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Editorial

We are happy to announce that the 2020 issue of *Journal of Women's Studies* is now published.

Feminism might apparently seem to be a much explored area but it is ever growing in relevance now as a tool for the comprehension of the sites of sex, gender and subjectivity. The study of gender inequalities is a widely used trope in feminist philosophy. Discrimination, objectification (sexual), inequality, sexism, stereotyping, literature and aesthetics that are fundamental to feminist criticism are the central themes of the research papers here.

While trans people disrupt the assumptions of sex, the designations into the rigid categories of male or female at birth, sex category and gender, the cis people or non-trans identified individuals who correspond with the sex category assigned at birth and remain accountable to the corresponding gender models, open up interrogations into the hegemonic gender norms structured and normalized in a society that has unfailingly maintained the male dominance.

The essays in this volume present a slew of issues that call into question some of our conventional thinking and interpretations. The essays critique the social constructivist assessments using the feminist theoretical framework and the politics of gender hegemony that our gendered existences impart and provoke. They bring to the fore arguments on whether there is a feminist research methodology, questions and discussions on women's representation in literature, the contesting sites of cosmopolitanism, analysis of women who have taken up their pens to articulate and question the concepts of moral authority, social privilege, their protesting voices that unfold the language of enquiry into social paradigm.

The editorial board of Centre for Women's Studies, University of North Bengal, extends its thanks to the authorities of the University for their constant support even in these trying pandemic times, to the

members of Advisory Committee, Standing Committee and the Academic Board of Centre for Women's Studies for their valuable inputs and support. We thank the contributors for their well-articulated research papers.

Zinia Mitra
Director
Centre for Women's Studies

Plagiarism and Feminist Research Ethics

Dr Dulika Chakravorty

Plagiarism (from the Latin "*plagiare*", meaning "to kidnap") is defined as "the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas and thoughts of another author and representation of them as one's original work" (*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* - unabridged). Plagiarism is a serious breach of research ethics which, if committed intentionally, is considered as a research misconduct. Plagiarism may result in loss of serious sanctions, including public disclosure, loss of research funding, loss of professional stature and termination of employment. Plagiarism undermines the authenticity of research manuscripts and the journals in which they are published and compromises the integrity of the scientific process and the public regard for science.

Plagiarism violates the literary rights of individuals who are plagiarized and the property rights of copyright holders. Violation of literary or property rights may result in legal action against the individual(s) committing plagiarism. Although plagiarism has existed since the beginning of writing, it seems to be increasing because the World Wide Web (Internet) facilitates finding and copying the work of others. It is possible not only to plagiarize the works of others, but one's own work also falls under the purview of plagiarism through reuse of identical or nearly identical portions of manuscripts without acknowledgement or citation (Hendee, 2007).

The ten distinct forms of plagiarism are listed below:

Cloning, where the student submits work entirely copied from (or written by) someone else, is the most common and most severe, but also often the easiest to detect.

Control-C is similar except that it contains a mix of copied and original material.

Find and Replace is where material is copied but some words or phrases are altered to avoid detection.

Remixing is paraphrasing other material and stitching it together so as to look original.

Recycling is re-using one's own work and presenting it as new.

Hybrid plagiarism mixes cited and uncited material.

Mash up is where several different sources are copied without being cited.

The final three forms do not fit precisely into the traditional definition of plagiarism, but are relatively common forms of academic dishonesty.

404 Error is when an academician cites a non-existent sources.

Aggregating is using properly cited sources in a student's work that adds no additional material.

Re-tweeting is when a work is cited and presented as being paraphrased, but the paraphrase is too similar to the original text (Turnitin, 2012).

Effects of Plagiarism

If the evidence suggests that plagiarism may have occurred, the editor should contact the accused author(s), the author(s) whose work may have been plagiarized and the copyright holder of the original material if she/he is different from the author(s). The correspondence should include the alleged plagiarizing language and a copy of the original and suspected work. If all parties agree that plagiarism (whether intentional or unintentional) has occurred, a written letter of apology should be sent promptly by the offending author(s) to the editor and to the author(s) and copyright holder whose work has been plagiarized. If the offending work has been published, a notice of plagiarism, citing both the plagiarized and the offending articles and containing the exact text that has been plagiarized, should be published in the next available article of the journal in which the offending article was published. The plagiarizing authors must agree that all dissemination to the offending article will to be accompanied by the notice to plagiarism.

An allegation of plagiarism is a serious accusation and should never be taken lightly. On the other hand, self- policing is a major strength of the scientific community, and plagiarism should always be reported when it suspected to have occurred (Hendee, 2007).

Feminism and Research Ethics

Feminist social science research methods have been discussed for years, and there is an ongoing question of whether there is such a thing as a separate feminist methodology. Some argue that methodology is methodology, the approach

cannot be masculine or feminine. (Chafetz, 2004), or that there isn't a -distinctive feminist method of research (Harding, 1987, p.456). M. Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook, on the other hand, believe that there is a feminist methodology, which they state- involves the description, explanation, and justification of techniques used in feminist research and is an abstract classification that refers to a variety of methodological stances, conceptual approaches, and research strategies (2005, p.2213).

Recognition of the importance of using women's experiences as resources for social analysis has implications for social structures of education, laboratories, journals, learned societies, funding agencies and thus for social life in general.

Feminist theorists began criticizing positivist experimental approaches in the early 1970s, claiming that they were limited to living lives to a sequence of isolated variables that failed to account for the nuances of social life. Feminists were also among the first academics to call attention to the marginalization of women of color in academic study and to propose research methods to address this issue. (Crenshaw 1993)

Feminists conducting social science research have a tendency to choose methods which enable them to answer the questions they pose in a way that is true to their feminist values (Melinda, 2012).

Two scholars, namely, Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddling, epitomize the challenge of 20th century feminism to modernism's principle based models of moral theory. Although many others have contributed to a relationship-based ethics, Gilligan and Noddling are chiefly responsible for producing what are now recognized as alternative feminist approaches to the European frameworks organizing ethics around such principles as rights, duties, virtues, and consequences (Tong, 1993). Men and women often have different patterns of early experiences in the family, centering on attachment and separation, and hence may view the world differently. Gilligan insists that women's most sophisticated moral decision making is based on the value for relationship, not the value for principle (Preissle, 2007).

