Chapter Two

FEMININE COMPROMISE

“...I have often had occasion to remark the fortitude with which women sustain the most overwhelming reverses of fortune. Those disasters which break down the spirit of a man and prostrate him in the dust seem to call forth all the energies of the softer sex and give such intrepidity and elevation to their character, that at times it approaches to sublimity”.

WASHINGTON IRVING.

Tagore’s support is for women and not for men. He gives women the unqualified sympathy and finds their dignity in suffering. It was an age of the beginning of the liberation of women in accordance with the spirit of the Renaissance. There was the demand for rethinking on the status of women particularly the widows. Gender discrimination was the order of the day with male domination as an acknowledged social feature, so necessary for the consolidation of family life. The Western culture encouraged individuality and self respect. However, most of the women were habituated into believing in the sanctity of social restrictions and taboos against them. The conservatives declared that such social
restrictions were divinely ordained. The ‘bhadralok’ women belonging to the Brahmin stock of cultural consciousness felt the impact of Western education and culture. Therefore Tagore had to portray these women characters as in the throes of new social consciousness of the new world unfolding before them. It was easy for Tagore to show them as responsive to the blowing winds of change. Most of his women characters are all out to realize what is best in them.

Tagore brings out the example of the zamindari women trying to shed their zenana influence and take to modern thinking. In general Tagore analyses female characters as they behave in the mould of their psychological making. Therefore Tagore’s social novels are genuinely modern with his creation of psychological characters in their realistic social setting. All the novels have the love theme concentrating on the emotional scenes as their private privilege. What was more important was to show how each one of his women characters has already chiselled out her emotional responses inside her inward being. It is in her grain. It forms the fund of emotional energy for them. It constitutes the core of the personality of each character. It is but natural that their emotional responses echo rival impulses from across their social hedges. It leads to the dichotomy of values as crystallized into emotions. This emotional being of each character is decisive and formulates a new system of
relationships that is to follow each situation involving confrontation. Most of the women characters are found steeped in the Hindu cultural consciousness and therefore they decide in favour of tradition, but with a difference. Even the Brahmoist women follow this in deference to the force of social tradition. The critical part of the whole game of confrontation is that these women characters have the genius to modernize the existing tradition to their advantage. It differs from character to character in consonance with their emotional resourcefulness and their status in life.

Tagore’s women characters are twenty four in number as in his nine novels under the present study. They fall into different categories. Each category is based on the characteristic preferences of the characters. There are three major categories, namely the traditional lovers, the modern lovers and the widows both young and elderly. Mother characters join as the last category. The category of modern characters is further divided into the subcategories like devotional lovers, modern eligible lovers, and Tagore observes in Two Sisters the lovers of mother-kind and of beloved-kind. The modern lovers are further classified into the group of patriots and the group of sophisticated women. The next category of women belongs to the elderly widows and elderly women. The last category is that of the young rebel widows.
The modern lovers as in the nine novels of Tagore are mostly concerned with their emotion of love for their eligible suitors. Sucharita in Gora leads them all. She is a special kind of a girl with unusual inward strength. No other heroine in Tagore’s novels under the present study is as philosophical minded as she is. Her love for Gora, the hero of the novel, is not the physical attraction. It is premised in her love for her country as projected by her lover Gora in terms of his advocacy of the Hindu revivalism. She sees through her love, India, in its cultural rejuvenation. Loving a person for his worth is not incompatible with Sucharita’s Brahmoist background with its leanings towards the Western ways of life. But she has her deference for Gora’s view that no luxury of sentimental love is permissible between any lovers since it is traceable to the English cult. Again, for Gora, the Indian women are to be considered as mothers and not as lovers. Sucharita finds her lover Gora opposing his Hindu friend Binoy’s proposal of love for a Brahmo woman in the English fashion. However, Suchirita has the vicarious experience of supporting Binoy Lolita’s marriage which is to be a prelude to her own marriage with Gora in future. Under the stress of these negative circumstances Sucharita has to keep herself in low profile. She is already known for her reticent nature. Her foster mother Bordashundari remarks, ‘she’s very different inwardly from what she makes herself out to be ‘(G 199). Gora’s comment on her is
'you have an exceptionally keen insight’ (G 330). Her elderly suitor, the Brahmoist Haran Babu observes, ‘Her mind is unusually developed for her age’ (G 77). Altogether she is as strong and stable as a mountain within. Her love for Gora has to face several challenges before receiving any response. She is the most faithful disciple for her foster father Paresh Babu, learning from him the art of living in terms of having meditative calmness while making decisions. In this respect, she differs from her adolescent companion Lolita with ‘fits of temper’. Added to this sobriety she is thoughtful enough to develop in herself a certain power of independent judgement. This is the most significant feature of her unassuming personality. Discerningly she makes a distinction between the ideas of Paresh Babu the liberalist thinker and those of Gora, the Hindu revivalist. She decides to follow Paresh Babu’s idea that the heart and not the intellect is to play a more significant role in absolving India from the morass of caste distinction. (G 121)

Gora’s idea is to inspire India by means of intellectual enlightenment in terms of Vedic orientation. It is wholly for its self liberation. Sucharita is more impressed with his oratorical prowess revealing his manly courage and patriotic fervour. Though a Brahma she declares herself a Hindu. But Paresh Babu tells her that a ‘Hindu is born and not made’ (G 355). Aged about 16 and good looking she is gifted with
force of character to bring about a thaw in Gora’s rigid character. This is to satisfy the thematic need to transform Gora into an uninhibited lover. Prophetically it is to save him of any discomfiture on the day of his knowing about his foreign birth.

Sucharita’s love is kept alive and active right through Gora’s cheerless intellectual temperament and she makes it out as a personal achievement for her. She has to wade through the dichotomous situations such as conflicts between emotion and intellect, the present and the future and above all, the modernity of having a quest for individual identity and the tradition of making compromises. Gora falls for her charm even in the beginning of the novel. Sucharita’s gaze at him stirs in him a romantic fervour in its subdued tension. According to Sucharita, “His speech has form and movement, it has life: it is full of the power of faith and pain of love for his country” (G 122).

Tagore remarks that ‘Gora’s whole nature trembled as a marble palace trembles in an earthquake’ (G 314). He is swept off by ‘the questioning glances of two entrancing eyes, soft with modesty’ and ‘bright with understanding’. (G 107) Her experience of love for Gora is not one of the physical attraction Through young and inexperienced she has the spiritual strength to modulate the emotion of modesty and the intellect of
understanding in a balanced rhythmic flow into strengthening her serene personality. In this respect she is to be likened with Labanya (FMI). In fact Gora, though college educated, looks eccentric with his tuft. Sucharita elevates her love to a "mystic realm" but she is able to send thrills through Gora and his misgivings are completely set at rest (G 119). Unlike the other modern lovers she keeps her love as a private joy for her. Lolita and Anandamoyi have a vague idea of it. Binoy understands it a little. However, there are no emotional or romantic gestures exchanged between these two lovers. The only intimacy that they develop is that they have dialogues as between a guru and his disciple. Their sense of patriotism binds them together lending credence to their human bondage. Sucharita sublimates their love into their desire to take up the work of national reconstruction. She asks Gora "What work I shall have to do?" and Gora’s reply is "I will show you what a tremendous power there is in you". (G 330) However Sucharita finds Gora as a committed Hindu activist and he finds himself hesitant to come closer to her. She has the confidence to declare, "He can never mean to forsake me in such a manner! He will have to come back to me...... No matter how great and powerful a man he may be. he has need of me". (G 359). Therefore Sucharita has to go in pursuit of Gora while giving up her reservedness. M. Sarada observes in her study of all women characters, "his voice and every movement of his body, show
her his strength of conviction, his patriotism and abundant vitality. She does not share his religious views. Gora attacks the Brahmo ideals she stands for’ (M. Sarada 58). Already she has managed to get over Haran Babu’s claim for her hand. She has to declare herself ‘Yes I am a Hindu’ suggestive of her intention to marry Gora. (Gora 335) Added to this she overcomes her aunt Harimohini’s machinations of marrying her off to her brother-in-law. Harassed by her aunt to marry, she retorts her aunt that she will marry none. She receives Gora’s letter through her crafty aunt asking her to be a religious minded woman. She shows an extraordinary forbearance on this occasion of emotional despair.

Gora goes to her after the dramatic revelation of his foreign birth. Sucharita takes Gora’s outstretched hands so readily, signifying her accepting him as her husband. As usual she keeps herself unnerved by the hectic events that precede Gora’s apologetic disclaim of his past as a Hindu propagandist. In the words of M. Sarada ‘The union of Gora and Sucharita is the union of tradition and modernity. It stands for universal love which knows no barriers of caste, community, race and nation. (M. Sarada 59).

It has been too thoughtful of her to have admiration for Gora’s masterful personality as an orator and not for his high flown ideas. Again,
her association with Gora’s noble mother inspires her to be as noble minded. In all her nobility of heart and magnanimity she accepts Gora as her even though he has no specific identity of his own. Quite willingly she steps into the void of negation that Gora assumes for himself in the wake of the debacle of penance. She lives decently with the excruciating agony caused by love and steers clear through the hardship. It is ended in her assumption of the tradition of finding the universal tolerance for her lover. In this context she symbolizes the message of her own lifetime in terms of infusing harmony and peace among the opposites.

Lolita (G) is the more realistic version of Sucharita’s character in total commitment to intercaste love and marriage. These two Brohmo girls, choose their lovers from the Hindu elite. They show the modernity of their outlook. They struggle to promote their love for their lovers while awakening into the reality of the new world of compromise of the traditional validity. Significantly Lolita’s character is notable for her freedom of mind and thought. It symbolizes the thematic concern of the novel in terms of bringing the concept of love as the cementing force. It is to combine the opposites of the Hindu militancy and Brahmo hostility into harmony. M. Sarada aptly remarks ‘Protest is the medium of her expression. She never takes defeat in her stride and does not believe in doing things by halves. Life, to her is a practical reality. Constraints like
womanhood, tradition and religion cannot bind her spirit of individualism and free thinking’ (M. Sarda 61). Lolita’s marriage with Binoy summarises the purpose of the novel as relevant to throwing light on the ongoing Hindu Brahmo conflict and its effect upon others. By taste and temperament she is given to revolutionary thinking in assessing the emotional issues like loving her beloved father and managing the social despot Haran Babu.

