Chapter-VI

CHATURANGA

Human Values Vs. Divine Values
Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!

Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner

Of a temple with doors all shut?

Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling

The hard ground and where the Path maker is breaking stones.

He is with them in Sun and in Shower

And his garment is covered with dust.

Put off thy holy mantle and even like him

Come down on the dusty soil!
Salvation in a hermit’s cave? No Not for me.

"Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight... No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight"1.

“Chaturanga” reveals Tagore’s immense sense of spiritual freedom, freedom from renunciation, freedom from religion, superstition, rites and rituals.

Even the creator himself is busy with creation why man is rejecting domestic values: seeking salvation in a hermit’s cave? To surrender to God to accept the vicissitudes of life with equanimity of mind but not dedication of it.

“We must steer our boat of life says Sribilas, a narrator of the story, but also advisor and well wisher to the protagonist, who is subjected to pulls and counter pulls with no clarity of mind in his spiritual journey.

“We must steer our boat of life’ up the stream of Nature. Our problem is not how to bypass the stream, but how to keep sailing without sinking. What we need is a rudder”

(Chaturanga, p.63)

Chaturanga stands out as Tagore’s most interesting experiment in the novel form in as much as he tries to achieve in it a pattern of thought and feeling, symphonic in structure and syncretistic in import. The underlying musical form helps him in the orchestration of ideas, ideologies and emotions, and as pointed out by Ashok Mitra “gives the strangely agitated stormy world of Chaturanga its still point”2
The novel seeks to portray is the dialectical relation between the spiritual and the secular in man’s quest for self-realization. The confrontation and conflict between the two is sought to be projected through the career of Sachis whose predicament becomes more complicated by his being subject to the pulls of the sensual in the form of Damini. The intellectual and emotional dilemmas of Sachis are presented against the cross-currents of religious and reformative movements that rocked the Hindu society in Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹

Chaturanga is hailed as a “work of art without blemish”. It is a great novel with a compact and well-knit plot embedded with music and poetry. One tends to agree with Niharranjan Ray when he says that ‘Chaturanga’ “is an exquisite and unforgettable work of art.”⁴ Humayun Kabir regards it as “A long story rather than a novel.”⁵ S.C. Sengupta proclaims that “it rivals the English Gitanjali and Bengali Balaka.”⁶

Tagore’s art underwent a significant change after the publication of his epic novel, Gora. It is quite possible that his tour of Europe the year before the publication of Chaturanga might have stimulated him to use the new techniques of the novel, in vogue on the continent, especially in France. Humayun Kabir feels that the French influence on Tagore is seen in that he “moved towards the dominance of theme over plot and simultaneously of the mind over the heart.”⁷

Chaturanga and The Home and The World written in the same year, 1916, are the products of the new impact. Both these novels have many qualities in common with regard to Tagore’s new technique but differ in their themes and settings. In The Home and the World, Tagore abjures the traditional method of narration and the three major characters narrate the story from their points of view, but in Chaturanga instead of the three major characters, only one Sribilas, the friend of the protagonist narrates the whole story as a participant.

In Chaturanga he exposes the religious fanatics who, in the name of Hindu orthodoxy and Vaishnavism, indulge in religious aberrations and self-exhibitionism

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and mislead the people from the true path of spirituality. Here the conflict is between spiritual and sensual where as in *The Home and The World* it is between human values vs. power values.

There are only four chapters and four major characters in the novel. Sachis, a young man with noble principles, uncle Jagmohan, agnostic but an uncompromising humanist, Sribilas, the narrator of the story, a caring and admirer of Sachis at first as Binoy in *Gora*, an attractive widow Damini, whose spell on Sachis causes a spiritual crisis between his divine quest and natural instinct. Another person worthy of mention is Leelananda Swami, a Vaishnava Guru, who preaches salvation through renunciation of the world.

