CHAPTER 3

WOMEN AND THEIR OSTRACISM

One’s Social Self is the recognition which he gets from his mates. We are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favourably, by our kind. No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke or minded what we did, but if every person we met cut us dead and acted as if we are non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the crudest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all. (James 293-94)

Ostracism is a wide ranging psychological concept that affects individual’s societal status as well as well-being at multitudinous levels. Sense of belongingness makes an individual feel safe and connected all the time; however, loss of belongingness with others may devalue human being to the lower pedestal. According to Kipling D. Williams, ostracism threatens four fundamental human needs. These needs are “… the need to belong, the need for self-esteem, the need for control and the need for meaningful existence” (60). And whenever an individual faces any challenges to these needs, strong signs of “pathological consequences beyond mere temporary distress” (60) are visible at different levels. In most of the societies, ostracism has been used as a tool of controlling the under-dogs, suppressed and simultaneously, protecting the interests of the privileged section in one way or the other. Kipling D. Williams highlights:

Ostracism, perhaps more than any other form of aversive control, is a poignant metaphor for what life would be like if the target doesn’t exist.
Because ostracism involves a withdrawal of attention or recognition by others, individuals exposed to it may be reminded of their fragile and temporary existence, and its lack of meaning and worth. They may even be reminded of their own death. (63)

Throughout the world, societies and cultures—religious scriptures, epics, myths, and laws have been constructed according to the patriarchal ideology. Hindu society is divided into air-tight hierarchy of caste and creed where Brahmins are placed at the supreme level and the lower castes are controlled by other sections of the society. The higher classes ensure to maintain this inegalitarian and class structure in order to have control over the weak sections of the society. Tagore remarks in Selected Essays, “At the present stage of history, civilization is almost exclusively masculine, a civilization of power, in which woman has been thrust aside in the shade” (226). Likewise women are controlled by men and little scope is given to them to ensure the individuality and independence and those who try are excommunicated. Even though women stand on the same ground of intellectual and professional capability yet their worth fails on the basis of gender that gives rise to several social evils. This obsession for power results in the seclusion and subordination of women.

The secondary position of women is not a feminine feature but it is the result of social tradition under the control of men. The social ostracism of women is an evil practice by the ever dominating men to banish them when they try to emphasize their identity in “normal” and “natural” stream of life. Woman’s identity is recognized with man’s name, that’s why Virginia Woolf calls her protagonist, Mrs. Dalloway, and Bankimchandra refers to his heroine as Rajmohan’s wife. This reflects the negligence of individuality to woman as her identity is derived only by the social status of her husband. Manu Samriti defines the role of woman who must live for her father, brother and then for husband and children. In verse 27 and 28 of Chapter 9, it is asserted:

27) The wife is the visible form of what holds together the begetting of children, the caring for them when they are born, and the ordinary business of everyday.
28) Children, the fulfillment of duties, obedience and the ultimate sexual pleasure depend upon a wife, and so does heaven, for oneself and for ones’ ancestors. (Doniger and Smith 200)

The law of Manu ensures woman’s total dependence on man and any kind of violation is to be observed strictly. Manu also points out that if a woman becomes widow it is because of her previous birth’s sins and she must ensure chastity for her and her husband’s in the other world; while after the death of wife, a man can marry as many times as he wishes. There are several other quotes that solidify and justify the misconception of the social ostracism of woman and negation of her identity:

Like a shudra, a woman is entitled to only one sacrament that is marriage. (Manu II: 66-67)

It is the nature of the women to seduce men in the world; for that reason, the wise are never ungraded in the company of females. (Manu II: 213)

Women are able to lead astray in this world not only a fool, but also a learned man to make him a slave of desire or anger. (Manu II: 214)

A wife, a son, a slave, a pupil and a younger brother who have committed faults may be beaten with the rope or a split bamboo. (Manu VIII: 299)

Though Indian Shastras also quote, ‘Yatra naryastu pujyante, ramante tatra devta’ which means where women are worshipped, gods themselves inhabit that place. But there is no denying in the fact that the life for women has never been easy. For centuries they have been personified as the mythical model of Sita or Savitri, the Earth-Sufferer or the Earth-Mother who are passive in accepting the role of woman. As de Beauvoir opines, “She is defined with reference to the man not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (16). She further asserts, “The situation of woman is that she is a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other” (155). The moment women try to free themselves from the clutches of
stinking rules to give a vent to their dreams, they are ostracized and declared
left out and unnecessary. Now, only two ways are ahead of them- one is to
accept the status of the unnecessary and left out beings and the other is to fight
back into the main stream of social life.

Social customs of the orthodox Hindu society of the late nineteenth
century and the early twentieth century added to the miseries of women. In
Hindu society to be born as a girl was sin and becoming widow was even
greater curse. The orthodox and conservative laws of Hindu religion made the
life of widows even more difficult and they were treated as untouchables and
prevented from participating in any religious or social ceremony as widows
were labeled as ‘husband eaters’. They were forced to accept restrictions either
willingly or unwillingly. In fact, most of the times, widows were dumped into
holy cities like Varanasi, Mathura and Brindavan. It is believed that these cities
are “the abode of God. Widows who reside here attain paradise” (Ansal 14).
Here they were forced to eke out their living from the clutches of exploiters
and suppressed their natural instincts of being loved. Anees Jung describes the
condition of these inferno like places saying, “. . .the streets of this medieval
holy town are littered with the shrunken figures of women, bedraggled and
dressed in dirty white, divorced from love, family and home” (73).

Even now situation for widows has not changed much. Famous novelist
Shashi Deshpande also describes the poor condition of widows in her
celebrated novel That Long Silence while painting the character of Ajji as “a
shaven widow” (26). The word shaven indicates the public humiliation which is
implicated on Hindu widow after the death of her husband. The removal of hair
is the symbol of the removal of glory. Ajji lives in complete seclusion that Jaya
recollects:

Ajji had denuded her for all those things that make up of woman’s life.
She had no possessions, absolutely none, apart from the two saris she
wore. Her room was bare, except for the large bed on which my
grandfather had slept […] Ajji herself sat on the bare ground and slept
on a straw mat at night. The bed was a memorial to grandfather and the
chairs meant for any male who, wearing trousers, could not sit comfortably on the ground. (26)

The social status of woman depends on the cultural and traditional status of the society, as Jawaharlal Nehru says, “You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women” (qtd. in Sharma 01). A humanist to the core, Rabindranath Tagore was moved to see the plight of women due to religion, caste, child-marriage, patriarchal oppression, young widowhood and the worst of all ‘Sati Partha’. He criticizes the views of Manu on women. In “Crisis in Civilization” (Rabindra Rachnavali Vol. 6), he raises voice against tyranny:

> It is difficult to find a suitable Bengali equivalent for the English word ‘civilization’. This phrase . . . has been called by Manu ‘Sadachar’ . . . Narrow in themselves these time-honoured social conventions originated . . . got the upper hand of free thought and the ideal of ‘proper conduct’ which Manu found established in Brahmavarta steadily degenerated into socialized tyranny. (126)

Certainly Tagore was disturbed witnessing the social restrictions imposed upon women without any basis inducing inferiority complex in them. His deep concern towards women’s sufferings made him give ample space to them in his novels and short-stories. His views reflect the attitude of many modern days’ feminists as he attacked the social injustice done to the women through the medium of his writings. Neeru Tandon throws light over characteristics of a feminist:

> A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious about women’s life and problem, and feminist consciousness is the experience in a certain way of certain specific contradictions in the social order. That means the feminist apprehends certain features of social reality as intolerable, and to be rejected if one is to transform the society for a better future. (28)

The initial period of Tagore’s writings demonstrates the cruelty and absurdity that lead to the ostracism of women. Radical in temperament he declares, “God is serving the whole world just like a mother nurses her child or like a love-lorn lady who takes care of her beloved. He is the server Himself and so He has
given so much gravity to servitude” (qtd. in Das Gupta 09). Analyzing the feminist temperament of Tagore, Joyasree Mukherji aptly opines:

Tagore had a very strong feminine side to his nature. . . . Tagore’s feminine intuitive perceptiveness gave him an almost godlike insight into the mind of a woman. . . . As a passing cloud casts its shadow on a sheet of clear, still water, similarly a woman’s every fitting desire, her every yearning, her joy, her sorrow and pain, her hopes and despair, her strength and weakness were all reflected in the deep clear pool of his understanding. (ix)

While writing about the social ostracism of Binodini, Annapurna, Harimohini, Shyamasundari and Bara Rani, the novelist gives voice to sufferings of the widows of India. In *A Grain of Sand*, he shows how the holy city of Kashi had become the ‘city of widows’, where widows discarded by their families were forced to seek refuge. The novel highlights how in India widows lose their rights to be treated and respected like human beings. Sara Barrera and Eva Corbacho declare it as ‘de-sexing’ of the widows and retorts, “Widows in India have a pronoun problem. The estimated 40 million women widows in the country go from being called “she” to “it” when they lose their husbands. They become “de-sexed creatures” (68). In fact, in the Hindu joint families, the plight of widows can be well imagined. What Anees Jung comments on Indian women in general, can rightly be applied to Tagore’s women in particular:

In this complex pantheon of diversities, the Indian woman remains the point of unity, unveiling through each single experience a collective consciousness prized by a society that is locked in mortal combat with the power and weakness of age and time. She remains the still centre, like the centre in a potter’s wheel, circling to create new forms, unfolding the continuity of a racial life, which in turn has encircled and helped her acquire a quality of concentration. (26)

During his stay in the countryside, Tagore closely witnessed the inner groaning of tender-hearted widows who had to abide by taboos, superstitions and decrees. Pandita Ramabai, one of his contemporaries, also depicts the plight of
child widows in her book *The High Caste Hindu Women* through female lens and highlights that child widows and childless young widows were perceived as criminals and receptive of social and familial hatred. She opines:

> Young widow is always looked upon with suspicion . . . for fear that she may at any time bring disgrace upon the family by committing some improper act. The purpose of disfiguring her by shaving her head, by not allowing her to put ornaments or bright garments on her person is to render her attractive to a man’s eye. Not allowing her to eat more than once a day and compelling her to abstain from food altogether on sacred days is a part of the discipline by which to mortify her youthful nature and desire. (43-4)