From the days of her childhood Lolita is given to ‘fits of temper (G155) Indifferent to the niceties of religious loyalties she makes a beeline to her goal of marrying Binoy. She is modern and radical minded. Gora’s critical remarks on the ‘immodest forwardness’ of the girls may be traced out to her being an assertive woman. (G 101) Unlike Hemnalini (TW) Lolita goes in hot pursuit of her lover Binoy and shapes him into an inspired bridegroom. By contrast the college educated Hemnalini chooses to be a silent and faithful spectator of what her hypocritical lover Ramesh does in his defence. On the other hand Lolita gets into Binoy’s problem of redefining his identity. In this context M. Sarada quotes Niharajan Ray’s views, ‘From a comparatively inferior position he (Binoy) rises to a height of magnificence: from a rather shadowy associate of Gora, he comes to discover his separate identity. All credit is due, for this transformation, to his philosopher and guide, Lolita……’
(M. Sarada 63). She tears up the initiation paper as the final act of resolving the ongoing crisis.

Unlike Lolita, Labanya (FMF) gives up her hope of reshaping her lover Amit in the midway. She deserts him as if leaving in the ill-fated ship. Ela (FC) brings in her lover Atindra, acting as his baptist in the terrorist outfit, and eventually leads unheroic death by her demonstrative love. Sucharita flatters herself that Gora will have to come to her sooner on his own choice’ (G 359).

Lolita’s love story has no customary feature of romantic intoxication. It matures itself weathering the stormy winds of religious opposition. Lolita is dark with no good features of feminine attraction and her mother worries herself on the difficulty of finding a suitable husband for her daughter. She does not attract but attacks. She is a fighter with no equal among Tagore’s women characters. The modernity of her outlook prompts her to behave independently both as a daughter and a lover. She ignores her high thinking father and snobbish mother and values Binoy for his innate goodness. As a true lover of the modern tradition she has the Western courage of expressing herself freely. Her option is for projecting the image of Binoy as her competent lover. No other woman among Tagore’s creations is found engaging herself in shaping her love into what
she wants him to be. In case of Ela (FC) she brings Atindra into the terrorist unit to have him as her lover by her side but now, she wants him to cease to be a lover and be a worthy patriot. But Lolita makes Binoy a man of courage and independent spirit by monitoring his thoughts and activities particularly in reference to the domineering Gora. She goes to the circus along with her party just to show that women like her have no fear of tigers.

Lolita joins Binoy in the steamer after quitting the drama troupe in protest against Gora’s unjust arrest by the British government. Her Western education prompts her to demand from the English hosts, honour and not the patronizing hospitality for the Indians. It is a mark of distinction for her to identify the problem of racial discrimination by the British. The other patriotic women like Bimala, and Sarala have no love lost for the English. Sarala (TG) ‘courts arrest going to the street with a flag in her hand protesting against the English government. Lolita is the only woman patriot opposing the British on the ground of racial superiority and segregation. Thus Lolita echoes the spirit of freedom as felt by the Indians in the wake of the Sepoy Mutiny and transfer of power. She is extraordinary with a mark of rebellion in her blood. She is traditional minded in the sense that she appreciates Gora’s mother Anandamoyi when she finds the latter as an embodiment of human nobility and tolerance.
Lolita is the key character giving out the message of the novel. Accordingly she sees no harm in having the Hindu and the Brahmo in emotional solidarity. She resolves this dichotomy of modernity of her Brahmoist reformism and the Hindu revivalism. She marries Binoy in the teeth of religious opposition just to proclaim to the Bengali world that she and Binoy are the modern generation having faith in making compromise between the opposites.

Bimala’s life story in *The Home and The World* as a patriot is in painful relevance to her zenana home and to her experience with the outerworld by proxy. The crux of the problem is that she converts her home into the outer world. But she behaves with the mind of a zenana lady while pretending to be a demagogue in the midst of the outer world. It is a make believe world for her to live in. Things go wrong for her. It is to show how the luckiest woman as she is, can lose her happiness totally when she fails to make others happy. This happens as a tragedy of character limitations. She ignores the values of culture under the psychological pressure to be self-conceited. But she is not to blame in one sense. Her husband, Nikhil wants her to be a freeminded woman with no zenana hangover. It is after reaching Calcutta with its cosmopolitan freedom, she Bimala tries to convince him of her being as competent as
the free woman in her zenana itself while declaring to Nikhil. ‘I have so much in this cage of mine that there was not room for it in the universe’. (HW19) But however Nikhil’s contention is that Bimala has to improve herself. He observes ‘Bimala has only come into my home and not into my life’ (HW114) She poses as if she is an aristocrat. But she is not so by birth. It is an acquired status for her.

Bimala loses her husband for ever for want of cultural refinement to sustain her life of fortunes. Her career as the issueless wife of Nikhil for nine years is drawn through her interpersonal relationship with other characters of inner contradictions. The first contradiction is that she herself is no zenana woman as her husband mistakes her to be. In fact she finds herself as a misfit in Nikhil’s zenana since she has neither the good looks not the aristocratic bearing. She has only good horoscopic credentials in her favour. Poor girls of Brahmin stock can get into high ranking families on the strength of their communal heritage like Asha and Kamala. Nikhil’s grandmother transplants her into the zenana for the bride’s mediocrity. It is a shield against the proverbial weakness of debauchery on the part of the male heirs of the zenana family. There is a case of Mahendra (B) who brings disgrace to his family by his sexual infatuation for the visiting widow. This occurs after a period of his over indulgence in the company of his lovely wife Asha.
Bimala’s grievance against herself is that she is not a beauty to fit into the zenana regality. But the Swadeshi leader Sandip calls her “a beauty” (HW 56). He corrupts her emotionally with a provocative suggestion of physical intimacy. Her own self-flattering remarks are “Sandip’s hungry eyes burnt like the lamps of worship before my shrine. All his gaze proclaimed that I was a wonder in beauty and power: .... I who before was plain had become suddenly beautiful. I who before had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendor of Bengal itself” (HW 56.57) Her psychological wound that she is no beauty by herself is healed off by Sandip at the cost of her personal honour. Sandip gives her books on sex education and incites her sensually. She falls for his boisterous manliness while she thinks of her husband as unmanly. Bimala is like the female child in Tagore’s poem ‘Superior’, who “does not know the difference between the lights in the streets and the stars”. (K R S. Iyengar 115) And Sandip does not deserve such a surrender on her part. The second contradiction of the whole thematic situation is that Sandip’s greed for money and power are to make him unworthy to be the Bengali leader for Bimala. But Bimala finds his incompetence lately and pulls herself out of her gamble of fancy for personal glory.

Bimala shifts her loyalty from Nikhil to Sandip due to Nikhil’s studied indifference to this kind of adulterous situation. Bimala is
confronting the third contradiction in Nikhil. She finds him not as a typical zamindari youth with the usual wild temper and social arrogance. Commenting on her husband’s queer personality she deplores: ‘He did not use his power just because he had it’ (HW 22) Again she adds, ‘I have often wished that my husband had manliness to be a little less good’. (HW 17) It is a crucial issue for her to find him with no power to compel her to go to Calcutta so that she can transform herself into an inspiring lover for him. She is able to appreciate his offer of freedom to her even before going to Calcutta. Thus she decides to act upon her newfound freedom while superimposing her zenana home with the outer world of Calcutta. It is to be vicarious. It adds to her conceit.

In this context, the modernity of her outlook is complete in terms of her asserting herself. It is not experimental but phenomenal. Significantly before the Swadeshi agitator Sandip’s entry into her palace, she is already a royal sympathiser with the Swadeshi message. She asks her husband Nikhil to carry out the Swadeshi act of burning their foreign clothes for the sake of excitement. She argues ‘such excitement will give us the energy to build’. (HW 24) Bimala is adrift as a fiancée for the rakish Sandip. Nikhil himself utters, ‘Her nature, perhaps, can only find true union with one like Sandip’ (HW 79) who brings her into his manly spell only by his words of revolutionary power. By contrast Gora’s powerful
words of Hindu revivalist agenda entice Sucharita whose love for him prepares him to meet the tryst with his destiny. No such creative change comes upon Bimala and she, with her home converted as the headquarters of Sandip, commits thievery in her own home. It prompts her rival queen the Bara Rani to call her the ‘Robber Queen’. (HW 246)

