Satayupa, Dhrtarastra made a hut and lived with Gandhari and Kunti. Gandhari and Kunti expressed their desire to Vyasa that they would like to see the dead sons and relatives once again. Vyasa then asked them to go and take a dip in the water. When they rose after a dip they saw standing on the shore of the river the great warriors Karna and Duryodhana and others. By the yogic power of Vyasa even the blind Dhrtarastra could see his dead sons alive once again. Two days later, a massive fire broke out in the forest in which Dhrtarastra, Kunti and Gandhari were burnt to death.

Undoubtedly, Gandhari was the noblest and best of the woman character in the Mahabharata. She, more than any other persons in the epic, kept her faith in the moral order undiminished, and in the hours of supreme crisis in her life, she always unhesitatingly sacrificed narrow, personal, selfish interests, and embraced the cause of virtue and righteousness. This she did even at the peril of herself and the fortune of her family. She kept aloft the standard of Dharma and asked others in the same manner. After the terrible disaster of the Kuruksetra War, in which she lost all her hundred sons and other near relatives, Gandhari stood firm and maintained her unflinching face in the triumph of the moral law, and she could boldly express her feelings to that effect. When she knew that her husband was blind, she made up her mind that she would voluntarily

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62 Ibid. p.564.
deny herself the pleasure of sight by blinding herself, which maintained on throughout her life, never wavering for a moment—so great was her devotion to her husband. She gave birth to one hundred sons, but their sons did not fulfill the expectation of the virtuous mother. She never approved of the conduct of her sons towards their Pandava cousins, and often appealed to her husband to check their evil propensities. In the game of dice at the court of Hastinapura Yudhisthira gambled away everything; his kingdom, fortunes, his brothers and even his dear wife. There was a great jubilation at the court, in which the old King Dhrtarastra also joined. But there was one person in Hastinapura on that day who was terribly stricken with grief. It was Gandhari. On seeing the base and irreligious conduct of her sons and the unmerited and unjust sufferings of the Pandavas, she approached her husband and asked him to express his complete disapproval of the conduct of their wicked sons. She went even a step further and told her husband to banish Duryodhana, who had become a disgrace to the whole Kuru family. As a mother Gandhari never allowed her love and affection for her sons to get the better of her judgment and wisdom. Her voice throughout the Mahabharata was the voice of warning to her sons, who were treading the path of error and injustice. Her constant exhortation to Duryodhana was to make up for the quarrel existing between the Kauravas and the Pandavas by finding out a formula of peaceful and amicable settlement. When Krishna came to Hastinapura on the eve of the Kuruksetra War as the plenipotentiary of the Pandavas and his specific peace proposal were contemptuously rejected by Duryodhana, Gandhari throwing aside all hesitations, appeared personally in the court and sternly rebuked Duryodhana for his wayward conduct. She plainly told her son in the midst of the entire assembly that the wages of sin was death. She also said the war would not solve any problems; but would only lead to the further complications. So her definite and emphatic advice to her son was to restrain his greed and desist from war. Duryodhana, however, had no respect for these sagely words of his mother and adopted war as an instrument of his statecraft. After the outbreak of the War, which lasted for 18 days, Duryodhana used to visit his mother every day before going to the battlefield, for her blessings. The pathetic prayer of Duryodhana was that his mother should wish victory for his cause, but in spite of his repeated entreaties, Gandhari always uttered the highly confident words before Duryodhana that righteousness always and invariably triumphed.
When the War ended, in which all her sons were slain, Krishna, after pacifying Gandhari, asked her permission to go away immediately to save the Pandava princes from an impending danger from Aswatthaman. She quickly asked him to depart and save the Pandava princes from this disaster; such was her composure in the midst of a terrible calamity, and so great were her sense of duty and her affection for the Pandavas. There was only one occasion when she seemed to be overpowered by terrible grief. Before the dead bodies of her sons in the bloody battle field, she fell unconscious. Gandhari made Krishna responsible for the terrible Kuruksetra War and uttered a fearful curse on the Yadavas, of which he was the most distinguished representative. She prophesied that a cruel calamity would overtake the house of the Yadavas, inasmuch as Krishna ignored or failed to prevent the ruinous war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. On the strength of her chastity and asceticism, she even said that Krishna himself in no distant future would fall a prey to a foul death. It is important to bear this in mind in this connection that Krishna smilingly accepted this curse and recognized her truthfulness, piety and penance. After the Kuruksetra War, Dhritarastra and Gandhari lived for 16 years at Hastinapura under the protection of the Pandavas. They forgot to a great extent their grief at the loss of their sons on account of the wonderful care and sympathy bestowed upon them by Yudhisthira. At the end of the 16th year, however, they decided to go on a mission of final pilgrimage to the Himalayas. In this mission they were accompanied by Dhritarastra’s half-brother Vidura, his minister Sanjaya, and Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas. On the eve of their departure, Dhrtarastra addressed a big assembly of the citizens of Hastinapura and men from the countryside. In this meeting Gandhari appeared by the side of her husband with her eyes blindfolded, and made a request to the assembled multitude through her husband asking their forgiveness for the sins of her sons. The final departure scene of the old sorrowful King Dhrtarastra was pathetic. Kunti came forward to lead the journey. Gandhari put her hands on the shoulders of Kunti, and Dhrtarastra followed Gandhari, placing his hands on her shoulders. Vidura and Sanjaya were on either side of this procession. The citizens of Hastinapura wept aloud like orphans as the procession came out of the main gate of the city, but Dhrtrarastra and Gandhari and others walked on unmoved. In the Himalayas, they spent a few more years till they were burnt alive by a conflagration, which enveloped that part of the forest in which they lived.
Confronted by it, they showed remarkable courage and fortitude. They refused to escape from the fire; on the other hand, they sat down on the ground calmly and with a spirit of resignation welcoming the approaching of the fire. On the day of her passing away from the earth, Gandhari's eyes were still bandaged, and she made the supreme sacrifice with unflinching loyalty to her ideals. She exemplified the best ideals of Indian womanhood through the ages from the days of the Mahabharata, and remained immortal in the minds of millions of Indians who derive their inspiration from the great epic.

1.1.4. Kunti—An embodiment of patience, fortitude and self-sacrifice, a noble heroine

In the Mahabharata, Kunti was the wife of king Pandu and the mother of the five Pandavas brothers. She was the sister of Krishna's father Vasudeva. Her real name was Prtha. Vasudeva and Prtha were the children of king Surasena of the Yadav dynasty. King Kuntibhoja was the son of Surasena's sister. He had no issues. Surasena had promised to give the daughter first born to him as the adopted daughter of Kuntibhoja, and accordingly his first-born daughter Prtha was given to Kuntibhoja, and Kunti was brought up in his palace. From that day onwards Prtha came to be known as Kunti. To treat Brahmins who came to the court of Kuntibhoja with worshipful offerings was the duty of Kunti. Once sage Durvasa visited Kuntibhoja, and as he knew that the sage was easily annoyed Kunti was specially deputed for his service, and she served him to the utmost. One day, to test Kunti, he asked her to be ready with his food by the time he took his bath, and he took practically no time to return after bath and sit for meals. But that time Kunti had managed to cook his food, which she placed before him in a plate. The food was too hot and steaming, and the sage meaningfully looked at the back of Kunti. Realizing the meaning of the look, Kunti turned her back to the sage for him to place the plate of food thereon. The sage placed it accordingly on her back and began eating. Though her back was really burning she showed no sign of it. Pleased at her behavior the sage taught her a mantra and blessed that repeating this mantra she would invoke which ever Deva she liked and thanks to his favor she would get children. After the departure of Durvasas from the palace, Kunti developed an irresistible desire to test the efficacy of the mantra. And one day she invoked Surya, the Sun-god with the mantra. Thereupon Surya approached her in the guise of a youthful Brahmin. Kunti got alarmed. Owning to the
disinclination to become an unmarried mother, Kunti could not make up her mind to welcome the Brahmin youth. But Surya deva argued that his coming could not be in vain, and Kunti had to yield. She requested Surya for a son adorned with helmet and earrings etc. Surya assured Kunti that even though a child was born to her from him, that would not affect her virginity and departed. Kunti delivered a son in due course of time in secret. She locked up the child in a box and floated it in the Yamuna. An old charioteer called Adhiratha picked up the child from the river and brought it up as though it were his own son. That boy grew up to become the famous Karna. In due course, Kuntibhoja celebrated Kunti’s savayamvara and she chose King Pandu of the lunar dynasty as her husband, and Pandu took her to Hastinpur in all pomp and glory. Pandu had another wife also called Madri, and all the three of them led a very happy life. During one of those days Pandu went hunting and arrowed to death sage Kindama, who was making love with his wife in the forest, but both of them had assumed the form of deer. The sage cursed Pandu with death the moment he touched his wives, and grief-stricken at the curse he told his wives about it and decided to take to Sanyasa. But the wives told him that they would commit suicide in case he took to Sanyasa. Ultimately Pandu went to Satasrnga with his wives, and there he began to perform some penance. After some time Pandu asked his wives to become mothers by some noble persons. But Kunti and Madri did not agree to it. Then Kunti told Pandu about the boon she had got from Durvas, and with his permission she bore three sons called Dharmaputra, Bhima and Arjuna respectively from the three Devas, Dharma, Vayu and Indra. As it had been ordained that the fourth and fifth children would bring sorrows and pain to the parents Kunti satisfied herself with three children. But as Pandu desired that Madri also should have children by Kunti’s mantra. She used the remaining mantra and two sons, Nakula and Sahadeva from the Asvinidevas were born to her. During the winter the forest was fragrant with flowers, Pandu forgot all about the sage’s curse and indulged in sexual pleasures with Madri, and immediately he expired. Kunti and Madri competed with each other to end their life in the funeral pyre of their husband. But as the sages and other relatives insisted that one of them should live to bring up the children, Madri alone ended her life, and Kunti returned to Hastinpur with the five children. At Hastinpur differences cropped up between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Kunti and the Pandavas removed themselves to the “Lacquer
palace" built at Varanavata. When the palace was gutted by fire Kunti and her sons escaped through a secret tunnel to the forest, and Bhima carried the worn-out Kunti on his shoulders. In the forest, the Raksasa woman Hidimba, requested Kunti to permit Bhima to become his husband. And Kunti advised Bhima to beget a child by Hidimba, and thus was born Ghatotkaka.

In the city named Ekacakra, Vyasa consoled Kunti. There the Brahmin complained to Kunti about the depredations of Bakasura. Kunti got Baka killed by Bhima and asked the Brahmins to keep the matter secret. On the advice of Brahmin who came there by accident Kunti and others visited the Panchala kingdom, and there, Arjuna, having defeated all the kings present at Panchali's Svayamvara, wedded her. The Pandavas who returned with Panchala at the dusk were asked by Kunti to enjoy that day's alms together among themselves. Accordingly Panchala became the wife of all the five Pandavas. Vidura, at the court of the Panchali king saluted Kunti and presented to her varieties of gems. Kunti and Vidura talked about the painful incidents of the past, and Vidura escorted the Pandavas back to Hastinopura. Arjuna led a solitary life in the forest for one year, and then returned to Hastinopura with Subhadra whom he had married in the meanwhile. Kunti received Subhadra heartily. In the game of dice with Duryodhana, Dharmaputra was defeated, and the Pandavas again started for their life in the forest. During this period, Kunti lived in Vidura's house. Meanwhile Krishna one day visited Kunti and she told Krishna about the fate of her sons with tears in her eyes. Duryodhana refused to give half of the kingdom to the Pandavas who returned after 12 year's life in exile in the forest and one year's life anonymously. Krishna prompted the Pandavas to war with the Kauravas, and both the parties began preparations for the great war. War clouds grew thick and fast, and Kunti got restless at Vidura's house. Her heart trembled at the disasters of the war as described by Vidura. She went alone to the banks of Ganges where Karna was engaged in a Japa with his hands raised and the face turned to the east. Kunti waited for sometime after which they began to talk. With tears rolling down her eyes Kunti told Karna that he was her son and implored him to return to the Pandavas side to which Karna replied that it was impossible because he had vowed to kill Arjuna and that she would always have five sons alive. If Arjuna were to be no more he would be there for her instead. Kunti shuddered at those terrible words of Karna. The great war
began and ended after 18 days which felt like 18 years. Thousands of warriors on the Kauravas side like the mighty Karna were no more. On the Pandavas side many were killed. Though the Pandavas won the war, their hearts no more enjoyed peace or happiness. Kunti suffered as though caught in a wild fire. She asked the Pandavas to perform the last rites for Karna as well. When she let out the secret that Karna was her first-born child Dharmaputra burst into tears. Kunti consoled Subhadrā and Uttara who were lamenting over the death of Abhimanyu. She requested Krishna to cremate the dead son of Uttara. Then Kunti went to Gandhari, who stood there bathed in tears. Grief-stricken, Dhṛtarāstra and Gandhari started for the forest. Holding Gandhari's hand in hers Kunti led the way. The Pandavas prevented their mother from going, but she did not yield. She advised Dharmaputra to have a special eye on Sahadeva, not to forget Karna's name and not to show any displeasure towards Bhima and Panchali. But the Pandavas wanted to follow their beloved mother into the forest. Panchali and Subhadrā stationed themselves behind Kunti, who shed copious tears at the sight. Dhṛtarāstra and Gandhari, who also felt deeply pained at the sight, tried their best to dissuade Kunti from following them to the forest. But Kunti consoled her sons and daughters-in-law with sympathetic and assuring words and followed Dhṛtarāstra and Gandhari to the banks of the Ganges, where all of them lived together. The Pandavas felt acutely the absence of their mother at home. They went to the forest and paid their respects to Kunti on the banks of the Ganga. Kunti embraced Sahadeva with tears in her eyes. Though Yudhishthira and Sahadeva wanted to stay with Kunti, She did not allow them to do that. Kunti, Dhṛtarāstra and Gandhari performed penance in the forest near the Ganges, taking food only once on a month. The three of them died there in a wild fire. Their relatives immersed their immortal remains in the Ganges and performed the necessary obsequies.

Kunti throughout the Mahabharata was the embodiment of patience, fortitude and self-sacrifice. As the wife of Pandu, she accompanied her husband to the Himalayas. There she gave birth to three sons. After the death of her husband, Kunti came to Hastinapura with her three sons and also with two stepsons, Nakula and Sahadeva. She showed wonderful patience and forbearance while she passed her days under the care of King Dhṛtarāstra at Hastinapura. After passing through the ordeal of wild fire at Varanavata, where Dhṛtarāstra and his son Duryodhana planned the burning of the entire
Pandava family, she escaped with her sons, after crossing the Ganges and wandering for days together in the wilderness, to the kingdom of the Panchalas. When Arjuna took Draupadi as new bride to her, she in darkness took her as alms and asked her five sons to share. When Yudhisthira was given half of the kingdom of the Kurus with Indraprastha on the Yamuna as his capital, Kunti was the queen mother. But her days of happiness and prosperity were short-lived, as Yudhisthira and his brothers, together with Draupadi, had to go to the forest. Because Yudhisthira lost everything in a game of dice plotted by Duryodhana and his uncle Sakuni. She was terribly aggrieved, but remained firm as a rock and uttered words of encouragement and advice to Draupadi as she was accompanying the Pandavas to the forest. Kunti stayed at the house of Vidura during the 13 years that the Pandavas had to live in exile. After this exile, the Pandavas returned and demanded their heritage. Duryodhana refused to return it, and war followed as a consequence. Before the outbreak of the great war, Kunti advised against compromise on humiliating terms. She could never forgive the Kauravas on account of the insults that they had heaped particularly on Draupadi. She was greatly pained that nobody except Vidura had protested against the inhuman conduct of Dussasana towards Draupadi on the day of the tricky game of dice. She pointed out that Yudhisthira's power of understanding and common sense was blunted by his excessive reading of the religious texts. Her counsel was war. Kunti now related the famous story of Vidura, the queen of the Sindhu country. Vidura had asked her only son Sanjaya to embrace death instead of making compromises with disgrace and dishonor, since it was far better to arise and shine even for a moment than to cling to a life that was purposeless and devoid of glory. Her one advice to her sons was war—for the vindication of the honor of their family and for the redemption of their lost glory and fortune. The only occasion in which Kunti seemed to show some signs of weakness and mental indecision was when she went out to meet her deserted son Karna on the eve of the Kuruksetra War. A terrible conflict passed through her mind when she visualized the impending battle between her two sons, Karna and Arjuna. Her motherly heart was bleeding at the prospect of the terrible fight, and she offered Karna alluring terms to win him over to the side of the Pandavas. But Karna remained steadfast in his loyalty to Duryodhana, and rebuked his mother for her pitilessly abandoning him as a new born. Kunti perhaps did not deserve this rebuke. As a mother
who was suffering from unbearable mental agony, she conceived it to be her duty to play the part of a mediator; and throwing aside all hesitation and sense of shame, she interviewed Karna for the purpose of bringing about an honorable settlement between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Her firm conviction was that Duryodhana, being deserted by Karna, would come down to reach an agreement with her sons. Thus the impending catastrophe would be averted, and the two branches of the same family would be able to live together in peace and with mutual understanding. The Kuruksetra War became inevitable. It was fought to a finish and was a terrible tragedy, for through it India became bereft of all male warriors. 16 years after this dire calamity, she was determined to follow Dhristarashtra and Gandhari to the Himalayas. It was to be expected that Kunti would be glad to continue indefinitely her life of ease and comfort after long years of suffering. But wealth and fortune no more attracted her. In the Himalayas, Kunti passed the remaining years of her life in placid contentment. Her devotion to Dhrtarastra and Gandhari during this period was also wonderful. Her end was as noble as her life. When a conflagration engulfed the forest in which she was living with Gandhari and Dhrtarastra, she remained steadfast and embraced death peacefully.

1.1.5. Satyavati— A devoted wife

Satyavati was the mother of Vyasa who was born to her before marriage, wife of Santanu, the king of the lunar dynasty. Her mother was the celestial maid Adrika. Because of a curse Adrika lived as a fish in the river Ganges. Once the semen of King Uparicaravasu happened to fall in the Ganges and this fish swallowed it as a consequence of which it became pregnant. A fisherman caught this fish and cut it. He got two human babies, male and female from the stomach of the fish. The fisherman gave the two infants to the king who took the male child. This child later became the Matsya King. The female child had the smell of fish. The king called her Matsya-gandhi (as she had the smell of fish) and gave her back to the fisherman, who took the child to his hut and brought her up as his daughter. As the child was dark in complexion the fisherman called her Kali. Thus the girl was known by two names Kali and Matsya-gandhi. Later she got the name Satyavati also. The fisherman was engaged in the work of ferrying people across the river. Matsya-gandhi helped her father in this work. She became a full blooming young woman. One day the hermit Parasara came by that way
and when he saw her, he fell in love with her instantly. She ferried the hermit across the river. In the middle of the river Parasara created an artificial fog inside which Parasara took Matsya-gandhi as his wife. From that moment Matsya-gandhi became Kasturi-gandhi (as she had the smell of Kasturi that means musk). Kali became pregnant and delivered a baby boy. Parasara left the place after having blessed her that she would not lose her virginity. The baby immediately grew up to be a youth. After promising his mother that he would come to her when she thought of him, the youth went to the forest for penance. And the boy was none other than Krishna. This Krishna later became famous by the name Vyasa. Satyavati again engaged herself in helping her father.

One day Santanu, a king of the lunar dynasty came to the forest for hunting. The fragrance of musk emanating from the body of Kasturi-gandhi spread through the whole forest. The king walked on through the forest tracing the smell of musk and reached the fisherman's hut. The king fell in love with Satyavati at the first sight. But the fisherman had a precondition that the son born by his daughter must be the successor of the king. The king already had a son, Bhism by his first wife Ganga. Bhisma made it easy for the king to marry by swearing that he would not marry at all. Two sons, Chitrangada and Vicitravirya were born to Santanu by his wife Satyavati. Citrangada was killed in his boyhood. Vicitravirya became a youth and married Ambika and Ambalika, the daughters of the Kasi king. Vicitravirya met with an untimely death before a child was born to him. When Satyavati saw that the family was about to become extinct, she thought of her son Vyasa who instantly arrived at the place. From Vyasa, Amblika got the son, Pandu and from Ambika, Dhrtarastra. Both these sons--Dhrtarastra and Pandu got married. Pandu died soon after he had sex with his wife as he was cursed to be so. The death of her son struck heavily at the heart of Satyavati. She did not wish to live much longer after this. She mentioned about the fearful things yet to happen. Then taking her daughters-in-law with her, Satyavati went to the forest to do penance and finally attained heaven. Here what is most impressive is that she raised her sons and tried to continue the blood of her late son by having her daughter-in-laws to give birth to sons, Pandu and Dhrtarashtra, from her pre-marriage-born son Vyasa and the extinction of her husband family was avoided.

1.1.6. Sumitra---An obedient wife
Sumitra in the *Ramayana* was neither senior queen nor a very favorite of the king Dasaratha. Her son Laksmana was always in the company of Rama, his elder brother. When Rama permitted Laksmana to accompany him in his forest life, he went to his mother to seek her permission and blessings. She told him, “I know full well, Oh, Laksmana, your affection towards me, your power, strength and unconquerable force.” She then advised him in the following words which were familiar to all, “Regard Rama in the place of Dasaratha, the daughter of Janaka in my place of Ayodhya and, my dear son, go happily at your pleasure.” Sumitra’s son Laksmana had also left for the forest along with Rama, still she questioned Kausalya, “Why are you sorry for your son who threw away the throne and went to the forest to enable his father to remain true to his word? That is the righteous way of the good and saintly people. The sun, the moon, the wind and all the deities will be serving the pious and righteous Rama—he will be happy while residing in the forest. What is unattainable to him, who is accompanied by Sita as by Laksmi? What is difficult for him to obtain when Laksmana armed with his great bow and arrows marched ahead of him? You will surely see, with the tears of joy in your eyes, your son triumphantly returning from the forest. No pain or sorry or any evil was visible in Rama when he went to the forest. Do not be sorry at all but console those who are lamenting. You should, as a matter of fact, give courage to others. There is no other person so righteous and firmly going by the right path as Rama. He will soon return to hold your feet by his soft hands and you will shower your tears of joy on him.”