Sachis's father Harimohan does not play a major role in the story, but Jagmohan’s God denying humanism is contrasted with his God believing meanness and cupidity. Jagmohan is an agnostic rather than an atheist; He does not disbelieve in God rather he believed God in man. Jagmohan had western education. Inspired by Bentham's philosophy of “the greatest good of the greatest number”, Mill’s agnosticism and Comte’s “positivist” creed of vivre pour auteur (to live for one’s neighbour) his humanitarianism is reflected in these words:

'Brahmos believe in god without form who cannot be seen.  
You believe in god with form who cannot be heard. We  
believe in the living god who can be both seen and heard  
one can’t but believe in him.' (p.20)

Here Jagmohan’s concept of humanism is as against the ancient Indian nature of humanism which is spiritualistic in nature, Indian humanists give importance to spiritual and ethical nature of man where as western humanists though don’t reject the importance of ethics for human beings, give more importance to material nature of man than to spiritual. About the nature of Indian humanism’ Dr.Amiya Chakraborty says:

"We notice that the history of Indian-thought is the history of humanism with a bias towards spirituality... Indian philosophy is a running commentary on the text. Thanks that I am a man."

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Jagmohan believes no other world except man. He never goes to temple. He never discriminates between permissible and prohibited food. He does not mind interdining and freely mixing with the low castes.

Jagmohan’s efforts with the co-operation of Sachis, whom he had adopted, at the upliftment of his Muslims and chamars brings him into conflict with his neighbour and young brother Harimohan — Sachi’s father whose religious orthodoxy is as strident as his brother’s atheism. Jagmohan loses his share of income from the family property- a religious trust — since he is not true scion of the family for that he never minds and says “I can’t cheat a God whom, I don’t recognize (p.21) but carries his humanitarian mission”.

Sachis revolted by his father’s rigid orthodoxy becomes an ardent disciple of Jagmohan. He comes across a young girl, an orphan, Nanibala, who had been seduced and impregnated by his own elder brother Purandar. Sachis takes the girl to his uncle’s house who gives her shelter and treats her as his daughter.

Despite the protests of his family, Sachis even prepares to marry her. But Nanibala however prefers the seducer to her supposed deliverer and takes her own life. In her dying apology to Sachis’s uncle, she asks forgiveness and says with startling candour that she can’t forget Purandar, the seducer. Soon after the city of Calcutta is effected by plague and as there are not enough hospitals in the city, the humanitarian uncle turns his own house into a hospital. Braving contamination, himself nursing the poor victims, he catches the dread disease and dies. In his final affirmation of his ideals on his death bed he tells Sachis.

“I have lived to reap the last reward of my faith. I have no regrets!” (p.36)

A fitting end for an atheist! Harimohan remarks.

Sachis is overwhelmed by the death of his uncle who had been to him both father, and friend-one may even add son as well (p.37). It is unbelievable how Sachis being such an atheist turns into an ascetic overnight. But according to Niharranjan Ray
The quarrels of Sachis's father with his uncle, Jagmohan on the ground of Hindu orthodoxy objecting to the latter's philanthropic activities and the tragic story of Nanibala whom Sachis protects, the self-exhibitionism of Leelananda Swami and later, the suicide of the wife of Navin, the disciple of Leelananda, have all to be studied in the light of Sachis's quest for truth. So it is observed that every incident and episode is selected and nothing is superfluous. The reader can never fail to notice that the narration "is characterized by dramatic intensity, the situations are unfolded swiftly, without any elaborations or details..."9

It can't be denied that the death of Nanibala and uncle Jagmohan not only shakes his faith in the God denying humanism but also transforms him to such an extent that, he totally renounces the worldly life to take solace in the company of an ascetic Leelananda Swami, the Guruji of Vaishnava group. Ironically, it is Sreebilas, who expressed dismay at Sachis’s sudden-change, too joins him later as he admits, "I too was soon over powered by this intoxication." (p.42)

Questioned by Sribilas as to how he could give up the radicalism, he has imbibed from his uncle, Sachis replies;

Uncle while he lived had given me my freedom in life’s field,
as a child has his freedom on the playground. With his
death he has given me my freedom in the sea of divine ecstasy, as a child feels free in its mother’s lap. (p.41)

Now, Sachis launches his spiritual journey in an ecstasy of wild emotion. In a state of self-delusion, he indulges himself in frenzied Kirtan singing, chanting, massaging of Guru's feet.