Bimala cannot but breakdown under the pressure of challenges, because she is chiefly related to the superimposition of the outerworld over her zenana home. The fact is that even under the changed circumstances of vicarious experience, she remains a baronial queen and not an ordinary lady of urban sensibility. Her being the queen is not lost sight of during the course of her leadership to the Swadeshi movement. She becomes a prisoner of indecisions forthwith. The challenges come one by one. One such challenge is that she has to protect the loyal Amulya from the danger of arrest by the police. She keeps Amulya’s pistol in her private box along with Sandip’s photograph. She feels the pangs of self pity impelling her towards fondling the idea of committing suicide to escape from defeat. (HW 254) She has no sympathy for her rival Bara Rani while conceding latter’s claim for Nikhil’s emotional affinity. She keeps up a discreet silence over Bara Rani - Nikhil intimacy. Thus she shows herself to be a chivalrous chip of the old block of zenana etiquette. She knows the rules of the game of the relaxed atmosphere in the zenana. Like wise Asha (B) has
to keep silent over Bihari’s uncivilized attention for her within the premises of the harem like zenana. In its essentials the dichotomous tangle of the home versus the world is explained by Bimala’s example of growing into modernity. Essentially things go wrong, she is enamoured of masculine impetuosity. It is a clear case of her liking the violence of the Swadeshi cult and not the message of Swadeshism. The theatricality of such Swadeshi agitation appeals to her ego. Sandip makes her the favourite icon of Bengali patriotism. The dilemma between the modernity of experiencing the outer world while inside the zenana home and the original tradition of home is resolved in the newly acquired identity. Now she is woman of political defeat and emotional recession. She gets back to her husband after the storm is seemingly over. M. Sarada refers to P. C. Chakrabarty’s view on this ‘When she traces her steps and comes back to her husband, she does so not on account of her love for her husband but on account of revulsion of feeling of her lover’ (M. Sarada 85). Endorsing this Niharajnan Ray also remarks ‘It is no Nikhil’s love but other things that restore Bimala. Therefore it is a forgone conclusion that she is not able to bring herself to love Nikhil for what he is not. But M. Sarada differs from these uncharitable critics that Bimala’s’ home coming shows that she really is repentant. It is her repentance for her behaviour and love for her husband that brought her back’ (M. Sarada 85).
She goes back to her husband ‘like the river meets the sea’ (HW 274). She is not destined to enjoy the fruits of reunion with her patient husband. She realizes the futility of her attempt to get her transformed from within the confines of the harem—like zenana, a citadel of conservatism. The couple in reunion renew their original plan to go to Calcutta and give a try at her transformation. But the political storm that she abets inside her zenana itself blows over. She has to take care of its debris of anarchist violence. She loses the loyal Amulya and her husband in the communal riots. She experiences emotional bankruptcy, and a sense of negation while whipping herself with self-pity. It is too much of a misery for her to find her follower Amulya dying in Swadeshi riots and her husband half dead quelling those riots.

Ela, the heroine of *Four Chapters* is the last of Tagore’s women with patriotic fervour. She has a self-consuming love for her lover Atindra. And patriotism recedes. Fearlessness is the badge of her existence. Self-mastery is the key element of the development of her character. Her love for Atindra is much of a challenge thrown to herself. It is against her past-disciplined life. She declares that ‘I could never have imagined such a revolution in my self’ (FC 31). M. Sarada quotes Bimanbihari Majumdar who remarks, ‘Ela is the bravest of all heroines drawn by Rabindranath.'
No other heroine of Rabindranath is so outspoken and analytical as Ela’ (M. Sarada 126).

By this transformation of character she is in confrontation with her four year dilemma whether to live by the modernity of keeping Atindra as her lovers or to change over to the tradition of consummating her love into marriage. She chooses to abide by tradition. And this decision takes her to the gallows. What is ironical in this context is that she has no opportunity to practice freedom of thinking and action. Now she wants to give her love, the honour of marriage. It is against the established terrorist code of conduct forbidding any emotional entanglement. She emerges as a rebel inside the terrorist camp. The chief reason is she loses her faith in the terrorist message of violence. Atindra, her lover shares with her this disillusionment. Ela gets into action. She treats the young recruits, mostly the boys, not as cannon fodder as Indranath will have them. She opposes Indranath’s system of using her as a sex symbol for the boys whom she anoints into initiation while using her ‘flowerlike fingers’. (FC 13) Indranath’s idea is to keep the boys under sexual stimulation and induced trance of obedience. But Ela wants the boys to treat the girls not as playthings of sex but as a race of mothers. When her influence among the boys in gaining momentum Indranath strikes the blow. He disbands the boys in tea shop and spreads disaffection among them. She is branded as a
traitor and declared expendable. Thus Ela is caught up in power struggle and conflict of ideas. Her own beauty becomes a source of danger to her. She is 28 years old with exceptional youthful grace and energy. Indranath’s chief executioner Pattu offers Ela either to live with him as a sexual partner or to die. She is to be turned over to the hands of police next morning. Ela finds the foregoing circumstances heavily weighing upon her mind, and she decides to call it a day. But what is more significant about their meetings is that they have no physical gratification for their feeling of love. It is a strange angularity of her character. During the exchange of reminiscent thoughts between them Atindra asks her why she decides against having such a physical satisfaction before. Again he questions her why she has so wrongfully drafted him into the soul destroying terrorist movement instead of marrying him forthwith. Ela gives him her characteristic reply in the best tradition of the genuine lover. Accordingly she says that he has to be spared of her owning him for herself. Instead he has to be given over to the country as a volunteer in recognition of his high calibre of abilities. She cares for him more than she cares for her. She is a true lover. Similarly Damini in *Chaturanga* leaves Sachis alone by releasing him from her bondage of love. In the case of Binodini she decides not to marry Bihari. She wants him to be spared of social ostracism.
Ela’s life of academic aspiration is thrown overboard. It is in order to accommodate her fancy for a life of fearlessness in the midst of tension of terrorist agenda and police interrogation. But her training as a terrorist is not to be lost on her. Consequently she obeys Indranath and dies in the hands of her own lover Atindra. She is a patriot, ready to give her life. “Should the day come for causing me to disappear, ‘I will silently vanish’ (FC 18) She declares to Atindra “By this love I charge you kill me, kill me!” (FC 86)

The modernity of her emotional reaction to the terrorist movement as a forum of patriotic activism keeps her in the dilemma of finding the uselessness of the movement. She resolves the dichotomous crisis by opting for the tradition of solemnization of marriage. It is a logical end of her life of skepticism vis a vis her finer instincts of love and admiration.

Sarala of *The Garden* is the woman patriot in direct action. As the second heroine of the novel, her character holds the key to the whole plot of the novel. The theme of the novel is tied up with the major question of how to rehabilitate Sarala while her employer lover Aditya declares her as his age long ward deserving his unconditional love. Sarala’s passage from her uncle’s garden to the jail as a patriot with a flag in hand is a story of individual suffering at a personal level. Aged 31, and trained as a florist.
she yields to the belated wish of Aditya to marry her. Thus she is to be the ‘beloved kind’ of wife while Aditya’s wedded wife Niraja belongs to the ‘mother-kind’ of wife. Unlike Sarmila of Two Sisters who is willing to share her conjugal life with her younger sister, Niraja opposes Aditya’s proposal to marry Sarala as an extramarital arrangement.

For Niraja, Sarala appears outlandish, trying to get away with her husband and her garden. Niraja finds out the romantic frame of mind of Sarala ‘Nowadays the mysteries of the heart hang heavy on her. ..... I suppose this is what you people call romantic-’ (TG 132). This reaction on the part of Niraja triggers the dormant love that she has for Aditya. She refers to this momentous happening as follows. ‘I had never looked into my own mind before, but now the flame of Boudi’s passion has lighted up its dark recesses, and I could see myself’ (TG 149-150). Sarala’s appreciation of Niraja’s grievance is not to tilt the balance of emotions running riotous. As for Aditya he declares to Sarala. ‘I will not allow you to be snatched away from me no never. It’s unjust, cruelly unjust’ (TG 151). Incidentally he wonders how he misses the chance to marry Sarala while working in the garden. He observes ‘Your truth burned brightly in the depths of your heart. You are bound by it without knowing it. Why didn’t you make me aware of it? Why need our paths have diverged?’ (TG 153) Again he refers to their love in incubation for
23 years. Sarala has no answer for Aditya’s question ‘Must the twenty three years of your life together be simply wiped out?’ (TG 152). It is for Aditya to find out that they have been in love for twenty three years and it is endorsed by Sarala. Sarala recollects that Aditya and herself have been ‘Children in years and brothers in spirit’ (TG 149). Then comes Niraja’s charge of corruption of their mind. Sarala continues her recollection as ‘Alas I was suddenly and rudely made aware that I was a woman! (TG 149)’ One reason why she has not been alive to the romantic feeling towards Aditya is that her uncle asks her to dedicate herself to gardening as a lifetime profession, and not to marry. Sarala’s contemporary quasi romance with Ramen is a discordant note.

Sarala encourages Ramen, her admirer, taking liberty with her in the garden. Again, she finds Ramen as a Platonic lover as Bihari is in the case of Asha (B). Ramen knows that Sarala is Aditya’s girl and he glosses over Niraja’s suggestion that he should marry Sarala forthwith. But Sarala plays the tactful game of asking Ramen to lead her to jail before he goes to jail. She is the only political activist among Tagore’s women of patriotic fervour. Tall with compact body, luminous eyes and tender but strong arms her look means serious business. (TG 126). When Niraja offers her necklace as a passport with which to get into Niraja’s shoes and the garden, her words of refusal are ‘I could never rob another of what fate has
robbed me of' (1G 162). She is a patriot with ethical ideals. The irony of
fate is that no one can decide 'who hurts whom'.