Gilligan explains the differences between how men and women make moral decisions and accounts for overlaps in their maturation by relying on psychodynamic (Chodorow, 1978) and psycho- developmental theories (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1978) of gender.

Women, according to Gilligan, begin their moral development interviews by asking more questions about the details of a decision, especially probing for the human relationships involved. As they reason through their choices and the justifications for these choices, they focus on relationships among people and not just the rules, norms, or laws that might operate in a given situation. Although aware of fairness as one priority in an ethical dilemma, women more commonly than men, privilege the value of caring. Among women, relationships are more likely to be conceptualized as connected networks or webs of reciprocities than as rule-governed hierarchies of authority and obedience among separate individuals (Preissle, 2007). Gilligan concludes that balancing rights and duties is a challenge for all adults, male and female, but men and women's ideals of care and fairness can never be achieved fully for everyone in any particular decision, but that care, responsibility, fairness, and rights all enter the mix when autonomous choices are to be made (ibid).

Gilligan's works were more directly approached by Nel Nodding in her formulations of caring beginning with *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* 1984 and 2013. Nodding begins by observing that contemporary ethics has been dominated by choices over the right normative principle, whether rights, justice, consequences, or something else, and by a focus on logical reasoning believed to contribute to making decisions based on the right principle. The feminine approach to ethics that Nodding endorses is rooted in the relationship of caring and being cared for. She emphasizes that "Relations, not individuals, are ontologically basic" to ethical decision (p. xiii). When caring must be prescribed as an obligation or duty, then the relation is with social expectations and not the other, not the *thou*, and what Nodding calls natural caring is diverted into something like the virtue principle: people behave in a caring manner because that is the *right* thing to do (Preissle, 2007).

Nodding labels her endeavor a "practical ethics" conceptualized from what she believes women commonly do when faced with ethical dilemmas. Although they may consider principles and reasons through logical decisions, women also consider the feelings involved and the relationships among the people in the situation. The caring relationship involves the *one-caring* and the *cared-for* in an interaction to which both contribute, but often asymmetrically.

Men as well as women develop the capacity to care, but Nodding views caring as the predominant response of women to ethical decisions. She then takes the human commitment to care as a framework for an *ethical ideal* that guides

decision making. The ethical ideal is an image people have of themselves as the one-caring, whose priority is to maintain relationship "guided in what we do by three considerations: how we feel, what the other expects of us, and what the situational relationship requires of us" (p. 46).

Caring is what Nodding calls a "constrained ideal", riddled with the guilt aroused from the necessity of selecting among competing priorities and from facing the conflicts inherent to everyday living, but sustained by the joy of positive feelings from and intense engagement with another.

Thus, both Nodding and Gilligan shift the focus of ethics from principles and argumentation to relationships and exploration of particulars. Neither gives up principles and arguments because consideration of both is necessary for deciding what is in the best interest of those in relationship and for weighing the conditions and particulars that contribute to competing priorities (Preissle, 2007).

Nodding and Gilligan together offer a feminist ethics based in relationship that challenges the principled ethics of rights, justice, consequences, and such. Feminist researchers from a variety of disciplines have tried to assure that their studies serve women's purposes by including participants in the formulation, planning, conduct, and analysis of work. Some scholars may formulate this as a kind of feminist participatory action research (PAR), but other consider it integral to the feminism they practice (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001), Fine (1992).

Importance of Research Ethics

There are several reasons why it is important to adhere to ethical norms in research.

First, norms promote the aims of research, such as knowledge, truth, and avoidance of error. For example, prohibitions against fabricating, falsifying, or misrepresenting research data promote the truth and minimize error.

Second, since research often involves a great deal of cooperation and coordination among many different people in different disciplines and institutions, ethical standards promote the values that are essential to collaborative work, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect and fairness. For example, many ethical norms in research, such as guidelines for authorship, copyright and patenting policies, data sharing policies and confidentiality rules in peer review are designed to protect intellectual property interests while

encouraging collaboration. Most researchers want to receive credit for their contributions and do not want to have their ideas stolen or disclosed prematurely.

Third, many of the ethical norms help to ensure that researchers can be held accountable to the public. For instance, policies on research misconduct, conflicts of interests, the human protections and animal care and use are necessary in order to make sure that researchers who are funded by public money can be held accountable to the public.

Fourth, ethical norms in research also help to build public support for research. People are more likely to fund a research project if they can trust the quality and integrity of research.

Finally, many of the norms of research promote a variety of other important moral and social values, such as social responsibility, human rights, animal welfare, compliance with the law, and public health and safety. Ethical lapses in research can significantly harm human and animal subjects, students, and the public. For example, a researcher who fabricates data in a clinical trial may harm or even kill patients, and a researcher who fails to abide by regulations and guidelines relating to radiation or biological safety may jeopardize his health and safety or the health and safety of staff and students (Resnik, 2015).

Conclusion

For a good and valued feminist research ethical principles and methodologies are to be followed and plagiarism avoided. Thus a nation, a state and society can develop towards sustainable gender development by getting the fruits of good and ethical research without plagiarism. The academic research endeavor is built on a foundation of trust. Researchers trust that the results reported by others are sound. Society trusts that the results of research reflect an honest attempt by scientists and other researchers and that they describe the world precisely and without unfairness. But this trust will endure only if the scientific society devotes itself to exemplifying and transmitting the values associated with ethical research conduct.

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Colours and Crisis:
A Study of Cosmopolitan Womanhood in Elkunchwar's
Sonata

Amrita Sarkar

"The scenes of this magical city are strange.

If you come with all your root.

To live here is like magic.....

Like pain, like anguish, like tear

You are we here....."

