Chapter Four

TECHNICAL NUANCES

“A copious manner of expression gives strength and weight to our ideas, which frequently make impression upon the mind, as iron does upon the solid bodies, rather by respected strokes than a single blow”. MELMOTH.

Tagore’s novels are psychological readings which bear the stamp of his artistic personality. Some of them are rather short and may be termed novellas. These novellas contain infinite riches in short compact works and are proofs to show the vast development in the artistic skill through the years. His later novels like Chaturanga, Two Sisters, The Garden are small. It has four parts as Exposition, the uncle’s story, Development through Sachis story, Deviation through Damini’s story and recapitulation through the story of Sribilas. The first chapter in Gora like a typical Shakespearean opening scene introduces the important characters.

The profound use of similes, paradoxes, witticisms and mythological allusions in Tagore’s descriptive style has a direct effect on the characters. Best examples for his similes are as follows: Tagore describes Asha’s (B) attaining womanhood. ‘As when the rains descend
after a drought and the dry wilted stalks of grain suddenly farm green and shoot up vigorously, confidently almost defiantly as though eager to make up for the long bleak days of fast – so Asha blossomed into womanhood (B 16). Tagore compares the young widow Binodini’s life in the remote village to a lone garden – creeper in jungle, a pathetic glory in a joyous wilderness (B 24) Binodini who leads a lone life in the village, while reading the letter of Mahendra, ‘Her eyes gleamed like sands in the midday sun, her breath hissed like hot wind in the desert.’ (B 27)

Mahendra’s infatuation for Asha and Binodini is ‘like the waters of the Ganges and the Jamuna the two women had mingled their charms into one overwhelming situation’ (B 34) Asha and Binodini revolve around Mahendra like two luminous planetary satellites (B 129).

Tagore compares young men and women to rivers, creepers and mountains and old people to the broken trees. In The Wreck he says, “Young lovers are like the mountain” (TW 34). Mahendra’s mother Rajlakshmi is ‘like a fallen branch from a tree resting her back on the bed’. (B.158) Hemnalini’s father Annada Babu is found collapsed in the chair ‘Like a tree felled by a hurricane’ (TW 63). Urmimala’s infatuation for Sasanka is described as ‘the madhavi creeper thrilled with pain in the creative agony of its sap to burst into flower’ (TS 77). Gora is called a
‘Snow Mountain’ by his professor. Sucharita’s gaze affects Gora’s nature as a marble palace trembles in an earthquake’ (G 314) Harimohini in Gora is compared to ‘tigress’ while defending her own rights (G 363) In *The Home And The World* Nikhil doubts whether Bimala’s love was to ‘come from the deep spring of her heart’... or was it merely like the daily provision of pipe water pumped up by the municipal steam-engine of society? (HW 43) Tagore compares passion’s purity to the flower lily in the novel ‘*The Home and The World*’. ‘Passion is beautiful and pure - pure as the lily that comes out of the slimy soil. It rises to its defilement and needs no Pears’ soap to wash it clean’ (HW 102) Tagore compares the stunted lives of clerks in Calcutta to the ‘fish gasping for breath in the slimy bottom of a pond sucked almost dry by the summer drought’ (B 162)

Tagore differentiates the sound of the train according to the moods of the characters. During Kamala’s sleepless night in Nalinaksha’s house ‘Trains’ roar was like the bellowing of a mad elephant bent on destruction” and it frightens Kamala. (TW 341) He compares Binodini’s lovely, inspiring eyes to ‘gleaming sands in the midday sun’ But in looks of Indranath, the terrorist head “there was a polished urbanity like a sharpened knife” (FC 8). The contrast in the descriptions has a powerful impact on the readers. The fingers of Ela, the heroine of this novel are ‘Flowerlike fingers’ (FC 57) Atindra in utter disgust for the terrorist
agenda observes ‘Patriotism is like a crocodile’s back used as a ferry to cross the river’ (FC 63).

In the novel Binodini, her love is a lotus sprouting from the slime of desire. (B 13) Tagore uses metaphor to denote the nobility of Anandamoyi in Gora. After knowing his real identity Gora says ‘It is in you who are India’ (G 407) Sandip calls Bimala ‘Shakti’, ‘Mother Goddess’ and ‘Queen Bee’ (HW 31) to praise her. Nikhil denigrates himself in self-flagellation: ‘I am not a flame, only a black coal, which has gone out. That is what the story of my life shows my row of lamps has remained unlit’ (HW 13). There are many smart comments in the novels. Youths like Bihari make witty observations on society and marriage. On marriage Bihari says’ ………… it is better to lose by not marrying than to lose by marrying wrongly’. (B 25)