Hearing these spirited, encouraging and appropriate words of Sumitra Kausala got free from sorrows.

1.1.7. **Kausalya—An obedient wife and kind mother**

Kausalya in the *Ramayana* was strong and stout in her young age. When king Dasaratha performed the horse-sacrifice in his early life, Kausalya, the principal queen cut the head of the sacrificial horse in three strokes of a sword. In his advanced age

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64 Ibid.
Dasaratha had 350 queens of whom the three principal queens were Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. Among the three the most junior Kaikeyi was his dearest and the most senior Kausalya received the least attention from the king. When Rama went to take the leave of his mother before going to the forest she did not know what happened in the palace since the previous night. She was then offering yagna with Vedic mantras so that the ceremony of her son should be completed without any difficulties. When she saw Rama coming to her she rose from her seat and embraced him and wished him all success. She also expressed the hope that his father would remain firm on his intention to carry that auspicious ceremony to a successful end. Rama told her of the great danger that was in store for him. He informed her of the order that he was to go into exile for 14 years in the Dandaka forests, and that the status of the yuvraj was given to Bharata as per the boons formerly given by the king to Kaikeyi, who insisted on their immediate fulfillment. This news came as a thunderbolt on Kausalya and she collapsed on the ground and became unconscious. When she was brought to consciousness by Rama she said it would have been better if she had no son at all as then there would have been the only grievance of childlessness; but she would have been saved from the terrible pangs of the catastrophe. She complained to Rama, "Incomprehensible is the action of destiny in this world; Oh my son, as it drives you away to the forest, Oh, Raghava, neglecting my request." Laksmana, who was present there, said that not only the words of the old king acting under the influence of his wicked junior queen were to be regarded, but as he was punishing Rama without any fault, he ought have been bound and even deserved to be killed. Kausalya asked Rama to do what he thought fit. But she said that she would not permit him to go to the forest. As his mother, she ordered him not to go to the forest and said that he would have to obey her. Rama told her that as a faithful wife she could not violate the word of her husband. All of them had to obey him however unpleasant his order might be. Rama again prayed to his mother to permit him to go to the forests. But she claimed that according to the holy law she had equal authority on the son as the father and that she would not permit him to go. Rama said, "Whatever is ordered by the preceptor, the king or the father, even angrily or of their free will, shall have to be done.

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid. Ayodhy-Kanda, p.76, Section 24.
Therefore, permit me, dear mother, to go. As for your desire to follow me to the forest, how can you leave your husband, to whom you are bound by your duty? \(^ {67} \) The desertion of the husband was mere cruelty on the part of the wife as she ought not to do it. She then consented to his departure with the touching words, “Shall I live to see, the time when you, my dear son, will return from the forest with matted hair and wearing bark garments?” \(^ {68} \) She invoked gods and deities in the forest to protect his son and even wished the wild beasts in the forests to be kind to him. She blessed him and hoped that he would return to fulfill her desires and those of his wife. Sita and Rama went to seek the blessings of Kausalya. Embracing Sita, Kausalya, with the instance of Kaikeyi before her eyes, urged her not to follow the path of sinful and wicked women, but should go by the rightful way of devout and faithful women. She told her to serve her husband who was in adverse circumstances and take care of him in all respects. Sita assured her that she well knew her duty and would do it whole-heartedly. Kausalya felt relieved, as Sita was going to share the hardships of the forest-life along with her husband.

1.1.8. Urmila—The embodiment of sacrifice and selflessness

Urmila, Laksmana’s wife did not appear much in the Ramayana, but it seems she was the most painful woman both mentally as well as physiologically and as a wife, she was the only woman in the epic who was kept away from the company of her husband for fourteen years of Rama’s exile, yet she was calm, patient and all enduring. She was the daughter of king Janaka and the sister of Sita. When Laksmana went to the forest with Rama and Sita, she remained in Ayodhya. As a young wife, she stayed at home alone for 14 years during which she every night slept alone without any male companion. She mentally suffered greatly. Quite different from her sister Sita who, although had hardship in the forest, had the happiness with Rama, her husband, Urmila could not have any such happiness. When she was painful at heart, only her husband could make her peaceful. But Laksmana was far away in the forest. So in 14 years, she could not receive any news about her husband—- an unimaginable 14 years of loneliness. She wasted her most flowering youth in loneliness. When she was sad or sick, no one was around to comfort her. But she endured all the pains and waited until her husband came back from the

\(^ {67} \) Ibid.  
\(^ {68} \) Ibid.
forest. She did not enjoy a long time of reunion when Laksmana, following Ram, ended his life by drowning himself at the same place where his brother did so, Urmila jumped into a pile of fire and reached the world of Visnu.

1.1.9. Anusuyā — A woman of austerity and compassion

Tapas and swadhyāya being the keys to eminence, as pointed out by Valmiki himself in his opening verse, it is but fitting that this humble study of the great women, described in this poem, should commence by paying homage to the saintly lady— Anusuyā. She was very old at the time, and her joints were hard and slack, her skin wrinkled and her hair white. As she is presented in the epics, her whole frame shook, like a plantain leaf in the wind. Unique was the meeting of Sita and Anusuyā. Both were equal in the depth of their devotion to their husbands. Atri's was a life of retirement and meditation, while Rama's was predominantly one of administration of vast territories. This accounted for the major differences in the experiences and reactions of the two chaste ladies. Thus Anusuyā, following her lord, performed mighty austerities and dedicated their fruits to the benefit of others. Once, said Atri, people suffered much from the massive draught extending over a decade. Anusuyā then created fruits and roots and made the waters of the Ganges flow through their very asylum. Austerity and compassion were the hallmarks of her character. She began to discourse on wifely virtues. When she met with Sita, she said, “By luck it is that you, O Sita, take delight in righteousness. You have left your kindred and, banishing pride, followed your husband to the woods.” There was no need to advise Sita on these topics, since the virtues mentioned by Anusuyā were already in her. Yes, as the words uttered by the saintly lady were charged with her love and blessings, Sita honored them and said with fitting humility, “I know that a woman’s spiritual guide is her husband. Even if a husband should be poor and of a disreputable character, he should be ungrudgingly obeyed by the like of me. What my mother-in-law instructed me at the time I was leaving for the lonely and fearful forest is constantly present in my mind. And also what my mother taught me in the presence of fire on the occasion of the bestowal of my hand, is also remembered by me. And, O you engaged in acts of righteousness, I have not forgotten the words that my relatives said to me, viz., the asceticism of a woman is ministering to her husband. They did not teach anything else. Having served her lord, Savior is highly honored in heaven; and you also, following
the same course, by virtue of having served your husband, has secured heaven."\(^{69}\) Anusuya was very much delighted, and she said, "By observing restrictions, I have earned great asceticism. By resorting to that energy, I would confer a boon upon you, O you of pure vows."\(^{70}\) Hearing her words, a surprised Sita said with a smile, to that lady equipped with ascetic strength, "All has been done by water pitches". She then asked Sita to put on the gifted dress and ornaments and go into Rama's presence to enhance his joy. Witnessing the honor accorded to Sita, Rama and Laksmana were completely delighted. Anusuya said that she would satisfy her own personal desire by gifting an unfading garland, a few ornaments and some precious sandal paste, "Daubing your limbs with this excellent paint, you will face your husband even as does the un-deteriorating Visnu."\(^{71}\) Anusuya then made Sita narrate the thrilling story of how Rama broke the bow and took her hand in marriage. As the narration ended, the day also ended. Anusuya, also with delicate poetic touches, described the sunset scene, with the birds settling down to sleep and the ascetics entering their asylums.

1.1.10. Swayamprabha --- A self-abnegating model woman

There was a saintly lady who did not come into direct contact with Rama, but assisted his work by serving Hanuman and his companions. When they all got fatigued, they entered into a vast cave in search of food and water. It was a magnificent cave, having golden trees, jeweled seats and elegant dwelling places. Going further inside, the monkeys met an old female ascetics wearing black deer skin, and flaming in energy. Hanuman asked her who she was and to whom the cave belonged. And referring to the beautiful things found there, he asked her, "To whom do these golden trees belong resembling the infantine sun? And the pure fruits and roots; and the houses and vehicles of gold and silver---veiled in networks of jewels, and furnished with golden windows? And by whose energy are these golden trees, bearing flowers, crowned with fruits, grateful to the sight, and breathing rich odor? And golden lotus spring in lucent water---how golden fishes are discovered in it along with tortoises! Have these sprung from your power; or do they owe their existence to the ascetic energy of any other? It behooves you

\(^{69}\) Ibid. Ayodhyakandam, p. 284, Section 118.
\(^{70}\) Ibid.
\(^{71}\) Ibid.
to relate all this to us who are ignorant of everything." 72 Swayamprabha, who was practicing righteousness and was engaged in the welfare of all beings, said in reply that the whole grove was constructed by Maya. He had obtained consummate mastery in his art through prolonged austerity and the blessing of the creator. Maya, however, conceived a passion for the Apsara Hema. This irritated Indra, who struck him down with his thunderbolt. Brahma then conferred on Hema this fine forest and the privilege of enjoying everything therein. As Hema, skilled in dance and music, had gone somewhere, Swayamprabha was remained there as a guardian out of love for her friend. Finding that the monkeys were tired and hungry, she first permitted them to eat and drink whatever they liked. Afterwards, when she heard their story and saw their eagerness to return to their work, she said, "Once entering, hard it is for any one to return hence alive. But by the potency of my asceticism acquired through self-discipline, I shall deliver all the monkeys from this den. Close your eyes. No one is able to issue out of this place without closing his eyes." 73 They obeyed and closed their eyes. Within a second she took them all near to the sea, and wishing them good luck, went back to her abode. What a glorious example of self-abnegation! Staying in the midst of plenty, and having the power to make nature obey her slightest wish, this saintly daughter of Merusavarni lived on frugal fare and guarded the abode of her friend. As occasion arose, she extended hospitality to others and even employed her yoga power to relieve those in distress. And all this she did with no more purpose than the welfare of all beings.

1.1.11. Tara — A wise and statesman-like help of her husband

Tara was the wife of Valin, the king of Kiskindha, who was very brave, but aggressive. Tara appeared only in the Kiskindhakandam. Valin had driven out his brother Sugriva and had forcibly kept his wife Ruma in his harem. Though vanquished by Valin on the previous day Sugriva again went to his palace next day and challenged him to fight. Valin was extremely enraged and started to go out to meet him. But Tara halted him and requested him not to fight against his brother. She told him that Angada had got the information from the spies that Sugriva had made an alliance with Rama and his brother Laksmana who were very powerful and invincible. Valin rejected her request saying that

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72 Ibid. Kiskindhakandam, p.136, Section 51.
73 Ibid. p.138, Section 53.
he could not deny the challenge thrown at him. That would be submitting to an insult and would be more disgraceful than death itself. How could Rama, who was righteous, act sinfully? He only assured her that he would humble the pride of Sugriva and not kill him. In the duel that followed between Valin and Sugriva, Rama shot a powerful arrow on the chest of Valin who immediately collapsed on the ground. Tara went where Valin was lying on the ground and wept bitterly. With the pangs of grief in her heart and tears in her eyes she sorrowfully uttered taking the head of Valin on her lap: “You wrested the wife of Sugriva and then drove him out and now this is the result of it. Out of ignorance you did neglect all my well meaning words which I said, being intent on your welfare and benefit.”74 Hanuman came there to console her. He said, “Angada and Vanaras are overwhelmed with grief. They do not feel safe and secure without you. And abiding by your commandments let Angada govern the earth.”75 Tara replied, “I can not myself govern this kingdom nor can I confer it upon Angada. Such duty devolves upon his uncle Sugriva now.”76 Even the deepest sorrow did not cloud her judgment and clarity of thought. Rama then went to her and said in consoling words: “You are the wife of a hero and should not think it a wrong manner. The creator of the world ordains the happiness or otherwise of all. One can not supersede one’s own nature and Vali has got the fruit of his own deeds. You will get the highest satisfaction when your son will be crowned as yuvraja. Wives of great heroes never bewail what the creator has ordered for them. Your great husband has won without care for his life. Kindly control your grief and do what is proper for the present time.”77 When Rama saw that Sugriva was not keeping his word he sent Laksmana to warn him to abide by his promise. When Laksmana went to Sugriva he was drunk in his harem and not in proper sense. He sent Tara to cool and pacify him. She went to welcome him and pacified his wrath by her sweet words. She said in a submissive tone that Sugriva was after all a Vanara, of the backward class and was for a long time in distress and so Laksmana should kindly forgive him. She told that Sugriva

74 Ibid. Kiskindhakandam, p. 54, Section 20.
75 Ibid. p. 56, Section 21.
76 Ibid. p. 56
77 Ibid. p. 66, Section 25.
79 Ibid. Kiskindhakandam, p. 99-100, Section 34.
was not unmindful of his responsibility; he had already issued orders and the Vanaras from different quarters had already arrived. Laksmana was softened in mood when Tara led him in the inner apartment to meet Sugriva. Laksmana saw there Sugriva seated on a golden seat surrounded by ladies and in close contact with Ruma. He burst forth in anger again, and Sugriva stood up in haste to receive him only to hear from him, “A king who does not keep his promise is not only ungrateful but also malicious. There is retributory penance for all other great sins, but not for ingratitude. You were seated on the throne by Rama, but you lost yourself in drinking and rolling in indecent happiness. Rama in his distresses is very much engravèd by your failure to keep your word and said that the way by which Valin was killed kept closed.” Tara intervened and pleaded: “Sugriva is not ungrateful, or cunning, or heartless; nor does he deal in falsehood; nor is he deceitful. Through Rama’s grace, Sugriva has here attained fame and enduring empire of the monkeys, as well as Rama and myself.... For rendering your assistance, the foremost monkeys have been dispatched in order to summon to the conflict numerous principal monkeys. Expecting these powerful and exceedingly strong ones, for attaining Raghava’s end, this lord of monkeys does not sally out. Things have beforehand been so satisfactorily arranged by Sugriva, that this very day the mighty one will be joined with all those monkeys. This very day billions of bears and thousands of golangulas as well as numerable kotis of monkeys flaming in energy shall join you. Banish your anger.” Tara was very shrewd in saying that it was the view of Valin and not her opinion that Ravana was unassailabłe without the help of a very big army, which Sugriva had already summoned and would be at the disposal of Rama. Laksmana was highly pleased and said that he was harsh owing to having seen the condition of Rama caused by the separation of Sita. He frankly expressed his regret for his harsh words. Even Valin appreciated her wisdom and admitted his mistakes in ignoring her advice. She fully realized the crisis created by the drunkenness of Sugriva and the wrath of Laksmana. She handled the difficult situation like an experienced statesman.

1.1.12. **Mandiñari— A devout, faithful woman with sense of righteousness**

It is noticeable that in the epics female raksasas, asuras, nymphs and spirits were

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79 Ibid. p. 101, Section 36.
Mandodari was the principal queen of Ravana. She was the daughter of Maya, the king of the Danavas, a race of Raksasas who were descended from Danu. Ravana highly honored her but paid no attention to her advice of returning Sita to Rama. A lady devout and faithful to her husband knew the full worth of such a faithful wife of another person, though she was considered to be his enemy by her husband. She admired the supreme love of Sita for Rama and had the great respect for Rama for his high moral character. Ravana had great fascination for the beautiful wives of others and his mind was warped by his lust for lovely and charming women. Mandodari herself was an extremely and a highly accomplished woman. In lamenting over the death of her husband, she said that Mathili was neither superior nor even equal to her in so far as high family, beauty and nobility were concerned, but Ravana on account of his mind being perverted by lust did not realize that. We know that there are some people in this world who in spite of having very charming wives hanker after beautiful or even less lovely wives of others. They want different types of lovely women for their satisfaction, and Ravana was of the type of such persons. Mandodari referred to his yearning for several types of attractive beauties as he kidnapped the charming daughters of gods, asuras and men as well, from various places. He was thus always after fresh beauties. She complained that Ravana had abducted such women by attacking their relatives and brought them by force. He regarded himself as a great warrior and he lured Rama to go away from his hermitage by the deceitful device of a golden deer and then kidnapped his wife. She condemned Ravana that he brought Sita but she did not understand her worth and steadfast love to her husband. In the infatuation of his might, he also failed to understand that Rama was not an ordinary and insignificant man. The wailing of Mandodari after the death of her husband on the battle field disclosed her self-respecting nature and her love as well as her respect for her husband. She also bewailed the weakness of Ravana’s character, which led to his downfall. Sita, the sufferer of Ravana’s aggressiveness, was now released with honor after her sturdy resistance to the aggressor, and the grand victory of her husband over her kidnapper. The released sufferer and her victorious husband were now in ascendancy. Mandodari was now the widow of the vanquished. But her vision was not clouded by her husband’s defeat, nor did her steadfast love for her husband...
suffering. She appreciated the spirited resistance of Sita against Ravana's advance and the virtues and valor of Rama, though he was the enemy of her husband. That showed the nobility of her character. She condemned the abduction of Sita by her husband as a deceitful and palpable theft and advised him to return Sita to Rama with honor and make peace with him. She also stood tall, along with Sita, Draupadi, Ahalya and Tara. Of these Sita and Draupadi were entirely blameless. We think that Tara who was the famous faithful queen of Hariscandra, who stood firmly by him in his joy or sorrow. Ahalya had washed her sin by repentance and hard and long penance. Mandodari was very pious, dutiful as also steadfast as great devotees, though they belonged to the race of the Raksasas, so also Mandodari was highly honored as a chaste and faithful wife and she rightly deserved that honor, too.

1.1.13. Sarama— A virtuous wife

As far as Sita's life in Lanka was concerned, it was nothing but full of agony of her. But there were a few bright spots here and there; and one such was her relationship with Sarama, the virtuous wife of Vibhisana. Before the battle began, Ravana showed Sita the illusion of a head resembling Rama, looking as if newly severed from the trunk. Believing that her husband was really slain, she lamented piteously and swooned. Before Ravana could do anything further, he had to hurry to the council hall to discuss with his generals about the manner of destroying the enemy. Ravana himself had deputed Sarama to be companion of Sita and to protect her. The kind-hearted lady comforted the exceedingly distressed Sita, who had been bereft of her senses by the lord of Raksasas. She approached Sita and said mildly: "Renouncing all fear of Ravana, and remaining hidden, I managed to hear every thing that he said as well as your reply to him." She assured Sita that Rama was incapable of being surprised in sleep, and that what she saw was an illusion. "Your good day has dawned," she said, "and certainly Laksmana seeks you. Rama has already encamped himself on the southern shore of the sea. And having come to know of this, Ravana is now consulting with all his counselors." Sarama tried to convince Sita that her lord (Rama) of controlled anger and inconceivable prowess would soon slay Ravana and make her happy. Preluding her speech with a smile, Sarama

80 Ibid. Yudhakandam, p.79, Section 33.
now offered to go secretly to Rama, using her power of traversing the shy, and communicate Sita's message to him. In this respect she went to the maximum in her discretion to protect Sita. Sita, however, politely refused to employ Sarama for such a purpose. The only service she required of Sarama was to ascertain, if possible, what Ravana intended to do—whether he wanted to detain her or return her to her husband. Sarama, accordingly, wiped Sita's tears, went out, saw everything and made a faithful report. She said that although repeatedly advised by his mother and counselors, Ravana did not intend to liberate her. She said, "He can not yield you up in sheer fear; nor is he backward in battle." 82 Yet, assured the sweetly-speaking Sarama, Rama would soon kill Ravana and take her back to Ayodhya.

1.1.14.Trijata—A sympathetic raksasa woman

Almost in the same way did another raksasi—- Trijata in the Ramayana, comforted Sita in her distress. According to Ravana's instructions, many raksasis threatened Sita to make her give up Rama and marry their master. In keeping with their low mentality, they urged her not to waste her youth, but thankfully accept silk dress, ornaments and sandal paste offered by Ravana and sport with him, with a thousand of females waiting upon her. But when she spurned these proposals with indignation, they did the only other thing possible for them, namely threaten to tear her limb by limb and banquet on her flesh. Seeing that this was going too far, the aged and wise Trijata asked them to stop and listen to the details of a terrible dream she had seen. "I saw Rama, wearing garlands and clothed in white, ride in a celestial chariot, along with Laksmana,...Sita too was clad in white...She met Rama at last like light joined to the sun...Rama, having truth for his prowess, along with Laksmana and Sita, went with speed to the north regions...I sawmRavana too, shaved, besmeared with oil, drinking honey...quickly going on a chariot to the south." 83

After giving some more significant details, Trijata said to the raksasis, who were frightened by this time: "No more rough words! Console the lady and implore her forgiveness. Surely, through Rama mighty disaster will overtake the raksasas. If Sita be pleased with you, you might be saved from ruin when it comes." 84 Trijata, who had keen

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81 Ibid. p. 80.
82 Ibid. p. 83, Section 34.
83 Ibid. Sundarakandam, p. 82, Section 27.
84 Ibid. P.83.
insight into the nature of things, explained also how certain signs, like throbbing of the left side of Sita or the delightful singing of the birds, indicated the success of Rama and the ruin of the raksasas. Her wise words had their effect. The guards became less threatening for the time, and Sita, partly soothed, said, “If this be true I shall save you all.”85 After Rama and Laksmana were struck down and bound with networks of arrows by Indrajit, Ravana caused Sita to be taken in the aerial car Pushpaka, so that she could have a clear view of the fallen heroes. Ravana thought that seeing no other course, Sita would now of herself seek him. But the moment she saw the brothers stretched on the ground, bathed in blood, she burst into bitter lamentation. Trijata then cheered her up by various arguments. She argued from the facial expression of the soldiers, and even from the behavior of the Pushpaka, that the two princes were really alive. “This I tell you from affection. I never told you untruths before, nor will I tell you now. These are only lying insensible with arrows. Grace had not taken leave of them yet.”86 Sita fervently said, “Be it so!”87 While conferring immortality upon Vibhisana, Brahma had made a beautiful comment. He said: “In spite of your birth in the raksasa race, your thoughts do not originate in sin.”88 In fact, they were all centered in righteousness. So it was in the case of Sarama and Trijata.