Hemnalini in *The Wreck* belongs to the category of modern lovers
of sophistication. Similar is Labanya (FMF) a graduate, with her love for
Amit as a privilege for him. Hemnalini's love for Ramesh is as natural as
for an Anglicized girl with the Western style of living. She gives evening
teaparties and moves with all. What is wrong with her is, she is serious
minded in following the precepts of Western culture but she is not very
happy about it. She is a Brahmo girl always at ease with the English ways
of life. This does not help her much in understanding men like her law-
learning lover Ramesh. Practically he is a hypocrite with a habit for
procrastination. Her love for him is traceable to their exchanging glances
from across the roof terraces of their adjoining houses in Calcutta.
Therefore their love is not of the usual Western style of social intimacy.
Ela (FC) has her love for Atindra at first sight on the steamer. It is a choice
that falls on a co-passenger. It is as simple as that for a wilful personality
like her. Sucharita has her look at Gora while 'his nature trembles as
uncommonly as a marble palace trembles in an earthquake' and she gets
into the 'mystic realm' of indistinct love for Gora. Lolita's stays with
Binoy as a co-passenger in the steamer and finds him keeping nocturnal
vigil outside her cabin and thereby winning her heart by his honest
behavior. Like Hemnalini. Labanya begins appreciating Amit’s London looks but she understands later that he is ‘full of sound and fury, signifying nothing’. Labanya is a stiff personality with her mind not to marry. She changes her mind because of the influence of Nature in Shillong while in the company of the poetically garrulous Amit. In all the above four cases it has been for the girls, a discovery of genuine love. In Hemnalini’s case, it is a love born of artificial mood for it. However she holds on to it as stubbornly as ever. And she suffers. It is not her way to learn from personal observation. Her obduracy is antithetic to womanly instincts. She is not able to see through Ramesh’s shallow character when he falters while learning from her how to play on the harmonium. She refuses to listen to her brother, Jogendra, who reveals the truth about Ramesh keeping his wife in the school hostel. This is the weak spot in her sentiment of love for Ramesh. However she contradicts herself while declaring that she is ready to marry anybody of her hypochondriac father’s choice. At last it is to her credit that she sustains the shock of knowing that Kamala has been Ramesh’s wedded wife by the mistaken identity. She does not blame herself for the twist of the circumstances. She accepts the reality of the situation with the sense of resignation. She is left with her usual sense of melancholy. She advises Kamala to put forward her legitimate claim for the doctor husband. For her it is a snap decision. But it
is of ‘profound wisdom’ and involving ‘supreme sacrifice’. It is too much of an emotional exercise for a ‘college beauty’ as Hemnalini is. Her stress on traditionality comes to her rescue. Ramesh is written off from her mind as a man of straw. Hemnalini’s fate is irrationally uncharitable. But it is accepted by her the tragic fate to have loveless life with the aged sickly father to look after. In her unique case, the character is not destiny. She suffers for no fault of hers but on account of the conspiracy of circumstances. It is keeping in the tune with the Hardyean rhythm of the novel’s course as related to the merciless Fate, the great leveller. Her perspective is that of genuine love first and last. Ultimately she becomes the willing victim of the system of arranged marriage which the novel projects as the social evil with far reaching ill effects. The boat wreck is one such ill effect. She renounces her love for Ramesh and Nalinaksha alike and supports Kamala. Like Gora, she meets with her vast negation of life, in defeat for her love life. The novelist observes ‘she wore an air of supreme melancholy and resignation that was like a permanent twilight on her features’. (TW 408) Hemnalini gives up her modernity of pursuing her love with her Western mindset and finally she settles down resolving the crisis of her identity by means of adopting the tradition of acknowledging the sanctity of marriage as in favour of Kamala.
Tagore makes his principal characters to bear with suffering. It is with characteristic dignity and desire for making compromise over the final choice among the dichotomous opposites. Hemnalini’s dignified bearing in this welter of misfortunes is born of Western character as marked by constancy of love and faith in human worth. At the end Hemnalini advises Kamala to abide by her devotion to her ‘wedded’ husband in imagination. Her words of counselling are ‘To get a thing in that way is real getting. Any other kind is merely physical and does not last’ (IW 384)

Tagore’s chief characters try to mould their new destiny in a fit of modernity. It may be for making supreme sacrifices or decisions of profound wisdom under the stress of dilemma. M. Sarada talks on her thus, ‘Hemnalini, in spite of her Western education remains traditional. As rightly pointed out by Niharranjan Ray’ she is “the first outline of Tagore’s ideal of Indian womanhood” (M. Sarada 49)

Tagore’s creation of Labanya in *Farewell, My Friend* marks out the change of epoch, in the saga of lovelife by the lovers. Tagore’s women characters beginning from Labanya ending with Ela (FC) become more independent and self-reliant. They make use of their higher education as instrumental in achieving self-realization. M. Sarada quotes the views of
Humayun Kabir thus, ‘Major criticism against the novel is, that it is conceived and composed at the level of the intellect’. (M. Sarada105).

Among the women characters, Labanya is the first post-graduate. Her intellectual temperament with academic spirit makes her more analytical in mind and less mellowed in heart. For her, the happiness is self-forbidden. She misses important chances in her life to settle into normal life of married union by love. First she rejects Sobhanlal’s nerveless love for her. It is for the irrational reason that he is not an aggressive lover. The interesting parallelism is that the other women characters like Binodini, Bimala and Ela do have the same grievance against the solicitors of their love. Sobhanlal’s one sided love and his discomfiture cut into her memory as a psychological injury for ever. Therefore she finds it not hard to renew her attention for Sobhanlal when he turns up to befriend her making no claims. She finds him the self same Sobhanlal unassuming and subservient. She makes him the beneficiary of her love in terms of what she makes in her last poem

‘What others receive

Are the daily driblets the heart yields’. (FMF 112)

During the course of her second chance to love she gets transformed into a genuine lover but her lover Amit is found as a lotus-eater from Calcutta. She finds that he often gets into a spell of poetic fancies. He is
unfit to be a husband for Labanya. He is incapable of providing a sweet home for her. Their love that crops up in the idylls of Shillong is the work of Nature. It is with beauty of emotion and not with power of intention.

Amit loves her for the reason that she appears to be ‘a picture of serenity born not of emotional self – complacency but of the profound poise of a calm and balanced mind’. (FMF 29) According to Labanya ‘Amit’s mind was literary, each experience rolling a wave of words to his mouth. That was his life’s harvest and the source of his happiness. Hence his need of her’ (FMF 47). No girl of her maturity will ever think of being a mere catalyst to his getting warmed up to verbalise his poetic fancies. She is in a fix. She declares ‘I have no wish to play the tyrant with his nature’ (FMF 51). She could never change him into what she wants him to be. Her capacity to be calm and serene is put to test when Ketaki lands upon Yoamaya’s house in a bid to take away Amit as her lover at Oxford for seven years. Labanya’s practical outlook of life comes into fuller focus when he advises Amit to change over to Ketaki. Strangely enough she parts company with Amit making him a lover with extramarital status. Eventually she is to marry Sobhanlal out of sympathetic love for him. She gives her amorous love to Amit as earnestly as before. Labanya achieves this kind of novel synthesis in terms of modernity of loving two men at a
time. In keeping with the title of the novel as of her last poem of farewell to Amit, she gives out this thought.

Could you see you would not know me now

My Friend, Farewell (FMF110).

Her character of emotional strength is in stubbornness of self assurance while keeping Sobhanlal as her willing husband. She describes the situation in the following words of verse.

I long to give myself to him

Who can see in the infinite compassion of love

The actual me, of good and ill blended (FMF112).

Among the modern lovers Amit’s London fiancé Ketaki (FMF) is a peculiar character with a mind and body corrupted by the exaggerated notions of the English fashionableness. At Oxford when Amit was doing bar examinations, she was engaged to him at the age of 18. Now back home in Shillong, she takes Amit by storm after eight years of separation. At last she is to marry him because of Labanya’s concession. Even Amit who is for eccentric style in dress and speech is to change Ketaki back to her natural appearance from her being, ‘a concentrated superfine essence of foreign make’. (FMF 89) Quite conveniently Labanya sympathises with the arrogant Ketaki, she is a pathetic version of the craze for Western ways of life. She has to burden her person with cosmetic appliances with a view
to winning new suitors while Amit avoids marrying her. Tagore points out how very few women characters take to English fashion in dressing. Tagore is particular to portray his women characters as having the native charm in their natural dress like saree. Although Tagore presents women in traditional as well as modern dresses, his vote seems to be for the traditional dress. Urm (TS) and Bimala (HW) know the art of bringing out the nuances of elegance of the saree. With no sense of creativity, Ketaki (FMF) opts for the artificial look with Western cosmetics. Baroda Sundari (G) wears highheeled shoes. In summary Ketaki is a pathetic figure with no roots of faith in Indian culture. She is misled into the path of glamourisation of personal look with a false sense of beauty. Therefore she deserves sympathy and friendly counselling on how to attain beauty of soul in the Indian idiom.

Urmimala of ‘Two Sisters’ is the young sister of Sarmila. She is to play the role of a lover of the ‘beloved-kind’ to Sarmila’s husband Sasanka. Urmimala is not a lover in the literal sense of the term. Rather she enjoys giving her friendly love to all. Her first suitor is the Bengali physician Nirad, who is not very particular about honesty. She helps him to continue his studies abroad according to her father’s wish. Nirad dislikes Urm’s sophisticated taste in dressing. When Nirad severs his connection with her, by marrying another lady in London she feels no regrets.
The second phase of her love begins when she finds Sasanka, her sister’s husband getting infatuated with her. Her company brings him out of his workaholism into a new world of relaxed living. For him, she is a human wonder. Tagore describes her elegance as ‘Slender and delicate as a trail creeper, she swayed with every breath of the wind. She dressed simply but elegantly; knew how to bring out the full beauty of the figure in a Sari by a slight turn here, a right twist there, a little tightening here and a little loosening there-in a way whose secret no one could catch’ (TS 35). She is an outspoken lover of arts, sports enjoying a game of badminton, the zoological garden, bicycle, gardens, a football match, a sitar performance, radio and cinema. Although she was born with the *silver spoon* in her mouth she is not given to aristocratic arrogance. She has an inexhaustible talent for creating joy out of dullness and filling emptiness with her mere presence’ (TS 35, 36). Urmi accompanies Sasanka on his inspection tours and thrills him with her arguments. Her involvement in his work is different from that of Sarmila. Sarmila merely puts him on the pedestal as the icon of work culture. But Urmi creates in him a man of feeling caring for the niceties of emotional life. There is no suggestion of Urmi’s attracting him physically. She is carrying out her sister’s command to look after the household which is synonymous with looking after Sasanka. No exchange of romantic sentiments between Urmi and Sasanka
is found in the story. But Urmi deserves all the romance in the world. She has the inner glow of good living which has its roots in the Western individuality and eastern sense of propriety. Thus she is both a romanticist and a traditionalist. She agrees to be a temporary life partner to Sasanka for the sake of obliging her lovable sister. She is in a dilemma and has to choose between love and sacrifice. Her life with Sasanka is no longer palatable to her taste. She stands by the tradition of making sacrifice for upholding the honour of her family. She wants to fulfil the wish of her deceased father to establish a well-equipped Hospital. As soon as her sister recovers from her ailment, she flies to London to continue her higher studies on medicine, in respect to her father’s noble aspiration. Thus she proves that she is a traditional girl at heart, one who lives a life of plain living and high thinking.