Binodini comments on love: “Love unrelieved by jealous anger is insipid – like a vegetable dish without chilli and spice” (B 37). In the novel Gora Annapurna’s advice to Asha is “our real and ultimate commerce is not with each other but with Him who is the supreme giver and the supreme taker”. Binodini sarcastically tells Mahendra “You will protect me from yourself” (B 210). The senior citizens in the novels make thoughtful and meaningful remarks. In The Wreck Ramesh’s father says
‘you may judge a flower or a butterfly by its looks but not a human being’ (TW 5) In Gora Binoy says “If love is unable to acknowledge differences then why are there differences anywhere in the world? (G 306) Gora says “Not to obey, the society is to destroy it” (G 42) Binoy remarks, ‘I will admit the claims of society upon me only so long as society admits my claims upon it. If it refuses to regard me as a man ............... I will regard it as a machine of iron’ (G 321) Nikhil in The Home And The World says. “Art is a creation – so we should humbly be content to receive our lessons about art from the work of the artist” (HW 89). He tells Sandip ‘Women are not the deities of the house hold fire, but the flame of the soul itself’ (HW 29) Tagore’s genuine appreciation of women is evident in his comment ‘woman was created out of God’s own fancy. Man, He had to hammer into shape. (HW 57). Sandip motivates Bimala to plunder her own treasury thus: ‘Theft becomes necessary only because of miserliness, so its sin must be divided between the miser and the thief’ (HW 75). In the same novel Tagore ironically comments, ‘The real tragedy is, that man does not know himself for what he really is’ (HW 105). 

In Tagore’s view, nature has a transforming power in relation to human beings of sensitive nature. Bimala says of herself ‘I had been like a small river at the border of a village. But the tide came up from the sea and my breast heaved; my banks gave way and the great drum beats of the
sea were echoed in my mad current’. Anita Desai remarks “Tagore’s feeling for nature is so deep and intense that it is more than a literary device. It is entirely natural for him to use it continually as a metaphor for human action and emotions” (HW Introduction by Anita Desai Penguin Book, 13)

Mahendra, the zamindari youth with extramarital love welcomes the dawn of the day in the novel Binodini: ‘the day dawned sweet as honey. The gathering din of the awakened city sounded like music to his ears’ (B 118). On the contrary the ascetic Sachis stands on the sea shore and observes as he watches the dusk: “That evening the sound of the distant sea borne on the south breeze went up to the stars like a moon from the bosom of the earth” (C 197).

Gora’s contact with Nature is described by Tagore artistically. “All this time Gora had been living aloof in his own world of thought and action. What was it that had now happened? He had been brought up against some point of contact with Nature and thereupon, the deep dark water of the river, the dense banks, and the illimitable dark sky overhead had offered him welcome. Gora felt that to-night he had surrendered himself to Nature’s overtures”. (G 107)
Like Thomas Hardy, Tagore beautifully describes the rural side of Bengal with his aesthetic taste in the novel *The Home and The world* as ‘A group of starlings beneath the trees were noisily chattering away. In the distance an empty bullock cart, with its nose on the ground, held up its tail aloft. One of its unharnessed bullocks grazing to other resting on the grass, its eyes dropping for very comfort, while a crow on its back was pecking away at the insects on its body. (HW 143).

Tagore uses many symbols in the novels. River is used as a symbol of peace. In Gora he says ‘The river used then to bring its message of peace from the stainless peaks of the distant Himalayas into the midst of Calcutta’s dusty bustle (G 106). T. Padma observes in her initial analysis of ‘Two sisters’. Sasanka’s wife Sarmila is the ‘Mother Kind’ who represents reality; and Urmimala is the ‘beloved kind’ who stands for illusion (T. Padma...83... ). T. Vijayalakshmi in her critical appraisal of the Heroines of Tagore’s talks in two types woman Lakshmi and Urvashi which symbolized the mother kind and beloved kind. As in G.V. Raj’s words, the garden is a symbolic representation of happiness and plenty. It traditionally suggests peace and harmony. ...........Aditya whose name significantly means the sun, the source of all life and light’ (G.V. Raj, 89). In *Chaturanga* Tagore uses caves and the sea as the symbols of isolation and spiritual abundancy respectively.
The titles and the names of the characters symbolically represent their personality. *Binodini* symbolizes wonderful qualities. *The Wreck* denotes the ruinage of the lovelife of Ramesh and Hemnalini. *Gora* means ‘white’ which symbolizes the purity of heart. The title *The Home and The World* denotes the two aspects of Bimala’s life both in her *home* and the *outer world*. *Chaturanga* means the four points of Chaturanga which symbolize the four aspects of the plot namely Exposition, Development, Deviation and Recapitulation. *Farewell my Friend* symbolizes the heroine Labanya bidding farewell to her lover as a friend. *Two Sisters* symbolizes the love of the mother kind and beloved-kind. *The Garden* symbolizes the short life of Niraja like flowers in the garden and *Four Chapters* a brief sketch of the lives of Bengali lovers with the terrorist background.