1.1.15. Kind and sacrificing mothers in the epics

**Yasodha:** In the Mahabharata Yasodha was the foster-mother of Krishna. When the little Krishna was born in the prison of Kamsa, just at this time a daughter had been born to Nandajopa and Yasodha at Gokula. At midnight when the prison guards were deep in sleep, the doors were opened automatically. Vasudeva, the father of Krishna, started for Gokula with the new born baby, and on his way the river Yamuna changed his course for him to proceed. The door of Yasodha’s house was open. Vasudeva placed Krishna by the side of Yasodha and returned home with her child. Her child was dashed against the rock. Even at the cost of taking cares of her own daughter, she brought up Krishna like her own child.

**Radha:** She was the foster-mother of Karna. When Kunti delivered Karna before

85 Ibid. p.84.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
marriage, she was so shy that she put the baby in a box and flung it into the Yamuna and it entered the river Ganges. Drifting slowly the box reached Campapuri, a country of Sutas. Adhiratha born of the Sutavamsa and an ally of the Kauravas, saw a box floating on the river while he went for his bath and took it home. Radha, wife of Adhiratha, who was childless and was greatly pleased to see a baby inside the box and adopted and brought it up as her son.

1.1.16. Arundhati—A devoted wife

Arundhati was wife of sage Vasistha, who outshone all other chaste women in devotion to her husband. She owed her great power to her chastity and service of her husband.

1.1.17. Sabari—A cursed woman secured through unflinching devotion to spiritual guides

If Anasuya represents perfection got through service to her husband, Sabari in Ramayana represents perfection secured through unflinching devotion to spiritual guides. She was the wife of Vitihotra, who belonged to a scholarly tribe. As he was ever immersed in contemplation of the Brahman his wife Malini, (later Sabari) kept one hunter, Kalmasa, as her paramour, and her husband cursed her thus, “As you become a lover of a hunter, you turn out to be a hunter-woman.” Malini in tears sought redemption from the curse of her husband, and he told her that she would get absolution from her infamy and the curse from Rama. Immediately she was transformed into a hunter-woman and she came to the suburbs of Matangasrama. She took a special liking for the place. Sabari lived for long there serving Matanga’s disciples, performing tapas and learning knowledge about the Brahman. Her masters were well known as disciples of the eminent sage Matanga. Their austerity was so wonderfully creative that even drops of sweat falling from their bodies, as they collected wild fruits for their teacher, were said to have transformed themselves into unfading garlands. What then to speak of words that fell from their lips! They assured Sabari that Rama would come to her asylum. Seeing him, she would go to that best of abodes whence none returned. At the time the munis giving up their physical bodies they blessed Sabari that without further delay she would meet Rama and get the redemption from the curse. They also blessed that she would possess divine eyes to see hidden things and also the past and the future. From that day Sabari

89 Ibid.
waited eagerly for the arrival of Rama, keeping various wild fruits to him. So, as soon as he arrived, she rose up with folded hands and touching his feet offered him duly water for washing his feet and mouth. In reply to Rama’s kind inquisitions she said, “Favored with your presence, my asceticism has attained its consummation. Blessed is my birth, fruitful is my service to my spiritual guides and accomplished is my asceticism. You are the foremost of the celestials. Worshipping you, I shall attain the abode of deities.” She then offered him the fruits. The left-over of Sabari appeared as nectar to Rama. Then Sabari told Rama, “When you go to a short distance southwards there is a beautiful stream called Pampa. You cross Pampa and advance a little further and you will reach Mountain Ryamuka. On the top of that mountain lives Sugriva, son of Sun, and if you enter into an alliance with him you will succeed in finding out and getting back Sita after annihilating the enemies.”

Having thus fulfilled her desire for serving Rama, the old lady, wearing matted locks, rags and the skin of an antelope, with Rama’s glance falling on her, surrendered herself to fire and rose up in the welkin like to blazing fire. She appeared of exquisite grace and lighted up the quarters like floodlights. By virtue of her meditation, she repaired to that holy region where the pure-hearted sages, her preceptors lived. Sabari, the low-caste woman who attained illumination, afforded a striking contrast to any characters of the Ramayana. Her main act of austerity consisted of serving her saintly teachers, and she shone owing to her simplicity, devotion, unerring insight and self-mastery. Her life showed that illumination came to the sincere aspirants.

1.1.18. Ahalya—Another cursed wife

Ahalya was the wife of sage Gautam who, due to her sexual relationship with Indra, cursed her to become a stone, which later on was turned back by Rama. When Visvamitra irrespective of his ancestry, scholarship, sex or rituals, took back Rama and Laksmana from the forest across an ashram on their way and Visvamitra told the princes, “This is the ashram where the sage Gautam was living with his wife—Aphelia. Indra fell in love with the beautiful Aphelia and while the sage was out for bathing Indra entered the ashram as a sage and took Ahalya to bed. But before Indra could get her enraged Gautam

91 Ibid. p.158.
came in and cursed them both. Indra was to lose his testicles and Ahalya was to turn into a stone. But taking pity on her the sage declared that she would take her original form the moment Rama came to that place and touched the stone by his foot. Testicleless Indra went to the devaloka and there his friends feeling sorry for him, substituted a goat's testicle from him and got him to normal."\(^{92}\) While Visvamitra was talking to the prince, Rama's foot touched the stone and Ahalya stood up in all her beauty. Ahalya and Gautam lived in the same ashram again for a long period.

In the *Ramayana*, Valmiki portrayed two female characters that are condemned by the public for their improper behaviors.

1.1.19. **Kaikeyi—A wife who was lost in interest**

In a way Kaikeyi was the personality in the *Ramayana* who had given a turn to what seemed to be the natural course of events and revealed to the world the ideal characters of Rama, Laksmana, Bharata, Sita, Hanuman and several others in the epic. Kaikeyi was the youngest and the most favorite queen of King Dasaratha. She once loved Rama as dearly as her own son Bharata. Rama had won her affection by his most charming manners and exquisite devotion equal to the way he behaved with his own mother. Rama was to be crowned as a *yuvaraja* when Bharata had gone to his maternal uncle in the Kekaya country. Manthara, the attendant of Kaikeyi, instigated her mistress that she would be permanently neglected if she did not act immediately. She would have to be the slave of Kausalya, who was still then in the background. The life of Bharata would be very miserable; he might even be driven out of the kingdom. Kaikeyi got afraid of this gloomy picture of her future as portrayed by her attendant and got engraved. When she asked her advice the latter reminded her of the two boons given by the king to her formerly and she should demand them immediately. She should demand the crowning of Bharata as the *yuvaraja* by one boon and the exile of Rama into the Dandaka forest by the other. Kaikeyi then dressed in old garments and lay on the bare ground breathing heavily with anger. When the king came to her she did not speak to him until he promised her to give what she wanted. When he so promised she demanded the fulfillment of her two above

\(^{92}\) Ibid. *Aranyakandam*, p.159, Section 74.
mentioned boons immediately. This came as a thunderbolt to the king. He was unconscious for some time. When he regained consciousness he felt whether he was in a dream, but soon realized that it was a terrible fact. He scolded Kaikeyi for her crookedness in making a wicked demand. He asked her what evil was ever done by Rama to her. He said that he was prepared to abandon any one, even his own life but would not be cruel to Rama. He requested her to be merciful, and not to press her demand. When finding that she would not budge he subjected her to severe showers of angry invectives; but she was as adamant as rock. She said: “If you do not fulfill my demand I shall end my life here before you and you will have to go to the hell for breaking your promise.”

When Sumantra came in the morning for the further order from the king for the crowning ceremony, Kaikeyi told him that the king was so much happy over the ceremony of Rama that he did not get any sleep that night and got exhausted by sleeplessness. He should, therefore, go to the prince and call him there immediately. Rama was brought there but he found his father dejected. He asked Kaikeyi why he was so sullen and dejected. Was he unwell or was he angry with him? She shamelessly replied that he was neither ill nor angry with him. She said, “Your father has a desire which he is unable to speak out, being afraid of you. What is desirable to him will be unpalatable to you. It is now necessary for you to accomplish what he has promised me before.” Rama then assured her that he would drink poison or jump into fire to make true the word of his father. He promised to do whatever the king might order. Kaikeyi narrated how the king had given her two boons and then shamelessly told him that by one boon she demanded the crowning of Bharata as yuvraj, and by the other the exile of him into the Dandaka forests for 14 years. Rama then said at once to her that had she told that to him before making that demand to the king, that would have saved all the worries he suffered so long. When Rama went with Sita and Laksmana to take leave of his father, Kaikeyi was there and she offered bark garments to Rama and asked him to wear them. He wore them instantly. She was warned that there was no order for Sita to go to the forest, but still she was following her husband voluntarily. Thereafter Dasaratha went to the residence of Kausalya but died within a week after the departure of Rama. Therefore, Kaikeyi was waiting for the arrival

93 Ibid. Ayodhya, p. 35, Section 12.
of her son from his maternal grandfather’s capital. When arriving, he was hot with anger to know of the havoc wrought by his mother. He flouted all her plans. He went to the forest along with others to see Rama, probably with the intention to see what would happen there. When she was there she did not utter a single word to Rama. It appeared, that she might have felt that her son’s association with the administration, though as a trustee, would tempt him in the long run to be a king. His affection for Rama in that period, she felt, might diminish. Nowhere in the Ramayana was she shown to have repented for her demand for the fulfillment of the boons. It was not a violence of Dharma that she asked her husband to fulfill the two boons he had promised. But as a wife of the king, the interest of the kingdom was the most important. King Dasaratha, her husband wanted to crown Rama as the yuvuraja for the benefit of the country, because Rama had all the qualities of a king and was greatly popular among the ministers and the citizens. Instigated by her slave, nurse of deformed Manthara she was blinded by avarice in her own interest. And that she wanted her son to be crowned as the king and she asked Rama to be exiled into the forests defied the opinion of all the people in the country. Pursuit of her own interest made her too drunken to realize that if power was not supported by its people, it could not last long. And the happiness she was chasing became painfully boring. But it has to be pointed out that before instigation of the deformed Manthara, Kaikeyi was ignorant. Only after she was instigated that her ambition exploded. And also she was over pampered by Dasaratha who drank a cup bitter wine he made himself. Her end was much contrary to the glory and splendor she expected. Instead, she was coldly treated by her own son and was condemned by the people. It was she who made her husband die soon. As a young woman, she lost forever the happiness as a wife and lived alone for the rest of her life. Just as the Chinese saying reads that she lifted a stone and dropped it on her own toes.

1.1.20. Manthara— The hump-backed instigator with a cruel tongue

Manthara, the maid of the favorite wife of Dasaratha, Kaikeyi, was the woman who was to be greatly condemned and cursed. Because under her vicious instigation to Kaikeyi, the Ayodhya kingdom was almost destroyed, the king Dasaratha died whose 350 wives became widows and Rama, Laksmana and Sita sustained great sufferings and

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94 Ibid. p. 55, Section 18.
hardslips in the forest for 14 years. When she knew that Rama, the son of first queen Kausalya was to be crowned, she went to instigate Kaikeyi, her mistress. "A great danger approaches you. You understand that a mighty grief overflows you...If the king establishes Rama in the kingdom, you will be annihilated along with your own."95 When Kaikeyi said, "Difference find I none between Rama and Bharata. Therefore, delighted am I that the king purposes installing Rama in the kingdom."96 She said, "You will, with clasped hands, serve as a slave of the illustrious Kausalya."97 Kaikeyi said that Rama was dearer to her than Bharata, and he also loved her more than he did Kausalya. And if the kingdom was Rama's it would also be Bharata's as well. But Manthara said, "Bharata will be at once cut off from the royal line and deprived of happiness, will fare like one forlorn, and will be sent to a distance land or to the other world."98 When she saw that Kaikeyi was moved, she told her to use two boons the king had offered her that Bharata be installed as the king, and Rama be banished to the forest for 14 years. She also told Kaikeyi how to tell Dasaratha because she knew that Kaikeyi was the favorite wife of Dasaratha. For compassing her pleasure the king could renounce his life itself. Manthara succeeded because Kaikeyi followed all her advice and Dasaratha agreed to grant the two boons.

In the two epics of India, Valmiki and Vyasa created many immortal female characters many of whom were models of all the latter generations. We have paragons like Sita, perfect but revengeful Draupadi who was the embodiment of love, fortitude, sense, sensitivity, pride and prejudice. We can see obedient and kind mothers like Kausalya, Sumitra, and Satyavati, and a wife of devotion and mother of righteousness, Gandhari. We know the embodiment of patience, fortitude and self-sacrifice in a wife like Kunti. We also have Urmila, a wife of sacrifice and selflessness. We meet the following wives: Madohari, a faithful, pious, dutiful and just wife; Anusuya, wife of austerity and compassion; Sabari, cursed wife of devotion to spiritual guides and also cursed wife Ahalya. Swayamprabh, wife of self-abnegation; Tara, statesman-like wife; Sarama, the

95 Ibid. Ayodhya Kandam, p. 20, Section 8.
96 Ibid. p. 20.
97 Ibid. p. 22, Section 9.
98 Ibid.
virtuous wife; Trijata, a sympathetic wife; Yasodha, Radha and Arundhoti, kind and sacrificing mothers. We also know Kaikeyi who was lost in self-interest; Manthara, instigator with a cruel tongue and Ahalya who was cursed for her extra-marital love affair.

It is also noticeable that in the epics, almost all heroines were from noble families.

2. Wives in Tagore

Tagore was greatly influenced by the female characters in the two great epics. In this chapter we can see that first some of the wife characters in Tagore are drawn directly from the epics. But Tagore did not repeat their stories. He renovated their stories and gave them new plots to express his own ideas on the issues regarding woman. He depicted many different female characters from whom we can find shadows of the wife characters in the epics. And in some cases the characters in his works were more complex, more reflective of his age and therefore more vivid. He depicted independently some more wife characters of his own time, which of course could not be found in the epics. Further more, he portrayed some wives, who limited by their own natures and by their time had weak points that became the sources of their misfortune. And also, in the works of Tagore, the wife characters were much more than those in the epics. Because in the epics the wife characters were most from the upper class families, from royal families, from ascetics or from raksas, while those in the works of Tagore were from almost all the classes of society and almost all the aspects of the wives in that society of Tagore were described. The number of wife characters in his works were of course much more. Here when we say that some characters in his works were like some other characters in the two epics we mean that we can see some qualities of some other characters and they both were similar only in some points, but not equivalent.

1.2.1. Gandhari--- A wife who put Dharma above all personal considerations, different from the one in the epics,

Gandhari in the drama Gandharir Abedan written in 1897 was a woman who put Dharma above all personal considerations. The source of Gandhari Abedan was the Sabhaparva of the Mahabharata in which Gandhari was the wife of the blind Dhrtrarashtra and the mother of his hundred sons. Duryodhana, her eldest son, with the help of his
maternal uncle Sakuni, by cheating at a game of dice, made Yudhisthira lose everything, including his kingdom, his brothers, and even his wife Draupadi. When Draupadi was sent for as a slave and refused to come, Dussasana dragged her into the hall by the hair, and both he and Duryodhana grossly insulted her. Dhrtarastra declared that his sons had acted wrongly and he sent Draupadi and her husbands away imploring them to forget what had happened. In the *Mahabharata*, Gandhari didn’t appear on the scene. But in Tagore’s *Gandhari Abedan*, she was the central character and an unswerving embodiment of moral uprightness. Duryodhana and Gandhari, the son and the mother stood firm and wide apart with two mutually contradictory and antagonistic ideals. Dhrtarastra was inwardly torn between his realization that his son had blatantly outraged *Dharma* and his weakness for his son, bared “a heart already rent” and introduced into the play a note of human wavering, the element of inner conflict—that of the higher and the lower urged in man. The character contrast was executed in a masterly manner. The drama reaches its peak of intensity when Dhrtarastra’s blind love for his wicked son and Gandhari’s passionate plea for moral justice clashed. Her righteous indignation was the core of the play. When asked by his wife to disown their son, Dhrtarastra helplessly replied: “The divine judge will punish him who has broken his laws. But, I am his father.” The drama reaches its peak of intensity when Dhrtarastra’s blind love for his wicked son and Gandhari’s passionate plea for moral justice clashed. Her righteous indignation was the core of the play. When asked by his wife to disown their son, Dhrtarastra helplessly replied: “The divine judge will punish him who has broken his laws. But, I am his father.” To this, Gandhari retorted: “Am I not his mother? Have I not carried him under my throbbing heart? Yes, I ask you to renounce Duryodhana the unrighteous.” Unable to concur with his wife’s uncompromising demand, Dhrtarastra asked, “What will remain to us after that?” Noble is Gandhari’s reply, “God’s blessing.”

The play, because of her plea for the right cause, turns out to be a fervent tirade against unethical political tyranny. Her voice was the stern voice of *Dharma*, not of a soft-hearted mother. Gandhari of the *Mahabharata* was noble, but Tagore had made her nobler. Tagore has changed the occasion on which Gandhari’s speech was delivered. It was not, according to him, during the interval of two rounds of play of dice but at the time of the departure of the Pandavas for exile for 12 years. In the original the *Mahabharata*, the triumph of Duryodhana was far from being complete, but in the Tagore version he was

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99 Tagore, the Mother’s Prayer, the Fugitive, p. 106.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
exultant at his complete victory over his cousins. This change in the time of the conversation between Gandhari and Dhritarastra made the situation tense and dramatic. The burden of the successive speeches of Gandhari was that Duryodhana should be given up and banished from the kingdom. Gandhari was not less affectionate to her son than Dhritarastra but she placed Dharma above all personal considerations. She placed herself as the representative of the whole body of women and demanded justice from the king on their behalf for the grievous wrong that had been done to Draupadi. The Mahabharata was entirely silent on the reaction of the mother and wives of the Kauravas at the attempted disrobing of Draupadi in the public assembly. Tagore had made Gandhari to expound the eternal principles of Dharma in the most forceful way. Dharma was not, according to her, a means to an end but an end in itself. The theory of punishment enunciated by her introduced humane element, which was lacking in the usual discussions in political philosophy. With great force did she tell her husband: “When the judge is callous of the pain that he inflicts, he has not the right to judge. And if you withdraw judgment from your own son to save yourself from pain, then all the culprits ever punished at your own hands will cry for vengeance against you at God's throne for had not they also their fathers?"103 Nowhere did Tagore’s Gandhari shine more brilliantly than at the time of bidding farewell to Yudhishthira and Draupadi. She had failed to persuade her blind husband, blind morally as well as physically, to discard the wily Duryodhana but all her sympathies and blessings went to the poor Pandavas. She predicted the return of much greater prosperity to them and prayed that they might get strength from the air, luster from the heaven, and patience and forbearance from the earth. To extol the character of Gandhari still further, Tagore had attributed to her the advice and benediction given by Kunti to Draupadi in the original epic. By all these devices Tagore has created a lofty ideal of Indian womanhood in Gandhari, who was prepared to sacrifice even her beloved son at the altar of justice and righteousness. No other lady in the whole range of his literary works was as stern, unbending and dutiful as Gandhari.

1.2.2. Kunti--- a crafty politician

In the drama Karna and Kunti Samvad (Karna and Kunti Dialogue) written in 1899, Kunti was a crafty politician. Apprehensive of the mighty valor of Karna, she made a

103 Ibid.
supreme effort to win him over to the side of the Pandavas. She told Vidura that she was not so much afraid of the enmity of Bhism and Drona to her sons as of the implacable hostility of Karna. She thought that Bhism and Drona would not be able to forget their affection for her sons, but Karna was wicked, glorious and so much attached to Duryodhana that he could not but bear malice towards the Pandavas. She, therefore, resolved to make an attempt to make him favorably disposed to them by disclosing to him the secret of his parentage. In the *Mahabharata* we fail to detect the least sign of shame or even hesitation on her in confessing to Karna that she conceived him before her marriage. The epic related how she proceeded to the bank of the Ganges where Karna was engaged in meditation at mid-day and told him abruptly without any introduction that he was her son born in the days of her maidenhood. She condemned him for siding with Duryodhana and not befriending his own brothers and told him that the law of piety demanded that he should regard the satisfaction of his parents as his great duty. He should, therefore, come over to the side of the Pandavas and share their wealth, which had been unlawfully wrested away by the sons of Dhritarashtra. Karna gave a sharp and sarcastic reply to her but at the end he assured her that he would not try to kill any of her sons except Arjuna. Whether Arjuna killed him or he killed Arjuna, Kunti would remain the mother of five sons. Kunti took care to remind him of this promise before her departure. Tagore had transformed this bald story into a tale vibrating with tender and graceful sentiments. He had first of all altered the time of the interview from noon to dusk because Kunti was ashamed to confess her maidenly transgressions and her unmotherly conduct to the son she had forsaken. The scene was the night before the cataclysmic clash of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The sunset, with the advancing darkness and shrouding mystery, provided the opening image of the play. Kunti, the queen mother of the Pandavas, motivated by selfishness had come to reclaim her prenuptial son, who was abandoned by her out of shame at his birth. She visited Karna when the latter was at his devotion. She was painted as repentant of her conduct and always cherishing sincerest affection for her first born. It was followed that by her effort to induce Karna to fight on the side of the Pandavas. She told Karna that she had come to let him take her breast thirsting for his love. The scene had additional pathos from the fact that Karna was represented as yearning for the love of his unknown mother. She said,
On hearing this, Karna had a strange stirring in his heart to which he gave expression:

"I do not understand: but your eyes melt by heart as the kiss of the morning sun melts the snow on a mountain-top, and your voice rouses a blind sadness with me of which the cause may well lie beyond the reach of my earliest memory. Tell me, strange woman, what mystery binds my birth to you?" The dramatic irony was understood when Karna found his mother, only after he and Arjuna, offspring of the same womb, had become each other's sworn antagonists. Kunti's request to Karna, who had now become a commander of the Kaurava army, to join the Pandavas was obviously determined by expediency as he was now a major force to count with in deciding the destiny of the war. When craving "a boon" she came to her son and revealing her identity said, "I have come to take you." Emotionally stirred for the time being, Karna said, "Command me, and whatever manhood and my honor as a Kshatriya permits shall be offered at your feet."