Asha in Binodini belongs to the category of women characters having the traditional faith in giving their unconditional devotion to their husbands. Kamala in The Wreck is like Asha in this respect. But these two young women have different kinds of situations to live through. As for Asha her troubles are man-made whereas Kamala has to face the stark realities of life in her fate. Both of them have their feeling of devotion for their husbands in a characteristic fashion of tenacity of purpose. They are put to trial and they come out triumphant at last. Asha’s sense of devotion
is with its empirical tenor whereas Kamala’s devotion is absolute, pure and mystically nurtured. But the tradition is the same for these two. According to Lakshmi Subramaniyan and R.K. Ray, ‘To the conventional Hindu woman, the husband was not just a person, he was an ideal a living god on earth whom the scriptures enjoined her to serve and worship for her own spiritual fulfilment.’ The subservience inherent in the relationship need not necessarily impair her personality, for, as Tagore pointed out, she submitted not to coercion but to a moral and religious idea’. (Subramanian, Lakshmi and Rajat Kanta Ray. “Rabindranath Tagore and the Crisis of personal Identity in Colonial India”. (pp. 245, 246). Asha finds her husband Mahendra, breaking the sanctity of marriage. She is a caged bird in Mahendra’s zenana with no sophistication as a qualification for being a suitable wife for him. However he is to be brought back to his senses and the mainstream of family life. She has no power to do it by herself. Her personal record is that she is a beauty with grace and innocence. But her clumsiness and lack of Western education make her a misfit for the zenana family and its palatial outfit. On this score she faces the threat of marginalization and displacement by Binodini who becomes a tool of revenge in the hands of her jealous mother in law. There has been no experience for her to get angry with others. On occasions of stress she cries out for her old aunt. Her aunt, Annapurna, gives her at Kashi the useless
sermon of equating the husband with God. This means that husband is always godly by destiny. Asha modifies this formula into her determination to consider the husband as human. She declares she is to die in case the husband chooses to spurn her.

The uniqueness of Asha’s character is to be sorted out as related to be a long episode of her heroic response of silence to Bihari’s Platonic love for her. It is riddlci inside an enigma in the novel. It is Asha’s fate that her marriage becomes the bone of contention. Bihari thinks that Asha belongs to him as his wife since he is the first and foremost suitor for her hand. Similarly Mahendra’s argument is that Binodini is his ever since he has been her original suitor. This plea is for legitimacy with a retrospective effect. It is a far fetched claim depending upon its hypothetical order of precedence. It is only to cover the erosion of emotional and ethical values. The ego-centered men thrust their views on without any consideration for their wishes.

The whole problem comes into the challenging dimension when Mahendra charges Bihari twice that the latter is in secret love with Asha. Binodini becomes jealous of Asha on this score and she is for revenge. Binodini looks upto Bihari as her prospective lover immediately after the Dum Dum picnic. For Annapurna and Asha, Bihari’s visit to Kashi is in
his design of pursuit of Asha. Annapurna’s words of appraisal of the situation are ‘Is he still in love with Asha? (B 83)’. Asha knows in her bones that Bihari is in love with her. What is significant about it is that she never makes any sign or reaction to this knowledge. She never speaks on her own to Bihari who is a regular and celebrated visitor to their zenana. Her profound sense of devotion towards her husband as the worshipful personage is the source of her emotional strength and moral stability. Her devotion is not as absolute as Kamala’s either. It has its reservation. It is suggestive of selfless love for the husband in the anticipation of the reciprocation of his love, as a duty of conjugality. When Mahendra visits the zenana after his elopement with Binodini the rift in the lute is complete. She realizes that her marriage is in jeopardy. She is weakened from within. She is painfully conscious of the hypocrisy and treachery on the part of Binodini and Rajlakshmi. The transformation of her character takes place by means of her emotional experience in the context of her estrangement from her wayward husband, her mother-in-law and her treacherous friend Binodini. She learns to assume adulthood as a mansoon energises the parched earth. She reads Bengali novels and broadens her vision of life in terms of awakening into a world of practical realities. Her goal is achieved. Her patience is rewarded. She makes her compromise with the realities of the situation. Accordingly she nurses her
sick mother in law while refusing to obey the latter’s command to join with the delinquent Mahendra in his room.

Bihari brings Mahendra back home. Significantly she lets Bihari to get into the sick room first and Mahendra next. She rejoins her worthless husband on her mother – in – law’s counselling. Likewise, Bimala (HW) rejoins her husband while she carries the load of her sinfulness. She accepts Nikhil’s proposal to go to Calcutta for knowing the outerworld. In the case of Asha, she makes no gesture of conciliatory love for her prodigal husband. Kamala rejoins her wedded husband Nalinaksha as effortlessly as the victim of the Fate. Strong faith in the sanctity of arranged marriage inspires Hemnalini to be Kamala’s benefactor at the most critical time. Asha is a sterling example for being a thoughtful wife of devotion to her husband. Added to this she has her self earned sensibilities for redefining her own personality. M. Sarada quotes Bimanbehari Majumdar’s comments on Asha, ‘The transformation of Asha from a simple, artless and incompetent to an efficient mistress of the household commanding respect from every one concerned is one of the chief attractions of the novel’. (M. Sarada 30)

Kamala in *The Wreck* is a wife of devotion, and she is devoted to the image of husband rather than the husband in flesh and blood. That
things are in a different shape for her is a matter of fatalism. To begin with it is a question of confrontation with fate in its vileless mood. Kamala is to get into the most intriguing situation of living a life of sin with the hypocritical Ramesh. The crux of the problem is that she believes that he is the wedded husband for her. It is in the Hardyean range of the element of chance bringing her the tragedy of mistaken identity in the wake of a boat wreck for wedding party. As for Ramesh, he has his own claim for Kamala as the man who saves her life on the site of the boat wreck. Again he claims to have had their first private meeting on the river banks as of nuptial consummation.

By a quirk of fate Kamala has to deal with two men Ramesh and Nalinaksha. Ramesh thinks that the wedded husband for Kamala is dead during the boat wreck. Therefore Kamala is to be considered as a widow as far as his moral conscience is concerned. Therefore Ramesh is to be found living in double sin. As for Nalinaksha he keeps himself clear of any marital relationship on the strength of his inner conviction that his wedded wife is alive somewhere. Therefore it is easier for him to condone Kamala’s sinfulness if any.
Kamala’s innate goodness is a secure armour for her. Ramesh walks off from her life while giving her his word of honour not to divulge any word on their sinful past. Nalinaksha is won over by her spiritual glow and sense of devotion to the ideal of husband as an image. Fate brings the external forces of evil like the boat wreck and orphaned living. But the same Fate brings into her life the cheerful people as friends in need and indeed. Except Nabinkali who is like the Egyptian slave driver all others like Sailaja, the Uncle, Umesh, Kshemankari and Hemnalini are too good towards her. She is unassertive by nature but she is so good that she inspires Hemnalini who advises her to reveal her true identity to Nalinaksha. Again it is by the new turn of her fortune that she reaches her husband who is ready to forgive her. Her prayers are answered. The fate as the submerged propeller comes into the reversible gear owing to her steadfast faith in her devotion to the image of husband. Faith serves her well in a mystical fashion while making a legendary figure of faith incarnate among Tagore’s women characters. She has a subconscious feeling for optimism. It is just unthinkable to have optimism under the reign of cruel Fate.

Kamala with her faith in devotional love for her husband can afford to have ambition for such optimism in life. She has her faith in her ideal of being devoted to the husband’s image through thick and thin. It adds to the
power of her inner self to have optimism as lying ahead of her life of woes. Tagore describes the faith thus, ‘Faith is the bird that sees the light when the dawn is still dark’. Kamala’s faith is as promising as the bird’s with its vision of optimism while she keeps her emotional vigil in Nalinaksha’s house. Her husband is restored to her. All along Faith invests her with the power of intuition to visualize the dawn of her deliverance from the iron hands of Fate. Her sense of optimism lifts up the mists of her self pity. It is in keeping with the Shelleyean poetic dictum ‘If winter comes o! wind, Can spring be far behind?’.

Sarmila belongs to the devotional type of women in *Two Sisters*. She has the unique distinction of being the wife of ‘mother - kind’ for her engineer husband Sasanka. It is in conjunction with his chronic absent mindedness. Sarmila’s motherliness is as prodigious as the seasonal rains in plenty. She holds him in her tutelage as possessively as ever. Sarmila’s concern is to make her husband a satisfied man by spirit and body. M. Sarada writes on her. ‘She believes that success in work brings self - confidence’ in a man. She feels that it is quite natural for a man to neglect his wife when he is immersed in business. She, therefore, is not hurt when Sasanka ignores her when she is sick. She condones his callous behaviour towards her since he is too deeply involved in making his career a “Tower of triumph” and wishes him well in the pursuit of the “call of glory”.
(M. Sarada 10). Sharing his humiliation as a government engineer Sarmila makes him a civil engineering contractor. It is with her patrimonial money as the investment. She gives him a receipt for the money returned. This shows her hold upon him with its peripheral formalities. This way she helps him not to have his social disgrace of being indebted to one’s own wife living under one roof.