While spending day and night discussing divine ecstasy in the company of Guru, Sachis suddenly finds a sudden flash piercing through his divine bliss. Sachis is happy in his escape from the worldly bonds till an assault in the shape of the irrepresible Damini is launched on his spiritual absorption. "Damini is like the
lightning in the heart of the Sravana rain clouds, heaving with youth fullness to outward view, but flickering with restless fires within."

(p.45)

To Sribilas Babu, she is a symbol of domestic bliss, the heaven of ecstasy more real than divine ecstasy. But to Sachis she is a huntress, she is a nature’s spy. she is a passion poisoned obstacle in the way of his spiritual progress. Commenting on the self abandonment of Sachis, Krishna Kripalani writes:

*Vaishnavism is a religion which seeks to realize God by a life of emotional self abandon. Tagore who loved the poetry inspired had a wholesome contempt for emotional self-exhibitionism into which in practice it had degenerated and found in the novel an excellent opportunity to show how religious emotion divorced from humanism is little better than a form of self hypnosis or an opiate.*

The novel whirls round the young, pretty widow Damini: we meet her first as a rebel against the excessive piety and submission to the Guru, Lilananda. Damini is the daughter of Ananda Prasad, a prosperous jute merchant. He gives his son-in-law, Sivatosh a house in Calcutta. But later he sustains great losses in the trade and is reduced to penury.

Damini’s husband is a great devotee of his Vaishnava guru, Leelananda Swami. But unlike Sivatosh, Damini has natural instinct for material interests, she never accepts his religious eccentricities. She protests when her husband gives away her jewellery to the Guru and says that he has no right over it as it was a present from her father.

Damini turns a rebel after the death of a non-complaisant husband who does not care to satisfy her psycho-physical needs, during their brief conjugal interlude, more over subjects her to the tyranny of devotion after accepting the discipline ship of Leelananda Swami. Infact, steam rolling her sensibilities he consigns her at death as part of his movable property to his Guru along with all his unmovable property.

Damini is a vivacious young woman who attracts every one with her grace and glitter, as her name suggests. She is “so real that no reader having known her can ever
forget her."¹² In the same strain Masti Venkatesa Iyengar remarks that "she interests us so deeply because she is extraordinary."¹³

Bengali novels before Chaturanga portray socially proscribed aberrations of Hindu widowhood and their severe consequences: Matangini for illicit sex relationship with Umashankar in Sibnath Shastri’s Jugantar and Rohini first for illicit love escapade with Gobindalal and then for betrayal and dual loyalty in Bankim Chandra’s Krishna Kanth will pay the price of their aberrations by their lives. Damini is not a direct descendant of those unfortunate widows, but is a much more developed version of helpless widowhood, reformed and animated because in between there is Binodini (Chokher Bali) in this evolutionary process.¹⁴ She is more passionate and more violent in her love for Sachis than Binodini for Bihari. “The difference between Binodini and Damini measures the degree of liberalism and universalism to which Rabindranath moved between 1901 and 1915.”¹⁵

Damini is against ascetic. Spiritual renunciation is her enemy. She wants to drink the honey of life to the last drop. She is vibrant and forever filling herself with grace and fragrance like flowers in the spring (p.45) she is anxious to miss nothing, reluctant to admit the hermit in her home (p.45).

In Sachis’s measured judgement as engraved in his diary she is the picture of hedonism, one who refuses to deny the pull of youth, denies death, yearns to enjoy life to its dregs an antipodal refraction to the ways of widowhood.¹⁶

Unlike Nanibala who gave up her life for a sinner, Damini represents social change. She is against the defeatist philosophy of meek submissiveness of Nanibala. Neither the death of her husband, the sudden poverty of her father, nor the religious influence of Leelananda and his disciples change her mind. There is nothing forbidden and unattainable in her moral code.