There are songs and ballads as sung by the characters of the novels. Except for *Binodini, The Wreck, Chaturanga, Two Sisters* and *The Garden*, in all other novels Tagore makes copious use of songs and ballads which add charm to the situations.

Gora starts with the song sung by the Baul mendicant

Into the cage flies the unknown bird
It comes I know not whence
Powerless my mind to chain its feet
It goes I know not where (G. 1).
In the same novel, Sashi sings the lines from H.W. Longfellow that make deep effects as Sucharita.

“Tell me not, in mournful numbers
“Life is but an empty dream” (G 60).

Bimala (HW) is motivated by Sandip to plunder her own treasury. Sandip quotes a poet’s lines on sin,

It is the month of August, and the sky
breaks into a passionate rain;
Alas my house is empty’. (HW 115)

Like that her home is empty without Nikhil and the loss of her treasures. Sandip has a love song to praise Bimala

My lover of the unpriced love, spurning payments,
Plays upon the simple pipe, brought for nothing,
Drawing my heart away (HW 118).

The use of verses is superb in his novel Farewell, My Friend. Half of the story is written in the form of verse. Tagore introduces poets like Amit, Labanya, and Nibaran Chakrabarty in the verse novel. There is an autobiographical note on Tagore in this context. Amit says Rabindranath Tagore’s literary creations are rounded or wavelike, like his handwriting,
reminding one of roses and moons and female faces (FMF 9). To cite an example of Amit’s poetic description of Labanya:

Lovely one, thou art the morning star,
On the far-away mountain crest,
When the night has run its course
Be thou visible still to the vagrant
gone astray (FMF 75)

He compares Labanya to lovely star of dawn’

Swiftly come, O lovely star of dawn
Ere the night has run its course.
Let me take my full in wakefulness
Of the music lost in dreams. (FMF 75)

Amit’s melancholic mood is depicted on his departure from Labanya as

Dark was life when I discovered in the hearts shrine
The lighted lamp you had left as your parting gift. (FMF 110)

Labanya’s farewell song is the best among the other lyrics.

What I gave to you
Is yours by right everlasting
What others receive
Are the daily driblets the heart yields
To render solicitude
O my princely, peerless friend
What I gave to you was your own gift
Fuller your acceptance, the deeper my debt,
My friend, farewell. (FMF 112)

In *Chaturanga* Guruji welcomes the oncoming darkness by a song of a modern poet which brings tears to Damini’s eyes

I met you on the road at end of day.
But the evening light went out
The moment I set my eyes on you

Here the Guriji gives a pause which deeply moves the devotees, then come the final lines

I shall not grieve
Even if we meet no more
Stay awhile.
Let me cover your feet with my flowing hair. (C51)

Atindra in *Four Chapters* quotes Ibsen’s lines on death

Upwards
Towards the peaks
Towards the stars
Towards the vast silence (FC 122)
Tagore’s deep knowledge of English Literature is revealed in his references. There are references of poets and their works like Dryden’s ‘The power of Music’ by Binoy in Gora (G.122), Matthew Arnold’s ‘Poetry, Criticism of life’, Donne and Whitman in Farewell, My Friend and Browning in the novel The Home and the World (HW 212).

Cryptic letters are written by the major characters which bring radical changes in the plot of the novels. Beginning with Binodini, it is Mahendra’s amorous letter to Asha, his wife, which kindled in the young widow Binodini, the taste for conjugal pleasures. She writes letters in Asha’s name to Mahendra. All of them, for want of any other means of communication write letters to convey their deep thoughts. In The Wreck, it is Ramesh’s letter, containing the secret about Kamala that she is the unwedded wife, makes Kamala flee from him and she marches her victorious journey towards Nalinaksha, her wedded husband. Gora writes a letter to Sucharita on the request of Harimohini, In Chaturanga Nanibala the young widow leaves a letter denoting the reason for her death. In Farewell, My Friend Amit and Labanya write letters of verses to bid farewell. Sobhanlal’s apologetic letter asking for Labanya’s explanation for her aversion towards him changes her mind. In ‘Two Sisters’ Urimimala drops the letter announcing the news of her departure to
London addressed to her sister Sarmila puts an end to Sasanka’s wish for a ‘beloved-kind’ wife.

