Chapter Five

SUMMATION

An indepth analysis of the nine novels of Tagore throws light on the different types of characters that emerge from the white heat of his imagination. One group is all for Modernity and there is another group which is a staunch supporter of Tradition. A third group comprises drifters who merely move with the times. The first two groups put up stiff fights with the opponent. Finally however, all of them in both the groups, seek asylum in the secure world of tradition.

Tagore presents the women characters who stand for the values of tradition as an integral part of Indian heritage. Tagore’s women are twenty four in number. Of them Rajlakshmi, Annapurna, Asha, of Binodini, Kamala and Kshemankari of The Wreck, Sucharjita and Harimohini of Gora, Yogamaya of Farewell, My Friend, Sarmila of Two Sisters and Niraja and Sarala in The Garden are the lovers of tradition. They are quite different in the sense that they have no dilemma under the stress of modernity. They are a chip of the old block of their puranic devotion to the traditional values.
Among the women characters, who live by the traditional views. Asha, Kamala, Sarmila and Niraja are the devotional wives. Asha is to follow the Vedantic precept of self-assertion, and accordingly, she chooses to find fault with her husband, Mahendra for his breaking the sanctity of marriage by eloping with Binodini. She simmers in righteous but mute indignation against her husband. In spite of her mother-in-law’s promptings she refuses to give him her usual good will and tolerance. It is a remarkable feat of uninhibited psychological projection. But she remains as devoted as ever. Mahendra bears testimony to this in the sense that he refers to her devotion as a bulwark against Bihari’s Platonic love for her. After Mahendra’s exit from zenana she teaches herself to acquire the necessary sophistication to take over the command of her zenana. She allows Mahendra to enter into his mother’s room only after Bihari. Her inner strength is sublimated in the form of her traditional devotion for her husband. It is of epic proportion and stoic silence and forbearance. She is not frustrated. Her devotion for her husband sustains her through her silent suffering of the imperceptible overtures of Bihari as the Platonic lover.

Like Asha (B), Kamala (TW) is also traditional at heart. Asha refuses to treat the husband as an absolute idea as her saintly ant Annapurna advises. She wants to have her husband as a presence and a person. But on the contrary, Kamala after reaching Nalinaksha’s house,
does not reveal her identity. Such forbearance on the part of Kamala is rewarded and her prayers are answered. Tagore’s fondness of Vaishnava hymns prompts him to ascribe to Kamala, the Vaishnava precept of self-surrender as a way of escape from the disastrous stroke of Fate, the great arbitrator. Kamala is just a plain girl without an alert mind to think deeply. She goes by her instinctively acquired devotional love for the image of husband. Like Saint Perialwar’s mystic-minded daughter Andal who reveres Lord Krishna as her husband in her mind. Kamala too keeps the image of husband as an object of devotional pursuit. after Ramesh, the illegitimate husband is given up. Similarly, the self same Asha is to follow the Vedantic precept of self assertion and she chooses to find fault with her erring husband.

Like Asha (B) and Kamala (TW), Sarmila (TS) and Niraja (TG) are also traditional wives as portrayed by Tagore. Sarmila is likened with Kamala and Asha. It is their devotion that gets them their husbands back. She belongs to the category of mother-kind of wife. Like Sarmila, Niraja is a traditional minded wife. She is a possessive wife with a split personality.

Sucharita is unmarried but stands for tradition. She admires Gora for his patriotic fervour. She proudly declares ‘I am a Hindu” though she is in the Brahmos house. She is mentally strong. She is different from her
modern counterpart Lolita. Sucharita, the champion of tradition gains the hand of Gora, the bulwark of Indian tradition.

Elderly women like Rajlakshmi, Annapurna, Kshemankari, Harimohini and Yogamaya are the followers of tradition. Rajlakshmi and Annapurna are the zenana women, who honour the traditional zamindari joint family system. These two widows lead a life of a vegetable. Annapurna advises her niece Asha to have God as a veritable substitute for the image of husband in the mythical fashion. These two live a make-believe world of reconciliation between the imperishable spirit and the perishable body. Kshemankari (TW) is the staunch believer of tradition. She keeps herself away from her Brahmo husband leading a life of purity at Kashi.

Harimohini (G) is the evilminded widow who mars the happiness in the family by advocating the conservative tradition. Yogamaya (FMF) is the symbol of purity and happiness. She is the traditional inclined widow but with profound humanity. She acts as proxy mother for the motherless Labanya. The minor character Nanibala in the novel *Chaturanga* commits suicide refusing to marry Sachis. She prefers to consider her rapist as her wedded spouse in her mind. She stands for the tradition of social honour.
and not for the modernist notion of widow’s remarriage which was deemed a matter of humiliation of her soul.