[Gulzar, Mumbai, Neglected Poems]

Sonata, published in 2007, belongs to the third phase of Mahesh Elkunchwar's dramatic career. In this play, Elkunchwar has come to a zone which is far distant from his usual disturbing and disturbed background of his earlier plays like *Garbo*, *Desire in the Rocks*, *Old Stone Mansion*, and *Reflection*. In the context of post-globalized Mumbai, Elkunchwar focuses on three working women and weaves his symphony to show how disturbed their lives are. The chaos in their lives begins because of their moving towards menopause, mid-aged crisis. They have fantasies, unfulfilled desires, scattered lifestyle, jealousy, sense of betrayal, sense of guilt, utter bonding, and immense helplessness. The three single working women in *Sonata* - a journalist, a teacher of Sanskrit, and one employed in an ambiguous 'big' post in a multinational company share a comradeship in life with all signs of solidarity and freedom. Aruna and Dolon have been sharing the same apartment for seventeen years. Subhadra once their apartment mate, now lives a disturbed conjugal life and comes to visit them on the particular day on which the play's action takes place. They are all in their forties; they were classmates in college. Aruna belongs to conservative Marathi origin, Dolon in her origin is a 'Calcutta liberal' Bengali, and Subhadra's origin is in North India. In the heights of Mumbai skyscrapers with a sense of cocooned security their entity is so precarious, fragile, and desperate that they always fear to lose one another, even one's own self. With this setting, Elkunchwar explores different shades of

womanhood in modern cosmopolitan life. This treatment is different from the typically known Elkunchwaresque treatment as it is not a male dominated world like his earlier plays; it is rather, a complete all-women drama to explore the issue of multiplicity through different shades of womanhood. Sathe, in this point, observes,

In *Sonata*, the Marathi Brahmin of Nagpur tries to use his gothic, anarchic Vidharbha in the sophisticated cityscape of Bombay which is not Garboesque Bombay, but Mumbai of polished people. The symphony is helplessly melancholic and helplessly human. Here we find how the genius a highly educated feudal creates his women in cityscape (341).

In this context, this paper tries to find the colours and crisis of modern cosmopolitan womanhood.

Sonata deeply explores into the lives of these three friends who are seemingly lost. Dolon and Aruna have been in the same flat for the past seventeen years. Yet it is quite evident that they have been continuously rejecting each other. There are a few reasons behind it. Dolon with her dazzling and spirited character on the exterior is but a buried loneliness in the interior. She becomes the symbol of those contemporary women living the very kind of life which is multiple within its singular existence. On the other hand, Aruna, who has been psychologically hurt by her lover, is a reserved sulky school teacher and symbolizes such women who are never at balance and blame all men for the miseries and suppression of the whole women folk. We find another type through Subhadra. She is the third woman who conceals the reality that she is tortured and physically assaulted by her pro-masculine lover. She is dissatisfied to the core, but tries to project herself as the utmost happy woman of the world. Thus she symbolizes the women, who, under no situation can think of living without a male counterpart. These kinds of women, in spite of all the tortures keep returning to their oppressive male partners rather than risking a safe and descent life alone. So a sense of multiplicity runs through the difference of their characters.

The issue of cosmopolitanism becomes quite prominent when the women in *Sonata* give the glimpses of their roots. They keep returning to the nostalgic memories of their past lives and quietly trace the routes of their being to the roots

of the small towns they grew up in once. Aruna, who seems to be an icy cold untouched woman, shares her yearning of going home with Dolon:

Aruna - I'm planning to go home next week.

Dolon - Sure.

Aruna - Twenty five years in Mumbai but I still think of home".(251-2).

Aruna has a strong desire to go back home but somehow she does not go home. She recalls her nephews and nieces and asks Dolon to join her for her visit to her home town. She, almost in a monologue, says to Dolon: "Let's go for a few days..... My nephews and nieces will dance around you with joy. Dolon mawshi, Dolon mawshi....." (252). In this context, when Dolon asks Aruna the age of her nephews and nieces, Aruna is not able to recall it properly: "The youngest is five, I think.....or six maybe....." (252). At his Dolon remarks "You don't even remember that..... You always say you'll go. You never do...." (252). Aruna has been disillusioned by the harsh reality of society. In spite of the desire of going back home, she knows very well that she cannot return home because nobody at her home wants her to return. When we find Dolon speaking about their forlorn typist neighbour, her repetitive life style, and feeling surprised that the latter had someone somewhere who might send her a postcard; we hear Aruna indulged in recalling:

The roof is leaking. Need money for repairs. Mother sinking rapidly. Losing her vision too. Wonder if you can take her in for a few days? But failed again. We want to send him to a computer class. But where is the money, with all these expenses? This year Ganesh festival will be a poor affair. You mustn't tire yourself and come here (255).

Elkunchwar has pointed out impersonal relationships in the play *Sonata* where the three women believe that the most significant part of their emotional life lies within themselves. They are more protected with each other but less connected to each other. They live at a time when their friendship becomes both all and nothing at all. Their relationships are connected in terms of which they are understood and measured, at the same time, dissolved in the same. They pretend to be satisfied as they have established a so called close relationship with each other, which they think is the major contribution to their happiness. They might

be the best friends living together for years, but each has her own private self hidden from the other. As Samik Bandyopadhyay writes,

The vulnerability and delicacy of the relationship among the three is played and simultaneously in terms of the continuing shifts in position and the private obsessions that they cherish and project to hide their raw sores, for example, Dolon's bottles of male ala Stanley Kowalski, and Aruna's intellectual- creative pretensions are obsessions that manifest themselves in intensely private spaces, often with a touch of poetry, as when Dolon turns Aruna into veiled beauty and "adores" her, visualizing a secret, unspoken desire (Elkunchwar xxix).