A distinction between social and familial ostracism is clearly visible in Tagore’s writings. Along with widows, married women who have to live without their husbands’ love and care can be declared ostracized. There is a whole range of women characters who are ostracized for one reason or the other; many a times without any fault of their own but due to familial and social set ups. Harimohini and Anandamoyi in *Gora* are sentenced to numerous miseries and humiliations. An unfortunate soul, Harimohini represents the whole range of widow’s sufferings in the Bengali society. The novelist defines how constant tortures shape the mindset of a simple and docile woman like her. One can offer what one receives, likewise the tortures and sufferings that Harimohini receive from society force her to become hostile towards it. At a very young age (eight years), she was married into a well-to-do family of ‘Roy Chowdhuries’. It is the commencement of her misfortune when the relationship of her father and father-in-law goes bitter because of dowry. Harimohini’s in-laws threaten her saying, “What if our boy marries again? We should like to see what their girl’s condition will be then!” (G 184). Her life in her husband’s house is a nightmare as at a very tender age she has to work like slaves. Through her conversation with Sucharita, Tagore highlights the condition of child-bride in a joint family. Harimohini says:

> In my husband’s home, the family was a large one, and when I was only nine years of age I had to help in the cooking for sixty or seventy
people. I could never have my own meal until everyone had been severed, and even then I had only what was left, sometimes nothing but rice, or rice and dal. I used to have my first meal as late as two o’clock and on some days not till almost evening, and then the moment I had finished my own food I had to start cooking again for the evening meal, and not till eleven or twelve o’clock in the night did I get a chance to have my supper in, and I simply slept with anyone who could find a place for me, sometimes without any mattress at all. (G 184)

The deliberate projected neglect of Harimohini towards her own health does not have any impact on her husband or on in-laws. The situation turns worse when at the age of seventeen she gives birth to a girl child, Monorama. The situation reveals how in Indian society birth of the girl child is welcomed by mourning and sobs. Monorama also meets the same fate still she is a great comfort to Harimohini. She accepts:

My position became still worse because I had given birth to a mere girl. And yet my little girl was a great joy and comfort to me in the midst of all the humiliation. Deprived of all affection, whether from her father or anyone else in the house, Monorama became to me an object of care as dear as life itself. (G 184)

The mentality of the Indian society is scrutinized by the writer where the condition of woman- good or bad depends upon her ability to produce a boy child. The position of woman is defined according to her accessibility and acceptance by the main stream of the society that is ruled by man. Any violation or deviation from the standard code can land her into a social prison. However, the situation of Harimohini changes with the birth of a boy and she attains her place as mistress of the house but the good time that began with the birth of a male ends with the death of another male as Harimohini loses her husband and son due to the epidemic of cholera. Harimohini pays the price of being a woman and suffers a lot in her life; likewise her daughter, Monorama, also goes through the same. Here Tagore hints at the never ending, brutal and corrupt circle that encompasses women from father to husband and then to son. Famous Pakistani writer and women rights activists, Tehmina Durrani in her
novel, *Blasphemy*, gives voice to similar kind of oppression, when Heer says, “I thought of my own mother’s paranoia. It seemed to be a universal problem. A woman’s position always depended on a man, whether she was rich or poor did not matter. She always went from father to husband to son, and I was at the second stage of the journey” (46).

It is through the characters of Harimohini and Monorama, Tagore shows that the sufferings of women are not a matter of any particular family; rather it is a universal problem which has to be faced by women of all the classes and ages. Harimohini marries her daughter to an extremely good looking fellow who in reality is like a “venomous snake” (G 185) in the garb of a “charming exterior” (G 185). Similar to any ordinary Indian wife, Monorama accepts all the tortures as her lot. This patriarchal mode makes her think that sufferings and tortures against her are righteous experiences which every woman of chastity has to undergo. Sudhir Kakar explains a connection between suffering and righteousness as “a major fantasy that protects Indian women from rage against their lot” (10). She, like Nirupma of “The Transaction” forbids her mother to give money to her husband as it would be an insult to her self-respect, “Never, mother, it simply can’t be done” (G 187). The result of Monorama’s courage is that her husband begins to treat her worse and insults her openly. Afraid of all these humiliations and tortures, she rushes to her mother’s home only to find herself pregnant. Tagore repeats the similar episode of unwanted pregnancy in *Relationships* where the protagonist bears the identical burden. Her miseries increase with Harimohini’s insistence to send her back to her husband’s house. The novelist shows how in Indian society, parents turn blind eye towards the plight of daughters and let them bear the tortures even if they die. This is insult and injustice to the girls who are considered burden right from their birth and to release this burden becomes their major consideration.

Tagore puts a light resistance here. Monorama doesn’t want to go back and pleads, “Let me stay just a while, mother, I can’t bring myself to go to-night. Tell them to come again after a few days . . . My father-in-law will be returning by the middle of *Phalgun*, I will go then” (G 187). To this,
Harimohini replies, “If I send the palanquin back again, shall we be able to control that turbulent husband of yours? No, Monu, you had better go now” (G 187). Disheartened and dejected, Monorama says ‘good-bye’ to her mother. The novelist makes a very heart rendering comment on this when Harimohini says:

I did not realize then that it was good-bye forever! Even to this day my heart is breaking at the thought that she would not go, and I made her. Never in this life will that wound be healed. That very night Monorama died of a miscarriage and, even before the news reached me, her body had been hurriedly and secretly cremated. What can you understand, my dear, about the agony of a sorrow for which there is nothing to be said or done, and which can’t be washed away, even with life-long weeping? Nor were my troubles at an end with the loss of my all. (G 187)

Social conditioning forces women to accept everything as their destiny and wish of God. After the death of Monorama, brothers-in-law of Harimohini ostracize her by seizing her property however she takes their reaction obvious as she considers herself an evil soul who is fit only for sufferings. She opines, “I can hardly blame them, for was it not almost a crime for a wretched woman like myself to remain alive? How can people who have no end of wants be expected to put up with one who has none and yet bars the way to their enjoyment?” (G 188) With this incident Tagore highlights the fact that in Indian society women are not considered eligible to get the share in parental as well as from husband’s property and if they ever try to claim it, they are banished from the family. Women who lose their husbands and sons are considered useless creatures and are expected to submit their lives in the worship of God. One of Harimohini’s brothers-in-law says to her, “Sister, God evidently doesn’t intend you to live a worldly life. For the days that remain to you why not go to some holy place and devote yourself to religious works? We will arrange for your maintenance” (G 188).

While writing about the sufferings of Harimohini, the novelist highlights how all the beauties and bounties are declared sin for widows. They are asked and even forced to renounce their possessions to take an ascetic life. For them
God becomes their husband, son or daughter. Binodini is also forced to live a Spartan life after the death of her husband as the novelist writes in *A Grain of Sand* that she is leading desolate life like monkeys. Highly agitated Harimohini asks her religious *Guru* the way to solace. He takes her to the temple and points to the image of Krishna and says, “Here is your husband and, your son, your daughter, your all. Serve and worship Him and all your longing will be satisfied and your emptiness will be filled” (G 188). She joins some pilgrims and goes to Benares, but her heart longs for some object of affection and is not absorbed in God. Dutta highlights the situation of widows:

Women in *Bangali* households were most often left to their everyday household chores in a potentially hostile environment of the in-laws’ house. If they happened to be young widows they were treated with very little affection and care. Their craving for love and companionship was the last thing on the minds of patriarchal society which instead ascribed a life of austere spirituality for these unhappy lots – the magnitude of which often crossed the border of physical and emotional endurance. (11-12)

The search of love and care forces Harimohini to find some solace and she comes to spend the evening of her life with Sucharita and Paresh Babu. Here also Barodasundari is less welcoming and hates her idol worship. She also criticizes Harimohini’s practice of not letting her food touched by servants. Harimohini also senses that she is an eye-sore to the mistress of the family. While talking to Sucharita, she sets her heart open highlighting the miseries of out-casted women of the time and accepts that places like Benares are the only option left for the widows. She says:

My child, the world is not the proper place for an unfortunate woman like me. It would have been better for me if I had been able to go to some sacred place and had tried to serve God there; I could have managed to get along somehow by cooking in some family. Plenty of people live in Benares like that! (G 205)
The gradual change in the character of Harimohini is brought to the fore. She releases all her suppression as soon as she attains a sense of power. In order to maintain the peace of the family, Paresh Babu sends Sucharita with Harimohini to a new house. Here, the tamed Harimohini becomes the tamer. As Dasgupta et al. put it, “Harimohini . . . presents someone who is victim-turned-accomplice” (181). The rapid change in this destitute, lonely and extremely unhappy woman surprises the readers. Once weak and submissive, Harimohini becomes aggressive and possessive. She would address Gora as the saint Gourango but this earlier affection turns into hatred. A cultured man like Binoy appears to her worse than Bhramo, almost an atheist. Gora’s socially active brand of Hinduism and his argumentative behaviour seems alien to her. She forbids Gora and Binoy to meet Sucharita and insults Anandamoyi. She even forgets her miseries and bends on arranging a marriage between Sucharita and one of her brothers-in-law, who is an old aged widower. Rajul Sogani defines the reason of Harimohini’s aggression:

Soon, her (Harimohini) self-centered possessive nature begins to reveal itself in her desire to control Sucharita’s activities, relationships and opinions. All her energy is directed towards guarding Sucharita and pulling her into her own world of Hindu orthodoxy. She disapproves of all her friends and suspects them of trying to corrupt Sucharita’s moral and gaining control of her property. She declares that she does not want any ‘shameless intimacy, all this Christian kind of behaviour to go on her house’ . . . Her frantic efforts to cast Sucharita in an orthodox mould and her appeal to Sucharita’s friends to help her in her enterprise, makes her a hideous figure – a victim transformed into a tyrant. (154)

Through the character of Harimohini many aspects of the life of widows in the Indian society are revealed. Most of the times, these widows are young in age because of the vast age gap between husband and wife. Throughout their life, they receive hatred from the society that naturally turns them cynical. Moreover, the utter negligence of these widows fills them with a sense of inferiority complex. For them, God becomes the ultimate escape from the sufferings of the world. But finding a little space their emotions exert like
volcanic eruption. The conversation of Harimohini with Sucharita clearly indicates her insecurity:

You little know, child, what a burden I am. God has placed such a heavy load on my shoulders that no one can bear me. When I saw that the burden of my presence had become unbearable even in my own husband’s home, I ought to have understood! But this understanding comes with such difficulty to me. I have been wandering about all this time trying to fill the emptiness in my heart and wherever I have been, I have carried my misfortunes with me. No more of it, my son, let me be. Why invade again somebody else’s house? Let me at last take shelter at the feet of Him who bears the burden of the whole world. I can’t struggle anymore. (G 210)