Leelananda Swami whom her husband worships is to her a dead stone. The precepts he teaches are lifeless and outdated to her. When large number of people rich learned, and talented sit round the Guru’s feet regarding it as a rare privilege, but Damini never bother to escape feigning illness. Instead she goes to the theatre or helps the neighbour in preparing sweets. The other disciples of the Swami are taken aback at her defiant behaviour and calls her ‘hussy’. Damini is a kite in a cage
fettered by spiritual chains. Repression of her bodily needs by an attempt at forceful
initiation to devotional ways keeps them temporarily subdued but after her husband's
death she bluntly refuses to drown herself in the 'wave of devotion'. As she remarks:

‘Am I here of my own accord? Haven’t you people put
chains round my feet and flung this woman without faith
into the prison of devotion? Have you left any way out for
me?’ (p.64).

But her repressed desires do not thrust her into destructive behavioural mould.
Damini who is starved of love, starved of bodily needs, when she senses the
possibility of love relationship with Sachis, she tears of her rebel mask and assumes
the graceful persona of self surrender. The rebel Damini mellows and becomes Stable
Soudamini17 and when her devotional attitude takes an about turn, the rebel suddenly
becomes a pliant devotee. Here her graceful mask is only to catch the attention of
Sachis, but Sachis sees only her grace but not Damini. His platonic love frustrates her
which is neatly expressed by the broken photographs of Leelananda Swami in a
meditation posture. Sachis' callous attitude gives her a sense of anguish and
helplessness. She knocks her head on the floor and mutters:

'Stone, o you stone have pity on me, have pity kill me' (p.49)

Damini loves Sachis but he does not reciprocate her love. She adopts a new
strategy of paying obeisance to Guruji as his follower to the inaccessible caves,
because Sachis too is his follower with Sribilas. Damini frustrated love takes the
shape of a passionate form. When Sachis is lying down on a blanket in a dark
cave, the darkness takes on the shape of a primordial block beast with neither eyes nor ears
but only insatiable hunger: Sachis records it in his diary:

Then something which I imagined to be a wild beast
grabbed my feet. But a wild beat has fur, this had none... It
was horrible precisely because it was so soft and clammy,
that heap of hunger... its breath was heavy and fast, I did
not know what the face was like. I kicked and I kicked
throwing my legs about (p.52).
But Sachish's is not fully aware that it is Damini who received his kick and refusal in his semi-awakened and semi drowsy state. In Sachish's experience in the cave in the twilight region of trance and semiconscious wakefulness the reality of Damini appears as a sort of the Jungian 'shadow' the shadow of the 'mass of hunger' which perplexes his mind.

The imagery of the primordial beast depicted in this context has "scarcely anything in symbolist literature that is more moving than this..." Further, it "... has got hardly any parallel in the literature of any country in the world." In the next stage, Damini’s overt partiality for Sribilas is nothing but an expression of her indirect protest to Sachis’s stolid indifference to her. Sachis and Sribilas are friends like Gora and Binoy. Like Binoy, though Sribilas at first is an admirer and follower of Sachis. He is very soon under the influence of Damini deviates from his path, Sribilas records:

I was exhausted with the hangover of spiritual intoxication and pretty thoroughly fed up with this continual churning of the heart day and night to the exclusion of man himself.

By pretending to be intimate with Sribilas, Damini succeeds in attracting the attention of Sachis. Now starts the struggle between spirituality and sensuality, attraction and repulsion, natural instinct and divine commitment. Just as it is true that Damini's interest now lies in arousing jealousy in Sachis, it is equally true that in Sachis's mind has arisen a new restlessness.

Sachis was hardly himself these days. He was like a paper-kite whose tow-string has snapped – still afloat in the air... He never missed the outward ritual of service, discourse, prayer and devotion but one could see in his eyes that deep within his feet were tottering (p.65).

It is Sribilas who never fails to watch the violent emotions of Sachis. However convinces him that the true way of spiritual discipline is to acknowledge nature and yet rise above it.
But Sachis considers Damini as an object of passion and tries to send her away and fails in his attempt. Unable to control his aesthetic sensibilities, in order to hide his sense of spiritual lapses he goes again to the sea-side solitude and returns with a battered body and exhausted mind. He acknowledges his mistake in asking Damini to leave and invites her to join them.