Gora leads the traditional minded men. His very appearance is a revolt against modernity. He hates everything modern. He stands for the good aspects of Indian tradition. His purpose of life is to regenerate India’s past cultural glory. He sports a tuft and a tilak of Gangetic clay and wears a dhuti. Gora argues vehemently against the Brahmoists. He attacks them with the charge of ignoring traditional values for self-improvement. Gora has the confirmed view that the West is incapable of appreciating India’s tradition of humanitarian culture with its universality of timeless glory. Like Gora, Nalinaksha in *The Wreck* is an orthodox Hindu, respecting the sentiments of his conservative Hindu mother Kshemankari. He values the sanctity of marriage. His faith in getting back his wedded wife Kamala turns out to be a reality. Like Gora who inspires Sucharita with his oratorical excellence, Nalinaksha preaches the value of Indian culture to Hemnalini. He never experiences the dilemma whether to stand by tradition or go in for modernity. Unlike Gora and Nalinaksha, Sachis in *Chaturanga* never talks on religion and culture. He is an ascetic with spiritual enlightenment. By extricating himself from the tentacles of Damini’s amorous advances, he attains self-fulfilment. The senior citizen Krishnadayal is the only strong supporter of Hindu orthodox tradition. He
is a negative portrayal for tradition. He is a misanthropist and lives in exclusion from own family in a ‘Hermitage’. Like him Dr. Nirad of *Two Sisters* is a self-centred traditionalist who clips the wings of the free bird Urmimala. He is a malechauvinist and a man of self-love.

There are women like Anandamoyi, and Bordashundari (G) who oppose tradition but with different points of view. Anandamoyi is much celebrated as the noblest and the choicest of Tagore’s creations. She has modern attitudes towards life with their roots in human nobility. She challenges the tradition just to protect the Irish foundling Gora. She bids farewell to tradition on the day she takes Gora in her hand. She is the symbol of ‘Mother India’. Her Kashi legacy of Hindu orthodoxy is compromised with her living in separation from her orthodox husband. She gives up her pandit heritage to secure a noble child like Gora. She saves Gora from social animosity. She knows how to agree to disagree. Her counterfoil is Bordashundari in the novel *Gora*. While Anandamoyi sheds tradition to be the mother of Gora, Bordashunderi sticks on to modernism by following Brahmo faith just to secure good husbands for her daughters. She is the negative portrayal of modernity who opposes tradition with her narrow-mindedness.
Tagore’s young women who oppose tradition are Binodini, Lolita Hemnalini, Bimala, Bara Rani, Damini, Labanya, Urmimala and Ela. Among these women there are young widows, married women and modern minded young lovers with dual love. The young widows Binodini and Damini oppose the values of tradition to secure their rightful place in the society. Young women of Tagore who lead their life with an eye to modernity go back to the secure world of tradition with a compromise. Young widows like Binodini and Damini have the option to remarry. Binodini declines the offer of marriage by Bihari because of her love for tradition. She renounces her love for the welfare of Bihari. Damini (C) loves Sachis the ascetic, but she marries Sribilas not out of love for him but for the sake of fulfilling her personal ambition for a married status. Bara Rani (HW) is too modern among the widows, playing cards and reading books in Nikhil’s zenana. She never blames her fate for living a single bird in the cage of Nikhil’s zenana. She admits her intimacy with her brother-in-law Nikhil thus, ‘as we grew up our mutual joys and sorrows took on deeper tones of intimacy. So has a true relationship grown up between us, from our childhood up till now’. (HW 259). She does not retreat back to tradition as she never encounters any dilemma.
Among the modern women who oppose tradition, the sophisticated lovers like Hemnalini (TW) Labanya (FMF), Urmimala (TS) and Sarala (TG) gloriously retreat into tradition. They draw upon the inner sources of emotional strength to solve the crisis of identity. They emerge as the new group of personalities arising due to the activisation of the truth of the symbiotic relationship between modernity and tradition. It is to be understood as the direct expression of harmony in its proverbial Indian idiom of universality.

There is a peculiarity of dual love among these sophisticated modern young lovers like Hemnalini (TW) Labanya (FMF) Urmimala (TS) and Sarala (TG). Labanya (FMF) goes to the extent of continuing her love even after her marriage with Sobhanlal. It is a blatant abuse of marital sanctity. She resolves the dichotomy by giving up the modernity of loving Amit and resorting to the tradition of marrying Sobhanlal who is very easy to manage. Urmimala (TS) like Labanya gives up her decision to be a co-wife. This decision is made for the sake maintaining the respect and honour of her family.

Hemnalini (TW) after knowing her lover Ramesh living with Kamala accepts the marriage proposal of Nalinaksha but she feels ‘terror’ while entering into his house. She is notable to mobilise her modern spirit
to resolve her dilemma in one sweep. She prefers the doctor to the sheepish Ramesh while feeling unsure of herself.