Nonetheless, their relationships are revealed as a psychodrama when there is an interaction between Dolon and Aruna. Though the two women have been living together for the past seventeen years, yet there is some unspoken distance between them. Time to time Dolon is eaten up by an inner guilt and many a times we hear her repenting it. But Dolon cannot take the cold, uncaring and devoid of emotions, attitude from Aruna. She is heard telling her: "You can live in the past tense all you like. Not me.....Why are you so intentionally cruel to me?" (260). Furthermore, Dolon also accuses Aruna that she had hijacked her life, when the latter wrote her short story that was awarded, Dolon thinks that the story is based on her. Infuriated Dolon also tells Aruna that the title of the story was inappropriate. Betrayal would have been a better title (278). It seems as if it is Dolon's guilt that makes her think that the story is based on her because Aruna clearly tells her that it is not Dolon who is the woman of the story: "That woman is not you. May be some similarities-only a few externalities?" (279). Nevertheless, Dolon does not believe her: "Don't give me that bullshit." (279). She is so exasperated that she is ready to leave the flat but then Aruna tries to calm her down and the two friends come to reconciliation once again only after some time we hear Dolon admitting the truth that she had slept with Aruna's lover the same night the latter had broken up the relationship

I have betrayed you.....You and Avi parted ways on that day. And your said to me, "Go, be with him". I can manage myself, but he is being ripped apart.....When I came back from him, I was full of him.....And I never told you. When I went to him, he was writhing in pain. As I tried to console him-I forgot everything at that moment. Your relationship with him. Our

friendship . The happiness I got was so overpowering. When I saw you crying, I felt like covering you with that happiness.....I never met Avi after that (285).

The entire episode is handled very maturely by Aruna. She takes Dolon in her arms and says: "Enough, my precious. It is the past. Leave it behind. You needn't have told me all this. You did. So it's okay."(286).

The desire to be happy interconnects them in spite of their difference. The choric conversation in the manner of choral song breaks the conventional prototype of womanhood and we get a multi-coloured womanhood

Dolon: What awful women we are!

Aruna: We're alright. We're self-sufficient. We earn, spend.

Dolon: Self-centred. Do nothing for society.

Subhadra: Without any commitment. Without any aim.

Dolon: No ideology.

Subhadra: We're not even feminists.

Dolon: We blow money, smoke, drink.

Subhadra; And my affairs.

Dolon (giggling): Sheeree. What kind of people are we.

Subhadra: Decadent. But happy. We're happy.

Dolon: Unabashedly happy.

Subhadra: Abominably happy.

Dolon: Obscenely.

Aruna: Nirlajjam sada sukhi (271).

So the three women through all their existence represent the individuality of the modern woman. From the point of the view of the outsider it may seem that they are almost very similar to each other but as we look at them closely and observe their inside activities and conversations we find that they are very different to each other in their own ways. Their multiplicity becomes a voice against the patriarchal tendency that attempts to fix the individuality of the woman by categorizing them in typical roles. Here this trio becomes the example of Judith

Butler's term 'Woman in Process'. Butler while re-reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* deals with Beauvoir's celebrated claim that one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. Commenting on Beauvoir's statement towards the end of the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes, "If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end." (33).

If we consider the trio of *Sonata* in this context of Butler's 'Women in Process' we find that the process of becoming of woman creates the individuality in Aruna, Dolon, and in some extent in Subhadra. They are not living their lives in the fixed role of 'woman', rather their process of becoming of the individuals is a process of celebrating womanhood. From the patriarchal point of view in *Sonata* it will seem that the trio is a big failure as they don't have any 'family' or a healthy 'conjugal' relationship. Any patriarch might point out that it is because they are without the help and guidance of any male, without the company of any male, that Aruna and Dolon lose their balance which is sometimes reflected in their emotional ups and downs. But if we look at the core of their heart we find that patriarchy, despite its all kinds of categorizations, cannot categorize these women within fixed roles. Thus Aruna finds Dolon as the very other to herself, Dolon finds Subhadra as the object of jealousy, Subhadra finds Dolon as the queen, Aruna finds Subhadra as short tempered, Subhadra finds Aruna as cold. So a rainbow like spectra is visible in this trio. In this way *Sonata* becomes a text of multiple shades of the womanhood in the backdrop of a modern metro life which is full of so many psychological ups and downs.

If we look at the psychological pattern of Aruna, Dolon, and Subhadra, we find that they are very different there too. The vulnerability and delicacy of the psychological relationship among the three is played out simultaneously in terms of the continuing shifts in position and the private obsessions that they cherish and project to hide their raw sores. The fetishes of them show their difference of desire, for example, Dolon's bottles of perfume and Rabindrasangeet, Subhadra's adoration to the male a la Stanley Kowalski, and Aruna's intellectual-creative pretensions are obsessions that manifest themselves in intensely private spaces. So in their patter of desire they are different to each other with a latent interconnection of similarity. In this point, Aruna and Dolon are almost 'double' in an antithetical way to each other, they are complimentary to each other not through similarity but difference. They take Subhadra and her series of 'affairs',

and the monotony of the lonely typist of their neighbourhood as the measure of reference for the sake superiority and privilege feeling that they require. Thus, psychologically, we find in them a pattern of justifying themselves. When we look at Subhadra, we can notice that her psychology is basically of an intuitional person who is never jealous of her former classmates. She, rather in a helpless way, admits that she is not that kind of deep like Aruna, or dynamic like Dolon. She has the honesty to admit that in spite of her non-working conjugal relationship, she wants to live with her lover. So there is a clear difference in the psychological pattern of Subhadra and the other two. Now, if we close in to look at Aruna and Dolon, we find that their psychological pattern is also different from each other in a subtle way. At the first wine sipping episode of Aruna, we find that the feeling of sweet and sour of Aruna becomes sour and sweet in the feeling of Dolon (272). This reversal concerning sweet and sour emphasizes the difference between the psychological pattern of Aruna and Dolon. This becomes more prominent as the play proceeds to the end as Dolon complains that the character of Aruna's award winning story is basically a perverted figure of Dolon, and whimsically admits that in the time of the turmoil of Aruna-Avi relationship she, in the name of bridging between the lovers, actually had sex with Avi. In this context, Aruna's hugging of Dolon suggests that Aruna is in balance after the purgation of writing the story, while Dolon needs this utterance desperately as her psychological pattern is not that of the composed and articulated Aruna.