Sarmila tolerates Sasanka’s lethargy at home in the frivolous company of her younger sister Urmimala. Sarmila’s emotional intelligence is evident when she suggests that her younger sister Urmi could be a co-wife for Sasanka. It is to satisfy his emotional need for romantic life as made available in the company of the wife of ‘beloved kind’. In M. Sarada’s opinion ‘Sarmila is a woman in the traditional mould, and worships her husband with great devotion. She is the rare type of selfless, self-effacing woman. She forgives her husband, his flirtations with her sister on realizing that she has not made him happy. She even asks her husband to marry her sister with whom he is in love.’ (M. Sarada110)

Sarmila never finds fault with her husband when she learns that he has sustained his loss even in his speculative coal trade. But the fault is hers. She holds before Sasanka no nobler objectives of life except working tirelessly so as to make money. She sets before him the ideal
of work. The ultimate glory is to get ‘the splendor of eminence’ in terms of social prestige as gained through the money power. Her vision of life is limited within the blinkers of worship of mammon and empty glory of social image. The other devotional list of wives like Kamala (TW) and Asha (B) develop their critical perception on their husbands who go astray while flouting the sanctity of marriage. As for Sarmila she has no word of criticism for her husband’s frailties and inadequacies. This is her style of being the most conspicuous of the devotionalist wives.

Sarmila too has the modernity of finding Urmi as a passing nuisance to the family integrity for a while. But this is not allowed to snowball itself into a crisis. On the other hand she chooses to stand by the tradition of having tolerance for all invoking her loyalty to the deceased father, and she is amply rewarded for this as Urmi withdraws from the scene deciding to go abroad for higher studies. Again Sarmila’s robust faith in her loyalty to her family and her husband alike is to get her the well earned self fulfilment. In Sarada’s opinion, ‘Sarmila resembles Kamala in her qualities of devotion, service, self-effacement and self-abnegation. Tagore believes that true love demands sacrifice and forgiveness. Such people are ultimately rewarded by God with happiness and contentment’. (M. Sarada 111).
Niraja in *The Garden* is the mother kind of wife for her husband Aditya who makes his own choice of Sarala as the beloved kind of wife for him. Niraja disapproves her husband’s choice unlike Sarmila. Niraja is to become the victim of the same circumstances of marginalizing her as the wife of devotion. In the ultimate analysis it is a tragedy of emotional intentions. Aditya and Niraja are in a straight fight for redefining their marital bondage. Niraja wants to die of her sickness and not of her unhappiness over Aditya’s impatience to bring him his Sarala as the beloved kind of wife.

Niraja equates Aditya with the garden. She considers her husband, like the garden as an item of a property. She allows him to share the ownership of property grudgingly. It infuriates her that Sarala is allowed unlimited freedom in the garden, particularly to Orchid house. It is a symbol of her attachment to the garden. However Niraja’s nature is not influenced in any positive sense by her close contact with Nature. And she refuses to be charitable enough to oblige her husband’s wish. He wants to have extramarital love. Sarmila (IS) agrees to admit a co wife into her life of devotion to her husband as a workaholic. Hemnalini (TW) gives way to Kamala while respecting the sanctity of arranged marriage. Labanya (FMF) surrenders her right in favour of Ketaki over the question of legitimate right over Amit. Aditya claims to have been
in love with Sarala for twenty-three years and this period includes his married life with Niraja. Now Niraja is pained over her having lived with Aditya under the veil of hypocrisy. He finds it wounding her having her psychologically when Aditya asks her to give him permission for taking a second wife on the strength of his having given her a devoted married life for ten long years. He expects her gratefulness so that he may be grateful to his mentor whose niece Sarala is to become co-wife. It is too much of pain for Niraja to have been thrown into the horns of dilemma. She relaxes her mental tensions for a while on the advice of Ramen but it was a shortlived feeling of relief for her. There is the inevitable relapse into psychic depression and she dies of her own pain of heart. She cannot be as modern or individualistic as her husband will be but she can certainly follow the tradition of loving her husband unto her last breath. It is alleged that she loses her spirit in the trial of strength that she has with her husband. She loses the game. There will be no other fitting description of her than what the translator of this novel ends his note ‘No misfortune is greater than the poverty of spirit which deprives a human being of the capacity to love and to forgive (TG 116)’.

The next category of women includes elderly women with their husbands in estrangement. These elderly women characters do come under the purview of the theme of love. They give their support to the eligible
lovers to pursue their lovelife. The most significant of such elderly characters is Anandamoyi in *Gora*. She symbolizes the message of the novel *Gora* that man is to be valued not in terms of religion or country but as a human being as deserving universal status and recognition. M. Sarada quotes Bimanbehari Majumdar’s views on the creation of the character Anandamoyi as the mother for Gora that Rabindranath as a novelist has his “transition from Nationalism to Internationalism”. (M. Sarada 69) Further her character is to show the traditional Indian truth that motherhood need not necessarily be a biological disposition but it can be also the matter of emotional creativity. Anandamoyi chooses to be the foster mother for Gora on account of her inner urge to be mother with instinctive love for the child. For her there is no need for biological ties or blood belongingness to love a child. Commenting on her having Gora as her adopted son she observes’ ‘Was such a way of getting the child less wonderful than giving birth to it myself? (G 26). For her a child in arms is an emotional experience first and last, human and divine, far and near, real and unreal. It is immaterial whether it is biologically born to her or not. Thus her character has a superhuman emotional maturity in terms of doing things with a progressive vision. Her career is on how she holds on to this ideal of having a son as her own though not of her own blood. In this endeavour she draws upon the inner sources of her emotional strength to get over the
opposition. Hers is not an ordinary case of casual adoption of a native born child. She acts on the basis of her experience of the outerworld with progressive ways of life. She wears a 'bodice' and she is called as 'memsahib' during the days of her husband in government service. Gora is the son of fugitive Irish parents, born in her cowshed at Etawah near Agra. Gora is unwanted as a foreigner bringing proverbial pollution to the Hindu home of orthodoxy. With intuition she keeps herself aloof from her husband in retirement. It is a matter of self exile for her. It is to forestall any the truth of his foreign birth. Her dilemma is whether to continue her life of modernity resort to the tradition of orthodoxy. Her conscience is of bifocal projection in the sense that she has to care for the ancestral legacy of Hindu orthodoxy extending back to seven generations of Kashi pandits. Kshemankari in *The Wreck* is not ready to give up her practicing orthodoxy on the ground that she has been born and brought up in the orthodoxy circumstances of her Hindu family. Aged and noble hearted she is affectionate and tolerant towards all. With this mindset she smiles away Gora's arrogant arguments of Hindu ascendancy and Brahminical exclusiveness. Her deep concern for Gora prompts her to warn him against losing Binoy by his arguments for dissociating oneself from emotion. Without any hesitation she supports the inter-caste marriage of Binoy and Lolita. For her 'marriage is a matter of hearts coming together-if that
happens what matters if mantras are recited or not (G 183). Her secret joy is to observe Gora getting mellowed during the course of his secret love for Sucharita. She knows the ways of the world. She makes the remarks that Harimohini is the scheming aunt of Sucharita who is to look like an escaped convict when in need of help and a ‘tigress’ when in contentment.

The supreme hour of Anandamoyi’s achievement is when Gora comes to her describing her as a mother of all and also as the symbol of India with its traditional humanistic culture. Her last act is symbolic of her noble personality and her son Gora’s redemption: she orders the Christian maid servant to bring water to Gora. Binoy is sent for as a sign of reunion of friends. Anandamoyi’s acts of consolidation are in recognition of the fact that there is always harmony among the opposites. Judged by this achievement, Anandamoyi’s character is the greatest of Tagore’s women characters.

Kshemankari in *The Wreck* is a model of a misguided elderly woman with her feeling of anger dominating her life. She is angry with her husband and she lives by herself at Kashi in separation. Anandamoyi also lives separated from her husband. But there is a major difference between these two elderly women. Kshemankari is deserted by her husband when she refuses to be a Brahmo convert as she is. In a huff she adopts a life of
the austerity of a Hindu widow in Kashi, bathing in the Ganges to get rid of her past sin of living with a Brahmo husband. Thus her estrangement from her husband is for satisfying her private feeling of anger against her indifferent husband. As a matter of consolation she keeps her son Nalinaksha with her out of love for him. By contrast Anandamoyi keeps her respectable distance from her husband within the premises of her own house lest unorthodox life should pollute his Brahminical purity. And her aim is to protect Gora from his future exposure to the social wrath in the event of the realization of his ‘Irish parentage’.

Kshemankari is as inexperienced as Rajlakshmi (B) is. The evidence for this is that she becomes irrationally impatient with Hemnalini’s habit of reticence and sets up Kamala (in the guise of Haridashi - a servant maid) as a rival for Hemnalini’s bridal appearance. Nalinaksha’s intellectual brilliance has no appeal for her. She asks Hemnalini, ‘why do you pay any attention to the nonsense he talks?’ (TW 293). To her credit she asks her son to marry as he pleases. In the same vein she asks Hemnalini not to be as austere as she is but experience the joys of life like using finery and jewelry. She is charitable at moments of generosity in terms of giving aims to the Brahmin children and handsome gifts to her well wishers. This shows that the brighter part of her personality is not erased out by the bitterness of life that she carries in the core part of her soul. The irony of
her life is that she is found unforgiving in reference to her husband but Nalinaksha her son, expects her to forgive Kamala for her sinful past. Thus Kshemankari is both good and bad with the fluctuations of moods in her temperamental life.

Belonging to the category of married women of elderly group, Bordashundari in *Gora* has no force of character so as to develop angularities of emotional commitment. She is not as great as her contemporary mother character Anandamoyi and nor she is as engaging as the introvertive Kshemankari (TW). Religion is too much with her as an outlet for her clumsy ambition for social prestige. She changes the Hindu name of Radharani of her foster daughter into Sucharita to be secular. She turns out to be a social snob with no rules of personal honour. Therefore her character and career will have to be studied as an illustration to show how the contemporary Brahmoist women like her are fast losing their original cultural moorings. The reason for this predicament is that her hybrid religion of the Brahmos has its Anglican leanings. It does not provide its women with any time tested traditions with which to sustain their emotional life.