It is a test of fortitude as much for Damini as for Sachis who goes through the contrary processes of distancing from and remaining close to Damini to see which method suits him best to starve off his desire and keep his steadfastness in his devotional path intact. However, Damini is a victim of Sachis’s fluctuating sense of attraction and repulsion. Sachis’s open-arm invitation to Damini to join the spiritual discourses doubles her revolt. Damini becomes an embodiment of devotion in her dress and demeanors. But under the guise of devotee Sribilas observes a glint of searing fire in the corner of her eye (p.70) in her dealings with Guruji.

Damini is obviously double dealing. She bows Sachis whom she adores, protests Guruji whom she hosts, and disturbs Sribilas in order to divert the attention of Sachis. She plays the role of devotee with a vengeance. Her presence creates a ripple-effect in the disciple’s spiritual life. She seeks to demolish the heaven of ecstasy to which Guruji sought Sachis and Sribilas to hold past.

The more she found that Guruji was scared and Sachis was smarting, the more she pushed and pulled me about...If Sachis, Guruji and I were engaged in some discourses, Damini would suddenly turn up in the middle of it and call from the doorstep. Sreebilas Babu?.....Thus began a disorderly, topsy-turvy, touch and go state of affairs. Things began to fall apart (p.66)

It is Leelananda Swami who was able to bag two formidable scholars and atheists like Sachis and Sreebilas, fails in his attempt to change this rebel of ascetic, but hopes a divine miracle will bring about the change he desires in Damini.

Damini procures pornographic novels through Sreebilas to read them. When Guruji objects she defiantly replies that there is nothing wrong in it since he himself once read them, she questions Guruji;
'You are free to indulge your needs while I am supposed to need nothing at all... But 'I have not renounced the world... as you know. I should like to read those books.'

(p.68)

Interestingly it is Damini who would have read the books by herself but she deliberately seeks Sribilas’s help to read them, in order to provoke jealousy in Sachis. Sribilas too knows that all her deliberate actions are oriented towards Sachis’s attention.

Here Damini’s attention to Sribilas at this point of her life is tangentially correlative to a sort of ‘passivity’ in respect of Sachis. Sribilas does her errands and gravitates towards Damini, but her relationship with him is at best peripheral, for inspite of the bruise on her breast that Sachis has inflicted in the cave her passion for the latter still remains undiminished. Sribilas’s analysis of women’s nature in general ‘what little I have seen from the surface, from outside has convinced me that women are ready to give their hearts where they are sure to get suffering in return.’ (p.58) is very appropriate in this context. It is a kind of masochistic pleasure as noted by Helene Deutsch21 which makes the ‘attraction of suffering’ a prime urge for giving themselves up to men in a spirit of love-surrender.

However by spending lot of time with Sribilas, channalising her love to domestic pets, Damini succeeds in dragging Sachis into their midst. Now she points out the emptiness of self-abandoned asceticism through the episode of the suicide of Nabin’s wife. Nabin, a member of the Kirtan party marries his wife’s guardian less sister after a brief spell of illicit romance.

She pours out her anguish, her frustration and helplessness for being in the custody of Leelananda Swami.

Your Guru has given me nothing at all. He has not been able to give even a moment’s calm to my troubled soul...

There is neither courage nor fortitude nor peace of mind on the path your Guru would have us follow... I beg of you please don’t throw me to that demon, save me. (p.73)
At last Sachis realizes that the ‘Guru way leads only to the Guru’s court.’ One had rather perish by one’s own creed than adopt another’s. One can borrow everything else, but one’s creed must be one’s own (p.83). In this regard Damini is an eye opener to Sachis. To Damini the change in Sachis is welcome but not sufficient. In the first phase his preceptor is an atheist, in the second phase his preceptor is an ascetic, then Damini, a domestic. But neither an atheist, nor an ascetic, nor even a domestic seems to have given him desired result in his quest for truth. Once again he changes his track. Like Gora, Sachis never does anything half heartedly. Off course light comes to Gora, at the end but Sachis is an eternal quester. As Srilbas comments: Nobody knew any more what he acclaimed or rejected. (p.74)

In the evolution of his mental delusion, it is Sachis who had once been loudest in his denunciation of caste and religion later he was loudest in his defence of rites rituals, prayers. Now once again he throws all his beliefs over board and set off his journey into his own world. Totally abandoning an atheist, an ascetic and a domestic, ‘he engages in such a battle within to know himself that one is frightened to look at his face.’ (p.82)

Sachis’s quest for God realization now leads him to renounce all human bonds and takes to solitary contemplation. He becomes so abstracted from his surroundings that Srilbas and Damini are worried about his very survival and persuade him to allow them to accompany him to a riverside retreat. About the mental state of Sachis Damini is furious with God, wrath against Leelananda Swami.