By taking the ideas of cosmopolitanism proposed by contemporary British born Ghanaian American philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, we can trace the function of cosmopolitan multiculturalism of womanhood in *Sonata*. Appiah's notion of cosmopolitanism is comprised of two primary, and interconnected, principles. The first is that our obligations to others reach beyond the traditional associations of family, culture, and citizenship. The second component reminds us that cosmopolitanism is not an abstract concept in that it reaches to the individual level. It's not just human life that is valuable, but the particular lives that individuals lead. Here, K.A. Appiah is reminding us that the difference is not innately a barrier to his project, but rather it's the opposite, in that it is more of a catalyst. This idea advocates for multiculturalism as "Cosmopolitans think they can learn something from those they differ from, even from those they disagree with. We recognize that people have a right to their own lives: it is this connection that ties all cosmopolitanism." (Appiah 39). It is an inclusive process in which all cultures are valued with dignity and respect. Subhadra, Aruna, and Dolon

represent this cosmopolitan multiculturalism. For this, the Marathi Brahmin is ready to eat fish as the Bengali cooks it well, and the North Indian misses the flavour of Marathi rice and curry, and the trio, at the end of the play, loves to be interconnected through the French wine. In this way, *Sonata* celebrates the colours and also the crisis of cosmopolitanism at the very same time.

As Martha C Nussbaum says:

...We should value human diversity. As Appiah says, the cosmopolitan ideal includes a positive delight in the diversity of human cultures, languages, and

forms of life. This pluralism prompts cosmopolitan liberals to insist on what is called "the priority of the right to the good;" that is,

on giving first priority to structures-prominently including structures of equal liberty-that will protect the ability of people to choose a form of life in accordance with their own lights, whether cultural or religious or personal. (Nausbaum 1996).

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Protesting Female Voices in Mamoni Raisom Goswami 's Short Stories

Apurbajyoti Hazarika

Indira Goswami (1942-2011), more popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami, is a powerful writer of Assamese fiction with her penetrative insight into the diverse, multilayered Indian society and culture. A cursory inquest into her fictional world brings to the fore a consistent pattern carefully designed to voice protest against any anti-human project operative in the society at different levels. Noted critic G.P. Sarmah's remark is pertinent in this context:

Her bold approach with a liberal outlook against anti-humanist traditional values in society shocks and charms her readers at the same time. Time and again, in all her fictional work, she lodges a protest, veiled in art at any offensive against humanity. And in this, women and workers-two most repressed and exploited classes in our society find her sympathetic focal attention. (G.P. Sarmah. *Fiction of Protest: the Novels of Mamoni Raisom Goswami*. Uddipana Goswami (ed), 48)

Her bold and moving narratives delineating frankly the desires and pleasure of women in a language rich with metaphors and imagery expressive of female eroticism, which were hitherto considered a taboo in a typically patriarchal set-up, is quite important in the context of feminist literary studies. In the novel *Ahiron*, one notes the following bold feminist statement:

A woman is completely free to love and bear children according to her own choice. Isn't this the view of Isadora Duncan too? (Tilottoma Misra. *Indira Goswami: Brave, Gentle and Bold*. Uddipana Goswami (ed), 65)

She is unabashed in narrating her own story in an *Unfinished Autobiography*. "In my childhood days I was not allowed to play with low caste children." She wrote. A habitual rebel against the wrongs of the society she "rarely obeyed that rule." She wrote, "Very often I was dragged to the well and buckets of water were poured on my head for purification...I had the least consideration of caste or

respectability. Nor did I think much of the social status of my family.” (Goswami, 2002)

Her concern for a women in society is reflected beautifully in her novel like *The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*. The novel, set between the early 19th Century and India's independence, depicts the atrocities perpetrated by feudal monarchs in monasteries against women, particularly Hindu widows. Durga, Saru Gossaine, and Giribala are three female characters in the novel who are forced to eat, live, and interact according to the ashram's strict patriarchal norms. Childhood experiences of Goswami in Vrindavan, her time spent in researching on the lives of widows, form the backdrop of this classic, as she writes of the emotional, physical and social deprivation of women victimised by the typical feudal Vaishnavite sattrā system. The book was adapted to a National Award-winning film *Adajya* in 1996.

Some of her stories carry this spirit even more forcefully. Her voice does not merely question the patriarchal values; an apparent resistance to the discrimination towards women has equally been instrumental in her texts. The primary focus in this paper will be to examine how the 'self' of the author in selected stories question and thereby attempt to protest the 'othering' of sex in a society modeled incorrectly on binary opposition of male-female. In this paper Indira Goswami's short stories are my primary sources and for my secondary sources I have consulted published articles and essays to supplement the discussion.

Sanskar (Caste), a significant story by Goswami, stands out in the context. This is a multilayered story with a fine feminist touch. Damyanti, a Brahmin widow, here breaks stereotypes of different kinds. In a traditional Brahmin convention, a Brahmin widow is not supposed to eat fish or meat. Damayanti subverts it clearly. The writer gives a clue about it in the beginning through a statement by Pitambar:

“I've heard she gorges on everything...meat, fish," said
Pitambar.

(Gohain 271)

Krishnakanta ensures, saying that she is a disgrace to the entire Brahmin community as she has been breaking all traditional values one after another. A hint is also given by Krishnakanta that she also starts keeping extra-marital affairs. As the narrative progresses, Krishnakanta designs a ploy for Pitambar who has no child even after his second marriage and desperately desires one.

Consuming a handsome amount from Pitambar, who is a mahajan, Krishnakanta prursues Damayanti, albeit providing her also a part, to sleep with Pitambar for having a child and eventually to be his wife in future. Things go well until Damyanti, a powerful creation by Goswami, aborts the child form Pitambar by her own choice. This act, whether to carry a child or not, has in fact a strong feminist concern with a patent resistance to the typical patriarchy. The patriarchal dream nourished so desperately by Pitambar is crumbled by Damyanti and is a big blow to the feudal-patriarchal consciousness of Pitambar and others.