Irresistibly drawn to his long-sought mother for whom he ever unavailingly sought the dim vista of his childhood, he told her, "The gloom of evening spreads over the earth, silence rests on water and your voice leads me back to some primal world of infancy lost in twilight consciousness. However, whether this is dream, or fragment of forgotten reality, come near and place your right hand on my forehead. Rumor runs that I was deserted by my mother. Many a night she has come to me in my slumber but when I cried, 'open your veil, show me your face', the figure always vanished. Has this same dream come this evening while I wake?"

Here Tagore had proved to be a far more excellent poet than the author or authors of this portion of the Udyoga Parvan of the Mahabharata where Krishna was described as having already divulged to Karna the secret of his birth. According to the epic, Karna told Krishna that whoever might have given birth to him he would always regard Radha, the carpenter's wife, as his real mother, because it was she who had reared him up with affection. He continued in an ecstasy: "Before the din of tomorrow's battle, in the awful hush of this field where it must be fought, why should the voice of the mother of my

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104 Tagore, Karna and Kunti Samvad.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
opponent, Arjuna, bring me a message of forgotten motherhood? And why should my name take such music from her tongue as to draw my heart out to him and his brothers? Capitalizing on Karna's softened state of mind Kunti eagerly rejoined, "Then, delay not, my son, come with me!" Under the spell of the motherly call, Karna, his heart filled with filial fervor, said: "Yes, I will come and never ask question, never doubt. My soul responds to your call; and the struggle for victory and fame suddenly become untrue to me, as the delirious dream of a night in the serenity of the dawn. Tell me whither you mean to lead?" Kunti asked him to join the Pandavas, his brothers, and it seemed that she had succeeded in winning him over to their side which might have then and there turned the scale in favor of the Pandavas. He, it seemed, had surrendered himself to her, but, in reality, from here the tide took a new turn. His emotional recoil began. Karna thought of her unmotherly act and asked her to explain: "Then why did you banish me—a castaway uprooted from my ancestral soil adrift in a homeless current of indignity? Why set a bottomless chasm between Arjuna and myself, turning the natural attachment of kinship to the dread attraction of hate? You remain speechless. Your shame permeates the vast darkness and sends invisible shivers through my limbs. Leave my question unanswered! Never explain to me what made you rob your son of his mother's love! Only tell me why you have come today to call me back to the ruins of a heaven wrecked by your own hands?" The query of Karna shattered the heart of Kunti and for a moment she was rendered speechless by remorse. Heart-rending was her admission of the outcome of her sin and the sorrow thereof: "I am dogged by a curse more deadly than your reproaches; for, though surrounded by five sons, my heart shrivels like that of a woman deprived of her children. Through the great rent that yawned for my deserted first-born, all my life's pleasures have run to waste. On that accursed day when I belied my motherhood you could not utter a word; today your recreant mother implores you for generous words. Let your forgiveness burn her heart like fire and consume its sin." Unable to bear her sorrow Karna said, "Mother, accept my tears!" Finding that Karna

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108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Tagore, Karna and Kunti Samvad
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.

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could not be moved from his high moral stand, Kunti pathetically changed her strategy, and presented before her heroic son the proposal which carried with it a great temptation, “I did not come with the hope of winning you back to my arms, but with that of restoring your rights to you. Come and receive, as a king’s son, your due among your brothers.”114 Spurning the offer, Karna said that he did “not covet the glory of greater parentage”, or the “kingdom” and refused to be deflected from his cherished ideal of life. Outright he told her: “Must you, who once refused me a mother’s love, tempt me with a kingdom? The quick bond which you severed at its root is dead, and can never grow again. Shame were mine should I hasten to call the mother of king’s mother and abandon my mother in the charioteer’s house!”115 Recovering from the transient sway of Kunti’s motherly appeal, he reminded her that he could not be false to the lowly mother who had reared him. Karna, whose “heart was devoted to righteousness”116 further added that he could not betray King Duryodhana who befriended him and, above all, he had to be true to himself. The contrariety of their attitudes created the dramatic tension. Here, Kama resisted the affectionate call of his mother to remain true to his ideal of honor. Kunti was the victim of her own action which now recoiled on her: “You are great, my son! How god’s punishment invisibly grows from a tiny seed to a giant life!”117 Here the fate sense found an empathic expression. Neither Kunti could undo what she did nor could Kama respond to her call. Their life showed the inexorable laws of destiny. Even so, Karna, consoled the heart-broken Kunti by prophesying the victory of the Pandavas in the ensuing war. Accepting the inevitable, he begged her to abandon him a second time: “Mother, have no fear! I know for certain that victory awaits the Pandavas. Peaceful and still though this night be but my heart is full of the music of a hopeless venture and baffled end. Ask me not to leave those who are doomed to defeat. Let the Pandavas win the throne, since they must: I remain with the desperate and forlorn. On the night of my birth you left me naked and unnamed to disgrace: leave me once again without pity to the calm expectation of defeat and death!”118 Though Kunti failed in drawing his deserted son, Karna to the side of the Pandavas, she made all her efforts to do so as manipulative

114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
and maverick a politician would do. For the triumph of the Pandavas in the war she overcame the shame as a prenuptial birth-giver.

In Tagore's plays we have more examples of such female characters as Sarasvati in the Genius of Valmiki, Sati in The Faithful Wife, and Gandhari in The king of the dark Chamber. The background of these female characters are furnished by the two epics.

1.2.3. Asha— A paragon wife like Sita, docile, meek but innocent and a deserted woman.

Asha in Binodini written in 1903 was the wife of Mahendra. She was a docile, meek, charming and innocent woman and was deserted by her husband. She belonged to the traditional type of Hindu woman who worshipped their husbands. Asha believed that her husband could do no wrong. She was an example of an innocent and simple-minded woman who could be deceived both by her husband and by the people around her. Through the character of Asha, Tagore pointed out how bitter sorrows, calamities and sufferings could transform a simple, artless and impractical woman into an efficient and able mistress of the household, commanding respect from one and all. Asha was an orphan, brought up by her uncle. She was a favorite niece of her aunt, Annapurna. Her uncle who was conscious of his prestige did not allow Annapurna to bring her up. As he had his own unmarried daughters, her uncle was anxious to get rid of Asha by arranging her marriage soon, without having to give a dowry. So Annapurna, who had Ash's welfare at heart, thought of Bihari as the prospective groom, but all her plans went awry due to Mahendra's insistence on marrying Asha. Asha, with her graceful, sweet and charming looks was regarded as a paragon of virtues. She created a favorable impression on both Bihari and Mahendra. Bihari felt that her nature must also be as nice as her looks. Mahendra was so enamored of her sweet disposition that he readily changed his previous decision of postponing his marriage. He even prepared to oppose his mother and broke his friendship with Bihari to marry her. After her marriage, Asha did nothing but obey the dictates of her husband. She had no knowledge of the behavior expected from a traditional daughter-in-law in a joint family. She was also ignorant of the ways to please the mother-in-law and dominate the house. She neglected her household duties to spend time with her husband who indulged in lovemaking, neglecting his medical studies. He

118 Ibid.
always kept her in his room on the pretext of educating her. Both Rajyalakshmi and Annapurna were taken back at her behavior. Annapurna taunted Mahendra: “Would it be good for her to live like the girls of today, reading novels, weaving rugs and leading a life of leisure?” By spending her entire time in the company of her husband, Asha embarrassed the two elderly women in the house. So Rajyalakshmi left for her village and Annapurna left for Kashi. Asha was inept in household duties and interior decoration. Her troubles started after the departure of both her mother-in-law and her aunt from the house. Her mismanagement of the house reached its peak when Rajyalakshmi, her mother-in-law returned from the village, bringing Binodini along with her. Being a simple-minded woman Asha could not apprehend the risk of having another woman—and that too a woman of Binodini’s beauty and celibacy—in the house. She naively introduced Binodini to her husband. As Rajyalakshmi later pointed out that but for her silliness, Mahendra would never have fallen into Binodini’s clutches. Asha suffered from an inferiority complex and magnified her drawbacks. She was a retiring and shy woman who could not mix freely with others. This complex increased when she faced an extrovert like Binodini, who exploited the opportunity to take the full charge of the household and looked after the personal comforts of both Mahendra and Rajyalakshmi. The ease with which Binodini managed to dominate the entire household confirmed Asha’s own estimate of herself as congenitally slow-witted and inept and incapable of doing anything smartly. Asha was a sober woman unlike Binodini who was a queen of emotions. As a result, she suspected no one of treachery and took people at their face value. She failed to understand Bihari and shunned his company. In the same way, she was unable to notice the weaknesses of her character and in her innocence, she let Binodini look after her husband during her absence so that he was not put to any discomforts. Similarly, she failed to comprehend the cunning nature of her mother-in-law who encouraged Binodini to entice Mahendra. Asha understood her husband’s true character only when she read Binodini’s letter to her husband admonishing him. This was the turning point in her character. After the elopement of her husband with Binodini she did not allow herself to breakdown under the calamity; rather she rose to the occasion and

119 Tagore, Binodini, p.24.
asserted her position in the house. Thus she was able to win the sympathy and love of her mother-in-law. She treated her husband with the contempt he deserved as she could no longer worship her husband as a god who degraded the purity of married life. Hence she consigned his image to the turbid waters of Binodini's dark passion as Hindu devotees consigned the image of the goddess Durga into the river during the puja festival. She differed with Rajyalakshmi in the belief that it was the duty of the wives to keep them on to the straight path. She declined to make any attempts to win back the affection of her husband. Mahendra had fallen in her estimate to such a low level that she could not tolerate him when he looked at their wedding photograph. Again, when he looked into her notebooks, kept on the table, she felt like tearing up those pages as they had been defiled by his touch. However, she did not waste her time in self-pity, instead she utilized the occasion to improve her reading and writing. She, who could hardly read Charupath, the Bengali primer, now read novels and journals with interest. Asha attended to her mother-in-law when she was ill. When Mahendra asked her mockingly whether he had to learn medicine for her, she retorted sharply, saying that not medicine but solicitude for his mother he might as well learn from her. Mahendra was shocked at such a rejoinder from his wife, whom he considered a simple, innocent woman. Asha displayed the same strength of character when Bihari brought Mehendra from Allahabad to attend to his mother on her deathbed. She did not allow Mehendra to enter the room but instead allowed Bihari to come in and see the mother first and follow whatever he advised. In the same way, she was able to form a true estimate of Bihari, reversing her former contempt for him. She made her aunt write to Bihari asking him to attend on Rajyalakshmi. Bihari also noticed that she was no longer a raw young girl, the baptism of sorrow had made her ageless like the paragons of chaste womanhood of which the legends spoke. Mahendra also discerned the change in her. The transformation of Asha from a simple, artless and incompetent woman to an efficient mistress of the household commanding respect from everyone was one of the major attractions of the novel.

1.2.4. Sudrasana---Gandhari-like wife who requested for union with divinity, to realize the personal relationship that bound man with God.

Sudrasana, in the drama The King of the Dark Chamber written in 1910, as her very name suggested, must have been an exceptionally beautiful princess. From her we can
see the shadow of Gandhari who, when knowing that her husband Dhritarastra was blind from birth, took a strip of cloth and tied over her eyes with a solemn vow to remain sightless so as to share the misfortune of her blind husband. But here in Tagore's works the heroine could only see her husband in the darkness. Sudrasana was married to the king who met her alone in the darkness of the chamber, where no light ever penetrated. She was eager to see the king, but nobody had ever seen him, though his faithful followers felt that he ordained and regulated everything. The king told her that he would appear amidst the crowd on the full moon day of the vernal season and she had to spot him out of the multitude. She was quite confident that she would be able to recognize the king, though the latter expressed doubts about it. She made the mistake of taking Suvama, who had dressed himself up as the king to be the real king and sent him offerings of flowers through her maid Rohini. The fake king failed to understand the significance of this offering, but the clever king of Kanchi realized it and prompted him to accept it and to honor the maid with the garland he was wearing. Sudrasana took that garland from him and put it on, but she felt that her love had not been recognized by her king. The king of Kanchi believed that there was no king in this kingdom and, therefore, planned to take the queen for his own enjoyment. He asked the fake king to set fire to the garden in which the queen was staying. The queen came out and requested the fake king to protect her; but he, afraid of his own life, admitted that he was no king. In utter shame, Sudarsana ran to the dark chamber where she preferred to burn herself. She heard the voice of the real king there, and confessed to him that she was guilty of wearing the garland given by some other person. She wanted to throw it into the fire but could not, because she told the king that she had been intoxicated by the external beauty of that person. She had had a glimpse of the king and found him extremely black with the glow of fire on his face. She contrasted it with the gracefulness of her enchanter, who was soft as butter, and beautiful as the butterfly. She recognized that she was unchaste and therefore, he wanted to go to a distant place where she would be able to forget the real king. The latter heard her confessions with equanimity and offered no resistance to her plans. This made her all the more miserable. She told him: "I cannot fly away from you, just because you do not prevent my going. Why do you not hold me back, hold me by the hair saying, 'You shall not go? Why do you not strike me?' Oh, punish me, strike me, and
beat me with violent hands. But your unresisting silence makes me wild—oh, I can not bear it."120 She decided to go away from him, but came back again to find that the King had gone away. She now considered herself free to go wherever she liked. She went to her father’s kingdom at Kanauj. But her father was ashamed of being the father of a woman, who had forsaken her husband. He could allow her to stay in his palace only as a maiden servant because she had willingly sacrificed her position as the unrivalled queen of her husband. Meanwhile, on hearing of her sojourn to Kanauj, the king of Kanchi accompanied by the fake king Suvarna came to her father’s kingdom to take her back to his own seraglio. The princes of Losala, Avanti, Kalinga, Virat, Panchal and Vidarbha all assembled there for the same purpose. Sudarsana came to learn of the cowardice of Suvarṇa, but still could not get rid of her infatuation for him. Her father fought against all the seven kings for the sake of his honor. But he was defeated at their hands. The king of Kanchi proposed that Sudarsana chose her new husband from among the victors. He asked Suvarṇa to hold the umbrella over his head with the object of attracting Sudarsana to his seat, knowing full well that in the midst of a big assembly she would be ashamed to put the garland round the neck of a person of servile rank and therefore would choose the latter’s master. Sudarsana found that there was no other way of saving the life of her father. She, however, decided to take a sharp knife hidden within her clothes. At this critical moment, she prayed to her invisible king and said to herself, “This body of mine has received a stain. I shall make a sacrifice of it today in the dust of the hall before all these princes! But shall I never be able to tell you that I know of no stain of faithlessness within the hidden chambers of my heart? That dark chamber where you would come to meet me lies cold and empty within my bosom today—but, O my lord! None has opened its doors, none has entered it but you. O king! Will you never come again to open these doors?”121 The king responded to her piteous cry. He sent a message to the assembled princes, all of whom fled away excepting the king of Kanchi who gave a straight fight and was defeated. He took his defeat in good grace and became an earnest devotee of the King. He addressed Sudrasana as mother. Sudrasana, too, gave up all her pride and

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120 Tagore, the Selected Works of Rabindranath Tagore, Shrijee’s Book International, New Delhi, 2003, p. 131.
121 Ibid. p. 145.
surrendered herself to the king. Seeing that she was walking on foot the king of Kanchi offered to take her in a chariot to the king. But she replied “I shall never be happy if I could not on my way back home tread on the dust of the road that led me away from my king. I would be deceiving myself if I were now to go in a chariot.” Her humiliation was complete when she told the grandfather: “I am his servant now, no longer his queen.” There was no longer any claim for equal rights. The error of the queen lay in the intense longing to see the pure spirit with sensory eyes that could see only the externals of things. The pre-existing but unrealized relationship of the human soul with the supreme lord was the basis of the dramatic idea. Its theme was an attempt to dramatize the secret dealings of God with the human heart. It was only in the innermost recess of the heart that the union with the king took place. The archetypal symbol of the King was a haunting iconography of the deeply felt reality of the divinity, the conception of the in-dwelling divine spirit, imminent yet transcendental, personal yet super-personal, manifested in infinite but outwardly elusive bonds of relationship with humanity. The chief concern of the play was God-realization or atonement of human spirit with God. The basis of a true union was that the first positive move had to come from the impassioned human soul that first surrendered itself completely to the king. Overcoming of the inner hurdle was the precondition of the spiritual awakening. God the eternal lover was ever sending his call to the human heart, but when man actively responded to it there was perfect reciprocation.

1.2.5. Sarmila—A Kausalya and Sumitra-like wife, and a mother-like wife.

In Two Sisters (Dui Bon) written in 1933, Tagore said, “Women are of two kinds, the mother-kind and the beloved-kind.” Sarmila was just such a mother-kind wife. Like Asha in the Home and the World and Kamala in The Garden, she was orthodox and traditional. She had all the attributes traditionally associated with Hindu womanhood: befitting modesty, selfless devotion, sacrificial spirit and self-effacement. Her main interest was to serve her husband with utmost sincerity and devotion. She was the eldest of the two daughters of Rajaram Babu, a very rich man of Barisal. She had no child and

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122 Ibid. p.146.
124 Ibid.
was reconciled to being barren. She was a homely beauty, with large, gentle eyes and steady looks. She was soft-spoken, graceful, wise and intelligent. Unlike her beloved-kind and ease-loving sister Urmishe was serious, duty-minded and believed in the principle of 'work is worship'. She had a strong will power and never accepted defeat. Her fighting temperament and strength of character gave her courage to face all adversities. She was not perturbed when she made her husband resign his position as the district engineer. She suggested to her husband that he join as a contractor in the business of her cousin, Mathurdada. She considered the honor and dignity of her husband as her own and would not tolerate anyone who looked down on him. For this reason, to protect their own dignity, she did not hesitate to pick up a quarrel with a railway official when he allotted the berth reserved for her husband, to a British officer. When her husband tried to ignore this slight, she insisted that he asserted his right since "In a compartment reserved for us, the British official is no bigger than you." 125 Again when Sasanka felt difficult about joining her cousin as a partner in a building contract for want of capital, she asked him to take her father's money so that he needed not feel small before his partner. She was the embodiment of service and looked after her husband as a mother looked after her child. She made him depend on her for everything. When he prepared to go to office she kept his clothes, including his handkerchief, ready. Some medicines were also kept in the car for emergencies. She personally looked after the comfort of her husband and did not rely on the servants. Even when she was sick, the comforts of her husband were not ignored. She gave elaborate instruction to her sister, Urmishe made him depend on her for everything. 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well in the pursuit of the 'call of glory'. Another example of Sarmila's keen insight was her correct estimate of the motives of Urmì's fiancé, Nirad. When everyone praised him highly, she alone rightly perceived his selfish intentions and stated, "Let's see how long these heroics last." Hence whenever Nirad was in the midst of one of his usual, profound discourses, she would suddenly get up and walk out of the room, her head mockingly cocked sideways. And in the name of research and his health at last he deserted her. Sarmila was a woman in traditional mould, and worshipped her husband with great devotion. She was the rare type of selfless, self-effacing woman. She forgave her husband, his flirtations with her sister on realizing that she had not made him happy. She even asked her husband to marry her sister with whom he was in love. In this respect she differed from Niraja in *The Garden*. Further, when her husband incurred a loss in business, she cleared the debt to Mathurdada without the husband's knowledge. She did not even allow Urmì to share the burden of repaying the loan. She was afraid that Sasanka's male ego might be hurt if he found out at once again he was indebted to his wife. She never let her husband know the sacrifice made by her and the mental agony she underwent for the sake of his honor. She behaved like a veritable goddess.

1.2.6. Kiranmayi—Wife who had loving hearts like Kausalya, Kunti, Satyavati.

In *The Nuisance* (*Castaway, Apad*) written in 1895, Kiranmayi was Sharat Babu's wife. She was staying with her husband and her mother-in-law in a garden house in Chandannagar to make a complete recovery of her health. Her doctor prescribed a change of air and a break from home and household duties. Nirkanta, a Brahmin boy, whose boat had sunk, had swum ashore and found his way into their garden. He belonged to a troupe of itinerant actors. She took good care of him as if he were her own child. She indulged him too much, without doubt. Sharat and his mother asked her to desist, but she paid no attention. Sharat's younger brother Shatish arrived to spend his college vacation in the garden house. Kiranmayi in great gaiety fed and clothed this brother-in-law, too. They were chasing each other, laughing, sometimes fighting, getting upsetting, then begging forgiveness and making-up. One day, the favorite swan inkstand of Shatish was found missing. Nirkanta was suspected to have stolen it. But he firmly denied any wrongdoing. But just in the evening before the family were going home, when putting some gifts and

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126 Ibid. p.32.
rupees secretly into his trunk in which Nirkanta did found the swan inkstand! He had
done this solely for revenge, intending to throw the thing into the Ganges, not to keep it.
Her affection towards Shatish provoked the jealousy of Nirkanta. When there was no
police in the room, Kiranmayi threw the inkstand into the river.