Damini is not only vivacious widow but also an epitome of sacrifice. She shakes off her rebel mask and becomes a sacrificial devotee. She has elevated her love for Sachis to the level of reverence oriented love through a process of mental evolution. Now she takes the critical role of a true devotee to bring him into way ward life. There are many days when she carries a plate of food for Sachis, wading through knee-deep water, and in the process, some times remains without food for the whole day. But Sachish who has transcended the requirements of flesh and blood seems to need neither food nor sleep even unmindful of himself grows thinner and thinner. The more Damini requests, the more and more Sachis resists to eat, and only seeks solace in isolation. Damini is not a dew drop on the lotus leaf. However she says that “the
body is wholly our creation and so our heart cries out in anguish when we see it suffer.” (p.85)

After several days of intense meditation, Sachis believes that he has seen the light at last and expounds a philosophy of progress through contradiction:

*I shall meet Him only if I went in the opposite direction.* (p.87)

Elsewhere he says... you limit yourself in me while I try to seek the limitless in you” (p.88). Damini who cannot understand the metaphysics of this, is only devoted to his welfare. But she realizes only one thing, that his sense of asceticism only develops callous disregard for her problems. It is proved when she attempts to protect him in the storm, she is misconstrued by Sachis. He begs her:

'I desperately need Him whom I am seeking; I have need for nothing else. Have pity on me, Damini, leave me alone'

(p.90).

However Damini who has transformed her love for Sachis into a devotional love, erects a secret temple to her pain like Charulatha. Though her feminine instinct no longer permits her separation from Sachis, she leaves him only to honour the advice of Sachis.

Here Sachis’s heartless rejection of Damini who loves and adores him reveals his lack of understanding of woman’s heart. In the earliest of the novel he proposes to marry Nanibala without knowing what is in her heart. In the second phase he cruelly rejects Damini considering her merely an object of passion also shows his immaturity. If Damini is only a passionate widow, she would have let her fire of desire on Sribilas too. But so long as she has the hope of Sachis’s love, the role of Sribilas is strictly limited to be her companion only to beat her loneliness.

On the other hand Sachis is not a genuine ascetic at all. If he is a genuine ascetic, he would not have minded her intimacy with Sribilas. His conflicting sense between desire and divine only troubled her soul a lot.
As Bhabatosh Chatterjee pointed out:

"His failure to see her as a human being is a failure of discernment: one can achieve genuine transcendence only by recognizing and absorbing physical reality. Paradoxically, it is this limitation of his vision which brings Sachis down to the level of humanity and holds back his advance into true saintliness."

The most completely human character is Sribilas. He marries Damini though fully aware that she has surrendered her mind and soul to Sachis. He is also not unaware of the consequences of marrying a widow and that too a widow outside his caste. Daring the possible consequences he confides in Damini that he will not be worse off by marrying her. Damini too is quick to notice the true worth of Sribilas who is to her not "an ordinary man" as he knows all there is to know about her.

Now, Damini and Sribilas are neither atheists nor ascetics, they simply represent what is human in human beings. They restart their humanitarian mission with all heart and soul. They swing into the same old humanitarian principle, "The greatest good to the greatest member" when Sachis is asked to join their mission he replies: 'No' I am afraid my work lies elsewhere. (p.97)

Damini is another Binodini in this novel more mature, more courageous, and outrageous than Binodini. Both Damini and Binodini are passionate widows. Both are sensual, sympathetic and loyal at first, then rebels in the middle, and sacrificial in the end. But like Binodini, Damini has no psychological conflicts, she has a definite mindset and knows what she wants. As Binodini loves Bihari, Damini too loves Sachis with all her heart. Binodini sacrifices her love on her own accord bowing to the tradition. But Damini is cruelly rejected by Sachis: forcefully transforms her love into devotion: half heartedly marries Sribilas: whole heartedly participates in his humanitarian work. After being happy for sometime with muslim friends, chamars and low castes, Sachis's cruel rejection symbolized by his kick – which has pushed her slowly towards death.