On the other hand, the peculiar gaze exemplified by Pitambar's sick wife from her bed is another major aspect that questions the patriarchal mindset of the male characters. She has no importance for Pitambar as she is infertile and appears almost like a lumber to Pitambar. While Pitambar talks about Damayanti with Krishnakanta a serpent like acute gaze of his wife catches his eyes. It may thus stumble upon a key aspect pointed out by French psychoanalysts Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). Lacan opines that man's desire is the desire of the other. The gaze of Pitambar's wife may be a desire for recognition. But largely, her sharp eyes are a reflection of questioning the male design in a society where scapegoating and stereotyping of women are quite common.

Mamoni Goswami's representation of life of women in her stories is not monolithic, but the way she describes the female characters is indeed a replica of how patriarchal framework judges women. She doesn't utter feminist slogans in her stories, but a careful reading would show how a resistance is dominant there. The following observation by Tilottoma Misra is noteworthy:

...Mamoni Raisam's writing is marked by what Julia Kristeva calls 'the flow of jouissance (physical or intellectual pleasure) into language'. Thus though Mamoni has stated that she is not a diehard feminist (*jabardast* feminist), her writings can easily be interpreted as a variety of *écriture feminine* (women's writings). Her language itself bears the imprint of the female consciousness. (Tilottoma Misra. *Indira Goswami: Brave, Gentle and Bold*. Uddipana Goswami (ed), 65).

The treatment meted out to Pitambar's wife by him thus is complemented by Damayanti. Pitambar completely starts neglecting his wife; he ignores her deliberately hoping that he would marry Damayanti one day. But his wish has been crushed by Damayanti. She aborts his embryo developed in her womb. This

demolishes Pitambar's delusion and he becomes insane towards the end of the story as he badly wanted a child to look after his huge property. While he comes to learn that Damayanti has aborted his child, he starts digging the soil at midnight where she buried the child. Damayanti can hear the sound of digging. Terrified, she asks Pitambar:

"Why are you Digging the earth?"

Pitambar looked back at the window but gave no answer.

Again, thud, thud, clomp, clomp! Damayanti was petrified.

"I've buried it-that's true. But what will you find? Only a lump of flesh is lying there".

Pitambar looked up. "It was my child. I'll touch lump of flesh. I'll touch the lump of my loins with my two hands". (Gohain, 286).

With it, Goswami shows how a resistance on the part of a woman could be so powerful! One, however, would be tempted to have the contention that this resistance on the part of Damayanti is passive but perhaps more powerful in a social set-up dominated by patriarchy in its ugly form, because Goswami so deftly sketches Damayanti's character who is reported to 'justify' her belonging to a *sandilya gotriya* Brahmin caste as the reason behind the abortion of the child, while the same woman, in order to subvert patriarchy and her so-called Brahmin lineage, devoured meat and fish also! It is quite interesting to note that Damayanti utilises to fullest degree the inherited caste lineage, veiled in acceptance, to assert her resistance against patriarchy.

The protest is however not always complete or overt; rather extreme domination of female by male finds a moving description in some of her stories. A woman is always an object of lust in her stories for those who nourish and practice patriarchy. In a story entitled *Pashu* (Beast), Nimai Rabha, an innocent girl is killed perhaps after rape. Before the incident, the author describes how male gaze constantly investigates her body. Through the consciousness of Chahabuddin, the author delves deep into the cruel and patriarchal activities of Krisnakanta and his crew. They have been hinted at in the end as the culprits behind Nimai Rabha's rape and death.

In some other stories such as *Udong Bakos* (The Empty Box) the *Riniki Riniki Dekhiso Jamuna* (Seeing Januna Unclearly), Mamoni Goswami reveals the psyche of some female characters who are actually betrayed by their male

beloveds. In *Udong Bakas*, Taradoi's faith in her beloved is finally crumbled as the man arranged his wedding with another woman. In *Riniki Riniki Dekhiso Jamuna* the unnamed female narrator finally realizes her beloved Krishnendu's indifferent attitude towards her whom she continues to love even after her marriage. The male characters are here embodiments of typical patriarchy who surrender before trying situations. A feminist approach can be seen in these stories.

The issue of patriarchy and protest in Goswami's stories are significant and merit in-depth analysis in the light of contemporary feminist theories. As has been stated earlier, the dominant female voice is not one of aggression but that of protest within the confines of the situation.

Note:

English translations of excerpts from the stories have been taken from Hiren Gohin (ed.) *Splendour in the Grass*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2010.

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Thinking Beyond Gender: Tagore's *Chitrangada*, the Breaking of the Stereotypes

Dr. Manika Saha

Gender refers to the biologically constructed characteristics of women, men, and children. This involves the norms, behaviors, and responsibilities that come with being a woman, male in the society as well as in interpersonal relationships. Sex as a social construct varies from one society to the next and can evolve over time. Gender has a historical and political base. Words like man, woman, boy, girl, etc. have evolved in the society and collected varied connotations over time. Biologically, an individual is born with an identity of a man or woman or sometimes with a third gender (who may not be categorized as male nor female). We can never change the instincts of an individual as it is genetically acquired, but the idea of being a 'man' or 'woman' purely depends on the individual. A person may be a male or a female by birth, but he or she may think of and be comfortable in another gender. Hence sex and gender may not always match. One's own gender may sometimes be a quest.

Our grand epic *Mahabharata*, has a galaxy of different and interesting characters. Chitrangada, the daughter of the king of Manipur and the wife or beloved of Arjuna is a remarkable character of the Indian Mythology. Arjuna, who was a celibate for twelve years, went to Manipur, met princess Chitrangada and married her. Chitrangada and Arjuna had a son named Bobhrubahan.

Our Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, reconstructed this story and produced his masterpiece, a poetic drama titled 'Chitrangada'. This work of Tagore tells us that the king of Manipur had raised and groomed his daughter as a male child, in other words, like a prince. He taught her warfare, archery, royal rules etc. Chitrangada grew up like a royal prince in the environment of all royal comfort. She was supposed to be a princess only but the gender stereotypes were defied. Lord Shiva had blessed Manipur that it will beget princes only, but a girl was born. Then the king decided to raise his child as a prince and as his successor and thus Chitrangada grew up as a prince. This is the framework of Rabindranath's Tagore's famous work, *Chitrangada*.