1.2.7. Subordinate, obedient and faithful wives

Tagore also portrayed some wives like Sita, Sumitra, Gandhari and Satyavati who were
subordinate, obedient and faithful to their husbands mainly in his first phase of writing
during 1881—1897. In Wealth Surrendered (Sampati Samarpan) written in 1891,
Brindaban Kunda's mother and grandmother could not be taken any medicine when they
were dying. When his wife fell seriously ill, the Kabiraji wanted to prescribe an
expensive medicine for her, but his father, Jajnanth questioned his competence and
dismissed him, and his wife died. In The Girl Between (Madhyavartini) written in 1893,
Hara Sundari, wife of Nibanra, had no issue from her husband. During the month of
Phalgun, she fell critically ill. On the 40th day, in spite of lovingly muddled treatment,
she began to recover. But she was so frail that she seemed like a ghost. Then the truth
struck that her husband must marry again. And he did marry a young girl Shailabala who
was obstinate, lazy, greedy, harsh and wayward. Hara Sundari looked after all the cooking
and household management. She quietly carried out every task. She began to lead a
celibate life. Then she was only 27. Under the pressure of the co-wife's envy, she gave all
her own jewelery to her. Then the young co-wife died of childbirth. She could not mix
freely with her husband any longer. She felt like an intruder in what had been her sole
domain. Side by side they lay there, just as they had lain before; but immediately between
them there lay a dead girl, and she was not able to violate her shade. She sacrificed her 27
years’ youth in drudgery of housework. In In the Middle of the Night (Nishithe) written in
1895, the zamindar Dakshinacharan’s first wife secured Dakshinacharan from fatal
illness by her painstaking care. But she herself fell ill and even after some time, she
showed no sign of recovery. She persuaded her husband to marry another girl. The
husband said that he would not be able to love anyone else. But in his heart he was
dismayed by the prospect with an incurable patient. Then he met Manorama, the doctor’s
fifteen-year-old daughter and his wife's sick room became doubly unattractive to him.
The doctor brought two bottles of medicine and showed them to the patient saying that
she should rub on the lotion in the blue bottle and take the other by mouth and make sure not to mix them up, for the massage-lotion was very poisonous. But the wife drank the medicine ‘by mistake’ and died. Before she died, she told her husband that that made her die happily. Dakshinachar then married Manoroma and flirted her in the same way to his first wife. Felner’s mother, in *My Lord, the Baby* written in 1891, whose real name was never used after the birth of her son, was a nonentity. Sashikala in *Didi* written in 1895, the wife of Jaygopal, was killed by her husband because she rescued her brother’s property from his clutches. Like Urmila, some wives were left in the cold and even deserted by their husbands. In *The Austere Wife (Tapashwini)* written in 1917, Shorashi was married to Barada at the age of nine. And her husband was a playboy. After three failings in examinations, he left the family at mid-night leaving a scrap of paper on which was written: “I am a sannyasi”. She knew that her husband was out to live a life of sannyasi. Shorashi was only 15 then. She sat alone in her room, her eyes sometimes filled with tears. The mundane world seemed to press in upon her from all sides and suffocated her very spirit. Serving sannyasis became the reason for her living. She wanted to find the shadow of her husband from the sannyasis. She searched and the search brought her happiness. It became the embodiment of her worship, the fulfillment of her life and youth. She herself took up the holy pursuit of austerity at home as a female sannyasi like Parvati. She began to sleep on the floor with only one blanket. She ate once a day, a meal of fruits and roots. She wore a coarse sari dyed ochre, but with a broad red border to show that she was still married. She began to study Sanskrit. In short time she memorized *Mugdhabodh*, the Sanskrit grammar. She was convinced that the farther she advanced on the path of learning, the closer she would come to mental union with holy men. She always sat by the window and listened quietly to a distant flute at the far horizon of her thoughts. The pundit’s reading and explication of the *Gita* sometimes made no sense, but a squirrel rustling in some dry leaves in the garden or a kite’s cry shrilly piercing the heart of the firmament, or the very knocking sound of an ox cart on the path by the pond, blown fitfully on the breeze, all made her alert and eager for no discernible reason. She also learned the yogi’s breathing practices. Barada, her husband had been away for 12 years, and Shorashi was now 25 years. Her yoga teacher told her that she had made great progress only because of her husband’s extraordinary spiritual powers. By such
mysterious means it was gradually revealed that Barada was sitting naked like Shiva in
the snow on the Longchu Mountain, an extremely inaccessible peak in the Himalayas. It
filled her with joy that her husband’s contemplative power surrounded her day and night,
and that even though she was separated from him physically, the separation was not real
at all. There and then she decided to undergo an even harsher discipline of devotion.
When her father-in-law told her that their assets were up, she decided to go to the
Naimisha forest to build a hut. Ironically, one day, a young Bengali dressed in sahib’s
clothes leapt down. It was Barada who had gone to American as a crewman on a
steamship. Now 12 years later, he was back as a traveling salesman for a washing-
machine company. In Elder Sister (Didi) written in 1893, Shashikala, whose parents
entrusted her two-year-old brother Nilmanuto to her care when they were dying. And her
husband Jaygopal was entrusted to run their estate. But Jaygopal seized all the properties
inherited to Nilmani. When the magistrate came to visit, she sued her husband. “So long
as he cannot get back the house which is his by right, I shall not dare to take my brother
there. Only if you keep Nilmani yourself will he be safe.” She left her small brother to
the magistrate and returned to her husband’s house. Not for long afterwards the villagers
heard one mourning that Shashi had been smitten with cholera during the night and had
been cremated that very night. Her death left a mystery.

1.2.8. Nirupama and Haimanti— victims of dowry

In Tagore’s time, dowry was a shackle on women. Many wives were despised, ill-
treated, persecuted and even murdered by the husbands’ families. Nirupama in Profit and
Loss (Denipaona) written in 1891, was the only daughter of Ramsundar after five sons.
Her father found a groom who was a deputy magistrate. The groom’s father, Raybahadur
asked a dowry of Rs10,000, and many additional gifts. Even after pawning, selling and
using every method he could, the girl’s father still owed Rs 6,000-7,000. The groom’s
father replied, "If you can’t hand the money to me now, the bride will not be brought
here". But the groom rebelled against his father, saying firmly, "This haggling and
bartering means nothing to me. I came here to marry, and marry I shall." The marriage
was completed in a gloomy, joyless sort of way. Ramsundar often went to see his

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daughter, but he had no honor in his son-in-law’s house. Nirupama was treated spitefully at every turn. She shut herself in her room and wept—a daily penance for the insults heaped on her family. Her mother-in-law’s assaults were especially vicious. Even her food was neglected. If a kind neighbor expressed concern, her mother-in-law would say, “She has more than enough”, implying that if the girl’s father had paid full price she would have received full care. Everyone treated her as if she had no right in the household, and entered it by deceit. When her father brought Rs 3,000, a part of the dowry he owed, her father-in-law burst into a coarse laughter and said, "Those are no use to me," making it plain by using a current proverb that he did not want to make his hand stink for no reason. After that, asking to bring Nirupama back home seemed out of the question. Her father had to sell his house secretly and raised full debts of dowry, but the sons were informed and they strongly protested against it. Nirupama had no difficulties in understanding the whole situation. “Father,” she said, “If you give a single paisa more to my father-in-law, I swear solemnly you will never seem me again.”129 Her father said, "If I don’t pay the money, the shame will be forever on my head,—and it will be your shame too." "The shame will be greater if you pay the money," replied Nirupama, "Do you think I have no honor? Do you think I am just a moneybag, the more money in it the higher my value? No, father, don’t shame me by paying this money. My husband doesn’t want it anyway.”130 In the meanwhile, her torture continued unabated. On a chilly autumn her mother-in-law made her lay with her head near the open door, and she wore no extra clothes during the winter. The servant would sometimes forget to bring her any food. She was herself a servant in the household. She now fell seriously ill. When her illness got worse, her mother-in-law did not allow her father and brothers to come to see her just once. When her breath began to fail the doctor was first called and it was the last visit that he made too. After her death, a letter from her husband arrived, “I have made all necessary arrangements here, so please send my wife to me quickly.” Her mother-in-law replied, “Dear son, we have secured another girl for you, so please take the leave soon.

128 Ibid. p.48.
129 Ibid. p.49.
130 Ibid. p.52.
and come home". This time the dowry was Rs 20,000, cash down.

We have another example in Tagore's short story *Haimanti* written in 1915 where the heroine Haimanti was killed for dowry. Haimanti was beautiful and educated. She was married to Apu when she was 17, that was much over the marriageable age and was concealed by her mother-in-law. But Haimanti was so honest and innocent that she told the truth before her in-laws, which made her parents-in-law greatly embarrassed. Haimanti's father offered a very big dowry. And her father-in-law knew that Haimanti was the only daughter of her father. Also he heard that Haimanti's father was an education minister under a raja in the western hills. Her father-in-law expected that the entire wealth of the bride's father would one day fill the belly of his son's future and his son would succeed the position of minister. Her father was a member of the state administration. There were many rumors about the amount of his money accumulating in the bank but none of it was put at less than a lakh of rupees. The consequence was that with every rise in her father's assumed bank balance, the affection Haimanti received from her in-law's family also went up. But one day her father-in-law's face looked ominously dark. Her father had given Rs 15,000 in cash and Rs 5,000 in jewelry for the marriage. Her father-in-law had come to know through an agent friend of his that the entire Rs 15,000 was borrowed, and not a low rate of interest either. The rumors about the lakh of rupees were empty. He found out that Haimanti's father was the director of the education department, the lowest in the scale of respected posts. In one night, the position of Haimanti in her in-law's family dropped from the cloud to the abyss. The fault was all Haimanti's, too. Her fault was that she was 17. Her fault was that her husband loved her. Every moment, bit by bit, Haimanti was dying inside. Through the iron bars, she held a mute conversation with a mute sky. She was wasting away. Banamali Babu, their matchmaker and her father's friend who saw her one day, was shocked. About ten days later, her father arrived without prior information. He had seen something on her face that had broken his heart. Haimanti's father-in-law had once assured him he could take his daughter with him when he wished. He could not imagine that word once given could be taken back. Her father brought a well-known physician to examine her. He said, "A

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131 Tagore, *Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore*, UBSPD, New Delhi, 2004, p. 188.
change is necessary. Otherwise she might come down with a serious illness." But her father-in-law smirked, "Any one can suddenly come down with a serious illness."

Haimanti realized her father’s proposal had been rudely rejected. Her mind stiffened like a block of wood. She said to her father, "Baba, if you could come running again to see me, I’ll lock the door on you." She soon died as doctor predicted. She became a sacrifice of dowry.

1.2.9. Child-Marriage

Child-marriage in Indian society was a conventional practice. This insulted into tragedies. In some cases, young wives in Indian families did thus bring about some problems. If a wife was too young, she was innocent and did not understand her husband and in-laws well and the family was difficult to become harmonious. Such tragedies can be seen in Mashi (Shesher Ratri) written in 1914 and also in the drama House-Warming (Grihaprabesh) which was adopted from the novel by Tagore in 1925. Mani, the young wife could not realize the seriousness of the illness of her husband Jotin. Defying Mashi, the widowed aunt of Jotin she went to her father’s house on the occasion of the Annaprashan ceremony of her youngest sister whom she had never seen. Jotin whose death was approaching felt that it was Mani who was coming to him in death’s guise. Mani’s father must have explained to her how improper was her behavior. Leaving aside the ceremonial function at his house he came to Jotin’s place with Mani. On seeing that her husband was about to expire, she flung herself on his feet and the aunt who appeared to have been highly critical of her behavior now requested Jotin to put his hand on Mani’s head and bless her. The aunt herself had been widowed in her childhood and now her sympathy went to Mani. Jotin was extremely kind and sympathetic to his tender wife who, due to her innocence of young age, subjectively brought some disharmonies and even pain to the family. Uma in Exercise-Book (Thata) written in 1891, was married off tearfully at the age of only nine. She took her notebook which she liked best with her to her husband family. But for Hindu wife to wield pen and paper was considered a sure prelude to widowhood. Uma put by her exercise-book, but returned to it after hearing a beggar-woman sing of the goddess Durga’s visit to her parents’ home. Uma was a name

132 Ibid. p.172
for the goddess: it inspired Uma to write down the song in the book she had brought from her parents' home. Her disobedience led to her husband's confiscating the book. At the end of the story, she clung to her mother earth as though seeking shelter in her bosom. But unlike the epical Sita, the present-day girl was denied even that refuge.

1.2.10. Caste separation—a serious blockage in marriage

Caste separation was a problem in Indian society in which women were first afflicted. In *Renunciation (Tyaga)* written in 1892, Kusum, the daughter of Kayestha, and Hemanta, son of Brahman loved each other, and they got married. When they were in great happiness, the groom’s father, after knowing the truth, came and shouted to his son, “turn your wife out of the house immediately.” Kusum mentally waded barefooted through fire, as it were, with slow unflinching steps, and no body knew how much she was scorched. Kusum thought that her husband had gone, never to return to her again. Only the world and love seemed to her as a void and make-believe from beginning to the end, even the memory of the protect of love, which her husband had made to her. in days past, made her lips dry, boged hard joyless smile, a feeling as if like a sharp cruel knife which had cut through her heart. So feeble was its support. No sooner did the priesthood touch it than the ‘eternal’ love crumbled into a handful of dust. Fortunately, when the father asked his son to turn the girl out of the house, the son said, “Father, I won’t forsake my wife.” The father roared, “Would you lose your caste?” The son replied calmly, “I don’t care for caste.” Then the father renounced them both.

1.2.11. Birds in Cages

Tagore portrayed the women characters who were kept in seclusion within their households like birds in cages, who were neglected, deserted, betrayed and even persecuted by men or husbands. From this point of view, Tagore’s works more poignantly reflected the reality of his society. In *Mukti in Palataka* written in 1918, Anon who married at the age of nine was so much pre-occupied with household duties for the next twenty-two years that she hardly noticed the change of seasons. Being face to face with death, she yearned for the free air of spring. Badhu, a village girl in *Manasi* written in 1881, felt herself imprisoned in the atmosphere of Calcutta city and yearned for natural

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scenery of her village. Binu, a wife of a joint family in *Phanki in Palataka* written in 1918, fell ill and her husband took her out for a change. She asked her husband to give a big amount to a beggar but the husband fraudulently gave only a small amount and told his wife a lie. In *Saved* written in 1900, Gouri was a beautiful, delicately nurtured child of an old and wealthy family. Her husband Paresh was an advocate in a small western town. All his thought was about his wife, so much so that sometimes he would come home before the rising of the court. He would dismiss one of the servants without reason. And he would begin to cross-questioning the maid about her. Her pride raged within like a wounded lioness at these insults. Deprived of marital happiness, the childless Gouri took herself to the consolations of religion. She went for Paramananda Swami, the young preacher of the Prayer-House, and formally acknowledged him as her spiritual preceptor.

All the wasted love and affection of her woman's heart was poured out as reverence at the feet of her Guru. Paresh did not dare to hint any suspicion against the guru. But his jealousy slowly ate its way into his heart like a hidden cancer. One day some trifling circumstance made the poison overflow. Paresh reviled Paramananda to his wife as a hypocrite, and suspected that his wife was in love with the ascetics. Gouri was maddened by his suspicion. Paresh forthwith went off to the Court-house, after slamming the door on her. In a heat of passion at this last outrage, Gouri went to see her Guru for rescue. With a stern rebuke, the Guru Paramananda sent Gouri back home. From that day Paresh got a guard to keep over the house. The Guru felt he ought to leave the place at once; at the same time he felt unable to make up his mind to forsake the tortured woman. One day the imprisoned Gouri got a letter from the Guru who wanted her to meet him by the tank in her garden at two o'clock the following afternoon. But the letter was found by her husband. He immediately died of apoplexy. Paramananda the Guru found this out and accordingly made his appointment with Gouri. The widowed Gouri watched the sight from the window of her Guru stealing in like a thief to the side of the pool. The Guru called: "Gouri," "I am coming," and she replied. When Paresh's friends heard of his death and came to assist in the last rites, they found the dead body of Gouri lying beside that of her husband. She had poisoned herself. In *Atonement* written in 1894, Bindhya Bashini, was wife of Anath Bandhu, a good for nothing college student. At the *Puja* festival, Anath Bandhu stole all the cash from her wealthy father-in-law's iron safe and escaped by ship.
to England. Bindhya Bashini kept the matter of theft to her self. The girl who failed to bring herself to beg money from her father, the wife who would have given her life to keep her husband least misdemeanor secret from even the closest relation, was now exposed to public view. Her wifely pride, her status as a daughter, and her self-respect got desecrated and trampled into dust beneath the indiscriminate feet of those she loved and those she did not, those she knew and those who were completely strangers. No one sympathized with her suffering. Every one was astounded at the wickedness of the conspiracy. Anath Bandhu at first wrote regularly to his wife from England, but gradually his letters became less frequent and imperceptibly a note of indifference crept in. He came to regard himself as miss-matched with a wife in a simple sari, a veil and a skin of the wrong color. Nevertheless, when he needed funds, he did not hesitate to telegraph this inferior Bengali girl, who would sell all her jewelery to continue to keep sending money to him. Finally she sold her last bangles and silver bracelets, and even her Benares saris and her shawls. On the very day of atonement ceremony of her husband held by her father, a rosy cheeked, auburn-haired, blue eyed girl who was as fair as froth on milk, and as nimble as a doe ran forward to embrace her husband and implanted on his lips a kiss of conjugal reunion. Bindu in Strir Patra (Wife's Letter) written in 1914, an orphan girl, lived in her elder sister's family where she was treated as a burden and was married to a lunatic. She ended his life because she found her life intolerable. In Karuna written in 1878, Karuna, daughter of Anupkumar, a rich man of a village was given in marriage to Narendra who was brought up by her father. Narendra took to evil ways and neglected Karuna. Subha, was a dumb village girl in Subha written in 1893. Although a dumb girl, she longed for a hopeful future. It was as if, on some full-moon night, a tide would come in from an unknown sea, and fill her soul with a new inexpressible awareness. She was brought by her parents to Calcutta where she was married to a man who worked in north India. Soon after the wedding he took Subha to his working place. Within a week everyone realized that the bride was dumb. But what they did not realize was that this was not her fault. She did not deceive anyone. Her eyes had said everything, but no one had understood her. She was soon forsaken by her husband. Next time her husband, having used both eyes and ears for the examination, bringing home a bride who could speak.
1.2.12. Kumu—Sacrifice of family

We have another wife who also became a sacrifice of her husband. In *The Gift of Sight (Dristidan)* written in 1898, Kumu was married to Abinash at the age of only eight. She survived her illness. But whether through physical weakness, or mental distress, or for whatever reason, her eyes were effected. Her husband was at that time studying to be a doctor. With all the enthusiasm of a student, he leapt at a chance to try out his medical knowledge. He began to treat her eyes himself. Her elder brother was a college student for his BL. He proposed that Abinash should let a really practicing good doctor to examine her. But Abinash insisted that he treat her himself. When her eyes got worse Abinash and her elder brother mutually agreed to call an English doctor to come and operate on her left eye. In its weakened state, it failed to withstand the shock of surgery, and its dim remaining light went out. After that the sight of other eye also little by little faded into darkness. One day the husband came to her bedside and said, "It was I who destroyed your eyes." And he vowed, "Kumu, I can never give you back what I destroyed through my stupidity, but as far as I am able to I shall make up for your loss of sight by staying by you." When Kumu said, "You must marry again", he replied, "I may be stupid, I may be arrogant, but that is not to say that I am wicked too! I made you blind with my own hands if I compound my error by deserting you and taking another wife, then I vow, by my *istadevata* Krishna, to count it a sin as wicked as patricide or the killing of Brahmin!" She rejoiced in the deep-seated knowledge that her husband's awesome vow would prevent him from marrying again. Nothing could dislodge that joy. Within a short time, she learned to carry out her customary tasks through sound and smell and touch. She stopped allowing her husband to do her work, and restored to herself all the work she had done for him before she got blind. Meanwhile an aunt-in-law came from her village to see how her nephew was getting on. She suggested that her nephew Abinash marry again. With the tacit consent of Abinash, she took Hemangini, 14-year-old daughter of her brother-in-law. The daughter was beautiful, too. Kumu began to notice that her husband was beginning to neglect his medical practice. At last, he took a boat under the pretext of marrying Hemangini without Kumu's knowledge which was

135 Ibid.
impossible because she could know anything with her smart senses of hearing, smell and touch. The betrayal of the vow of her husband made her into great agony.

1.2.13. Surama and Bibha—the victims of family and political conflict

In The Queen Consort Fair (Bauthakuranir Hat) written in 1883, Surama was the wife of Prince Utayaditya who loved his wife very much because she was beautiful, kind and considerate. She supported her husband in everything which she thought just. But she was extremely envied by her mother-in-law, the queen in whose eyes her daughter-in-law was like a witch who induced her son. Colluding with the real witch, Rukmini, she poisoned Surama. In the same novel, Bibha, the princess became victim of political conflicts. She was married to Ramachandra, the head of a native state. To hold up his dignity, Bibha’s father, King Pratapatya of Mesore Kingdom was very cold to his son-in-law, which offended the son-in-law greatly. He was determined to revenge. He decided to abandon his wife. When Bibha was being sent to his palace, a magnificent wedding was going on to receive a new bride. Bibha was insulted and kicked out by Ramachandra. Bibha had no other way but to go to Varanasi and devoted herself to God.