Harimohini is one of the examples of Tagore’s sensitivity and awareness of the issue. Her ostracism is not like the ostracism of Binodini or Bara Rani. Sufferings of the life have made her wicked and cruel even to those who have given her shelter and love. Undoubtedly, her character gives the readers a deep insight into the life of poor widows. Through the image of Harimohini, a universal problem and its lethal impact has been discussed by the writer. The mejobau of Nikhil’s family is also sailing in the same boat. When Nikhil recalls their childhood days, her grief comes on her lips, “I would not live my life again, -- not as a woman! Let what I have had to bear end with this one birth. . . Freedom is for men. But we women would keep others bound. We would rather be put in bondage ourselves” (HW 411). Her only identity is of Bara Rani without any particular name. According to Bimanbehari Majumdar, “She plays the part of the chorus in Greek drama, offering comments on the events which were taking place” (133). Her childless status makes her situation more vulnerable and isolated. She has no object of affection that’s why Bimala suspects her attachment with Nikhil. She is not well received by her mother-in-law also and this intensifies her anger. T. Sarkar puts it as:

Widows were, thus, doomed to a suspect existence. They were like notified or criminal tribes of British India, whose crime lay not in the nature of individual action but in their collective social location . . .
Widow without a son is described as the messenger of death, her Ekadasi fast always suspect for she may sip water as she bathes in the pond. You can’t trust the woman till she is burnt to ashes and her ashes are scattered to the winds, goes another. (95)

Anandamoyi also suffers the pangs of social as well as familial ostracism similar to Harimohini. Anandamoyi is ostracized because of her radical lifestyle, but she makes this ostracism her strength instead of weakness. Once orthodox Brahmin, she converts herself according to her then progressive husband and becomes quite modern. She even adopts Gora, son of an Irish woman, who died in mutiny and rears him with utmost love and care. However, Gora turns hostile towards his mother when he finds that she is not observing customs of a Brahmin family. He forbids Binoy to take food from her hands, as she keeps a Christian woman Lachmi as her maidservant. This ostracism of Anandamoyi by her own adopted son fills her heart with pain as she says, “So Binoy is not to be allowed to eat in my room- is that the latest?” (G 13) At this, Gora replies, “He is the son of a Bhramin. It won’t make him forget his responsibilities for the sake of a few sweetmeats. He will have to make many sacrifices, to exercise severe self-control before becoming worthy of his glorious birthright” (G 13).

The reality of Anandamoyi’s ostracism is unveiled before the readers after presenting its personal as well professional utilization by her husband. Her husband who used to get promotion because of his modern ways of living becomes an ardent Hindu and starts following strict orthodox religion. He does not allow his progressive wife to participate in his life because she can take water from the hands of anyone in the world. He always keeps her at a hand’s distance and doesn’t allow her to enter in his room. Although, the balanced and poised nature of Anandamoyi gives her strength and she bears all humiliations with utter patience, still one can hear silent sobs in her ever smiling eyes. She deliberately detaches herself from the regular duties of her orthodox husband who doesn’t want even the touch of her shadow. What Tagore writes about her throws light over her humorous nature but a deep pain lies in that humour also. Entering in her husband’s room, she exclaims:
Are you listening? . . . I am not trying to enter, you need not be afraid, but when you have finished I want a word with you. Now that you have got hold of a new Sannyasi, I won’t get a sight of you for a good long time, I know, so I have come here. Don’t forget to come to me, for a minute, when you’ve done. (G 21)

Not only Gora and Krishnadayal but Anandamoyi’s relatives also keep a safe distance from her because of her unorthodox ways. She is criticized by addressing as Christian and has to bear humiliations for being a philanthropist. She fears that if she would makes discrimination between man and man, God will snatch Gora from her whom she considers as His gift. If Gora stays in her arms, she is ready to accept water from the hands of anyone in the world. According to her, none in the world is born with a caste and she is happy to bid farewell to the useless customs. Her conversation with Krishnadayal unfolds her humanity:

So you think I have no conscience merely because I am not like you, sprinkling holy Ganges water all over the place? . . . I have long ceased to take pride in my caste. Why, when our relatives made a fuss at Mohim’s wedding because of my unorthodox habits, I simply kept at a distance without a word of protest. Nearly everybody calls me a Christian, and whatever else comes to their lips. I accept all that they say in good part, contending myself with the reply: aren’t Christians human beings? If you alone are the elect of God, why has He made you grovel in the dust first before the Pathans, then before the Moghuls, and now before the Christians? (G 27)

Two different faces of ostracism are hinted at which cause great humiliations and problems to women. Whereas the ostracism of Harimohini makes her cunning; Anandamoyi makes it her weapon to fight against the evil of the society and emerges as one of the most perfect figures that Tagore has created. She becomes the symbol of universal motherhood. Imdad-ul Kaji Haq makes a beautiful comment on the ostracism of Anandamoyi:
In fact, there is no other character like Anandamoyi in all of Rabindranath’s literature or in the entire Bengali literature. This is not because Rabindranath wanted to show in Anandamoyi the one-sided picture of maternal affection. He tried to make Anandamoyi a complete human being . . . Anandamoyi is not a wholly free human being; all her potentialities have not been developed. She is a woman living in her inner apartment; whether or not, there is doubt in her mind, she is confined by everything—her natal home, marital home, family, husband, offspring. Because of this she and her mother’s love are certainly of a limited nature. She has overcome some of their limits, some that she has not even been able to recognize. (195)

The image of Anandamoyi and Harimohini reflects the early phase of Tagore’s literary career where he portrays women who passively accept the miseries and oppressions of patriarchal society. However the writings of his later period reveal him as a vehement critic of social evils who creates rebellious women. His sensitive consciousness finds an expression in his writings. He wants to remove the evil of child-marriage, especially where age gap is highly disturbing. It is because of this evil, many girls had to suffer the pangs of early widowhood. Binodini in A Grain of Sand is leading a life which is a saga of the sufferings of wretched widows. This novel portrays every niche of the heart of those socially out-casted women who become toys in the hands of social formalities. In this novel Tagore portrays three different images of ostracized women- Binodini, Asha and Annapurna.

A critical analysis of the upper class Bengali society gives an insight into its make up where men were considered gods and the entire household would revolve around them to fulfill their whims and caprices. Women were considered equivalent to the servants of the antarmahal whose major aim of life was to satisfy every wish of their ‘owner’. Through the character of Binodini, the novelist shows all the passions of a woman’s heart that include love, desire, envy, adultery, friendship and betrayal but when she is ostracized, fire of her revolt ignites the very foundation of the traditional and patriarchal paradigm. Young and beautiful Binodini is the reservoir of all the feminine
qualities and all she wants in her life is true love and care. But fate offers her only early widowhood. After the death of her husband, “Binodini had spent her days alone in the cheerless household like a lone flowering plant in the barren wilderness” (GS 28). She deserves the right to relish the bliss and fulfillment of life which are curbed under the weight of seclusion and solitude. But at the end, the story as well as Binodini’s life reach to a deadlock and leave only one way, i.e., to get her secluded from the normal life. The novelist shows Binodini leaving for Kashi to lead her entire life in seclusion and solitude in an ashram worshipping God. It is to challenge this age long tradition of social ostracism of widows, Binodini raises her voice but the ultimate destination of an unfortunate widow like her is not home or husband, only city like Kashi. While commenting on the reasons of few widow remarriages, Risley states:

A second marriage for widow women was a scandalous proposition in the eyes of most nineteenth-century Bengali Hindus. It was especially so for upper-caste widows, who were prohibited from it by sacred texts and customs and who were deemed exemplars of female virtue within a wide sprawl of upwardly mobile ‘low’ castes. (82)

Written in the early twentieth century, A Grain of Sand deals with some of the burning issues of the contemporary Bengali society. It was the time when the controversial issues such as widow-remarriage, age of the consent for marriage, child-marriage and the conflicts between Hindu and Bhramo Samaj were creating great upheavals in the society. The image of Binodini brings these issues to the limelight. In fact Tagore himself declares this novel as a mirror image of the ruthless and merciless society where widowhood was a sin. In the nineteenth century, widows were completely bound and shrouded by rituals and scriptures. Many restrictions were imposed on the body of these widows. Social ceremonies such as marriages and child-births were strictly prohibited for them as their presence in celebrations was considered inauspicious. The bodies as well as the souls of widows were ostracized. Walker comments on the situation, “To the socially conservative, her presence brought contamination, the sound of her voice was a curse, her glance was poisonous, her very existence perilous
and brought woe and ill luck to all her relatives” (603). Thus, the individual bodies of the widows were transformed into social body.

Even today, the condition of widows is not very appreciable. Still, they have to bear the stigma of unfortunate and husband-eaters. This kind of regulatory system on all aspects of widow’s body in a patriarchal society has a strong resemblance with Foucault’s ideas of the Panopticism. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault opines, “Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere” (195). Anika Mahim defines it in this way:

According to Foucault, the concept of Panopticism embodied in the Panopticon prison model created by the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (*Foucault, Discipline and Punish*, 200), is not confined within the structure of the prison. It is a concept that can be utilized in every structure and institution of the society. The kind of surveillance and control it entails has become omnipresent in the whole structure of society. In fact, the widow was under the constant watch and surveillance of patriarchy. Such monitoring had one purpose only: to subjugate the widow’s self and sexuality. Along with the bodily impositions came certain other moral, social and psychological demands that the patriarchal society placed before the widow. (129-30)

Socially ostracized widows condition their mind in such a way that they start taking their miseries the results of some previous birth sins. Here the initial submissive attitude of Binodini can be traced in terms of Antonio Gramasci’s notion of ‘Hegemony’ which states that society makes its denizens believe this and prevailing power structure by unconsciously conditioning their minds. Binodini also believes this, that’s why when Rajlakshmi asks her to take care of her health, she rejects the idea saying, “Unfortunate souls like us don’t fall ill, Aunty. You have come to your home after so many years – I have nothing here with which to care for you properly” (GS 29). Throughout her life, Binodini longs for a home, but what she gets is the desolate place of Barasat which Tagore defines as, “Godforsaken place” (GS 29). While defining the difficult life of Barasat, the novelist writes, “There were only a few very old widows living in Rajlakshmi’s ancestral home. Thick forests of bamboo and foliage ran
wild all around, the water in the pond was a deep, mossy green and jackals howled nearby all day long. Rajlakshmi was quite distressed” (GS 28).