The king of Manipur raised Chitrangada as a male child. She was trained as a valiant prince. Hence, inspite of being born as a female child, manliness entered

her psyche. This 'manliness' has to be acquired even by men. Primary education, training and environment made Chitrangada manly. Simone de Beauvoir, in her book, *Le Deuxieme Sexe* translated into English as *The Second Sex* (1949) says that one doesn't take birth as a woman but grows up to be a woman.

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman .no biological, psychical or economic destiny defines the figure that human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between male and the eunuch that is called feminine. (Beauvoir 293)

Since time immemorial, our society has made rules and opinions on child rearing. The social framework and guidelines coerce a child to grow up strictly as a female or a male. The concept of marriage and bearing children is introduced to the girls since their childhood and hence they grow up towards a fulfillment of their roles. On the other hand, a male child grows up as a male without any such constraints. Rabindranath Tagore, in his legendary work *Chitrangada* broke this stereotype thinking. Chitrangada was not the product of a society with stereotypical bindings or male chauvinism. In mentality, activities and personality, Chitrangada grew up as good as a man. But instincts do not change. Whatever manliness Chitrangada achieved, she was fundamentally a woman. Feminine qualities and instincts flowed in her blood.

During her youth, she started being and feeling feminine. First love, for many woman happens after meeting a man. The first meetings of Chitrangada with Arjuna made her infused with the feeling of first love. During a hunting activity, the celibate Arjun saw Chitrangada dressed as a man and took her very lightly as a funny boy. Chitrangada fell in love at the first sight of Arjuna.

বঁধু, কোন্ আলো লাগল চোখে!

বুঝি দীপ্তিরূপে ছিলে সূর্যালোকে!

ছিল মন তোমারি প্রতীক্ষা করি

যুগে যুগে দিন রাত্রি ধরি,

(I)

[Friends, what a light struck my eyes!/ Perhaps you were the sun in the domain of light. / My mind was waiting for you/ From age to age night and day.]

She expresses the eternal want and wait of a woman for a man. Chitrangada feels eternal love. She goes to Arjuna and submits herself before him, but Arjuna declines her offer. He explains that he is observing celibacy.

চিত্রাঙ্গদা! আমি তোমারে করিব নিবেদন
আমার হৃদয় প্রাণ মন!
অর্জুনা ক্ষমা করো আমায়,
বরণ যোগ্য নহি বরাসনে,
ব্রহ্মচারী ব্রতধারী।

(II)

[Chitrangada: I will dedicate my heart and soul to you. Arjun: Forgive me. I cannot accept you I have the vows of a Brahmachari.]

By his rejection Chitrangada becomes aware of the lack of tenderness, beauty, grace and charm in her which are an indispensable parts of a woman. The opposite way of grooming her as a male child had closed her doors of her first love! So, she prays to Madana or the god of love, for a year long to instill in her all the qualities of a woman. By his boon she turns into a heavenly beautiful lady full of charm, grace and elegance.

একী দেখি!
এ কে এল মোর দেহে
পূর্ব-ইতিহাসহারা!
আমি কোন্ গত জনমের স্বপ্ন;
বিশ্বের অপরিচিত আমি
আমি নহি রাজকন্যা চিত্রাঙ্গদা,

(III)

[What do I see!/ Who is this who has entered my body./ Previous history of women./ I am the dream of the last birth/ I a stranger to the world. /I am not Princess Chitrangada,]

By the blessings of Madan, the 'kurupa' Chitrangada turned into 'Shurupa'. Feminine beauty entered her body. Enthralled by the beauty of Chitrangada, Arjuna left the path of abstinence and accepted her. The moment Arjuna was about to submit to the beauty and charm of Chitrangada, she encountered an inner conflict! She felt that this love is due to her physical beauty and not because of the individual person in her. So, this love is false. A fight between ego of the personality and ego of the beauty is ensured. Chitrangada realized that beauty is just a cover that a person is under, which is false. In love, one must submit to the qualities and not to outer beauty. If a man gets attracted towards a woman due to her physical beauty, then that is the greatest disregard to womanhood. Rabindranath Tagore made us rethink on gender construction by the highlighting the above said conflict in Chitrangada. Chitrangada condemns Arjuna the lover. Again here, we can see how does the stereotype break.

ধিক্, পার্থ, ধিক্!
কে আমি, কী আছে মোর, কী দেখেছ তুমি,
কী জান আমারো কার লাগি আপনারে
হতেছ বিস্মৃত মুহূর্তে কে সত্যভঙ্গ
করি অর্জুনেরে করিতেছ অনর্জুন
কার তরে? মোর তরে নহে এই দুটি
নীলোৎপল নয়নের তরে; এই দুটি
নবনীলিন্দিত বাহুপাশে সব্যসাচী
অর্জুন দিয়াছে আসিধরা, দুই হস্তে
ছিন্ন করি সত্যের বন্ধনা কোথা গেল
প্রেমের মর্যাদা? কোথায় রহিল পড়ে

নারীর সম্মান? হায়, আমারে করিল
অতিক্রম আমার এ তুচ্ছ দেহখানা,
মৃত্যুহীন অন্তরের এই ছদ্মবেশ
ক্ষণস্থায়ী। এতক্ষণে পারিনু জানিতে
মিথ্যা খ্যাতি বীরত্ব তোমারা

(II)

[Alas , Partha, Alas !Who am I, what is mine, what have you seen, What do you know about me? For whom are you forgetting yourself. For a falsehood of a moment you are turning Arjuna into un-Arjuna. Not for me. For these two blue lotus eyes. What a shame, oh, what a shame!