1.2.14. Kumudini—the self-willed woman, a victim of the family feud.

Kumudini in Yogayog written in 1929 was the youngest sister of Bipradas of Chatterajees family who was her closest relative after their parents died. Kumudini was beautiful, tall and slim like the stalk of a tuberose. Her eyes were intensely dark, and her nose, perfectly straight, was delicate as if fashioned out of the petals of a flower. She had her education at home, but was hardly aware of the world outside. She lived in a twilight zone between the old and the new. Her world was dimly lit, ruled over by obscure goddesses like Sidhiwari, Gandhwari, and Ghentu. The fortune of the family was now on its last legs. Madhusudan, was a rich merchant of Ghoshals family that had been having a feud with Chatterajees family. Madhusudan was 47 years old and became a Maharaji of his fortune. To keep the feuding on and to show that his family now was winning the fighting, he wanted to marry none but 19-years-old Kumudini of Chatterajees family. In spite that the would-be bridegroom was old, ugly, rude, stingy and greedy, Kumudini agreed without any hesitation because some astrologer predicated that she would be a Rajtirani. She told her brother, “My match must have been already fixed with him of
whom you speak of ”. “I cannot marry anyone else.”\textsuperscript{136} The innocent girl was not aware that their marriage was also a sequel to the old feud. After wedding, she was a bird in cage. She had not any freedom. Even the letters and telegrams from her brother were kept by her husband. Madhusudan only knew how to make money. He did not know at all how to please his wife with tender feelings. To satisfy his physical desire was all he wanted to have from Kumudini. And partly, his cold attitude towards Kumudini was out of the revenge to Chatterajees family. That he was not the one to tolerate defiance of his authority made Kumudini defied him more, because Kumudini was not a wife who was submissive to her husband unconditionally. She came to know that life between wife and husband without any love and tender feelings was not life at all. She was very painful. And she deposited her soul to his inner God Krishna. But the suffering lingered on there. She came back to her brother, Bipradas. They decided that Kumudini would not go back to Madhusudan. But Bipradas owed too much debt to Madhusudan who violently forced him to pay. Otherwise it would get worse. Furthermore, surprisingly, Kumudini came to knew that she was pregnant. Now she had no option. She had to go back to Madhusudan. Again she was trapped into the bird cage and there was no hope to get out. Kumudini’s tragedy came from two factors: she was too innocent and self-willed.

1.2.15. Nirjharini and Nada’s wife—wives equal to their husbands in family

But in Tagore’s works, there were some families in which wives were equal to husbands and competed against husbands. In \textit{Darparahan} written in 1902, Nirjharini and her husband competed for a prize in story writing. She felt extremely unhappy in winning the prize, because her husband did not get it. From the story we can see two things: the wife and her husband were equal in the family and the wife was not deficient at all in relation to the husband. In the story entitled \textit{Adhyapak (Professor)} written in 1898, Kiran, the heroine passed the B.A. examination with the First Class securing topmost position amongst the successful candidates at the Honors examination. But she was so modest that she tried to hide her knowledge and education. In \textit{Match-Making (Patra o Patri)}, Nada Krishna was a headmaster of a school. His wife, though beautiful, lacked the proper family background. She was from where said to be such a low caste that the drinking

\textsuperscript{136} Tagore, \textit{Yogayog}, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1996, p.38.
water and some other pure properties got vitiated by her touch. When every one pressed her husband, Naneeda Krishna about this, he said, "Yes, she is of low caste, but she is my wife." Then the question arose of whether such a marriage was legal. To the man who raised it Nanda Krishna said, "God knows my marriage is more legal, every minute of the day." 

1.2.16. Mothers like Kanti and Satyavati

1.2.16.1. Kshemankari—a combination of an orthodox way of life, refined taste and liberal outlook

In The Wreck written in 1906, Kshemankari, the mother-in-law of Kamala played a significant role in the novel, though she was a minor character. She was the representative of the early 20th century orthodox woman to whom ceremonial purity and religion was of utmost importance. She was the precursor of Anandamoyi, the important woman in Tagore's magnum opus, Gora. She resembled the latter in her spirit of independence, keen sense of perception and literal outlook. Kshemankari was the wife of Rajaballabh, a landlord in the neighborhood of Faridpur in east Bengal. They had a son, Nalinaksha who was greatly attached to his mother. She was a strong-willed woman who did not reconcile with her husband in matters of religion. Her husband joined the Brahmo-Samaj at the age of thirty but she refused to follow him, leave the Hindu fold and follow him. Rajaballabh, slighted by this rebuff, remarried a Brahmo widow. Thereupon Kshemankari left her home and settled down in the holy city of Benaras on the bank of the river Ganges. Kshemankari was the type of woman who gave utmost importance to ceremonial purity. In Benaras she led a puritan life. Her day began with a ceremonial bath in the waters of the sacred river Ganga. Since she did not take food or water from non-orthodox Hindus, her son Nalinaksha cooked for her whenever she was ill. She observed all the rituals and ceremonial purity of orthodox Hinduism. She was a connoisseur of art and kept her home spic and span, a trait which was rare in women of her kind. Further, she was skilled in embroidery, knitting and sewing and learnt modern styles of hairdressing from an English lady. Hemnalini, on her first acquaintance with Kshemankari, was pleasantly surprised at the latter's eyes for beauty and order. Apart from her taste for

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138 Ibid.
beauty and order, Kshemankari’s powers of perception and critical analysis were marvelous. Hemnalini was amazed at the critical comments and observations of Kshemankari on the Bengali novels that she read out to her. Kshemankari was not a narrow-minded doctrinaire. Though she led an orthodox and austere life, she forbade her son to emulate her example as she believed that under insistence on ritualism it was uneconomic of men. In the same way, she did not approve the simplicity and austere life of young Hemnalini. She told the latter: “At your age, you should be enjoying life thoroughly, You should be thinking of clothes and amusements instead of religion.”

She confessed that she was orthodox because she was brought up in an atmosphere of piety. She asked Hemnalini to stick to the faith of her childhood and not to be influenced by the teachings of her son. She was so liberal in her outlook that she herself proposed Hemnalini as a bride for her son though the girl was a Brahmo. Kshemankari was impulsive and short tempered. She could insult anyone who tried to hurt her ego. For example, when she detected that Hemnalini was not very enthusiastic about marrying her son, she decided to snub her. She asked Kamala to dress up fashionably so that “when that college-trained beauty sees you, she’ll be put to shame. You can hold up your head with any of them.”

She failed to understand Hemnalini’s agitated mind and cheerless disposition and concluded that she did not estimate her son very highly. So she decided to let Hemnalini know that her son was not an ordinary man, to be got so cheaply. One wondered how Kshemankari, who had refused to accept the religion of her husband when he became a Brahmo, proposed a Brahmo girl, Hemnalini, to her son. And in the same way, she requested her son not to be austere, and practice orthodox rituals. One understands that she was liberal and tolerant only with regard to her son and intolerant with her husband. “In the whole gamut of Tagore’s women, Kshemankari was a rare type-- a combination of an orthodox way of life, refined taste and liberal outlook. Further, she was an extreme example of women who preferred to sacrifice their husbands for the sake of what they considered their religious duty…”

139 Tagore, The Wreck, Macmilan, New Delhi, 1999, p. 293.
140 Ibid. p.294.
141 Majumdar, Heroines of Tagore, p. 221.
1.2.16.2. **Anandamoyi**—Symbol of motherland and universal motherhood without sense of barrier of caste, religion and race, and a rebel against the customs and conventions of the conservative society.

Like Hemnalini, the readers too are pleasantly surprised at her behavior. With some modifications she appeared again in the name of Anandamoyi in Tagore's next novel, *Gora*. Anandamoyi in *Gora*, written in 1910 played a significant role in the novel. She was drawn as a foil to Gora. Through her Tagore pointed out how the barrier of caste, creed, religion and race could be overcome by love and understanding. She was a living example to show that mere religious practice and arguments could not bring purity. She illustrated, from her own experience, how love for fellow human beings could create miracles in life. She played a pivotal role by influencing, inspiring and guiding all the four major characters in the novel. To Gora she was, besides being an ideal mother, a great source of inspiration and the very image of his beloved motherland; to Binoy, a living scripture; to Lolita and Sucharita, a moral supporter and to Poresh Babu, a source of peace and solace. She was the universal mother, who loved all. Anandamoyi was the second wife of Krishnadayal who held a post in the Commissariat Department. Being fatherless, she was brought up by her orthodox grandfather, a great pundit of Benaras. With her dark complexion and well-knit figure, Anandamoyi did not look as if she was the mother of Gora who had a fair complexion and a towering personality. Her delicate body appeared to have been chiseled by God, tenderly and with utmost care. Her gray hair indicated her age and wisdom. Her face radiated the purity of her heart. She was bestowed with sound sense, keen perception of mind and sympathetic understanding of people. She was the only character who did not take part in the polemics, which occupy a major part of the novel. She and Poresh Babul were free from religious fanaticism and did not take sides in the heated Brahma-Hindu conflicts of the day. Anandamoyi appeared to be a symbol of Tagore's broad vision of life, liberal and non-sectarian outlook and universal love. She echoed the novelist's ideal of 'heaven of freedom', where there was no barrier between man and man. The adoption of Gora was a soul shattering experience that shook the foundations of her beliefs and gave her a new religion. She brought up Gora, the orphaned child of an Irish couple who were killed during the tragic days of the Mutiny. She considered the child as a gift of God and felt that she held him in her womb.
in her previous life. From the day she took the orphan into her arms, her religious outlook changed. She confessed to Harimohini, "He Himself took away my caste, I have ceased to fear what others may think of me." She believed that human beings were not born with caste and there was no reason why they could not be united in wedlock in spite of their different religions. That was why she welcomed the marriage of Binoy with Lolita. She was opposed to coercion and imposing of one's religious opinions and forms on others. In this regard she was in sharp contrast to Gora, a bigot. Binoy and others were surprised by her liberal outlook. It was quite probable that she received her broad outlook on life and social problems from her grandfather. Anandamoyi was a great social rebel, as a true follower of Raja Rammohan Roy. She did not care for the traditional and orthodox practices of her community. Her dress, eating habits, social and religious practices proclaimed her a rebel against the customs and conventions of the conservative society. She was the only one in her class to wear a bodice. Hence, she was mockingly referred to by her people as “Memsahib”. She ignored such taunts and regulated her life as she thought right, but never came out of her religious fold and obeyed the ethos of her group. In matter of marriage too, Anandamoyi’s views were more liberal than others. As she advised Binoy not to marry Sashi, the daughter of her step-son, Mohin, since she was a child. On the other hand, she encouraged the inter-communal marriage of Binoy and Lolita. Even regarding the performance of marriage, whether it should be according to Hindu or Brahmo rites, she alone felt: “It’s quite enough if the ceremony be performed in God’s name.” Without care for social sanction and despite the opposition from Gora, she took upon herself the responsibility of arranging the marriage of Binoy and Lolita. Born in an age of tradition and taboos, Anandamoyi was not a docile woman. She was such an independent person and staunch individualist that she did not follow any of her husband’s religious fads. In this respect, she resembled Kshimankari of The Wreck. After the adoption of Gora, she became somewhat unorthodox in her behavior and habits but they did not come into conflict with her husband’s religious way of life. She did not think it inconsistent to lead a life different from that of her husband and at the same time served him and her child. Anandamoyi showed the same love, affection and concern for Binoy

142 Tagore, Gora, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2001, p.471.
143 Tagore, Gora, p. 183.
that she extended for Gora. She understood like a mother all the subtle workings of Binoy’s mind. She told Mohim that she knew Binoy better than Gora. Again, she supported Binoy and Lolita when the entire society took up cudgels against them for their journey on the steamer. She did not hesitate even to oppose Gora in her support to Binoy’s marriage. She told Gora: “If Binoy knew that I would not give his bride my blessing then nothing would induce him (Binoy) to marry”144 Binoy, too, had great love and devotion for Anandamoyi. He wished to return to God all his learning and knowledge, to take refuge in her lap, and become a child once again. Unlike Gora, Binoy understood and admired her advanced, liberal and non-sectarian outlook. He often wondered from where she got such a liberal outlook. She was a living Goddess to him, one who took on herself other’s sorrows and burdens. He told Sucharita that he was prepared to die young if only Anandamoyi who knew his drawbacks and virtues, wrote his biography. In short, she was the ‘the image of all the mothers in the world’ for Binoy. Binoy’s love and regard for Anandamoyi found a fitting comparison with that of Bihhari for Anandamoyi of Binodini. The fiery, dashing and rebellious Lolita, at her first meeting with Anandamoyi, was overwhelmed by the latter’s comparison and affection. Her troubled mind found peace and solace in Anandamoyi’s company. She confessed to Anandamoyi that on seeing her she learned where Gora got his strength from. She felt herself belittled before the magnanimous and noble-hearted Anandamoyi. When Poresh Babu dropped Lolita in Anandamoyi’s house, she consoled and assured him that he had nothing to worry about as Lolita was fortunate to marry Binoy and she treated Lolita like her own daughter. Anandamoyi appreciated Lolita’s liberal outlooks. She felt as though she was given a new life, when Lolita argued that there was no need for Binoy’s initiation into the Brahmo Samaj. Anandamoyi’s relationship with her son was not an ordinary one, commonly found between any mother and son. Her faith that Gora was a consecrated child born to fulfill something great gave her strength to break away from the traditions and oppose the whole society. She made it clear to Lolita: “If Gora had been like an ordinary child to me, from where could I have got the strength myself?”145 Her great

144 Ibid. p.341.
145 Ibid. p. 341.
confidence in Gora’s mission in life was evident when he was jailed. She neither felt sorry for his imprisonment nor abused the magistrate for convincing him. She knew quite well that Gora was not a coward to allow any man-made laws to stand in the way if he felt it right. However, Anandamoyi’s love for Gora was not uncritical and therefore she was not blind to his drawbacks. She warned him about his religious fanaticism, and never accepted his religious views and plainly told him: “It is impossible for me to accept what you call your religion.”146 A comparison of Anandamoyi and Poresh Babu enabled us to understand her better. Both had a non-sectarian and liberal outlook and sympathetic understanding of the people when they came into contact with. They had clear thinking, unperturbed minds and were free from fanaticism. Both acted as philosophers and guides to their respective arts. Both were humanists. The difference between Poresh Babu and Anandamoyi lay in the way that realized the unity of humanity. The former realized through his intellect and the latter by her heart. Anandamoyi’s liberal attitude was the result of her adoption of Gora but Poresh Bubu had no such emotional experience. And, perhaps, for this reason, he appeared to many critics as a shadow and vague figure. But Anandamoyi, in contrast, was intensely alive. Anandamoyi was unique and the noblest creation in the galaxy of Tagore’s woman characters. In her non-sectarian and liberal outlook, perceivable love and sympathetic understanding, Anadamoyi was nearer to Tagore’s life than any other character. No other character was endowed with the same culture, enlightened mind and advanced views on life and marriage. In his portrayal of Anandamoyi one may see Rabindranath’s transition from nationalism to internationalism.

1.2.17. Sumitra—A woman who wanted much more than to be only a wife:

In the drama Tapati written in 1929, Sumitra (namely Tapati), the heroine, did not want to be only a wife of the king Vikram of Jalandhar to meet his indulgence and passion but to get right over the performance of kingly duties. Tapati was almost a new drama, though some of its characters were common with Raja O Rani. Sumitra was much more spiritualized. The background of her marriage with Vikram was quite different here. When Vikram the king attacked Kashmir, some of the treacherous nobles of that country joined him. At this critical juncture Sumitra, then a maiden of 16 was making preparation

146 Ibid. p.178.
for sacrificing herself before Rudra-Bhairava, but her uncle Chandrasen and the ladies of the royal household persuaded her to marry the aggressor and thereby bring peace to the people of Kashmir. She prayed to Lord Kailashnath for three days continuously and took the vow that she would not allow the marriage to degenerate into a life of indulgence. The more she avoided Vikram, the greater became his passion inflamed. He bestowed high offices on the Kashmirian nobles with a view to pleasing her. But Sumitra had taken her position of Queen of Jalandhar so seriously that she implored the King again and again to drive them off the country because the people were suffering terribly due to them. The King retorted that her animosity towards these nobles was due to the fact that they helped Vikram in defeating Kashmir. The King also reminded her that she had got right over his heart indeed, but not over the performance of kingly duties. Sumitra proudly asserted that she did not derive any pleasure when she thought that she was a mere playmate in his frolics but had no place in the discharge of his work as a king. She spoke as if she were under the influence of the Satyagraha movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. She advised the subjects to make a demand for justice with much vehemence as the King did not in collecting the taxes. Being unable to afford any substantial relief to the oppressed people she went to the inaccessible temple of Martanda, the Sun God, and dedicated herself to its service. When she found that the King in his vain efforts to capture her was ravaging Kashmir, she brought peace by offering herself to the sacred fire in the temple. The play rested on the foundation of the spiritual truth of the Hindu myth of Tapati, the daughter of the Sun-god which pervasively informed texturally. The title-metaphor Tapati, meaning a woman engaged in austere self-purifying penance, (The name Sumitra assumed on her way to Dhruva Teertha after leaving her husband's evil State of Jallandhar), was a central point of reference. Myth and ritual interblended, for the mythical fact had been presented at the climactic stage ritualistically, in the offering of oneself, one's life-spirit, to the fire-god, essentially deriving its power from the sun-god, to be freed from the clutches of the temporal power as well as carnal pleasure. King Vikram wanted to make Sumitra only his queen, whereas the people wanted her to be their royal mother. The Queen made known her desire to drive away the 'band of avaricious hangers-on' who accompanied the king to Jallandhar after betraying Kashmir, their motherland. She considered them no better
than parasites, sinners, and locusts-like hordes. In an effort to appease Sumitra, who insisted on having her rightful position as the Queen of the land, the king offered her his whole royal treasure to distribute it in charity among the people and to be content with her benevolence overflowing the kingdom. Deeply conscious of her dignity, she spiritedly declined the material proffer. She wanted to see the king in her doting husband the king who would consider the public weal as his prime duty in which she would be his Queen-partner. The self-centered, the hedonistic king was attracted by the Queen’s outer beauty but he could not value her spiritual nobility. With composure and firmness Sumitra reminded her raving husband that his love had exceeded his object of love and that she was too weak to be a fit company for his tumultuous passion. Her shame would have been dispelled, she added, were she given a place at least at the door of the people whose heart-rendering cries were piercing her ears day and night. But the king told her that the critical state of affairs might involve war and serious State matters were not to be discussed by the Queen. When the guard reported that the Queen had gone to Kashmir, he thought that the Queen was to incite the rebellious subjects and declared his determination to capture his Queen and then to forsake her publicly. When the king surrounded Kashmir, the Queen wanted the messenger to tell the king that she would wait at the feet of god in the temple for the final settlement of their relations. Then she asked to throw open all doors, and to invite Vikram in. She asked the servant to prepare the pyre for consigning herself to the flames. Vikram stood penitently, weighted down with his great sin, transfixed, watching the flames consuming Sumitra.

1.2.18. Haratani—A woman with awakening sense to change conventional stagnant social status

Tagore depicted a woman—Haratani with awakening sense to change conventional stagnant social status in the drama Tasher Desh (The Land of Cards) written in 1933. A restive Rajaputra (literally, the prince) satiated by the luxury of the royal household was actuated by the irresistible spirit of adventure. In quest of an unknown object of desire, he was accompanied by his boon company, Sadagarputra (literally, the merchant’s son). Ship wrecked, they were landed in a strange country inhabited by a strange people. Though human beings, they looked like playing cards wearing some distinctive costume of one of the numbered and habited figures of the four main suits called ‘spades’,
'diamonds', 'hearts' and 'clubs' presenting a stratified society. The denizens of the land of cards were prisoners of system-bound existence, akin to that of a pack of cards. Endowed with the spirit of cards, they did not have any will of their own acting and moving strictly according with set rules (niyam). The presence of the two foreigners who were guided by their indomitable would disturb the placidity of the inhabitants of the new land. Their ridiculous, routinized conduct caused to laugh the full-blooded intruders from the outside world. The card-land community was in deep ferment following the contact with messengers from afar which acquired the form of a rebellion against age-old slavery to system and a welling forth of long-buried human emotions. Efforts by a die-hard section of the society to arrest such non-conformity proved of no avail. The new spirit born of the free would overtake the card-islanders. The rigid fold of the old-order crumbled as a result of total psychological transformation. Haratani was aware of the rigidity of the old order. To defend their new stand, she used a relevant image. She likened the peace of the land to an old tree, worm-eaten within, and said that as it was lifeless it had to be felled. In utter consternation, the pandit Dahala exclaimed: "Alas! Alas!! How could such words escape your lips. You are a woman, you should preserve peace; we men should defend culture." She boldly spoke out: "You have deceived us too long, Pundit. No more; our blood has been frozen by your message of peace, deceive us no longer." Dahala inquired: "From whom have you got these words?" Replied Haratani: "I am inviting him from my heart of hearts. The sky is vibrant with his song."