Even Bihari is shocked to see this inferno like place and believes that it is a sin to leave Rajlakshmi here. Binodini nourishes the notion that it is because of Asha, she is deprived of Mahendra’s love and respect. She finds that Asha is the mistress of the family and Mahendra is ignoring his mother because of her. Binodini’s heart fills with rage and jealousy. When she reads Mahendra’s passionate letter praising Asha’s beauty, she reads it again and again, “Binodini’s eyes began to burn like the desert sands at noon and her breath became as fiery as the desert winds. Her mind was a whirl with the thought of Mahendra, Asha and their passionate romance” (GS 32). Binodini has been ostracized but her early widowhood can’t kill her sexual and emotional desires and when she perceives Asha enjoying the heavenly bliss of her married life with Mahendra, she loses her mental stability and is filled with jealousy.

Meena Shriwadkar comments, “The novel projects Indian fatalism fully clouding Binodini’s life with perverse events” (17). The character of Binodini serves as a foil to other three women in A Grain of Sand. She is far superior to Asha in beauty, education, maturity, sexual appeal and as a manager of the household. She befriends Asha but can’t accept her as real friend because of her rivalry to win Mahendra’s love. She does not pamper Mahendra and she is also not submissive like Annapurna, whom Rajlakshmi treats the way she likes. The day she enters the house, she manages the entire house with utmost care. Even the egoist Mahendra notices the contrast between his child bride, Asha and competent Binodini. Swagato Ganguly defines the jealousy of Binodini in the following words:

Women’s education had, in fact, taken off in manner that widow remarriage hadn’t. One of its goals was to equip women to be proper marital companions to their husbands; another was to make them good homemakers. Binodini excels in these areas and we see that her father had invested a great deal in educating her—she has ever taken lessons from a British woman. All that, however, is rendered naught by her
widowhood, and her rage boils over when she sees Asha, an illiterate and unfinished ‘child-woman,’ running away with what should have been hers. (xiii)

The charm, beauty and education of Binodini are insignificant in comparison to her widowhood. The household which could have honoured Binodini as the owner of the family receives her like a refugee. This hospitality only increases her prudence. She is well aware of the hostile attitude of the society towards widows. She sometimes tries to leave the house of Mahendra but every time her lurking desire of a comfortable life stops her. A woman without husband is treated as enchantress. The very pattern of Indian society is that the image of a woman is outlined by the presence of man in her life and if that outline is absent, she is considered as a disfigured object. Bihari also perceives Binodini as a characterless woman but when he talks to her, he finds that:

The tender heart that was at the centre of her flashing radiance was still full of gentle affection and the burning embers of unquenched desires and all her sharp banter had not yet succeeded in withering the woman in her. Never before had Bihari been able to visualize Binodini tending to her husband as a shy, homely wife or holding her child in her arms like a loving mother – but today, all of a sudden, the performing stage that he always seemed to see her on, vanished before his eyes, and he could envisage her in a happy home. He said to himself, “Binodini may appear to be a teasing, coy temptress, but deep in her heart a chaste woman rests in silent prayers.” (GS 71-2)

Surely, it is an ill practice of the society to judge a woman’s virtues by her prospects of catching a good match; if fails, she is declared worthless. Binodini counts herself unfortunate as both Mahendra and Bihari rejected her. Mahendra wishes to marry Asha and “Binodini had to be exiled to the wilderness of Barasat and married off to an uncouth ape” (GS 83). Later on, her attempt to tame Mahendra is a kind of revenge. Sarada rightly observes, “Her attitude is one of tempting him while retaining her own self-control” (20). The game of teasing takes a dangerous turn when Mahendra falls blindly in love with her. Though, his love is more on the physical side as he wants to keep both Asha
and Binodini. But with the passage of time, she detaches herself from this ugly game of love and starts loving Bihari from the bottom of her heart. Bihari being a worldly wise man doesn’t fall in the trap of Binodini’s charm but understands her suffering which is the result of Mahendra’s reckless decision. She does everything to win the love of Bihari. She kisses his feet and puts her arms around him saying:

Thakurpo, don’t wipe out that tiny bit of weakness that you have! Don’t be purer than the driven snow. Love is vile and be little vile yourself . . .

My dearest life, I know you are not mine forever, but do love me even if it’s for this moment. After that I shall vanish into the forest where you cast me, I won’t ask anyone for anything again. Give me something that can last me till my death. She closes her eyes and offered her lips to him. (GS 176)

The standards of morality are kept intact for all heroines of Tagore’s fiction and Binodini is no exception to this. All he wants is to expose the psychology of the socially out-casted widows, whose sexuality is also drenched in pain. Binodini knows well that unfortunate soul like her cannot be the companion of a man like Bihari so, she wishes at least a moment of affection that she can cherish for the rest of her life. Failed to attract the love of Bihari, she goes to her native place but here also ignominy chases her in the face of Mahendra. Drenched in the devotion of Bihari, she at once rejects Mahendra’s love. Not only this she also turns down Bihari’s proposal of marriage, “Oh, for shame, even the thought is shameful. I am a widow, I am tarnished – I shall bring dishonour to your name in the eyes of society—no, no, this cannot happen. For pity sake, never say these words again” (GS 269). Meena Shirwadkar aptly observes, “As a woman, she cannot help responding to her lover, but as a Hindu widow she cannot marry him. So, she remains a silent, throbbing, longing woman” (17). Binodini’s profound love for Bihari forbids her to reciprocate his love. Instead of marrying him, she chooses to help him in rendering her services to the poor. Perhaps, she accepts what she had once told to Asha in jest, “Death is the only bridegroom, I can ever have” (GS 109). In Deshpande’s That Long Silence, Jaya’s views echo similar notion when she feels, “Surely
there comes a moment in every human's life when he or she says, like the Sibyl - I wish to die” (96). It is a debatable issue why Tagore after being so progressive could not let Binodini marry again. Why Binodini is ostracized forever? Anika Mahim’s query is important in this regard when she says, “Although, Tagore raised questions about these age old social norm and tradition, by the end of the novel he confirmed to the constructs of the patriarchal paradigm” (130). Dasgupta et al. give a befitting reply to this question:

It might be argued that Binodini was not simply a widow, but deeply compromised a fallen, stigmatized women or Kalankani in colonial Bengal. Few people in those days would have believed that she could travel for months with Mahendra, who was madly in love with her, and yet their relationship would remain strictly platonic ... Marriage with Binodini would have definitely lowered the status and reputation of Bihari ... (194)

In the Hindu scriptures, marriage has been prescribed as obligatory for women. Women are expected to be men’s alter ego, still secondary to them. The image of Asha is symbolic of all sacrificing traditional Hindu women who deeply love their husband and consider them God. The arrival of Binodini, whom Rajlakshmi brings to make her feel down, ruins her conjugal life. Being an orphan, she could never learn to exercise right over anything. Extreme love of Mahendra for Asha annoys Rajlakshmi and she starts treating her as rival. With the help of Binodini, she makes Asha realize her incompetency. Tagore writes, “Rajlakshmi also took pleasure in praising Binodini in Asha’s presence, giving her more than her due share of importance ... All this made Asha feel very small beside Binodini” (GS 40).

The arrival of socially ostracized Binodini makes Asha suffer ostracism in her own family sphere. Mahendra, who used to spend hours with Asha, now seems losing words when alone in her company. He keeps on comparing her with Binodini, “Why can’t Asha be what I want, why can’t she work the way I like, why is her innate lassitude and feebleness making me so restless instead of bonding me to the path of domesticity?” (GS 77). In order to hide his
confused desires, Mahendra leaves home and goes to hostel. Here also, Rajlakshmi blames Asha for his decision. Innocent Asha can’t understand the complexity in her husband’s behaviour and feels herself responsible. She thinks, “Am I so useless that I am pushing my husband out of his home? Death would have been a better fate” (GS 78). She requests Mahendra to treat her like a servant if he wishes but should not leave her. Bihari haa a soft corner for Asha so he forbids Mahendra to ruin her life but Mahendra accuses him for loving Asha. He says to Bihari, “If you were a genuine friend, you would have told me the truth about your feelings long ago and kept yourself far away from your friend’s inner chambers. I can say this to your face – you are in love with Asha” (GS 107). Egoist men hide their ill desires by blaming their wives and Mahendra also does so to balm his wounded ego. Binodini takes Asha as a “bashful, dainty China doll” (GS 108) and her constant comparison with Binodini fills her with inferiority complex. Innocently she asks Annapurna, “Aunty, you always say that a husband should be worshipped and served like a god. But what can a wife do, if she is stupid, slow-witted and doesn’t know how to serve him?” (GS 152).

The thought of Mahendra loving Binodini never comes in Asha’s mind, until she chances upon Binodini’s letter rebuking him for approaching her. Realizing the truth, crest-fallen Asha can’t integrate the ideal character of Binodini with the cruel contents of the letter. Moreover, Rajlakshmi’s hostile attitude towards her adds to her miseries. Tagore writes how Asha becomes the victim of the envy of two widows - Rajlakshmi and Binodini. He writes, “Rajlakshmi blamed Asha’s behaviour and inadequate personality for Mahendra’s action and spoke her mind vehemently. Asha accepted the insult with her head bowed, went away to her room and began to cry” (GS 180).

At the end of the novel also it is Asha who is expected to forget the felony done by her husband. A man can’t forgive woman, if she commits duplicity, but a wife must forget all wrong done by the husband. This is nothing, but the double standard of patriarchal society and Tagore criticizes it in a strong voice. Annapurna advises Asha, “Chuni, if you want to be happy, try and forget what happened. The misery of remembering the crimes of others
is greater than the pleasure in laying the blame at their door” (GS 278). Years later, another Asha is also instructed in the same tone in That Long Silence, “Go home like a good girl, Asha, I should say. Go back home and obey your husband. And never mind whatever it is he has done, he’s your husband, after all, and a husband can do no wrong” (Deshpande 115).