The period of Tagore’s nine novels under the present study ranges from the appearance of *Binodini* in 1903 to the publication to his last novel *Four Chapters* in 1933 and it works out to about thirty years of productivity. The fictional time of each of the nine novels may be fixed with the help of the references to events in each of the novels. *BINODINI*’s fictional time may be assigned to the years that followed the publication of Bankim Chandra’s novel ‘Vishaviruksha’ - ‘The Poison Tree’ in 1873. Bihari calls the heroine Binodini the young widow as the ‘Second Poison Tree’. (B30) Therefore the timing of *Binodini* as the novel of the rebellious widow is definitely fixed after 1873. Hero Mahendra is medico in Calcutta and Bihari a student of Law. These professional colleges in Calcutta were started by the British rulers during these years.

The next novel *The Wreck* refers to Hemnalini and Nalinaksha as members of the Brahmo Samaj which was formed in 1828. Ramesh the hero of the novel secures a pass in his Law examination while Mahendra fails in the examinations. It is to be concluded that these two novels belong to the earliest days of modern Bengal after the introduction of colleges and banks. The fictional time of *Gora* as a novel is easy to fix up in the sense
that the hero Gora of the novel was born during the stormy days of Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The story of the novel begins with the career of Gora himself who has just completed his college education and his age is about twenty. Therefore the story of *Gora* takes place around 1880s.

The plot of *The Home And The World* is woven around the Swadeshi Movement which was caused by Lord Curzon’s partition of Bengal in 1905. So the fictional time is self-evident as related to the first decade of the twentieth century. *Chaturanga* as a novel of ideas, has its scholarly hero Sachis who starts as an atheist and ends as a spiritualist seeking bliss under the tutelege of the Hindu Guru. There is a parallelism between Sachis and Swami Vivekanda because former’s taking to spiritual quest in terms of enlightened asceticism occurs after his collegiate studies and Western cultural impact.

Asok Mitra, the translator of the novel *Chaturanga* finds it irresistible to make a comparison between Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, the Bengali Wisdom incarnate and Uncle Jagmohan, the guru like Uncle for Sachis. The same writer mentions ‘the stormy figure of Vivekananda who lighted up the Indian sky and disturbed complacency, Nivedita and her account of the cave, Damini, unique to Bengal and nowhere else, and Sribilas who learnt to rid himself of self-pity: they certainly represent the
Bengal of the first half of Tagore’s life’ (C. Translator’s note 8) and Vivekananda’s career falls within the years that the first half Tagore’s life span the early years of Tagore’s literary life. Therefore Chaturanga’s fictional time may be fixed on the basis of the contemporaneity between Swami Vivekananda and Sachis. Like Swami Vivekananda, Sachis emerges out of his discipleship under the Guru and embarks upon a career of seeking enlightenment with learning. Therefore the comparison between Swami Vivekananda and Sachis is appropriate. So the fictional time of Chaturanga is in the range of 1890s when Swami Vivekananda had his peak period of spiritual attainment and fame.

The next novel Farewell My Friend (1916) mentions Sobhanlal as being employed as an archaeologist and the Department of Archaeology was instituted during the period of Lord Curzon. Therefore the fictional time of the novel is to be assigned around 1910s. The novel Two Sisters (1933) may as well be assigned in the days of First World War. It is for this reason that there occurs a scene involving a military general on duty in a wordy quarrel with the heroine Sarmila over the issue of his commandeering of the railway berth. Following M. Sarada’s assessment it may be surmised that the interwar period as between 1918-1939 has three heroines of Post-graduation such as Labanya, Urmimala and Ela.
Urmimala of *Two Sisters* completes her Master’s Degree and goes abroad to do research in Medicine.

The next novel *The Garden* refers to Sarala as the ladylove of Aditya, wearing khadi and courting arrest in the street as a patriot with a flag in her hand. It is evident that it refers to the Gandhian Civil Disobedience Movement around 1922. As for the last novel *Four Chapters*, the hanging of Sardar Bhagat Singh in 1931 on the charge of terrorist activities is to be remembered. The reference is relevant in Master Indranath’s treacherous handing over of his dissenting lieutenants to the British Police authorities who invariably punished them with hanging or by transportation. Therefore the fictional time of this novel should be around 1930s.

Tagore demands the unique status of being the dispassionate novelist with no commitment to describing the environmental forces. But his involvement in sorting out the evolutionary process of thought development of the age under consideration is indirectly in his description of social trends. But Tagore, however, claims that he is not a chronicler of social events and it is true that he does not make any direct reference to fictional time.