In despair Dahala exclaimed: "Utter ruin! A song in the sky? The collapse of Tagher Desh is surely imminent. Let me leave." Impressed by Haratani, whose stand by the new order exuded confidence, Chhakka and Panja approached her for guidance. Their exchange was significant:

Panja: You have got the message of unrest, initiate us into that.
Haratani: We are living in the ignominy of providential contempt, disgraced by our own folly. Come, let us go out.
Chhakka: They find fault with us at the slightest movement and condemn us as

147 Tagore, Rabindrar Rachchanabali, Tasher Desh, p.172,Vol. XXIII.
148 Ibid. p.185.
149 Ibid. p.185.
impure.

Haratani: Let us be guilty of impropriety. There is no greater impurity than lifelessness.\textsuperscript{150}

1.2.19. Bimala— the wife who went out of the zenana for political movement

But different from the above said wives, Bimala, the wife of Nikhil in The Home and the World written in 1915 did not agree with ‘caged birds’. Set against the stormy days of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1903--1908), The Home and the World unfolded the trials and tribulations of a home, caught up in the convulsions of a political struggle, with profound implications for the individual and the nation alike. For the first time in the history of the Indian novel, Tagore portrayed the tensions and the problems caused in the life of a woman like Bimala when she took part in the National Movement. Through Bimala, the novelist recorded the transition of ladies from their secluded life in the zenana to the national politics. The action of the novel was predicated on the two movements—one, an inward movement towards the projection of the home as a world in miniature and the other, an outward movement towards the outlook that the world was a larger home, a great home as it were. The novel raised certain fundamental issues like the role of woman at home and outside, and the equality of the sexes. For 9 years, Bimala had led a happy married life, anchored in the love of her husband, the modern-minded Nikhil, who arranged for her English education and introduced her to modern ways of life. Longing to find her blossom fully in the knowledge of herself in the wide world outside, Nikhil urged her to step into it: "What I want is, that I should have you, and you should have me, more fully in the outside world. That is where we are still in debt to each other....I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality.... If we meet and recognize each other, in the real world, then our love will be true."\textsuperscript{151} Perfectly content with her life and also out of regard for the conventions of the Rajh’s house, she declined to come out of the zenana. She recalled: “I have read in the books that we are called ‘caged birds’. I can not speak for others, but I had so much in this cage of mine that there was no room for it in the universe, --- at least that is what I then felt.”\textsuperscript{152} The eruption of the Swadeshi Movement broke down the barriers between the home and the world for Bimala because its impact was felt even in the innermost recesses of every

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid. p.186.
\textsuperscript{151} Tagore, The Home and the World, Macmilan India Limited, New Delhi, 1999, p.18.
home in Bengali. Bimala recounted: "One day there came the new era of Swadeshi in Bengali; but as to how it happened, we had no distinct vision. There was no gradual slope connecting the past with the present. For that reason, I imagine, the new epoch came in like a flood, breaking down the dykes and sweeping all prudence and fear before it. We had no time even to think about, or understand, what had happened, or what was about to happen. My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, up to this time, the walls of the home--- which was the ultimate world to my mind---remained unbroken, yet I stood looking over into the distance, and I heard a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart."\footnote{Ibid. p. 22-23.} Eager to do some personal sacrifice, she wanted to get rid of her English teacher, Miss Gilby and also burned her foreign clothes but was dissuaded by her husband who told her: "... why this bonfire business?... Why not try to build up some thing? You should not waste even a tenth part of your energies in this destructive excitement"\footnote{Ibid. p. 24.} Bimala felt happy that though her husband supported Swadeshi, he did not whole-heartedly adopt the spirit of Bande Mataram. Unknown to herself, she had a longing for the flamboyant and the passionate, and hence, her husband's 'dull, milk-and-watery Swadeshi.'\footnote{Ibid. p. 122.} did not appeal her. It was at this critical point in the story that Tagore introduced Sandip whose fiery eloquence held Bimala spellbound. Setting behind a screen at his meeting, she impatiently pushed it away---the action was symbolized that now she was face to face with the world---and fixed her gaze upon him. She recorded later: "I was no longer the lady of the Rajha's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood. And he was the champion of Bengal. As the sky would shed its light over him, so he must receive the consecration of a woman's benediction. I said within myself that his language had caught fire from my eyes; for we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself."\footnote{Ibid. p. 19.} Bimala's delusions of being the Sakti of the Motherland were clearly exploited by the unscrupulous Sandip who through clever flattery laid a snare for her mind and body. Under the pretext of promoting Swadeshi, he stayed on with Nikhil and pursued his
strategy of seduction extolling Bimala as the 'Queen Bee' of the Swadeshi workers. She felt exalted when she was told that the whole country was in need of him. To quote Bimalar, "Sandip's hungry eyes burnt like the lamps of worship before my shrine. And his gaze proclaimed that I was a wonder in beauty and power; and the loudness of his praise, spoken and spoken, drained all other voices in the world. Had the Creator created me afresh, I wondered? Did he wish to make up now for neglecting me so long? I who before was plain had become suddenly beautiful. I who had been of no account now felt all the splendor of Bengal itself." \(^{157}\) Nikhil, though perturbed and pained by Bimala's growing infatuation with Sandip chose not to intervene but to wait patiently for her to realize the truth of circumstances and recant herself from her headlong rush to ruin. He could easily expose Sandip for the hypocrite that he was—his habit of glorifying his selfish lust under high sounding names—but desisted from doing so for reasons given below: "It will, however, be difficult to explain to Bimala today that Sandip's love of country is but a different phase of his covetous self-love. Bimala's hero-worship of Sandip makes me hesitate all the more to talk to her about him, lest some touch of jealousy may lead me unwittingly into exaggeration. It may be that the pain at my heart is already making me see a distorted picture of Sandip. And yet it is better perhaps to speak out than to keep my feelings gnawing with me." \(^{158}\) He realized that image of Bimala had to reckon with the stubborn reality of her nature—her partiality for the audacious and the tumultuous in men—and he felt that it was up to her to realize her error. If she could not liberate herself from her delusion, he would rather bow out of her life than exercise the traditional authority of a husband over a wife to claim her back: "I must not lose my faith; I shall wait. The passage from the narrow to the larger world is stormy. When she is familiar with this freedom, then I shall know where my place is. If I discover that I do not fit in with the arrangement of the outer world, then I shall not quarrel with my face, but silently take my leave... Use force? But for what? Can force prevail against Truth?" \(^{159}\) Bimala was not altogether unaware of Sandip's designs; the patriotic causes which had drawn her to him has well nigh been forgotten; his conversation took an intimate,
personal turn; yet she felt hypnotized by him, unable to free herself from his spell. She confessed: "I will not shirk the truth. This cataclysmal desire drew me by day and by night. It seemed desperately alluring--thus making havoc of myself. What a shame it seemed, how terrible, and yet how sweet! Then there was my overpowering curiosity, to which there seemed no limit. He of whom I knew but little, who never could assuredly be mine, whose youth flared so vigorously in a hundred points of flame—oh, the mystery of his seething passions, so immense, so tumultuous!" It was made evident time and again that it was Sandip’s passionate rhetoric that enthralled Bimala. She reminisced: "Sandip’s eyes took fire as he went on, but whether it was the fire of worship, or of passion, I could not tell. I was reminded of the day on which I first heard him to speak, when I could not be sure whether he was a person, or just a living flame." Nikhil’s refusal to banish foreign articles from the markets in his estates provoked Sandip and his followers to resort to violence. Nikhil’s argument was that it was up to the people to choose between indigenous and foreign goods. He declared: "To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country." As the Muslim traders were particularly obdurate, Sandip’s followers sank a boat, and as its owner, one Mirjan, threatened to go to the police, it became necessary to pay him some hush money. As usual in his flamboyant manner, Sandip asked Bimala for a sum of Rs 50,000, but settled for Rs 5,000 at the end. Bimala stole the sovereigns of gold from her own home and the indignity of it set her on the path of self-introspection: "The burden of the theft crushed my heart to the dust. … I could not think of my house as separate from my country: I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house had ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me." The turning point in the story occurred when she went to present the gold sovereigns to Sandip. Seeing all that gold, Sandip was unable to restrain himself and sprang forward as if to embrace Bimala in congratulation; she thrust him away from her--a symbolical release for her. He reeled back hitting his head on the hedge of a marble table and dropped to the floor. Bimala recounted: "The moment I had stolen my husband’s money and paid it to Sandip, the music that was in our relations stopped. Not only did I destroy all my own value by making myself cheap, but Sandip’s powers, too,
lost scope for their full play...Sandip has lost his aspect of the hero; a tone of low quarrelsomeness has come into his words." He betrayed his covetousness and jealousy when Bimala handed over her jewels to Amulya, the young revolutionary, to be sold to replace the stolen amount. She now saw him in his true colors, and realized that all his eloquence was mere bluster and all his songs of praise false. She exclaimed: "Sandip, the wielder of magic spells, is reduced to utter powerlessness, whenever his spell refuses to work. From a king he fell to the level of a boor.... His snaky coils, with which he used to snare me, are exhausted.---I am free. I am saved, saved, saved. Be rude to me, insult me, for that show in your truth; but spare me your songs of praise, which were false." She was restored to Nikhil and received his blessing but she could not get rid of the feeling that her disastrous journey into the world had left its permanent mark on her: "What keeps crushing my heart is the thought that the festive flutes which were played at my wedding nine years ago, welcoming me to this house, will never sound for again in life... How many years, how many ages, must pass before I can find my way back to that day of nine years ago?" The reunion of Nikhil and Bimala did not last long, however. Sandip's attempts to turn nation-worship into Kali-worship and his joining forces with a neighboring Zamindar in coercing Muslim tenants to take to Swadeshi, resulted in a break out of communal riots and Nikhil rushed out in defense of the women of the neighboring Zamindar's house and was seriously hurt. The novel ended with Bimala disconsolately gazing out at the distant flames as Nikhil was brought in a palanquin with serious head injuries. The novel was primarily a declination of the delusions and discoveries of self of the principal characters---Bimala's delusion of grandeur about herself and about Sandip, Nikhil's delusion of Bimala and Sandip's delusion of Bimala and himself which were powerfully dramatized in their interaction to the objective reality---the Swadeshi Movement against alien rule. Bimala was able to realize the explosive potentialities of a self-centered Sandip who under the guise of a chauvinistic stance unscrupulously exploited the religious and patriotic sentiments of the people with disastrous results---almost breaking Bimala's home life by postulating a false connection
between the home and the world. Bimala represented both the traditional and liberated classes of women. Bimala, the wife of Nikhil, a titled landlord, was a dark, tall, slim lanky woman with lustrous eyes. She often grieved that God had done her injustice by giving her a dark complexion which she inherited from her mother. To compensate for her lack of beauty, she aspired to be a traditional Hindu wife on the model of her mother. From her mother Bimala had learned that beauty was not a woman's only asset, but service and devotion to her husband were as important, if not more, as beauty. During the first nine years of her married life Bimala's existence was like that of any traditional Hindu wife. Her way of life and behavior was similar to the traditional class of women like Kanjala (The Wreck), Asha (Binodini), Sharmila (Two Sisters) and Niraja (The Garden). Like them she began her day by consecrating the dust of her husband's feet. Everything connected with the husband was sacred. She kept all her husband's letters in a sandalwood box and put flower over it. She had no interests in the world other than her husband. She was of the opinion that wife's devotion for her husband would not come in the way of true equality. She firmly believed that a woman's salvation lay in surrendering her pride to her husband through devotion. Bimala led a contented life, discharging the duties of a traditional housewife. To outsiders, the women in Rajah's (Nikhil) house appeared like caged birds. But Bimala did not agree with that assessment since, "I had so much in this cage of mine that there was not room for it in the universe." 166 Bimala, unlike Asha in Binodini knew how to please the elderly woman related to her husband. She kept their company and engaged them in her own way. She maintained the dignity of the house and adjusted easily without creating unpleasant scenes. She won the favor of Nikhil's grandmother by reading out to her stories from English books. The old woman was so fond of Bimala that "she kept me in the shelter of her bosom, and trembled if I was in the least bit unwell." 167 Contrasted with Bimala's, Nikhil's views on the position of wife vis-à-vis her husband was quite modern. He was the champion of a new ideal of husband and wife relation. He was the opposite of Tovald of A Doll's House. He did not allow his wife to worship him. He believed that "man and wife are equal in love because

166 Ibid. p.19.
167 Ibid. p.19.
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162 Ibid. p.192-193.
163 Ibid. p. 211.
164 Ibid. p.239-240.
165 Ibid. p. 255.
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166 Ibid. p.19.
167 Ibid. p.19.
of their equal claim on each other." He valued that kind of love which was given out of free will and in the open competition with outside world and not as an obligation, or under duress. Bimala was not educated. Nikhil appointed an English governess, Miss Gilby to educate her. He believed that woman should come out of purdah. He asked Bimala to "come out into the heart of the outer world and meet reality... If we meet, and recognize each other, into the real world, then only our love will be true." Bilama had no desire to come out. She made this very clear to Nikhil: "If the outside world had got on so long without me, it may go on for some time longer. It needs not pine to death for want of me." Bimala was an aristocrat by temperament even though she was born in a lower middle class family. She declined to co-operate with Nikhil in ameliorating the lives of their tenants as she believed that they did not aspire for it. This made Nikhil think: "Bimala has only come into my home and not into my life." In order to appear civilized and refined, Bimala developed a fastidious taste and dressed according to the current fashion, ignoring the remarks of her sister-in-law, Bara Rani. And she also displayed her European doodas before her guests. She was always status conscious and never parted with her rights as the head of the family. She refused to accompany Nikhil to Calcutta for his higher studies, lest Bara Rani should take charge of the establishment during their absence. She felt that "One ought to stand up for one's rights. To go away, and leave everything in the hands of the enemy, would be nothing short of owning defeat." Bimala's outlook on life and society underwent a change with the advent of the Swadeshi Movement. Her home, which was her only world, was now taken and she failed to comprehend its real meaning, she was changed. The Swadeshi Movement synchronized with her modern education. Her husband encouraged her to step out of the Zenana into the world outside. In her excitement she decided to burn her foreign clothes. She decided to dispense with the services of her English governess. Nikhil's suggestion that she should understand the Swadeshi Movement in its proper spirit was of no use. She did not reason and was carried away by passion. Just at that moment, Sandip, a friend of Nikhil and a propagator of the Swadeshi Movement entered her life. She was impressed

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169 Ibid. p.18.
170 Ibid. p.18.
171 Ibid. p.114.

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by his eloquence. Then, in her excitement, she removed the screen of the Zenana to have a glimpse of Sandip. The fire in his words enflamed her mind. The spell of Sandip was so profound that she felt no longer like the lady of the rajah's family, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood. She persuaded her husband to invite Sandip for dinner and attended on him herself. Bimla wondered: "Would Sandip Babu find the 'Sakti' of the motherland manifest in me? Or would he simply take me to be an ordinary, domestic woman?" on the day of the dinner, Bimla dressed in her best, anxiously awaited Sandip's arrival. He came and boldly sat beside her. "He had no hesitation and seemed to be accustomed to occupy, unchallenged, his chosen seat. He claimed the right to intimacy so confidently, that the blame would seem to belong to those who should dispute it." At first Bimala's admiration for Sandip was due to his active involvement in the Swadeshi Movement. His gift of the gab cast a spell over her. Lowly, she was attracted by Sandip and became conscious of it. She was enchanted by his eloquence and felt that "the loudness of his praise, spoken and unspoken, drowned all other voices in my world." She was aware of the transformation taking place in her. "My rhythm and my language were different from what they are now. But the tide came up from the sea, and my breast heaved; my banks gave way and the great drum-beats of the sea waves echoed in my mad current. I could not understand the meaning of that sound in my blood. Where was that former self of mine? Whence came foaming into me this surging flood of glory?" Bimala had no difficulty in believing Sandip's balder dash that "...all the country was in need of me." In the second phase of her entanglement with Sandip, the earlier worship and respect for him was replaced by contempt and he looked down upon him. At the same time she could not get him out of her mind. He underwent an emotional conflict that was painful, and at the same time, sweet. Her conversation with Sandip was no longer about the country but about sex. Bimala was quite aware that in Sandip's appeal

172 ibid. p.12.
173 ibid. p.11.
174 ibid. p.12.
175 ibid. p.56.
176 ibid. p.56.
177 ibid. p.57.
"his worship of the country gets subtly interwoven with his worship of me." 178 Then her 'blood dance, indeed, and the barriers of my hesitation totter." 179 The novel was a boarding-house flirtation that masked itself in mystic or patriotic talk. It was only when Sandip demanded fifty thousand rupees from Bimala that she began to suspect him. Nevertheless, she stole gold and gave it to him. On seeing the gold, Sandip was so thrilled that he dashed forward to embrace Bimala. She threw him away in contempt. She recounted: "The moment I had stolen my husband's money and paid it to Sandip, the music that was in our relations stopped." 180 She realized her true position, for Nikhil had already told her, that "he set me free". She realized that freedom was "like setting a fish free in the sky,---for how can I move or live inside the atmosphere of loving care which has always sustained me" 181 Bimala, in spite of her flirtations, could never be accused of committing adultery with Sandip. She managed to check herself before it was too late. It was not fair to blame her entirely for all this. It was her husband, Nikhil, who by his various acts of commission and omission, contributed to her doom. Knowing full well that Bimala led a cloistered existence in her own home, without any knowledge of the real world, Nikhil dragged her, much against her will, into the outer world for which she was not prepared: "What I want is, that I should have you, and you should have me, more fully in the outside world...I would have you to come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality...! If we meet, and recognize each other, in the real world, then only will our love be true." 182 Again, noticing the growing intimacy between Bimala and Sandip, Nikhil did not take any steps to avert the catastrophe in his domestic life. In the other hand, he rationalized her flirtation, stating that "her nature, can only find true union with one like Sandip." 183 He consoled himself, patting himself on his back with the feeling that Sandip "is not a greater man than I." 184 Nikhil's permissive attitude was partly responsible for the tragedy that followed. If a husband who loved his wife objected to her doing something wrong, it could not be entirely selfish, he might be doing it in her

178 Ibid. p. 92.
179 Ibid. p. 92.
180 Ibid. p.183.
181 Ibid. p. 221.
182 Ibid. p.18.
183 Ibid. p.79.
184 Ibid. p. 79.

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interest. One might guide a young woman who was one's friend, might one not guide a wife? Poor Bimala in her introspection wailed: "Some demon has gained possession of me, and what I am doing today is the play of his activity—it had nothing to do with me." Nikhil did nothing to help his wife to avert the danger. She did not seek the assistance of her husband or Chandranath Babu, the teacher of Nikhil. It was her repentance for her behavior that brought her back. That was why she wanted to end her birthday celebration by taking the dust of her husband's feet. The union of Bimala and her husband did not last long, for at the end of the story Nikhil was brought home in a palanquin, with serious head injury. The reader was left wondering, whether Nikhil survived or not as the doctor made the cryptic statement 'can't I say yet! The wound in the head is a serious one.' Whatever one might feel about her infidelity, there was no doubt that Bimala was a real and convincing character.

