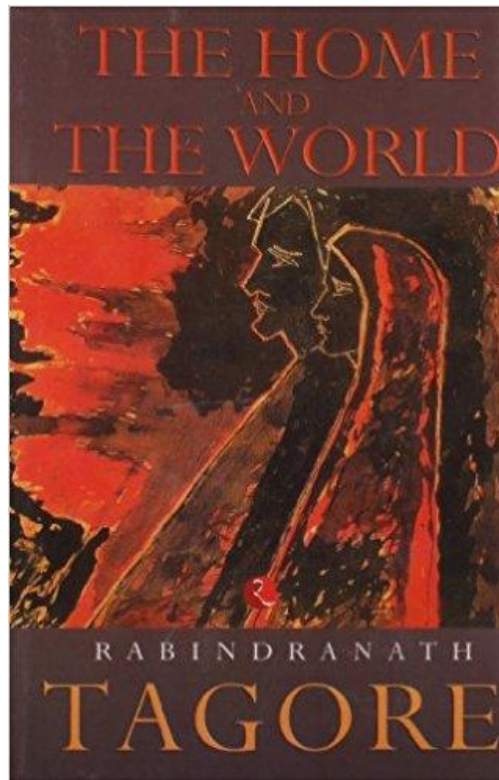


## **Tagore, A Harbinger of Feminine Voices – A Glimpse**

**S. Samundiswari and Dr. Rajalakshmi Sathyananthan**

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Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.in/Home-World-Rabindranath-Tagore/dp/8171679498>

### **Abstract**

As a prolific writer of various interests Rabindranath Tagore did not leave himself bothering about women of his time. His presentation of women in his works gave a new dimension of novel ideas in the minds of every reader, which helped in erasing the blurred image of woman as useless, futile, unnecessary being, a mortal for pleasure, and brightened their skills,

glory, lawfulness, ability in handling their mind and spirit. Tagore also proved that they are not only the creators of future off-springs but also decision makers of future.

### **Rabindranath Tagore**

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is considered as one of the supreme writers of the world. As an entity he represented himself as a learned man nurtured by the Upanishads and Veda, Brahmo Samaj, Buddhism, Indian Nationalism, Western Philosophy and Humanism. He is a man possessing fine artistic sense blended with social values. Being born as a Bengali his writings echo universality. He is a man who generally embraced Nature in its fullest form and tried to mould the minds of the people in viewing everyone as an important component of Nature through the manifestations of his characters. He was born in a reputed Jorasanko family of Bengal which was known for talents in music, art, poetry and culture. His father Maharishi Debedranath, the son of Dwarkanath was a learned and thoughtful man, in-charge of zamindari known for his righteousness which earned him a title of Maharishi. His mother Sarada Devi, a woman of patience managed to lead a large house-hold in harmony.

His exposure to the poets, scholars, musicians, philosophers, artists, and social reformers and other essential personalities ignited his soul much with the outer world other than his home. As a poet artist, writer, playwright composer and philosopher. Tagore painted women with varied moods and forms. Throughout his life journey, his literary career has been cradled by the hands of women relationship since his childhood days. The great women who enlightened his life were Kadambari Devi, his sister-in-law, his wife Mrinalini Devi and Victoria Ocampo.

### **New Women**

Tagore was an evidence to see women of his family as the torch bearers of emancipation by overcoming many hurdles and leaping over innumerable boundaries marked by the society. It is the Tagore's family under the name, Rabindranath Tagore as a catalyst, the whole Bengal culture generated into the new era of Renaissance. The women of Jorasanko modeled themselves as examples of modern women to the other women of Bengal, which triggered Tagore's mind in presenting 'New Women' to the world. Tagore's mind was influenced by the emancipation of women initially with his famous short story "Steer Patra" (The Wife's Letter) which paved the

way for the protestation from conservative part of the society that eventually stirred the heart of the family and society.

## **Individualism**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengal witnessed the importance of individualism among the middle-class society where the modern husband and wife wished for the independent existence besides their close personal relationship. The resultant of the individuality also looked out for the same sense of sexual freedom of the women.

Besides being a Nobel Prize laureate for his *Gitanjali* in 1913, the greatest collection of his poetical works, Tagore is also a renowned writer of novels. Tagore's excelled his contemporary Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in etching the personality of his women characters in his novels and short stories too. His notable novels that had won excellence of his time are *Choker Bali* (1902), *The Wreck* (1905), *Gora* (1910), *The Home and the World* (1916), *Farewell*, *My Friend* (1929), *Chaturanga* (1916) and *Yogayog* (1929).