The difference between Damini and Binodini whose oscillation between her sense of desire and control and between her sense of revolt and her defeatist attitude is
sharply contrasted to the equanimity of Damini who comes out as victorious by marrying Sribilas reveals an inevitable compromising philosophy of life.

The novel is surely landmark in feminist thinking. In this novel not only Tagore has made a bold and decisive assault on the age-old conservative thinking by bringing about the marriage between Sribilas and widowed Damini. But he has also accorded due importance to the individuality of a woman by prioritizing Sachis as the object of true love over Sribilas in the heart of Damini. That Damini rises above Binodini is proved by the fact that the question of society and public calumny does not deter her from the path of marriage. The proposal of marriage comes from her:

'I (Sribilas) what according to you is the real thing?

Say what would happen to you if you marry me?' (p.93)

Chaturanga is remarkable among Tagore’s novels for its innovation in novelistic technique in the sense that narration is from the point of view of Sribilas, the mouth piece of Tagore. Though Sribilas is full of admiration for the protagonist at first, we soon find there is a note of irony in his voice, regarding to his shifting postures due to lack of true spiritual vision.

According to G.V. Raju:

Sachis’s shifting postures are, to say the least, perplexing. The motivation for such shifting is not adequately depicted. His divine frenzy under Leelananda-Swami runs counter to all that he imbibed from his uncle earlier. His explanation that his uncle gave him the freedom of choice is understandable but his sudden opting for a religious life is intriguing. His quitting the fold of Leelananda Swami can be understood but the light towards which he ultimately finds himself advancing remains indiscernible to the reader.24

No wonder, Srikumar Banerjee too opines that “....it is extremely difficult to discover any psychological norm in Sachis’s wayward dilettantism and sudden spurs
of eccentric behaviour. That Sachis's endeavours at attaining selfhood are more earnest than those of a dilettante is, however, evidenced from what Sribilas has come to comprehend and appreciate:

I did not, to be quite honest, appreciate this restless seeking on Sachis's part. Time was when I had laughed at such things but now I had to pause, for this was no will-o-the wisp but real fire. Once I had seen this fire in him I dared not to make a light of it... All I could plainly see was that Sachis burned, he was a flame right from one end to the other (p.82).

Perhaps what Tagore chose to symbolize in Sachis is the divine yearning of a Ramakrishna or Vivekananda towards a mystic union with God. Sachis does not attain the kind of transcendence which these saints had. What his experience exemplifies is a quest towards it by an active consciousness subject to the pulls and counter pulls respectively of the spiritual and the sensual.

It can't be denied that, Sachis remains as an eternal quester, a traveller, frequently changing his track, exploring different channels, treading in the labyrinths of spirituality, sometimes surging towards the light, or sinking into the darkness, neither can he attain divine heights nor enjoys domestic bliss. But he remains as an unsuccessful God's aspirant, creating problems for himself and others.

No doubt 'Chaturanga' explores the fundamental difference between the ancient Indian nature of spiritual humanism oriented towards God and the 14th century innovation of renaissance humanism, oriented towards man.

By portraying Sachis as an unsuccessful God aspirant and Sreebilas as a successful humanist Tagore seems to have overlooked God over man, he seems to have advanced towards the promotion of human values rather than divine values. In this respect 'Chaturanga' runs somewhat parallel to 'Gitanjali' in which he clearly pointed out:
Deliverance is not for me in renunciation...

“He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground where the path maker is breaking stones.”

According to Tagore salvation is neither non-worldly existence, nor complete absorption with God, but it is to be in absolute dedication to humanity. He never wants to attain freedom by the process which negates what is human in human beings. He says

“If freedom of man is to be attained by blotting out man then why are we human beings?”
NOTES


2. Ashok Mitra, translated *Chaturanga* (Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1963), pp.7-8.


17. Ibid, p.442.


27. Gitanjali, p.73.