1.2.20. **Nora-like wives who broke out of the family nets**

Also we have 4 heroines in Tagore's works who broke out of the family nets for their own individuality like Nora in Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. Detective' wife in *Detective* written in 1898 defied her husband and went out to meet her friend, Manmatha, in the latter's hotel. In *Furry Appeased (Giribala)* written in 1895, Giribala was the wife of Gopinath, a rich profligate whose persistent negligence drove her to the public stage and won warm applauses from the audience by the gift of excellent acting. Giribala was 16-year-old wife of Gopinath. She was charming, beautiful and graceful and was inferior to any of the pictures of foreign ladies in various states of dresses and undress on the wall. Her beauty was like a sudden ray of light, a surprise, an awakening, a shock. She was drunk with the wine of her beauty. Her husband was outside her control. His visits to the inner part of the house became rarer as he roved further and further afield. He abandoned himself completely to a ceaseless social whirl. Meanwhile Giribala, imperiously beautiful, ruled a realm without subjects from her bedroom's desolate throne. No lover came to enslave himself to her feet. Gopinath, however, was enslaved to Labanga, who acted at the theatre. Giribala went to the theatre secretly with her servant Sudhmukhi without the knowledge of her husband and was charmed with the performance. It was

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185 Ibid. p.190.  
186 Ibid. p. 280.
that brightly lit musical realm, where she could reign at the world’s center, dispensing her
greatness, where she would no longer be merely unknown, unloved, insignificant,
ordinary woman. She decided bitterly that if the day came when her husband, lured by
her beauty, were to fall at her feet like a scorched insect, enabling her to walk away
grandly, only then would her wasted beauty and youth be avenged! One night, her
husband came home. She thought that her day had come. But unexpectedly, he said, “The
key please”. No music, no love, no magic, no sweetness. “I’ll give you the key and
everything if you don’t go tonight”, she said. But the answer from her husband was
“That’s impossible.”187 When she refused to give him the key, he then grabbed hold of
her, wrenched off her armlets, her necklace and rings, kicked her and left. That night, she
thought of killing herself, of tearing to shreds her incomparable beauty, to avenge her
loveless state. But she realized that nothing would be gained by that: the world would
remain unaffected, no one would feel the loss. Labanga, the favorite actress of Gopinath
was playing the title-role in Manorama. But Gopinath took her and they eloped. The
theatre managers had to rehearse a new actress in the role of Manorama. The theatre was
full to bursting. And news of this reached Gopinath. Consumed with curiosity, he
returned to Calcutta to see the play. When the curtain closed, everything had broken loose
in the audience. When Giribala stood up in the bridal chamber, in all her beauty, unveiled,
dressed in red, glittering with jewels, inclining her head with indescribable hauteur,
directing at all, but especially at Gopinath, a fiercely contemptuous stare, sharp as
lightning, so that all the hearts of the audience leapt and the whole theatre rocked with a
barrage of applause: it was then that Gopinath jumped up yelling, "Giribala, Giribala!"
He ran and tried to leap on the stage, but the musicians restrained him. Outraged by this
interruption, the audience shouted in English and Bengali, "Get him out, throw him out."
Choking like a madman, Gopinath screamed. The police came and dragged him from the
theatre. All of Calcutta continued to feast their eyes on Giribala’s performance; all except
Gopinath. The revolt of Giribala was against the double standards of morality that
prevailed in the Hindu society. Mrinal, intelligent, very beautiful and a secret poet in The
Wife’s Letter written in 1914, was married at the age of 12 from a village to a rich family

in Calcutta and became the second daughter-in-law of her husband's family. Her husband was indifferent and unsympathetic to her. It did not take long for him to forget that his wife was beautiful. The family abused her daily as an over-clever female. In this family daughter-in-laws were "like a clump of grass from loose earth". Bindu, the younger sister of the first daughter-in-law came for shelter after her parents died and was driven out by her cousins. The family was irritated and angry. They took her as nuisance and treated her as a slave. The obedient first daughter-in-law lacked the courage to show her love openly, from the heart, to her orphaned sister. But Mrinal was providing Bindu with the love. In the end, unable to get rid of Bindu by their own means, her husband, conspiring with the family, had recourse of Prajapati, the god of marriage. They pressed Bindu to get married. At the wedding night, Bindu found that the man they forced her to marry was mad! Very late at night, when her husband had fallen asleep, Bindu found a means to flee the house and come to Mrinal. But Mrinal's husband said that Bindu was lying and tried to frighten her by saying that if Bindu's in-laws lodged a case with the police, they would be in trouble. Bindu had no way but to set her clothes on fire and kill herself. Mrinal's husband and other people began to say, "it's now the fashion for girls to set their saris on fire and kill themselves", "This is all play acting." and destroyed the letter left to Mrinal by Bindu. Mrinal felt that she could not stay in such a family and with such indifferent and merciless husband any longer and decided to go out of this family and her husband's house. She told her husband in the letter, "I will never again return to your house. I have learnt what it means to be a woman in this domestic world. I need no more of it." "You had shrouded me over in the darkness of your habits and customs. For a short space, Bindu came and stole a glimpse of me through the rents in that shroud. And it was this very girl who, through her death, tore my shroud to tatters. Today, having come out, I find no vessel to contain my glory. He who found my slightest beauty pleasing, that Beauteous One is gazing at me through the whole sky. The second daughter-in-law is dead at last." 'Mrinal' means a lotus-stem. At the end of the story, Mrinal, "bereft of the shelter" of her husband's lotus-feet, resolved to blossom like the lotus itself. The catalyst

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188 Tagore, Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore, UBSPD, New Delhi, 2004, p.204.
189 ibid. p.207.
in the process was Bindu, whose plight awakened Mrinal to the helplessness of a woman in that society. In the *House Number One* written in 1917, Anila, the heroine was married to Adwaitacharan who was bookworm and only knew reading and discussing with his friends. He was not considerable of his wife who was just like a furniture in the family. Sitangshumouli, a 32-years old and single *Zamindar* came as their neighbor in *House Number One*. The man was handsome, high-spirited and expert in horse-riding, Indian music, tennis and social contact. And what was more, he was very considerable of women. When, Saroj, her younger brother hanged himself after he failed in the examination and was reviled by his stepmother. When the news reached Anila towards evening, she had not waited for a carriage to be called. Taking the servant Ayodhya with her, she had gone out and hired a carriage on the way. Having heard the news from Ayohhya that night, Sitangshu went to Adwaitacharan’s in-laws’, squared the police and personally supervised the cremation. As Sitangshumouli was leaving the next morning, Anila prepared a much more elaborate dinner than she had ever done before. When Adwaitacharan woke up next morning, he found that Anila had gone. A piece of paper was under his spectacles on the table. On it was written, in Anila’s writing that she was leaving and asked them not to try to find her. And on opening the drawer, he discovered a packet of 25 letters tied with red silk ribbon. They had come from house number one, Sitangshumouli. In one of the letters it was written that she had moved about this world all this time with his eyes open and had found what she desired. The husband had received Anali from the priest, but he had not paid the price to receive from her Creator. The new school of logic and his books were far more important than she ever was. Since he had never really seen her, how could he complain if someone else had won her by offering her his life’s worth? From the letter, Anila’s husband was reassured that his wife had eloped with Sitangshumouli. So he went to Mussouri hills where Sitangshumouli was staying. But surprisingly, Anila was not there. Sitangshumouli showed him a letter. Anila’s going out of her family left an unresolved riddle. The 25 letters that Sitangshumouli wrote to his neighbor’s wife expressed his wonder at the singularity of her being—a wonder her Creator was held to share. Why did Anila leave these letters behind when she left home? She must know that soon or later, her husband Adwaitacharan would light upon them. Did she hope that on reading them, he would at
last realize that she was something more than the furniture of his daily life---realize the
treasure he had unwillingly lost?

From these characters a light of hope was revealed to women who were suffering in
their families.

Of course wives had their own shortcomings and demerits of which Tagore was clearly
aware. In his works he depicted some wife characters and pointed out frankly these
shortcomings and demerits that limited wives themselves in their happiness of life and
even resulted in their tragedies.

1.2.21. Stingy and Envious Wives

In the Revenge written in 1895, Vonodbehari, a zamindar, got bankrupted from his own
follies. His manager Ambikacharan helped him to buy back his lands. There was an
attempt to find money but it could not be collected. He pleaded and begged his wife
Nayantara for the jewelry but Natantara simply would not give it. She saw that
everything was about to crumble around her and these ornaments were her last and only
support. These she clasped to herself with the utmost care. In the Raja and Rani written
in 1900, Rani Basanta Kumar was very jealous of Bipin Kisore, a comely boy, an adept
in music, who was admitted by her husband Raja Cittaranjan into his Amateur Theatre
Party. The Raja suddenly became enamored of Bipin like one unto drink. Rani Basanta
Kumar laved at her husband, and said that he was wasting himself on a luckless baboon.
The sooner she could do away with him, the easier she would feel. The servants of the
house, took their cue from the Rani’s aesthetic and willful neglect of the wretched
hanger-on, and grew more apathetic and willful still. After the performance of the play
Suhadriharan in which the Raja acted the part of Krishna and Bipin that of Arjuna, the
Raja came to the Rani and asked her opinion. The Rani deliberately praised greatly Bipin
while showed indifferences to the Raja. From the day following, very good arrangement
was made for Bipin’s meals. The Rani told the Raja that it was undoubtedly wrong to
lodge Bipin Babu with the petty officers’ and proposed that there might be another
performance on the occasion of the first-rice ceremony of the royal weanling. Now the
Rani made the Raja be envious of Binpi. One day he found his wife was reading
something. On asking her what she read, the Rani was a little taken aback, but promptly
replied that she was conning over a few songs from Bipin Babu’s song-book and that they
had no music since he tired abruptly of your music hobby. Poor woman! It was she who herself made no end of efforts to eradicate the hobby from her husband’s mind. On the morrow the Raja dismissed Bipin. Even after deep cogitation, Bipin failed to ascertain the cause of the Raja’s sudden strange behavior.

1.2.22. Shailabala and Manimalika— misers

But, Tagore depicted another different kind of wife in The Girl Between (Madhyabartini) written in 1893. Shailabala was the second wife of Nibaran who worked in an English Company. His first wife Hara Sundari had no issue and not likely to have one because she was too frail after a critical illness. Shailabala was obstinate, lazy, greedy, harsh and wayward. She did not lift a finger in chores, waited upon by Hari Sundari as if by a slave, and entertained by her husband as if he were a court jester. Ideas about sharing the running of a house and caring for others as important duties in life were lessons Shailabala had never learnt. She pocketed all the jewelry of Hara Sundari. She was like a whirlpool sucking in costly items that had nothing to do with her. They included her husband’s monthly wages and Hari Sundari’s welfare and possessions. Cash in hand belonging to Nibaran’s company was also sucked into the vortex. In the end, her husband was caught. The sahib in charge was fond of him and allowed him two days to replace the cash. He had no other way but to ask Shailabala to sell her jewelry. But she said, "Why should I give up what is mine?" And she promptly flung the safe key over the wall into a pond. When Hari Sundari asked her husband to break the lock, she said that then she would hang herself. Her husband had to sell his ancestral home to replace the cash. Then he lost his job. But Shailabala’s vexation and misery were unending. She adamantly refused to accept that her husband could do nothing about them. If he could do nothing, why did he marry her? When his neighbors came to see them, she bolted herself in and refused to come out. When they had gone she flew into a rage, wept, starved herself. Such disturbances became routine. Manimalika in the Lost Jewelery (Manihara) written in 1898 was a rich man’s wife. She considered her jewelry more important than her husband. When her husband was bankrupt, she refused to deposit her jewels to save him. Following her adviser, she escaped with all her jewels to her mother’s home with the man by boat. But unfortunately she disappeared since then and no one knew her whereabouts.
1.2.23. Gunavati---A conservative of sacrifice

Gunavati in the drama Visarjana (Sacrifice) written in 1890, was a domineering personality. She had no issues and she took a vow to sacrifice one hundred buffaloes and three hundred goats every year, if the deity was pleased to grant her a child. Immediately after this, however, Govinda the king and her husband, being moved by the pathetic lamentations for Aparna’s lamb which had been offered as a sacrifice in the temple, passed a decree prohibiting the sacrifice of animals in the temple thenceforward. Without being aware of this decree, she asked the king to punish the person who had dared to insult the queen. Govinda confessed that he himself should then receive the punishment. Now Gunavati realized the situation. With boldness and subtlety she drew a distinction between the secular power and spiritual authority. She asserted that the king had got no right to interfere in matter spiritual. Thus a struggle between the church and the State ensued. The conscientious king could not allow the continuance of a practice that militated against the dictates of humanity. The queen wanted to uphold the age-long custom of offering animal sacrifice. She felt doubly aggrieved. First, that her sacrificial offerings had been turned away. This is an insult to her dignity. But more important than that was the fact that the king did not yield to her importunities and she thought that he had never loved her truly and that though he always professed that she was the mistress of his heart, in reality she was nothing but his slave. Such an idea would never have occurred to the queen of Pratapaditya as she never dared to oppose her husband in any way. Gunavati’s love for Givinda also prompted her to follow the time-honored custom because she feared that the stopping of animal sacrifice may bring evil consequences to her husband. When all her womanly wiles and entreaties failed to move the resolute Govinda an inch from the decision he had once taken, Gunvati threatened to play the part of a cobra that had been trodden down. She took to conspiracy. Raghupati, the priest of the temple who was eager to demonstrate the superiority of priestly power over temporal authority, encouraged her. The weak-minded Nakshatra, the brother of the king, played into the hands of the priest and the queen. Gunavati knew that her husband was intensely fond of an orphan infant named Dhruva and with a view to wreaking her vengeance upon the king, she was cruel enough to instigate Nakshatra to offer this child as a sacrifice to the idol of the deity. She became reconciled only when she found that the idol had been
thrown away into the river by the priest himself.

1.2.24. Bidhumukhi and Sukumari—Children-pampering and selfish women

In the drama Sodhbodh (Acquaintance) written in 1926, Bidhumukhi was the mother of Satish and Sukumari was Bidumukhi’s sister. Sukumari was childless. In defiance of his father’s will, they pampered Satish overmuch, contributing to the aberrant disposition in him. The sudden death of his father precipitated a crisis in the domestic set-up, forcing him to take shelter in his uncle’s house. The hope of inheriting the property of his rich and childless uncle was dashed consequent on the unexpected birth of a child to his aged aunt, Sukumari. The attitude of Sukumari reversed from one of extreme indulgence to that of an unconcealed aversion, which deeply hurt his self-respect and made him embezzle a large sum of money from the office in order to clear his debt to her. This landed him in greater trouble, for his office-chief, accompanied by the police, came in pursuit of him. Satish, who decided to end his life to save himself from utter ignominy, was dissuaded by his uncle from carrying out his intents. If Satish were not spoiled by his mother Bidhumukhi and his aunt Sukumar, if he was not hated by Sukumari after she had her own son, Satish would not develop an aberrant disposition and would not go to a criminal way.

1.2.25. Niraja—narrow-minded wife, a self-destroyer of a happy family

Niraja in The Garden was the first tragedy character portrayed by Tagore In The Garden written in 1934, Niraja and Aditya had been happily married for ten years. She fell sick and in bedridden after the birth of her child, who died soon after. Aditya brought her distant cousin, Sarala to attend on his sick wife and tend the garden. With her arrival, a crisis developed in the life of Niraja and Aditya. Sarala who was experienced in tending the garden, helped Aditya in his work. As a result their old friendship and love was revived. The taunting and jealousy of Niraja made Aditya and Sarala conscious of their love. Burning with anger and hatred, Niraja ill-treated Sarala. Aditya ignored his wife and justified to himself his love for Sarala. Niraja died as a frustrated woman. No tragedy was greater than the poverty of spirit that paralyzed our capacity to love and to forgive. At the beginning of the story, Aditya doted on her wife who shared his passion in tending the nursery garden. The love of these two had mingled in a hundred ways in the love and care of this garden. Both were so happy in the first ten years of their married life that her
friends were jealous of their harmony and would comment that "she had more than she deserves". The first blow in her life was the death of a child born after ten years marriage. By nature, Niraja was generous and kind. She used to give basketful of flowers and fruits to the friends who visited her garden. She had fanatic faith in love and took for granted that her husband would love her forever. But her faith in love received a shattering blow when she became an invalid, confined to bed. The other trait of her character was tenacity: "she was not the meek and docile sort who would bow her head and accept the verdict of fate."¹⁹⁰ A great transformation took place after she fell ill. She became very mean, cruel and self-centered. She was deeply hurt when Sarala helped her husband in developing the garden. She felt that she was being ousted from her position by an intruder. Niraja was conscious of the change in herself and tried to analyze the reasons and correct herself. But she was helpless. She lamented: "I've grown petty and mean—My mind had shrunk to the level of Harimali's... As ill-luck would have it, I am crippled physically. But why this crippling of the mind as well?"¹⁹¹ Another feature of her character was her possessive nature. Her love was marked by jealousy. She identified herself with the garden that was to her a symbol of marital bliss. The entry of Sarala into the garden was, to Naraja, the end of her marital bliss. So she asked her husband: "Did it mean nothing to you? Could you have born to cut up my flesh. If I were in your place I could have done it."¹⁹² Besides, being possessive by nature, Niraja demanded forever the love of her husband. She was unaware of the truth that she should deserve her husband's love. Her attitude was in sharp contrast to that of Nikhil, in The Home and the World who tried to win the love of his wife without exercising his authority as a husband. In moments of sanity, Niraja was overtaken by remorse at her vindictive attitude towards Sarala and asked for forgiveness: "I've been unjust to Sarala. I touch your feet and swear. I'll never again do her a wrong. Forgive me for what has happened."¹⁹³ However, just before her death she could not tolerate the presence of Sarala and went on abusing her with bitter words. The novel ended with the ghastly and horrible death of Niraja. Her death was not only due to physical sickness, but more, also due to her great jealousy and

¹⁹⁰ Tagore, The Garden, p.113.
¹⁹¹ Ibid. p.122.
¹⁹² Ibid. p.136.
¹⁹³ Ibid. p.161.
possessiveness. We can say that in more sense she destroyed the happy family and caused her own misfortune even her death. She could not tolerate that her husband was working together with Sarala. She could not bear her husband praising Sarala’s skill in gardening. She would often resort a mean trick to embarrass her by picking out an obscure botanic name from a book and innocently asking Sarala about it. When she faltered in her reply, Niraja would burst out into laughter and exclaim: “How clever! Even a child knows it.” Niraja’s accusation of infidelity on her husband’s part roused his dormant love for Sarala and he did not hesitate to openly express it to her. She asked her husband to forgive her for her ill-treatment to Sarala. But when Sarala came out of prison and came to see her, she again burst out and insulted her.

So from this novel it can be seen that the happiness of a family was maintained by both husband and wife. Of course we feel a little sympathy for Niraja, because she was bedridden. She did not want to lose what she had before. Her jealousy was from the nature of a woman.

1.2.26. Barodasundari—A wife with a narrow sectarian outlook

Barodasundari, the wife of Poresh Babu in the Gora, was a typical representative of the Brahmo society with a narrow sectarian outlook. Her behavior was arrogant as she tried to exhibit her superiority to the Hindus. She was the counterpart of Panu Babu (Haran) the supposed fiancée of Sucharita. Through such characters, Tagore revealed that such men and women were carried by the current of every new religious movement. Most of them joined the fold from an impulse of narrow selfishness…They differentiated between human beings on the basis of religion. Barodasundari was a middle-aged woman who came from a humble family but was anxious to show herself off as one belonging to the elite. She wore high-heeled shoes and took great care to dress herself and her three daughters in the current fashion. In the words of Panu Babu, she was a shining example of a Brahmo wife who could preserve the ideals of the Samaj. She had three daughters, Labonya, Lolita and Lila. Her son, Manu died very young. She was very keen to make friends with the Europeans and tried to win their favor. She is proud of her daughters’ accomplishments in acting and singing, and encouraged them to exhibit their skills. Barodasundari was least influenced by Poresh Babu. She had not imbibed his noble qualities even after long years of companionship with him. She admired the Brahmo
zealot, Panu Babu and believed that he was one of the ideal Brahmos. She suspected and feared that her husband might rejoin the Hindu fold as he was on friendly terms with the Hindus. She was such a narrow-minded and sectarian woman that she could not tolerate even the presence of Hindus. She changed the original name (Radha Rani) of Sucharita as it was a Hindu name. She was the Brahmo counterpart of Harimohini who hated the Brahmo as much as Barosundari hated the Hindus. She liked Binoy, whom she invited often as he was not an orthodox Hindu. Moreover, she saw in him the very image of her dead son, Manu. She could not tolerate Krishnadoyal, the father of Gora, who rejoined the Hindu fold. She was prejudiced against Gora and often argued with him on issues such as caste and idol worship. She showed no motherly affection for her rebel daughter of Lolita, but was afraid of her due to her fiery and revolting temperament. She did not approve of Lolita's marriage with Binoy. On the other hand, she joined hands with Panu Babu. She was such a Brahmo zealot that for it she was prepared to discard her daughter, husband and feminine decency. She went to the extent of visiting Binoy at midnight to force him to apply to the Samaj for his initiation. She would allow Binoy to marry Lolita only if he joined the Brahmo fold. She was just the opposite of Anandamoyi who did not raise barriers between man and man in the name of religion. With regard to Sucharita's marriage also, she supported Panu Babu, against the wishes of Sucharita. She encouraged him to fight for the hand of Sucharita and advised: "You must not give up your claim so easily. Be firm and we shall see what she can do."194 She was a jealous woman who could not tolerate the intimacy between any two persons. She often accused her husband that he loved Sucharita more than his own daughters. She thought that he was solely responsible for Sucharita's refusal to marry Panu Babu. Again, she could not tolerate Sucharita's concern for her aunt and was angry with Sucharita and said: "as if she has never received any care or affection from us."195 One redeeming feature in her character was that she cooperated with her husband in bringing up the motherless children, Sucharita and her brother Satish, in such a way that the people around her did not know that they were foster children. Barosundari reminded us of Mrs. Benet of The Pride and Prejudice who resembled her in many ways, especially in her anxiety to get her daughters married into

194 Ibid. p.203.
195 Ibid. p.192.
rich and fashionable families.

In the epics, women in families first were both wives and mothers. As wives, most of them were devoted, obedient, faithful, virtuous and sacrificing. Sita, Draupadi, Kunti and Satyavati became models of such wives for traditional Indian wives. As mothers, they were kind, sympathetic, selfless and even righteous. Gandhari, Yasodha and Radha were such good mothers. But some wives like Kaikeyi and Manthara were to be condemned. Because the former, being instigated by the latter, was drunk by power and destroyed the normal order of a state. But women in the epics were more than wives and mothers. Some of them were statesman-like. Gandhari rebuked his son Duryodhana at the game of dice when he was cheating Yudhisthira. Kunti went to see her pre-marriage-born son Karna and tried to persuade him to side with Pandavas. It is noticeable that in the epics, raksas were of the same feelings as human beings. Some of them were also devoted, faithful, obedient and even statesman-like. Mandodari, Trijata and Tara were such raksas. Mandodari persuaded her husband Ravana to set free Sita and not to fight against Rama. Trijata dissuaded Ravana and other raksas from persecuting Sita and consoled Sita. And Tara helped Sugriva to comfort Laksmana.

Tagore first took some characters from the epics as his heroines. But he did not repeat their stories. He used them to express his own ideas. In Gandhari Abedan, he stressed the righteousness and put Dharma above all the considerations through Gandhari. In Karna and Kunti, he emphasized Kunti as a crafty politician. Following the epics, Tagore also portrayed some similar wives as those in the epics. They were the same because they, as both wives and mothers, were devoted, obedient, faithful, virtuous, sacrificing, kind, sympathetic and selfless. But Tagore described much more of wife characters and their aspects than those in the epics. This just agreed with the social conditions of his times. Nirupama and Haimanti were persecuted to death by dowry and Kusum became the victims of caste separation. Such women as Anon and Gouri became birds in cages once they got married. Tagore exposed the unfair practice of child-marriage. Mani and Uma became its victims. Mothers in Tagore were more characteristic than Yasodha and Radha in the epics. Anadamoi was a universal motherhood without sense of barrier of caste, religion and race. Maybe Tagore more liked such mothers. Haratani had a sense to change conventional stagnant social status. Bimala went out of zenana to participate in political
movement. Murinal and Giribala, unable to endure the indifference and even persecution of their husbands, broke out of the family. Tagore even pointed out objectively the shortcomings of wives. Some of them like Nayadara, Shailabala, Manimalika, Bidhumuki, Sukumari and Niraja were stingy, envious, misery, child-pampering and narrow-minded. This is what Tagore was different from the epics.