## **Focus of This Paper**

This article is an attempt in reflecting the mind of Tagore about women of his time before the dawn of proper feminine approaches in India. Among many of Tagore's women characters Binodini (*Chokher Bali*), Bimala (*The Home and the World*) are selected for this endeavour.

## **A Respectable Place for Women in Everybody's Heart**

Tagore proved himself to be more creative and original than his contemporaries. He wished to engrave a respected and pleasing state of women in every mind of the readers directly through his novels. It was his western education inspired his mind in bringing liberation to women from their blind traditional veil. His unconscious desire of women being empowered, stable - minded and confident on their self are made true through his efficient women characters. Sapowadia observes, "Tagore was aware of all that happened in the West and the East too, so he had emphasized that it was through co- operation among the both and correction of the ways of men that women would enjoy their place and position in society" (37).

## No Discrimination Based on Gender

He emphasized that woman to her fullest not to be discriminated under the name of gender. A woman likewise a man has the same feeling, passion and equality accommodated with rights in her every move wherever she steps into however if it is under the household roof or beyond it. In all his novels besides the male characters he illuminated the characteristic features of each female in a different temperament of asserting their own individuality. In patriarchal set up Tagore was bold enough in admitting women's dignity and progress. Tagore viewed closely the pitiable and sinless status of women in each sector of his female characters with various roles performing as a widow (*Binodini in Chokher Bali*), the dutiful and conservative wives (*Asha in Chokher Bali and Kamala in The Wreck*), practical and outspoken wife (*Bimala in The Home and the World*), politically enriched women (*Sucharita and Lolita in Gora*) educated and independent women Hemnalini and Labanya in *The Wreck and Farewell, My Friend*).

### *Chokher Bali*

*Chokher Bali* is considered as the strongest foundation for the birth of the other novels in Indian literature. Niharanjan Ray maintains that with this novel Tagore, "struck out a new path for the further development of the Bengali novel on still refreshing lines." It is the first psychological novel where Tagore researched the inner workings of all characters very delicately providing all the possibilities in understanding the female characters.

Child widows were once highly prevalent in the Indian society of all classes. this resulted because of the unequal marriages between young aged girls and old men with malady. This was the basic reason for the young child widows to lead their life with repressed sexual urges. With the same idea the author begins the novel by focusing the heroine Binodini in *Chokher Bali* who feels jealous on finding the blissful conjugal relationship between Mahendra who rejected Binodini in his married life as his wife and Asha his life's companion.

Besides feeling jealous on their marital relationship Binodini also wishes to be firm in her life's decision. Her envy over the relationship between Mahendra and Asha grows as a hide and seek game under the mask wishing for true love and support for her, throughout her life Binodini unconsciously thinks as.

This room, this bed, which now belonged to Asha could have been rightfully hers and Binodini never followed herself to forget this loss. Today she was a mere queen and tomorrow she might be asked to leave (*Chokher Bali* 49).

Her dying embers of her forgetful life get watered after breathing a new breath in Mahendra's home. Her disgrace of being widow turns into a rare combination of beauty, grace, dignity and intelligence and wins everyone's admiration including Bihari. Tagore beautifully describes her brilliant skill as, "Binodini was adept in every sort of housework, leadership was instinctive to her she had no qualms ordering the servants about, setting their tasks and disciplining them when necessary" (*Chokher Bali* 47).

Before Mahendra knowing everything about Binodini he gets himself entangled in her magic spell. She has been pictured with the peculiar character of analyzing the minds of the people around her. She not only moves easily with the persons but evaluates the status of each one's mind with minute observation and prepares herself to clear her way hurdle less. Tagore remarks a new idea about the remarriage of widows through the male characters Mahendra and his friend Bihari to enlighten the life of a widow. Bihari commented "Even if you get rid of her. She may still return. Better marry the widow." (*Chokher Bali* 53).

The budding stage of love entanglement of Binodini with Mahendra might be pictured as a seductress but later her act proves her as not a heartless and scheming seductress and also in exposing of the wretched nature of Mahendra too. "Her attitude is one of tempting him while retaining her own self-control" says Humayun Kabir. In the developmental stage of Binodini's attitude she finds the true nature of Mahendra which resulted in the rift between Bihari and Mahendra in addition to that she evaluates how her life to be and what to be. Binodini sets her right by exemplifying that she is not driven by passion but only by her mind. In her final stage of her crucial life she firmly chooses her path to proclaim her saintliness. She never hesitated to claim honesty to Bihari as:

I was sanctified because I had placed you in my heart. I realized how strong you were the day you sent me away from you to be worthy of you I swear to you that I have not allowed that worth to be sullied. (*Chokher Bali* 275)

*The Home and the World*

In the novel *The Home and the World* with the introduced Swadeshi Movement of then Bengal captures the minds of female interested in the movement with their political ideas. With Bimala, the mighty woman character, the novelist brings out her mental turbulence caught between the politics of the world and conflicting loyalties of her home. Through the triangular love of Bimala with Nikhil and Sandip Tagore found easy in differentiating idealism and realism.