Bordashundari takes her Brahmoist affinity too seriously quite inappropriate to the liberal atmosphere that her husband Paresh Babu
creates in her home. She is indifferent to her husband’s valuable teachings. Her vision of life is the blind alley of the Brahmoist ties. In reality Brahmoism is a way of life for her and not a religion or ideology. Her ways of life are in the direction of finding suitable boys for her three daughters. Though wearing high-heeled shoes and engaging an English governess for her daughters, she disapproves the English fashion of romance between her first daughter Lolita and her Hindu lover Binoy on the ground of religious differences. She is wise enough to keep a discreet silence on the episode of Binoy’s initiation paper, being torn and forgotten. She values her unequal association with the British masters too snobbishly.

It is evident in her ready remark that she would talk to the wife of the English magistrate so as to get bail for Gora now in jail. She has no strength of character for want of traditions to follow. She dislikes the visiting Brahmo activist Haran Babu and her foster-daughter Sucharita on the ground that they have independent views of their own on love and marriage. Her confrontation with Gora shows that she is a reckless thinker with no courage or conviction. She considers Harimohini as a Trojan Horse of Hinduism sneaking into her Brahmoist home, with idol worship. She is literally scared of her first daughter Lolita. She considers Paresh Babu as a dullard totally unfit to be the head of the family. It is interesting that Tagore makes the husbands of these elderly women as no objects of
admiration for their wives. The common element among these three elderly
women is they choose to live aloof from their husbands with emotional
separation of varying degrees.

The next category of elderly women characters are widows who
suffer the devaluation of their normal personality. It is because of the
social taboos in force in those days of 1880s. They are divided into three
groups. Each of them is noted for a specific characteristic. Accordingly in
the first group there are elderly widows. The second group includes
middle-aged widows. The last and the third group involves two young but
rebellious widows. Each character demands separate detailed study
because each of them has her own individual image of exclusive traits.
Rajlakshmi and Annapurna are the elderly widows in their personal feuds.
Together, they belonged to the zamindari family with their cloistered life
in their zenana. In the first group of elderly widows we have Rajlakshmi,
Annapurna and Harimohini. The second group is with Bara Rani (HW) and
Yogamaya (FMf). The third group involves young rebellious widows
Binodini and Damini and they are to be dealt with in greater details
because of their being rebels against social injustice.

Rajlakshmi and Annapurna are the pair of elderly widows having
petty fogging inside the zenana family. Rajlakshmi sets up the young
widow Binodini against her son, Mahendra. It is to satisfy her feeling of jealousy that she has for her innocent but docile daughter-in-law Asha. It is so thoughtless of Rajalakshmi to unchain the indomitable young widow Binodini. Poor Annapurna is made the scape-goat for her niece Asha's inadequacies as the wife of Mahendra. Annapurna is concerned and she goes in self-exile to Kashi. The inefficacy of the joint family system is revealed in terms of treating the helpless and hopeless widows finding themselves unwanted. Rajlakshmi fails in her duty to treat Annapurna with sympathetic love. Bara Rani (HW) is the middle-aged zenana widow who keeps herself majestically independent. Her brother-in-law Nikhil keeps her happy. Their relationship of mutual concern and love is 'with deeper tones of intimacy'. The Bara Rani enjoys the company of her zenana aides, playing cards in a cheerful and harmless buoyancy. She makes no nuisance of herself. But her emotional commitment towards Nikhil is not an eyesore for Bimala, who keeps discreet silence over this ongoing relationship. The Bara Rani returns this courtesy by her indulgent view on Bimala's indiscretion in having a love affair with the zenana guest, Sandip. She makes no secret of her spying arrangements maintaining for the honour of the zenana house. When Nikhil is gone to quell the communal riots, she is in despair. She can afford to have this genuine concern for Nikhil. Anita Desai talks of the radiance of the

Harimohini’s character is designed by Tagore, in deviation from his usual sympathetic attitude towards the widows in general. She is described as an evil incarnate with her wounded psychology. Her life of misfortunes is a matter of evil destiny. She believes that her sufferings are undeserved. She thinks that she is a victim of fate. She becomes a hardened evil thinker. She turns against the society and loses her sense of proportion. Her desire is to take Sucharita into her father-in-law’s house as a ransom for her. That house of the village in reality is a ‘Fagin’s Academy’ with her brothers-in-law who robbed her of her lawful rights for shelter and property. She forgets her bitter experience in that house quite conveniently for the reason not known to anybody. This illogical desire of hers is for the realization of her hope. This may identify her as a psychic personality with the unnatural desire to get back to the place of known danger. She has no love or gratitude for her benefactors including her younger sister’s daughter Sucharita. It is a significant event for her to get asylum in Sucharita’s house with the green signal from Paresh Babu. She tells Paresh Babu, ‘When after all my wanderings, I at length arrived here, and got to
know you, then I understood that God could have pity even for me’ (G 216). Her wanderings are ended. But she becomes unhappy over her chance to be happy. She harasses Sucharita with the proposal of marriage to her visiting widower brother-in-law and Sucharita despairs into declaring that she will never marry in her life. There is no accurate explanation why she turns on her own benefactors doing evil to them. She is ignorant of the workings of her mind breaking under the pressure of emotional disorder.

By contrast Niraja (TG) gets into the delirium of mixed emotions on gain and loss while having the paranoia about losing her husband Aditya and garden to her rival Sarala. It is an open story of how a sinking woman is fighting for the integrity of her status as a devoted wife. The case of Harimohini is not with its justification. She does not despise her father-in-law’s home for its hellishness but she forgets her past experience of ill treatment in that house. Stupidly she describes to Sucharita that their house is a haven of prosperity and baronial prestige. This shows that she values the social status much more than personal happiness. Once she is entrenched into a place of security she makes her claims upon others for getting her personal desires gratified. It is a violent transformation of her character. Anandamoyi aptly judges that she ‘had always been as timid as though she were a criminal,... To-day she stood like a tigress defending
her own rights’ (G 363). In this way she arrogates all responsibilities of doing good to Sucharita. She is the only person to be unmindful of Gora, the dynamic leader. She questions Gora the great Hinduist defender, on the propriety of his action of visiting a Hindu girl Sucharita of veiled privacy. This kind of appreciating evil and ignoring good is symptomatic of a diseased mind. Sleeplessness is an attribute of her mind in disorientation. Harimohini’s own words are, ‘I can hardly sleep for thinking of what may happen some day’. (G 364). The novelist portrays Harimohini’s character with psychological depth. It is to show how the spirit of the Renaissance with women’s education and empowerment in the forefront has been lost to some of the women, particularly the elderly widows like Harimohini. Tagore’s idea is to show that womenfolk by virtue of their having their preferences for the objective values of wealth and power will have to lose their traditional human worth in a subjective way.

Tagore’s creation of Yogamaya, is to point out how some widows, younger for their age will remain uninhibited by the excessive social concerns. It is exceptional to go as free as all other women, in spite of the rigors of widowhood. Yogamaya, a widow calm and serene, is unique in keeping up her cheerful temperament through a life of gloom that is destined for her as a Hindu widow. By contrast the other Hindu widow Harimohini (G) is lost to herself and as such she is a problem to others.
Similarly Annapurna (B) is a self-willing nonentity with her communion with God as the convenient need for survival. Rajlakshmi (B) is not inclined to indulging in charitable activities and exhibits ass her total ignorance on how to use the inherited wealth to enhance one's own happiness. Yogamaya is left with the sizable riches and two children. She knows how to use her riches. She educates her children. She engages Labanya as a governess for them while camping at Shillong. The Hindu widowhood is not a stone slung around her neck. Rather it disciplines her mind. The winning quality in her is that she is not embittered by her past experience at her husband's house. It has been a veritable prison for her throwing around her the 'shackles' of conservative restraints. Similarly Damini (C) suffers such religious excesses in the hands of her sickly husband who turns her over to the custody of a heartless godsman. At her husband's home Yogamaya finds her husband overdoing his self-styled role of an orthodox Brahmin in the company of Kashi pandits. She has a practical mind to forget the liberal atmosphere of modern living at her father's home and to identify herself with her husband's house. She never shows any sign of protest when they take away her freedom of choice at an age of talk on liberation of women.

Tagore creates Yogamaya’s character as a woman of serenity inviting a feeling of reverence from the onlookers. About 40 in age and
with her hair cropped close with a veil over it. She wears no sandals while moving about solemnly ‘in coarse white cotton saree’ (FMI 26). She is a woman of refined taste and high thinking. Amit wins her confidence as a young man of poetic vision and words. Her advice to her employee, Labanya, to marry Amit but she is democratic minded as not to impose her ideas on others. She keeps herself composed when Ketaki appears in her house and puts forward her claim that Amit is hers by their past engagement at London. Yogamaya accepts the hard reality of finding people as they are.

Tagore creates the two young widow characters who are found fighting for their right for identity as normal women in the society. Though widows they love the men of their choice with their ambition for self-fulfilment. In doing so they defy the existing social norms as designed to victimise the Hindu widows. M. Sarada quotes Bimanbehari Majumdar’s views on these two widows, ‘The difference between Binodini and Damini measures the degree of Liberalism and Universalism to which Rabindranath moved between 1901 and 1915’. (M Sarada199). These two characters are fascinating for their surprising capacity to make sacrifice of their love. It is for the sake of protecting their lovers from social disrespect and personal defeat. Judging Tagore’s characters V.S. Naravane observes that they are exceptional people ‘who can surprise us by flashes of
profound wisdom or by acts of supreme self-sacrifice'. (V.S. Naravane, An Introduction to Rabindranath Tagore (115). In the light of this observation it is Damini who gives up her pursuit of love for Sachis as an act of 'profound wisdom'. So also in the case of Binodini who resolves not to accept Bihari’s proposal to marry her as an act of 'supreme self-sacrifice'. It is a path of self glory for them.