Lolita is a fine portrayal of modern-minded young woman like Anandamoyi of the elderly group. She has no dilemma. She is firm in her faith of love for Binoy. Her union with Binoy is the union of modernity and tradition. She is the embodiment of new womanhood as dreamt by the national poet Bharathi. She is one among the three girls of Tagore having their virginity in mind and heart. Like Lolita, (G) Ela (FC) is a modern girl with her love for Atindra. Sarala (TG) is the modern-minded woman wearing Khadi, courting arrest with a flag in the hand. Her timely departure from Aditya’s garden denotes her respect for the traditional husband and wife relationship. Bimala (HW) is the modern zenana woman, who brings tragedy into her home by her extra marital relationship with Sandip. When she realizes that her modernity invites trouble from the outerworld, she makes a glorious retreat homeward.

Tagore’s young lovers climb down taking the recourse to the social tradition of righteous behaviour when they find their relationship with men socially untenable. They choose to make compromises a sign of reconciliation with the new reality which they have to face. The instinct of survival is handy for women. Relevantly the Buddhist adage goes as thus.
the choicest way to reach the top is up the ladder. Otherwise it could easily become a greasy pole. Women who oppose tradition, and live a life of modernity find solution to their dilemma in terms of coming down the ladder, whereas men who question tradition find the climbing as slippery as on a greasy pole.

Among the male characters Mahendra, Ramesh, Sandip Sribilas, Sasanka Aditya and Atindra are the men with modern outlook. Except Sribilas and Atindra all of them are men of dual love. They maintain two women, at a time, one of the mother kind and the other of the beloved-kind. They want to enjoy both the rain season that stands for motherly love and the spring that refers to the beloved type of woman. They simultaneously can never occur together. All these modern men have college education. Mahendra (B) is a moral delinquent with no residual spirit to live on. Ramesh (TW) finds himself superfluous in the world of hard realities. Sandip a ‘Victorian Philanderer’ is a negative portrayal of a fanatic patriot. Sasanka, a workaholic, wants Urmimala to be a co-wife for him. He is the best example of modern minded selfish professional who degrades the traditional values of conjugal sanctity. For instance, we notice a loss of emotional loyalty on the part of Aditya (TG) the florist towards his sick wife Niraja. Among the modern men of dual love Amit (FMF) is a
bachelor. When Labanya rejects his hand he goes with Ketaki, his former fiancé. Men like Ramesh and Sandip have no women in their lives.

Paresh Babu, the Brahmo, is the mouthpiece of Tagore. He advocates the policy of secularism, with a maturity of mind and universal humanity. He is a real Brahmo who allows marriage with the unity of emotions. On the contrary Indranath is for the negative portrayal of modern minded elderly man. He makes the young terrorists of his camp to perform his violent terrorist activities in the name of patriotism. He questions the Indian tradition of loving one’s fellow men and even the enemies.

Tagore’s men have their mind attuned to the Western spirit of individualism and this modernity of outlook on their part made them intensely emotional. There are also drifters among them. They are the men and women of moderate values. They can never be classified either with the traditionalists or with the modern-minded people. Bihari (B), Binoy (G) Annada Babu (TW) and Sobhanlal (FMF) are non-committal in their outlook in life. They have no way of their own. They are the passive onlookers of the traditionalists and the modern-minded men.

There are women, who are more sinned against sining. Binodini, Damini and Asha are the best examples for the concept of suffering not for
the fault of theirs. Binodini and Damini who are talented and beautiful young women are denied social status, only because they are widows. Asha, is a modest orphan with no formal education to suit her place in the zenana richness. The young widows do not want remarriage, but the rightful place of a normal woman in the society. They are true to their contemporary social tradition of womanly modesty. They never rebel against the society. Kamala after her long trials reaches her real wedded husband Dr. Nalinaksha who accepts her hand by saying, “In the course of her (Kshemankasi) life she has forgiven many sins, surely she can forgive you for what was not a sin at all (TW 414).

Tagore presents traditional themes through the modern techniques. Tagore has the balanced views of Western individualism and Eastern humanism. He excels in innovating new techniques of writing modern novels with no historical figures but psychological characters. Literary devices like simile, metaphor, witticism, use of verses and the use of letters are generously used by Tagore. As there is no mention of time and places in his novels, his novels gain timelessness and universal relevance.

Tagore’s men and women are the different versions of the Tagorean formula of making a compromise between the dichotomous choices of opposite pull. And this kind of compromise in terms of tolerance is to
represent Tagore’s achievement of being the novelist with a modern vision with vistas opening into the traditional past and the cosmic future. This message of tolerance as the winning human quality has universal relevance. Our ‘Gurudev’ prays to God in his Gitanjali, aspires for a world.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action-

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.