Though it is difficult for Asha but at last she forgives Binodini. The socially out-casted Binodini makes Asha feel the pangs of familial ostracism. After committing all blunders, Mahendra comes back home and is accepted with dignity. Being a widow, Binodini can’t say ‘yes’ to Bihari because of the social pressure and being a wife, Asha can’t say ‘no’ to Mahendra because of the familial pressure. Mukhia rightly comments:

The acceptance of Mahendra’s guilt, transform their relationship. Asha is now an empowered woman, deriving her authority from her conscious effort to ‘do good’ to others. The foregrounding of her husband’s guilt and his sense of shame, on the other hand legitimized the power and authority assumed by her in her husband’s absence and in his household. This, in its turn, created the other Asha who could establish her morality over her guilty husband ever so confidently. (79)

Annapurna represents the image of the typical widow of the contemporary Indian society devoid of all pleasures of life and confined to the rites and rituals imposed on them whereas, Binodini’s image is the symbol of bold and rebellious widow, who rejects the notion of accepting the sufferings as her lot and questions all restrictions on the humanitarian grounds, though, she can’t be hailed as an emancipated woman as she fails in her ultimate mission. Annapurna is the most ardent follower of social customs. A child widow, she has only a vague memory of her husband. Rajlakshmi humiliates her for not bearing any son. She taunts her saying, “Mejo-bou. Why does it distress you if my son loves his mother more than most other sons? If you had a son you would know what it means to a mother” (GS 04). Rajlakshmi feels that “the empty womb was envious of the proud provider of the male scion” (GS 04). Annapurna decides to go to Kashi, the only place left for widows. But at the end of the novel after forgetting all past memories, she becomes the solace for
Rajlakshmi. She advises Asha to forget all the nuances created by Binodini and takes the latter to Kashi. Sogani aptly reviews:

Annapurna leaves to peaceful seclusion of Kashi to attend on Rajlakshmi’s family and unite the family before her death. . . Annapurna forgives Mahendra for his lapses . . . persuades Asha to overcome her resentment against Binodini and treat her with simple friendliness . . . Finally, she takes the erring Binodini under her wing in a spirit of true compassion to assist in her moral recovery. (162)

Here the novelist seems to incline towards maintaining the balance in the favour of the patriarchal family by resuming the order and he sends Binodini along with Annapurna to Kashi. It appears that the novelist stresses more on the order whatever it is than no or new order at all. Kusum Ansal makes a very befitting comment on the victimization of women in the name of religion saying, “In an Indian context, to get married and widowed is the easiest way to exploitation” (05). Rabindranath Tagore’s A Grain of Sand underscores the abject state of widows in India. Before this novel, Bishabriksha and Krishnaskanter’s Will by Bankimchandra Chatterjee defined the sad and disturbing plight of young widows due to the prevalence of child-marriage. Young widows like Rohini in Bishabriksha and Kundanandini in Krishnaskanter’s Will are shown as bringing dooms in the families they are married into. After falling as victims of the carnal desires, these widows bring fatal consequences to their life. As Kunda of Bankimchandra’s Bishabriksha, Binodini does not commit suicide but tries to assert her own identity however that identity remains only of a widow. She accepts this bitter truth at the end of the novel to Bihari, “I am a widow and besides, a woman in disgrace. I can never allow you to lose caste on my account” (GS 218). Her fate finally leads to the acceptance of the patriarchy and forces her to leave for Kashi, “the traditional abode for widows where she will have to subsist on the most meager of necessities” (Ganguly xv). Tagore gives respect to her rebellion without giving any retribution as he understands the emotional turmoil of a widow’s heart. Thus, Binodini comes across as “a woman of great beauty and charm with contrary feelings and wishes and torn by rival passions that pull in
different directions” (Kabir 37). This grim picture of widows raises several questions such as why the status of woman is always determined by the presence of her husband? Why a widow is forced to forbid all pleasures of life? Why she loses the right to look beautiful? In Meera Khanna’s words:

The widow is ‘uglified’ to deprive her of the core of her femininity. It is an act symbolic of castration. She is deprived of the red dot between her eyebrows that proclaims her sexual energy. But ironically, the sexual cravings of men are not deterred by the lusterless lives of these women. For them, women are merely bodies to be devoured and women without any male protection are always an easy prey. (qtd. in Arora 45)

A bold leap is taken in depicting the ostracism of woman within the institution of marriage as Tagore discusses the issues of marital incompatibility in many of his works. The novelist highlights the problem of married woman not because of the extra-marital pulls only but also because of the incompatibility with husband due to patriarchal snobbery. What a girl nurtures in her father’s home and what she faces in her husband’s home leads to the cultural shock. The collapse of his daughter Meera’s marriage despite of giving ten thousand rupees as dowry affected Tagore to a great deal and it forced him to write against the snobbery in many of his novels and short-stories. For the first time in *Relationships*, he presents a male character to advocate feminism explicitly. He shows how the valiant effort to accommodate in the callous environment of new home is indeed a Herculean task. However, Tagore is not stereotype in describing the condition of women. In the Bengali language and culture, in-laws’ home is termed as *sashur bari* and parental home is called *baaper bari*. In Tagore’s play *Tasher Desh*, a character remarks that prison house or jail is synonymous to *sashur bari*. Women are expected to adjust in the environment offered to them. The plot of the novel revolves around the life of Kumudini, her husband Madhusudan Ghoshal and a poor widow Shyamasundri, who contributes silently in the story. Though Tagore turns to her only for a short period but her character gives vivid description of the ostracism of widows in *Zamindar* families, who are the victims of the game of love and lust under inescapable circumstances. Madhusudan cares little for her and goes to her only
out of frustration or to take revenge against his wife Kumu, who is mentally beyond his reach. Dasgupta et al. describe it: “… the desire to control the body and mind of the wife is about masculinity and patriarchal expectation and so Kumu’s resistance is incomprehensible to Madhusudan who has been nurtured in traditional beliefs and unquestioned conventions” (202).

Madhusudan is presented as the product of a typical patriarchal tradition who considers wife as well as marriage secondary having no important existence. A glimpse of his belief is evident when he says to his mother at the outset of the novel, “It’s a waste of time getting married and waste of time being married. I don’t have that kind of time” (R 40). Somehow he develops a fancy for the daughter of Chatterjee’s family who are once aristocrats and his rivals. Kumudini is the blend of modern and orthodox ideas. She is educated at home by her brother, Biprodas and is adept in Sanskrit literature, music and photography. Her brother quotes Keats to her, yet her ideas of an ideal wife are not inspired by Ibsen’s Nora or modern feminists but from the ancient ideals of Kalidas. Though, Kumudini is extremely sensitive and intelligent still similar to other Hindu women, she doesn’t count her say in the family. Tagore writes:

Kumudini was apprehensive on her account. She believed herself to be unlucky. She knew that men supported their households by their own powers, while women brought prosperity to the home by virtue of their good fortunes. She had not been able to do this. From the day she reached the age of understanding, she had seen everywhere the evil eye of misfortune. And pressing upon the family like a huge stone was the burden of her own unmarried state, as great a dishonour as it was a grief. The Almighty had not given women the means to solve such a problem, only the capacity to feel its pain. (R 42)

This sense of insecurity makes Kumu surrender completely to her future husband whom she resolves to worship as her God, “Where are you, my prince? Where is your jewel worth seven kingdoms’ wealth? Save my brothers, and I’ll be your slave forever” (R 42). Ironically, the prince happens to be Madhusudan. Similar to Bimala, she looks back to the happy experiences of her parents and love between her father and mother. But the aristocratic manners of
her impetuous father end in disaster and death of both. Strangely, Kumu blames her mother to deviate from the role of a devoted and all forgiving wife. Here Tagore quotes from Vyasasamhita 2:27 in the original Sanskrit, “The wife must always be to her husband like a shadow, devoted and pure, in auspicious tasks a companion, in commanded duties like a servant” (R 74). Later on when Kumu faces the reality of married life, she comes to understand that the ‘bird has no nest but only a noose’.

The reproductive role of woman is utilized as a tool to suppress her claim for individuality. A man like Madhusudan, who has never experienced the feminine sensibility before marriage, fails to understand the gentle feelings of his wife. He takes wife a symbol of captive sex which can be achieved only by force. For him, Kumu is nothing more than a chattel in his inventory. He wants her to lead a Zenana life under the silent command of the men folk. The writer also highlights the thinking of husband to control their rebellious wives by making them the mother of their children. Madhusudan also thinks, “There is only one way to tie Kumudini to his own life in tight knot, and that is the way of making her the mother of his child. He finds consolation from the imagination” (R 135). In The Fifth Child, Doris Lessing also exposes the psychology of the ever dominating man who acts as oppressor and leader of the family. It leads to a male dominated culture within a family where he snatches powers and woman becomes powerless at home and in society as well. Ingrid Holmquist makes the relation of man and woman clear in this regard:

When the male sex role is confronted with the female in the interaction between the sexes a form of parent-child relationship is established . . . this interaction which may at first sight seem complementary involves a hierarchy in that the male sex role behaviour implies control of the woman, whereas her function signifies the adjustment to support of the man . . . the man . . . dominates while the woman is subservient. (66)

The commercial concepts of Madhusudan proclaim that wife is only a commodity for sexual gratification and child is the medium to punish a disobedient creature named wife. This ill-fated husband-wife-child trinity reminds the concept of Elizabethan philosopher, Judith Wright, who says that a
child is the result of sex-love between a husband and wife, the outcome of which is slavish for woman. Though, Kumu is not mentally prepared, but she has to submit to the forceful sex-hunger of her husband. Having won her physically, Madusudan feels triumphant but can this be called a victory? This loveless sexual relationship of Kumu and Madhusudan echoes the similar kind of tragedy of Indian feminist poet, Kamala Das when she says in “Captive”:

The love that she receives from her husband is nothing but an empty gift, a gilded

Empty container, good for show. (10-12)

Again, Das asks in “The Conflagration”, “Woman is this happiness, this lying buried beneath a man?” (12). Judith Wright also writes in “Woman to Man” how a child is the product of love-sublimated sex:

This is no child with a child’s face;
This has no name it by;
Yet you and I have known it well.
This is our hunter and our chase,
This third who lay in our embrace.
This eyeless labourer in the night,
The selfless, shapeless seed I hold,
Builds for its resurrection day—
Oh hold me, for I am afraid. (6-14)