Bimala is the first Indian woman to make “a frank analysis of her illegal passion.” Bimala a traditional wife of Nikhil, an idealist wishes her to break out from her shell and to fly off independently into the outer world as a butterfly with her own feathers of ideas for her Mother India. As a wife Bimala’s inner self urges her to be a conservative domestic woman modelled on her mother.

If the outside world has got on so long without it may go on for some time longer. It need pine to death for want of me. (*The Home and the World* 8)

But as Bimala, her individual self-initiates her for her autonomy. Preoccupation of Bimala’s subconscious public images is triggered with the new era of Swadeshi and feels excited as:

My sight and my mind, my hope and my desires, became red with the passion of new age Though up to this time , the walls of the home which was the ultimate world to my mind – remained unbroken, yet I stood looking over into the distance and I heard a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me but whose call went straight to my heart (*The Home and the World* 12)

For the cost of Swadeshi, she is ready to burn all her foreign clothes and also to get rid of miss Gilby, her educator for the sake of being an English. Forgetting herself a lady belonged to the Rajah’s home Bimala enthusiastically feels as the sole representative of Bengal’s woman hood after witnessing the speech of Sandip Babu and his triumphant cry of “Bande Mataram”. His powerful words lacking true nationalistic fervour blinded the eyes of Bimala who just quenching her thirst of Bande Mataram.

Sandip's hyperbolic expression of calling Bimala as "Shakthi Mother of India" soon drives her to be more passionate in her dedication of the welfare of Mother India. At all her conversation with men is liberal enough to give her own remarks on woman hood. She explicitly says about woman's nature as

When her passion is reused she looks her sensibility for all that is outside it when , like the river ,we women keep to our banks , we give nourishment with all that we have ; when we overflow them we destroy with all that we are.( *The Home and the World* 42)

Sandip's vulnerable nature turns Bimala's nationalist excitement into erotic. Bimala being a woman of an upper- class family he uses his masterful passion over her to extract wealth for his own sake and to master the nation as his own. Bimala wished to lead her passionate nationalist fervor in regard to the benefit of the society when she discovered the selfish nature of Sandip more than she expected she returns to her home expecting for a better return to the outer world later. She dares enough to evaluate her attitude at each step of her act and decides smart as:

The moment I had stolen my husband's money and paid it to Sandip, the music that was in our relations stopped. Not only did I destroy all my own value by making myself cheap, but Sandip powers, too.... So, Sandip loses his aspect of the hero; a tone of low quarrelsomeness has come into his words (*The Home and the World* 164).

Bimala is a woman of refreshing energy and confidence and always feels as, "Nothing could fetter me, nothing was impossible for me; whatever I touched would gain new life. The world around me was a fresh creation of mine (*The Home and the World* 96).

Both Binodini and Bimala are the fine art work of characters originated from the mind of Tagore beautifully. Binodini is the fine creation of unparalleled feature of any other female characters in Indian English Writing. Binodini is a well-known character known for deep thoughts and sensitive emotions. She proved to be a woman of high thinking equal to that of a man. She stands at her own level without belittling her own self. Bimala therefore represents herself and also represents the male protagonist as much as they represent her. The self-representing woman is not a new comer in Tagore's writing she is a startling new character on the Bengali literary and social landscape with her domestic capabilities Bimala travels through the political movement with her

self – determined concepts and comes out successfully with newly acquired principles about “Home” and “World”. Bimala is a traditional heroine of Hindu revivalism and also a modern independent woman modeled on her own autonomy to return to her position which she finds suitable.

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S. Samundiswari  
Ph.D. Scholar (Part-time)

Dr. Rajalakshmi Sathyanathan  
Asst. Professor of English (Retd.)  
PG & Research Dept. of English

Govt. Arts College (Autonomous)  
Coimbatore-18  
Tamilnadu

Govt. Arts College (Autonomous)  
Coimbatore-18  
Tamilnadu

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India  
[samuconfident@gmail.com](mailto:samuconfident@gmail.com)

India  
[satyan\\_raji@yahoo.co.in](mailto:satyan_raji@yahoo.co.in)