Each of these characters is to be studied in detail as related to her self-growth. Damini is the sympathy winning character assuming the role of social rebel. It is the obvious reason why she is denied of justice at all occasion and places. She is less conscious of her beauty and grace than of her personal right to be independent. She is destined to have ill-fated and unsuccessful relationships with people around her. But her spirit of nonchalance keeps her going steady through the odds of her life. The wheel of misfortunes turns non-stop unmercifully for her. She is robbed of her properties, her freedom and her happiness by the Guru whom her husband nominates as her legal warden. It is almost repetitive of what the previous novel *The Wreck* holds out to be as the supreme rule of fate. Damini feels crushed under the weight of the ill will of others with her solitary exemption of sympathetic love from Sribilas. Her fighting spirit never fails her. She helplessly watches her wealthy father dying in poverty. Her life in the Guru’s camp of ‘kirtans’ hardens her into a rebel. She has
the practical view of life in the sense that she never talks about her deceased husband who gives her dowry house and jewels as gifts to the Guru. She slogs like a slave in the camp by cooking everyday for sixty to seventy devotees. However she refuses to go to the kirtan classes though she never neglects her duty of cooking. Her refusal to attend the sessions of ‘Bhajan’ by the Guru is misunderstood for arrogance. Sachis describes her as an archetypal woman. She is misunderstood for a flippant lady with a rebellious nature. In truth she is a lady of original ideas. Damini’s arguments are against the Guru’s indifference to her legal right to live in his camp. For her Guru’s creed of self-love is unspiritual with no human feeling for the fellow beings.

Sachis and Sribilas as the dedicated inmates of Guru’s camp, think that she is shrewish. But the truth is she has her ideological conviction of having no faith in the philosophy of self-ecstasy as advocated by the guru. Her reticence is characteristic of her inner fury of love for Sachis. She makes demonstration of this love in her room, the sea-side cave on the riverside but she is rebuffed. She goes by her individual decision that Sachis will continue to have his extra attention to her as in the beginning of their acquaintance. The achievement of hers is that Sachis and Sribilas are dislodged from Guru’s camp as feared by the Guru. It is to her credit that she proves Guru’s inhumanity beyond doubt. Further she impresses upon
the mind of Sachis how Guru is advocating a creed of self-love while lacking humanity and love for others. She cites the example of Nabin’s wife’s suicide to identify Guru as a heartless spiritualist who prefers dancing after hearing the news of suicide. Her attempt to play upon the feelings of Sachis falls through and Sribilas becomes the target of her attention. She wants to inspire Sachis. Among Tagore’s women characters Anandamoyi and Damini are the two, outstanding creations giving solid ideas on human life.

Freedom for her is more than her common ambition that she wants to be free from the shackles of widowhood. M. Sarala says, ‘Damini is an epicurean in her attitude and is anxious to miss nothing in life’ (M. Sarada 95). Sachis is enlightened in the art of finding spiritual identity within the range of his own inner sources. Rather she has to seek peace and bliss from within. With these achievements to her credit, Damini contradicts herself while trying to make Sachis her lover. It is during her quest for personal happiness for a widow as she humiliates him while giving him the status of her Guru. Sucharita of Gora has only an indistinct love for her lover Gora who is described by her sara as her ‘guru’. Bimala of The Home and The World develops extramarital love for Sandip who teaches her the lesson of Swadeshi movement.
Damini's demonstration of love as displayed in her room in the seaside cave and in riverside room frightens Sachis and he gets hardened into being an ascetic with renunciation of all emotions including the dormant love for Damini and the genuine friendship for Sribilas. It is to her credit that she feels reconciled to his getting lost to her and she allows him to go. However her goal of seeking social status and married happiness is not to have recession. She finds Sribilas as a willing substitute for Sachis. She agrees to have him as her understanding husband while cherishing Sachis as her lover. This kind of extramarital love for the erstwhile lover receives a special attention of Tagore. He makes a reference to it in the case of the love story of Amit and Labanya in *Farewell, My Friend*.

Binodini is the young widow with her rebellious character crusading against the contemporary social prejudices. There has been certain rethinking of the Bengali Renaissance. Binodini as the heroine of the novel is to be adjudged as the choicest and the most brilliant of Tagore's amorous characters. The most compelling reason is that Tagore creates Binodini's character as a psychological study in a realistic social setting. She is the first heroine of the first psychological novel in Bengali literature. Necessarily her character has to be designed through the spectrum of the spirit of Bengali Renaissance in terms of women's empowerment and progress for Bengali literature. Though born in a remote village in Bengali
Binodini grows into a modern minded girl, with the special gifts for urban living. She owes her sense of modernity to her English governess whom her father engages. She inherits the trait of extravagance in thought from her father who earns much but leaves little for her dowry. The result is that she becomes a widow soon by marrying a sick person. She refuses to get reconciled to her fate. The reason is that her father engages an English governess for her. Though informal, her English education opens up the flood gates of her modern spirit. She becomes restless with her inner fury. She is restive for giving herself the fuller satisfaction. Her desire for self-fulfilment is with a sharp mind and useful talents. She combines artistic beauty and scientific precision in managing the trades of housekeeping and dress-making. It is evident in her superb work that she has metamorphosed Mahendra’s zenana. Rajlakshmi is so satisfied with her that she is encouraged to think in terms of displacing Asha, her incompetent daughter-in-law. For her the end justifies the means and she thinks of Mahendra as hers since he rejects her once as a bride for him. Likewise Bihari has his Platonic love for Asha on the strength of his argument that he has been about to marry her at first. This nexus of love with its credence as derived from the previous anecdotes of proposals of marriage forms a causative factor for the complexity of the plot. Once Binodini entrenches herself as the celebrated guest of talents for housekeeping, the door of
opportunity is thrown open to her. She makes sense of time and situation. She launches her mission to get the normal pleasure of life including making love, like any other normal woman. As she is an adept in social diplomacy she exploits the clumsy Asha to get to know about Mahendra and his private life. She has the cunning to write letters for Asha containing her personal thoughts on love. This kind of gyration of arguments supplies the necessary dynamism for the thematic thrust towards the delineation of the plot of the novel. They are the undercurrents of the plot crisis-crossing, making the psychological image of the novel more pronounced. Binodini reaches her decision to love and marry Bihari. M. Sarada quotes the views of Masti Venkatesa Iyengar that ‘the process by which Binodini’s heart turns away from Mahendra and fixes itself on Bihari, is not described sufficiently to carry conviction, that by which Bihari comes to care for Binodini is described slightly and fails to carry conviction’. (M. Sarada 24). It is a free choice for her to her heart’s content. She never shows it out. She knows that Bihari is in love with Asha from the beginning. Whether to pull him out of the circle or to smoke him out that is the question for her. She makes out a strategy. It is first to win Mahendra over to her side. He is to be a tool in her game to get at Bihari. Mahendra’s excessive libido is taken into her consideration as of weakness. She plays a flirt with him. He becomes totally inept with
infatuation for her. Asha is neglected and Bihari is concerned. Commenting on his sensual passion for her she describes it ‘Why this congenital covetousness, this begging itch? (B 132)’ Mahendra goes out of her favour by his acts of ungentlemanly indiscretion. This prompts her to tell him, ‘out of pity for you I renounce you’ (B 132). She is no longer a flippant butterfly for him but a woman of depth of character. This thaw is not to continue. Mahendra takes his infatuation for Binodini very seriously. He oversteps his limits as the keeper of the asylum for Binodini. She calls him a coward. In this context her remarks are ‘neither the guts to love nor the guts to do your duty (B 136). She further tells him that the amorous relationship is for her just a sport liable for changes in tune with her fancies. She is with intuitive knowledge of man and their ways of behaviour. She tells the uncontrollable Mahendra ‘You will protect me from your self’ (B 210). She means by this that Mahendra is unfit to be a forcible lover or a duty-minded husband. When Mahendra proves himself a nuisance to her she consults Bihari over her problem. Mahendra exhibits his love for Binodini and his mother blames her as a moral wreck calling her a ‘seductress’. But Binodini gives her alert reply, ‘We are a race of seductresses’ (B 135). She silences the guns by betraying Rajlakshmi being an ally to her in seducing Mahendra. M. Sarada quotes Humayn Kabir’s opinion ‘Her attitude is one of tempting him while retaining her own self
control. (M. Sarada 23) During this time of crisis in Mahendra’s zenana there is no occasion for Asha to question Binodini on her treacherous behaviour unbecoming of a confidante. Nor does Binodini talk to Asha on this matter. When Mahendra goes to Binodini village in pursuit of her she agrees to go on an elopement with him but on her own terms. Accordingly he is to have no physical contact with her during the days of her wanderings in the upcountry. Previously Mahendra is kept in the dark that Binodini is only a frivolous player or a partner in the love-game with the option to fall out at any time. Again she never tells him that she is not a lover for him on elopement. Bimanbehari Majumbar observes, ‘It was the case of the strangest elopement in the world’. (Bimanbehari Majumdar. Heroines of Tagore, 212). But her real intention is to find out her real lover Bihari’s whereabouts. She is able to convince Bihari of her chastity even after Mahendra’s advances upon her. Bihari proposes to marry her. But she withdraws her saying, ‘Religion and Society would never tolerate it’ (B 218). She prefers to be a devotee keeping herself aloof from him while he is at his welfare projects. It is a matter of controversy why Binodini denies herself the great chance to marry Bihari when he himself proposes. In fact it has been a lifetime ambition for her. It is inconsistent for her to keep her love ever green and invisible as a private joy for so long a time and now she misses the opportunity to get what she wanted all through
these days of waiting. She withdraws herself from the scene of marriage to be a martyr-lover. The Tagorean way of explanation is that Binodini is to give and not to take in her relations with her lover. She cares for Bihari so lovingly that Bihari is not to get to the trouble of facing social ostracism when he marries the widow like Binodini. The criterion of love in its fundamental glory that true loves care for each other.
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