Kumudini’s anxiety reaches its extreme when she faints on her wedding night but this is not enough to melt her stone-hearted husband and he at once reacts, “Every day she’ll fall into a faint, and I am to rub her forehead with herbal oil! Is that why I married her?” (R 104). He chides her for loving her brother and insults her saying, “You are your brother’s disciple, but let me tell you this, I am his creditor. I can buy him at one market and sell him at another” (R 105). Humiliated and hurt, Kumu retires in seclusion and starts working as a servant in the house. When Madhusudan forcefully takes away her sapphire ring given by her brother, she decides that from now onwards she has nothing to call her own in this house.
Thus, Kumu is the victim of ostracism, if not social then certainly at familial level. By law, she is the mistress of the house but in reality, her condition is no better than a maid. She thinks, “Was Savitri Satyaban’s servant or Sita in the Uttararamcharitam? . . . What kind of men are they whose wives are their servants?” (R 107). Tagore’s portrayal of Kumu’s ostracism reflects the feminist concept of American critic Elizabeth Candy Stanton, which Deborah quotes, “The married woman surrenders all her rights including the right to control her own body, though her husband gives up nothing, she becomes an unpaid domestic drudge” (70). Kumu decides to repay for what it costs for her food and clothes. She does not want to stay there as unpaid servant. American Marxist feminist writer Gilman in her book *Women and Economics* (1898) aptly puts it:

She must consider what he likes, not only because she loves to please him or because she profits by pleasing him, but because he pays for the dinner, and she is a private servant. Capitalism and patriarchy work together in the economic and sexual exploitation of women. Under capitalist patriarchy, the economic relation is combined with sexual relation and consequences are women’s dependence and sub-ordination. (116-17)

Widows of the contemporary Indian society were expected to submerge themselves in worshiping God to find solace but here a married woman wishes to find peace in the name of God to escape her miseries. Kumu becomes Mira and devotes her heart to Krishna. Her quest makes her a *sanyasini* wandering in imaginary Vrindavan singing, “Hear me, beloved Manomohan, love has grown / Between myself and you . . .” (R 115). In this period of sufferings, Moti and his mother become Kumu’s solace. She is well aware of the hurt pride of Kumu. She knows that however mighty a King can be but he can’t hire any clown to make his queen happy. In order to avoid her husband, she sits on the roof in the cold nights without warm clothes. This is her attempt to give herself physical pain in order to forget her heart’s miseries. Tagore writes:

For two days, Kumu had sat on the roof, all she had seen was the coiled smoke emitted from this chimney. . . Kumu had bathed while it was still
dark, and come to sit on the terrace with her face turned to the east. Her wet hair lay loosely on her back; she had not a trace of adornment. She was wearing a coarse white cotton sari with a narrow black border, and a scarf of silk waste against the cold. (R 114)

Madhusudan is portrayed as a tough man with little emotions. Moti’s mother remarks, “The woodcutter only knows how to cut trees down; he does not get the tree, he gets the wood. The gardener knows how to keep trees alive. He gets flowers and fruits. You’ve fallen into the hands of a woodcutter—he is a businessman, after all. There is no pity in his heart” (R 108). Indeed, Kumu always wanted to be a devoted and ideal wife, but this relationship gives her only miseries and sufferings. She is accused of rigidity and one-track mind, along with her over-sensitive, extra-refined and unfriendly approach which is hurdle in the adjustment with her over-rigid husband. Kumudini and Madhusudan relation can be compared to the beauty and the beast of French fairy tale. In the tale, the beauty transforms the beast into a handsome prince by the tender touch of her love. So, why can’t Kumu do something like this? The fact is that extremely sensitive she can’t forget the very first impression of her husband’s rigidity on her mind. Even when he tries to win her love, she feels guilty. Gangopadhyay makes a very interesting remark in this regard:

The insulted Kumudini does not do so, with her hard positivity, she remains fixed in a particular stance . . .Not only does her cruelty prevent her from being established in her husband’s household, but it also takes her away some distance from emerging as a living character in the literary field. (443)

It should be noticed that Kumu is not just a female character, but personification of the colonial India. Retorting to Frederick Jameson’s stance that the “Third-World’s novel is an allegory” (qtd. in Mukherjee 143-44), where the worthless husband is being compared to the British rule and wife is ever suffering Bharat Mata. Kumu has been perceived as an object of possession that Madhu wishes to acquire completely. He represents the bourgeoisie of the colonial India. He is quite harsh to his subordinates, but very cordial to the ‘Whites’ in his native land. The difference in the treatment can be
seen in his marriage where the _sahibs_ including some low class and questionable whites are honoured guests of the wedding of this _Raja_, while his in-laws are insulted. The novelist exposes how Madhusudan takes Kumu as a bird to be shot down. Madhusudan boasts several times about the British managers working in his office. The ugly side of the colonialism has been exposed in the novel, where the tea plantations, mostly owned by the Britishers are notorious for the colonial exploitation. The worldly-wise capitalist, Madhusudan and secluded girl of an aristocratic family, Kumu, are incredibly opposite to each other. This diversity makes the feminist angle of the story very complex and due to her class, gender and background, she becomes a victim. Chaudhuri puts the concept into words, “Kumu is opposed not because she is a woman but because she is weak. An oppressive society becomes strong when it comes across some weak person. Compared to the strong, the society becomes weak” (74).

Every effort of Madhusudan plays havoc on the feminine sensibility of Kumu and she feels left out. The physical submission to Madhusudan and unwanted pregnancy makes her feel sick even at the sight of her husband. His wish of getting an heir is only a psychological pressure on Kumu to tie her as his servant. He is unaware of the term marital rape like Soames Forsyte, but it is his evil design to tame his wife. Kumu also does not act like Irene, the wife of Soames and surrenders herself to her husband’s desires, but can never forgive him for this insult. Toffler suggests “Men prefer a large number of children as the greater the number of pregnancies, the less opportunity women had to compete for power” (127). When Moti’s mother asks her to be nice to Madhusudan, Kumu replies:

I might have loved him. I’d brought something within my heart that might have helped me to adjust to everything easily. But your _Barthakur_ shattered all this at the very beginning. Everything now grates on me harshly. It is as though someone’s rubbed off the soft skin that covered my body, so that all that’s around me is painful, it’s hurting me constantly. Whatever I touch makes me start in pain. Afterwards, when the callous form, I’ll get used to it, but I’ll never have happiness in my
life . . . Today I am wholly disenchanted. My life seems shamelessly
clear to the view. There is not the slightest cover for self-delusion. Can
women make no space for themselves except in death? Their lives are
bound fast by a merciless God. (R 187)

The doubly problematic vision of women is given due attention where after
marriage they feel alien in their parental home and uncomfortable in the
husband’s home. Kumu not only feels alienated in Madhu’s house but also feels
detached in her own house. Before marriage, woman is made by her parents and
after marriage, “a wife is what her husband makes her” (de Beauvoir 484).
Germaine Greer also observes the life of woman after marriage “changed
radically, but not her husband’s” (321). When Biprodas talks to his aunt in a
very low voice about Madhusudan and his family, Kumu feels that she “had
become an outsider to such consolations. Her opinion counted for nothing.
Kumu did not like this at all” (R 204).

Biprodas becomes Tagore’s spokesperson and accepts that it is society
and its very structure which is the root cause of women’s humiliations and
ostracism. He believes that society has no love but only rules. Moti’s mother
says to him that once a woman has seven circles with a man she is bound to
him in body, mind and spirit; after it, there remains no space for her. This bond
of wedding rites becomes stronger than death and she can’t go against the
destiny. Biprodas realizes that this attitude of women is their biggest foe that
makes them vulnerable. He feels that this approach makes them easy prey to be
ostracised both at home as well as in the world. Women themselves have put
the light away as they believe that silent suffering is the only fulfillment of
their life. Moti’s mother holds the notion that “Whether the husband is good or
bad, the compulsion of that household must be recognized. If that proves quite
impossible, the only recourse is death” (R 230). Quite strange, an educated girl
like Kumudini also holds similar notion:

We are born to embrace the world of the household with both arms. So
we cling to both the tree and the straw. It takes us no more time to
believe in a fraud than in a holy preceptor. The fraud is within our
hearts, so who’s to save us from grief? That’s why I think, if we must
suffer, we must both accept it and rise above it. It’s for this reason that women cling so to religion. (R 229)

The conflict of heart and mind forcefully attracts the readers to delve deep in the psychology of the characters. The situation of Shyama, a widow but in love with Madhu is even worse than Kumudini. Tagore highlights, “Madhusudan hurried by without taking the paan. Shyama’s large eyes burned with indignation; then they overflowed with heavy tears. The Lord who dwells in our hearts knew that Shyama loved Madhusudan” (R 175). However the ratio of lust is also quite high in their relation. Whenever she notices him craving for Kumudini her eyes burn in indignation. The jealousy of Shyama has very close resemblance with the jealousy of Binodini as she also tries to control Madhusudan by using her sexuality. After his marriage, this sexual rivalry becomes much intense as Tagore writes:

She knew that Madhusudan took this route to his bedroom. The sight of his journey was intensely painful to her, yet for this very reason she was powerfully drawn to it. Not merely the madness of piercing her heart with useless affliction, but also a certain hope, was latent in her waiting . . . Madhusudan frowned once at her and went upstairs. Shyamasundari, filled with anger at her fate, gripped the railings and began to beat her head against them. (R 198)

Shyama is herself unaware of the emotional upheavals of her heart like Binodini, she doesn’t want to negate her desires. Widows had to suppress all their physical and emotional needs and this agony was high in case of child-widows. Shyama starts losing control over her desires when she finds that Madhusudan too has carnal weakness. The novelist writes, “Shyama could no longer hold on her patience. Never before had Madhusudan drawn Shyama as close as on the night before Kumu’s departure” (R 212). B. B. Majumdar comments on the poor condition of widows by referring to a data:

The custom of marrying the girls in their childhood persisted and a large number of girls were found to be widows in Bengal during the census of 1931. The report for that year states that the number of widows below
the age of 8 was 241, at 11 was 312, in the age group of 4 to 6 it was 8904 and that at 7 to 13 as high as 37564 and between 17 to 23 rose to 2, 24, 176. (124)

Social norms are declared victorious in most of Tagore’s creative works and sometimes, even at the cost of the identity of his female characters. This has been criticized again and again by the critics and readers. To suppress the feelings is the toughest task and the unfortunate creatures designated as widows are always expected to curb their desires and when one can’t suppress them, one becomes Binodini, Damini or Shyamasundari. Shyama is unable to find any escape of her emotions which forces her to surrender in front of Madhu asking either for love or death. She intends to be at peace at any costs. Earlier, Tagore had presented similar kind of episode in *A Grain of Sand* where Binodini pleads for Bihari’s love. The novelist writes, “After his meal, Madhusudan sat for a while in silence in his empty bedroom; then he sent for Shyama himself . . . Shyama entered the room uninvited and exclaimed, ‘What a shame, you are all alone!’” (R 213). Tanika Sarkar comments on the exploited sexuality of widows:

Widows provided almost the only possible route to consensual love and self-willed romance, because the wife, married in infancy and crushed under domestic and procreative labour, was rarely a figure of romance, and wives of other men were less responsive and less available sexually. (96)

Madhusudan and many more like him exploit the helplessness of widows. They take advantage of their plight and poor widows gain the stigma of fallen women and for this, they are socially ostracized. It is Binodini, not Mahendra who is out-casted from her village for living with another man. Mahendra is welcomed back in the family and Asha has to accept him. Likewise, when the rest of the family members come to know the sexual indulgence of Shyama with Madhu, they call her bad names and hate her but nobody dares to ask even a single question from Madhu. Shyama is also hell bent to make her relation with Madhu public so that the affair could become strong and open. Again and
again, she comes in his room uninvited as she can’t digest his losing head over one woman. Tagore writes:

Shyama refused to cast any veil over their relationship. It was as though she wanted to cement her claim over Madhusudan in front of witness, uninhibitedly. There was not much time. Kumu might come back any day; by then, her hold over him must be total. The hold would be stronger if it were public; its knowledge among the servants. The flame of Madhusudan’s appetite burst out with a violence equal to that which had suppressed it all these years; it cared for no one. Its madness was palpably felt in the household. (R 213)

Even moral degradation of Madhusudan is declared Kumu’s fault because she couldn’t satisfy the appetite she aroused in her husband. Moti’s mother feels that Kumu should think it her prime duty to please her husband. In *A Grain of Sand*, Rajlakshmi also accuses Asha for letting Mahendra slip from her hands. Over this, Tagore makes an apt statement:

The Chinese woman who, following custom, has not objected to having her own feet deformed, would most certainly, if she heard there were women in the world who considered the pain of bound feet humiliating, laugh their reluctance to scorn. She would call it affectation. What is most deeply natural appears to her as unnatural. (R 202)

Though Kumu has to return to Madhusudan’s house finding that she is pregnant with his child but she is quite confident that one day she would free herself from all miseries. The situation of socially fallen Shyama turns worse as her position in the household becomes very restricted. Several times, she wants to lighten her heart by talking to Moti’s mother but she brushes her aside with a dismissal. Her insecurity does not let her live in peace even for a single moment. She fears that Kumu might come back to resume her throne. In fact, her desperation makes her think of committing suicide but then she thinks, “I found a place because I was cheap: one who’s valued highly gets more regard, but the cheaper one wins in the end” (R 237).
Like many of his novels and short-stories, Tagore leaves the novel also open-ended. Readers are informed that Shyama becomes detached from Madhusudan and he brings back his pregnant wife, Kumu, to Mirjapur palace with great pomp and show. Helpless Kumu is trapped in gestation and childbirth which is not the result of love. But Tagore is not at all comfortable with this attitude of Madhusudan. In a letter to Radharani Devi, he writes, “Such a huge humiliation is equal to adultery – it is as if it were an insult to the God – submerging in mire what is best in you” (qtd. in Biswas 98). In the beginning of the novel, it is only Abinash Ghosal, their son, who is referred and “Kumu and her mothering remain in the shade” (Chakrabarti 59). While summing up the sufferings and ostracism of Kumudini, Indira Chatterjee trenchantly avers:

The focal point of Jogajog is the utter helplessness of woman not only in Hindu social life, but also in the family of which she is supposed to be the mistress according to the scripture text. The woman has no individual freedom; she can never make any choice of her own. Even the education and accomplishment are not taken into account. Woman’s position is always under the heels of man. (84)

The novelist has been criticized for sending Kumudini back to Madhusudan. Not only Tagore, but Bankimchandara also seems to settle the feudal system in morality, when Prafulla of Debi Chaudhurani despite being innovative, resourceful, intellectual like Kumu, sheds her courage to challenge the outside world, enters into her husband’s household with his other existing wives. Bankimchandara’s Suryamukhi of Bishabriksha and Indira of Indira also return to their husband, in the climax of the novels. Perhaps, both the novelists give the glimpse of their ideas of an ideal society. This notion is continued in modern literature also when Jaya in That Long Silence has to return to Mohan despite of living a long meaningless married life. She has always been taught that husband is like a sheltering tree. Deshpande comments on the institution of marriage in Indian society in the same novel:

Marriage is a very strange thing. It’s a very public institution, it’s meant to tell the world that two people are going to live together, to declare
that their children will be legal, that these children can inherit their property. It’s meant for social living, to ensure that some rules are observed, so that men and women don’t cross the lines drawn from them. At the same time, marriage is an intensely private affair; no outsider will know the state of someone else’s marriage. It’s a closed room, a locked room… (106)

In the contemporary Western literature also women protagonists hardly find courage to end their meaningless marriages. Either it is the case of Mrs. Morel in *Sons and the Lovers* or Mrs. Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *Anna Karenina*, Dolly has to bear the infidelity of her husband, Prince Oblonsky because of her five children and if on the other side, Anna tries to secure happiness by moving out of her love-less marriage, she is shunned, isolated, humiliated and at last she finds it’s easy to die than to live. Critics wonder, why Tagore never allows his widow heroines as Binodini, Kusum or Shyama to remarry. Why he always makes patriarchy win? It is perhaps that the socio-cultural conditions of the contemporary Bengali society were very strict and any sudden change in them could create a chaos. Here, G. V. Raj comments:

> The end . . . is a powerful indictment of the orthodox morals, achieved by deep and subtle insight into the existing social situation. Tagore does not choose to be explicit by affording bold and neat solutions to the widow remarriage glossing over the misery and wretched of conjugal living without a basic change in the orthodox and classified social system. In *Chaturanga, Jogajog*, Tagore raises the same question which he did in *Binodini*, the question of the remarriage of widow. (27)

The evils of child-marriage and dowry system that lead to tragic consequences attract the attention of all sensitive readers. Not only Tagore’s novels but his short-stories also define ostracism of women both in the familial as well as social spheres. Many of his short-stories such as “The Transaction”, “Shubha”, “The Living and the Dead”, “Haimanti”, “The Exercise Book” fall in this category. All these short-stories force to trace the root cause of many social and familial problems. He is not in the favour of the boundless freedom of men. Many of his short-stories revolve around the issue of dowry system that has
caused havoc in the lives of many talented and beautiful girls. Still, our society has not moved ahead. Even today, thousands of young women are burnt alive or humiliated because of insufficient dowry. In “A Transaction”, Tagore has painted the plight of Nirupama, victim of the dowry system. She is the only girl child among five brothers. Her father marries her in a well-to-do family of Rai Bahadurs with a dowry promise of 10,000 rupees. However, he fails to pay the full amount which results in the objectification of marriage by the groom’s father. But the boy, a young magistrate overrules the objection and marries the girl only to earn title of young brat of spoiled culture. The marriage brings misfortune to the girl as well as her father who is not allowed to see his loving daughter in her in-laws’ house. Even the servants look down upon him for not paying enough dowry. Unable to bear humiliations and miseries of his daughter, Ramshunder decides to sell the house to pay off the balance but somehow Nirupama comes to know this and forbids her father saying, “It will shame me more if you do pay the money. Does your daughter have no honour? Is she only a money bag? As long as there is money in it, it is of value? Baba, don’t insult me by giving this money” (SHE19). When her in-laws come to know about this, they start humiliating her even more. Tagore writes:

> Crying behind closed doors over the insult flung at her family had become her daily routine. . . Even in her food and clothing she did not receive proper care. If a kind neighbour mentioned it, her mother-in-law would say, “It is enough for her – meaning, if the father had paid full price, the daughter would have received full care.” (SHE15)

Here the writer criticizes the selfish and greedy people who consider their daughters-in-law a cheque-book to grab more and more money from their parents. Life becomes hell for Nirupama, who is now completely ignored by her family. In fact, when she falls ill her mother-in-law counts it her tantrums. Feeling herself responsible for her father’s insult, Nirupama starts ignoring her health. Even in her last time, she is not allowed to meet her father and family. Tagore remarks, “Would anyone believe, that only when Nirupama was gasping for her last breath, was a doctor called to see her for the first, and as it turned out, also the last time!” (SHE 21). He also adds, “The eldest daughter-in-law of
the family had died; the funeral rites were conducted with great pomp” (SHE 21). After becoming Deputy Magistrate, Nirupama’s husband asks for her, but his parents write brazenly, “Dear son, we have selected another girl for you, so take leave immediately and come here” (SHE 21). This time the dowry is 20,000 rupees in cash. Thus, the story presents a picture of the horrible conditions for women in Indian society who are sold, tortured and even murdered by in-laws for the sake of money. Nirmalkumar Sidhanta writes about the tragic end of Nirupama:

She dies uncared for and unattended. But her funeral rites were celebrated with the greatest pomp, befitting the family into which she had married. The father heard the news of his daughter’s death embellished with this commentary: the husband received the news with a postscript about proposal for a new marriage, with a bigger dowry, this time cash down! The satire is bitter; the pathos is deep. It required many of these human sacrifices and the artist’s elaboration of these tortures for society to get rid of, at least to minimize this evil. (279-80)

Nirupama’s father-in-law is representative of the first rank of intelligentsia who torture women and his son and wife belong to second category who adds to the sorrows of women passively. The role of the husband is so insignificant in her life that even his name is not mentioned. Though he challenges the old norms, but can’t uproot it completely. He is well aware of the real nature of his parents, still leaves his helpless wife with them. In Nirupama’s funeral, the snobbery of middle class is reflected as a doctor is not called but thousands of rupees are spent on the rituals. Tagore is quite bitter in criticizing such hypocrite society. The Marxist School of Feminism also points out that women are often “looked at and treated as the property of men. As such, a woman’s position is reduced to that of a commodity meant to be used and disposed” (Tandon 46). Tagore becomes the advocate of women’s liberation similar to the English thinker John Stuart Mill and his writings reflect similar thoughts, when the latter says:

The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal sub-ordination of one sex to the other— is wrong in
itself, and now are among the chief hindrances to human improvement . . .

. it ought to be replaced by the principle of perfect equality, admitting
no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other. (17)

After twenty four years of writing “A Transaction”, Tagore wrote “Haimanti”
only to find out that nothing much had changed in the last two and half
decades. Haimanti also meets the same fate as Nirupama. She is a beautiful and
intellectual girl, who is also forced to pay for the crime of not paying sufficient
dowry by her father. However, her husband loves her deeply but he is also
weak like Nirupama’s husband and can do nothing for his innocent wife. In the
opening lines of the story, the husband, who is also a narrator, declares the
difference in the freedom of men and women in Indian society:

In our country, a man who has managed once is free of any apprehension
about marriage. His attitude towards wife is akin to that of a tiger’s
towards woman after having got the taste of human flesh. Regardless of
his age and worthy circumstances, he doesn’t hesitate to fill the loss of
one wife immediately with another. All the wavering and brooding I
have noticed is the lot of our young students. With repeated marriage
proposals, the grey hairs of their fathers become black again and again
with the blessed help of dye . . . (SHE 172)

Initially, the narrator does not dare to tell the name of his wife and calls her
Shishir. Readers are informed that Shishir is only two years younger to her
husband and this was something indigestible in the orthodox society. Still, the
father of the narrator agrees for the marriage as the dowry is big for the big
girl. The father-in-law believes that one day Haimanti’s father would give all
his property to her which naturally would come to them. With the passage of
time, her father-in-law comes to know that her father is not that rich and
influential as they used to think about him and this revealing of secret makes
the position of Haimanti quite awkward. She is humiliated every now and then
and is criticized for revealing her real age to the relatives which the simple girl
can’t understand. Not only this, they call her father names and accuse him as a
liar. When her mother-in-law makes fun of Haimanti and her father’s
traditional values, she doesn’t remain silent and says, “Do you know, there,
people call my father a saint” (SHE 183). While describing the agonies of this girl, Tagore writes, “Rolls of laughter reverberated all around. After this, when they talked about her father, they invariably said, “Your saint of a father” (SHE 183). The family has found the weak spot of the girl. Even the letters that Haimanti writes to her father are read first by her in-laws. In fact, the love of the narrator for his wife is also not appreciated. He writes, “The fault was all Haima’s. Her fault was that she was seventeen. Her fault was that I loved her” (SHE 184). Gradually Haimanti starts losing her natural charm and becomes a silent picture. Her husband can’t do anything to fill the abyss of her despair. Her plight as described by her husband stirs readers and critics:

Every moment, bit by bit, Haima was dying inside. I could give her everything except freedom. Where did I have it myself? That is why in one of Calcutta’s narrow lanes, through the iron bars, she held a mute conversation with a mute sky. Sometimes, I woke up at night to find her not in bed. She had gone up to the rooftop to lie with her head on her arm, her gaze lost amongst the stars. (SHE 186)

The heart break of both the daughter as well as the father is hinted at by the writer. Knowing the illness of her daughter, Haimanti’s father comes to see her and she pleads to take her with him, but he is not allowed. Moreover, the attitude of the narrator’s parents has changed a lot towards her father. A self-esteemed girl, Haimanti can’t tolerate humiliations of her father and asks him to go at once saying, “Baba, if you come running again to see me, I’ll lock the door on you” (SHE 188). The poor girl and even poorer father can do nothing and death is the ultimate escape for her. The narrator’s parents again start looking for a suitable bride for him and the readers know that once again he would not oppose their decision. Thus, Haimanti is also sacrificed like Nirupama for the rotten rituals of the society. With this piece of writing, Tagore exposes the ugly face of Indian patriarchal system. Through the narrator, the writer brings to fore the cruelty and cowardice of the Bengali bhadralok:

. . . If I had not put social duty before moral duty, if I had not been able to sacrifice the person closest to me at the altar of the family, then what
was the use of carrying the age-old doctrine in my blood? Do you know, the day the people of Ayodhya demanded that Sita must be sacrificed, I was amongst them! And those who have, through the ages, sung to the glory of that sacrifice, I have been one of them! Only the other day, I wrote an article in a monthly magazine on the nobility of giving of one’s wife to satisfy public sentiment. Who knew then that I would have to write the saga of a second sacrifice of Sita with my own blood . . .?

(SHE 188)

Feminist ideology exposes literary and cultural binary opposites where woman, mother and Nature are considered ‘uncultured’, ‘powerless’, ‘passive’, ‘negative’ and are provided marginalized position in the society, whereas man is equated with ‘god’, ‘active’, positive’ and ‘powerful’. Therefore, man has the right to dominate and dictate the rules over woman and Nature equally. This concept is echoed in “Eco-Feminism”, term coined by Francoise d’Eaubonne. Neeru Tandon describes the ideology in following words, “Eco-Feminism is a social and political movement which believes that a relationship exists between the oppression of women and the degradation of Nature. There is an interconnection between women’s oppression and destruction of natural environment by patriarchy” (161).

Tagore attacks the patriarchal ideology that believes in the oppression of women and this is the concept of Eco-Feminism also. “Shubha” describes the pathos of a dumb girl, Shubhasini, the youngest of the three daughters. Being dumb, she is considered a curse even in her own house. Though, Shubha lacks speech but she has two large expressive eyes which communicate with Nature. In fact, “Shubha has a rare Lucy-like rapport with Nature” (Ghose 81). Tagore also uses the illustration of Nature in Shubha’s loneliness, “ . . . beneath the vast impressive heaven there were only dumb Nature and a dumb girl, sitting very silent one under the spreading sunlight, the other where a small tree casts its shadow” (SHE 46). Tagore personifies the river of Bengal and many similes of the Nature. Warren quotes Carol Adam’s premise of Eco-Feminism which reflects the stylistic technique of Tagore, “Language which feminizes Nature and naturalizes women describes, reflects and perpetuates oppression of the
twin dominations of women and nature... are, in fact, culturally analogous and not metaphorically analogous” (19).

Ostracized by her own family, the poor girl after completing her work creeps quietly to the banks of the nearby river. Right from childhood Shubha has been conditioned to consider her own self worthless. While defining her loneliness, the writer writes, “Like the shunned noon hour, she was wordless and friendless” (SHE 39). In order to find company, she makes the dumb Nature along with two cows her friends. Nature and animals make a great company for this poor soul who is misfit according to the social norms. Dodd has a point when he opines, “They became one great wave of sound which beat upon her restless soul. They were her real language in which she talked with nature” (35).

Society threatens to ostracize Shubha’s parents for not getting her married. Thus, marriage is destined for her without her concern. Before leaving Shubha spends some time with her cows as she is meeting them for the last time. She goes to the riverbank, embraces the mother earth with her two hands as if she wants to say, “Mother, don’t let me go. As I am holding you, you too hold me back with your two hands” (SHE 45). Here Tagore compares Shubha with lonely Nature and thereby reflects the idea of Eco-Feminism. The metaphor of ‘mother’ to nature is an important factor in Eco-Feminism. Tagore compares her pathos with that of Nature and highlights that man destroys Nature whose “Virgin timber is felled, cut down: fertile soil is tilled and land that lies fallow is ‘barren’, ‘useless’”. (Warren 19). Highly terrified, Shubha can’t hold her tears and the boy considers them the symbol of her purity and chastity. Tagore makes an apt statement:

The bridegroom himself came with his friend to take a look at his prospective bride. The girl’s parents, worried and afraid, fell over themselves to please him, as if God had come down to choose his own sacrificial animal. From behind the scene, the mother, with enough shouting, warning, scolding and consequently doubling the copious flow of girl’s tears, pushed her forwards to face her examiners. (SHE 46)
Shubha is plucked away from Mother Nature and eventually renounced by her husband. She loses both the solace of Nature and the company of human beings. She is left by her husband only to marry again, now to a girl with a felicity of speech. Tagore highlights the plight of Shubha, “She looked around but failed to express herself. Those who understand her language, she could not find. In the girl’s eternally silent heart, a primordial inarticulate cry kept ringing. None but the all-knowing God could hear it” (SHE 46). There is indeed something pathetic in the mute agony of this human heart which is deprived of all possibilities of life. Highly sensitive and sensible, Shubha craves for love and respect but can’t get any. Her destiny is not different from Haimanti and Nirupama’s who are shunned by the family as well as society. This is not just a story but a poetic expression of Tagore’s emotional heart towards women. There is hardly any difference between dumb cows, dumb Nature and dumb Shubha. How difficult it must have been for Shubha to leave her house, her cows, her friend Pratap for a stranger? And at last, her husband also leaves her. The parents are at peace to ‘unburden the burden’ of a dumb girl. One is naturally wonder-struck at the insight of Tagore in reading human minds. Srinivasa Iyengar defines the ostracism of Shubha in the followings words:

She was soon abandoned by her husband for another, as casually as one exchange one pencil for another, but has not the dumb girl—even she—feelings of her own? Just as the great Spanish painters poured love and understanding into their pictures of the dwarfs maintained by royalty and aristocracy for their amusement, Rabindranath too clothes the nakedness of his castaways and runaway with his limitless compassion and love. (76)

Through his fiction and non-fiction, Tagore advocates the rights of women. Though, he doesn’t provide any concrete solution but wants readers to brood over the issues and find solution. Ostracism of any type - familial, social or emotional is always painful. The novelist makes use of his first hand experience of the social issues. He clearly takes his stand in all cases and propounds his views. Tagore’s heroines are not mere caricature but they are lively figures. One can find something of the creator in them. He doesn’t leave
any aspect of women’s problems untouched; either it is dowry system, poverty, social exploitation, miseries in life, sexual suppression and seclusion by the society. Most of the women who are ostracized are widows or their husbands are spineless, weak-kneed men. Men of such ilk are to be found in all the sections of the society irrespective of education and civilization. Most of the men are unable to take stand and participate willingly or unwillingly in the cruelties against their wives. Tagore opines, “Those who meet out or tolerate cruelty done unto others, your hatred should incinerate them like dry grass” (qtd. in Biswas 45). Even today, many girls are murdered brutally to compensate the lack of dowry. He is highly critical of the issue of dowry and its tragic consequences like tortures and sufferings which result into death. The picture of sharp-tongued mother-in-law and cruel father-in-law left a deep impression on his mind. He writes in Probashi, “I have seen . . . the unredeemed animosity of the mother against the daughter-in-law . . .” (qtd. in Biswas 45). His fiction deals with the woes of not only of Binodini, Kumudini, Nirupama or Haimanti or Shubha but thousands of such helpless women who suffer for not meeting the demands of the society and sentenced to one type of ostracism or the other. Undeterred Tagore goes on the mission of revealing ostracism of women with amazing variety and diversity of themes, knowingly or unknowingly wearing the heart of a woman.
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