Will you be ensnared thus, by this enchantress, caged, in your pursuit of chasing this mirage breaking the bondage of truth? Where is the honor of love? Where is the honor of women? Alas my trivial body has superceeded me. This outer disguise of inner immortal self is short lived. Now I have known your false honour of your valour]

She questions beauty that covers the inner self by a veil and is short-lived. For a true human being, no pretensions are required. If man gets attracted by the superficial beauty of a woman, then it is a matter of disgrace for the man and also an immense disrespect for the women because true love is not realised. The vastness and beauty of love is at stake then. Gradually, Chitrangada is able to convince Arjuna her opinion and make him realize the reality of love. Arjuna understands the vastness of real love. Finally, Arjuna wants to have Chitrangada the way she wants. She asserts her particular position. In society, the position of a woman ought to be just beside the man , she says.

Yes, worshipping a lady as a goddess or neglecting her as a waste, both are unacceptable. To give respect to a lady, we need to acknowledge her as equal to men and give her the required position in society.

Chitrangada of Rabindranath Tagore is totally different from the conventional or traditional women portrayed in India. The thought and the conflict of thoughts

from where Chitrangada has taken birth, symbolizes a long dispute. The evaluation of women in a male dominated society has got a new turning point through the character of Chitrangada. At the end of the poetic drama, Chitrangada tells Arjun, "You had refused to accept me as I didnot have the beauty of a woman and you could only see my manly features. I wanted to convince you being a man. By refusing that lady, Arjuna had done the right. The reason is that, if Arjun had accepted her only on the basis of kindness towards a woman, it would have been a big disrespect for women. Chitrangada would have kept on lamenting till death, because at that time, the lady lacked many aspects of a perfect woman. Whatever she had was incomplete. By the blessings of Madan, the beauty and elegance that Chitrangada achieved, is again partial. It was just a false veil. To be a complete woman, she has to be on the same axis as that of a man. She must sit just beside a man. Complete womanhood can be achieved only when man and woman share their happiness and woes together, only when they complement each other. Here again, we find a deviation from the traditional sociological mind set. It breaks the stereotype of woman as the subordinate. Chitrangada says....

আমি চিত্রাঙ্গদা।
দেবী নহি, নহি আমি সামান্য রমণী।
পূজা করি রাখিবে মাথায়, সেও আমি
নই; অবহেলা করি পুঁষিয়া রাখিবে
পিছে, সেও আমি নহি যদি পার্শ্বে রাখ
মোরে সংকটের পথে, দুর্ভাগ চিন্তার
যদি অংশ দাও, যদি অনুমতি কর
কঠিন ব্রতের তব সহায় হইতে,
যদি সুখে দুঃখে মোরে কর সহচরী,
আমার পাইবে তবে পরিচয়।

(Chitrangada, 12)

[Chitrangada: I am Chitrangada, the precious daughter of the king of Manipur./Neither a goddess, nor a woman, commonplace and

mundane./Allowing me to be a true partner in your life's journey/ I am not the one you hail in the altar, worshipping,/Nor am I the one you keep behind you, in negligence./Once you recognize my essence, keeping me beside you/Amid your deep hours of crisis,/Allowing me to be a true partner in your life's journey,/A true accomplice in your missions,/Only then you will know my true self.]

It does not end here, Chitrangada proves that, she with her maternal education, has the capability to raise Bobhrubahon to become a second Arjuna. Maternal education and motherhood can make a child brave and valiant. This is the actual essence of womanhood. So Chitrangada tells Arjuna -

গর্ভে
আমি ধরেছি যে সন্তান তোমার, যদি
পুত্র হয়, আশৈশব বীর শিক্ষা দিয়ে
দ্বিতীয় অর্জুন করি তারে একদিন
পাঠাইয়া দিব যবে পিতার চরণে,
তখন জানিবে মোরে, প্রিয়তমা

(Chitrangada, 12)

[The child I have conceived in my womb, if the child is a male child , I will teach him to be second Arjuna/ and send him to his father /the you will know me, beloved]

Here the stereotype is challenged once more. She wants to raise her child alone, make him a second Arjuna and then send him to his father.]

Rabindranath's *Chitrangada* had been debated critically by Mr. Tomson. Mr. Pramatha Chowdhury had condemned the criticism. He read out an essay titled 'Chitrangada' in the Presidency College. On the request of Mr. Somnath Maitra, Mr. Pramatha Chowdhury had to speak on the poems of Rabindranath. He took the opportunity to criticize and oppose the views of Mr. Tomson. Maybe, Mr. Tomson was not fully aware of the Indian culture so, he interpreted *Chitrangada* from the Western point of view. Pramatha Chowdhury, in his essay 'Chitrangada', expressed that Mr. Tomson would have gained satisfaction only if Arjuna had accepted Chitrangada as his brother. Chitrangada not only wanted to be a lover but also a wife. Mr. Tomson could not second the final position of

Chitrangada. Pramatha Chowdhury pointed out that by portraying Chitrangada as a mother and a wife, Rabindranath has not made her erotic. Instead he has dignified her.

Discussing Tagore's drama *Chitrangada*, written in 1892, Pramatha Chowdhury observed that Rabindranath had created a world of beauty in which, "Chitrangada was an image — a reality in the realm of beauty. Rabindranath's artistic brilliance", Pramatha Chowdhury commented, "lay in his making Chitrangada a dream personified, independent of any historical context." According to Pramatha Chowdhury "Art, is the realization of the waking dream of the human mind, given expression in painting or music. And who else of the contemporary age but Rabindranath could claim such mastery over this technique." (Chowdhury 60-61)

Rituporno Ghosh, the famous film maker, has given a new face to the character of Chitrangada. In his film, he has represented Chitrangada as a Transgender. A human body built with the body of a man and the mind of a woman gradually evolves into a woman. Along with this long fight (sociological and political) of metamorphosis, he has given a symbolic representation of Chitrangada. Rituporno Ghosh, has interpreted the boon of Madan to gain physical beauty and charm, as cosmetic surgery. Even in his reconstruction of the character, we find breaking of the stereotype of the society. Actor and film maker Rituporno Ghosh has himself played the role of Chitrangada and portrayed his personal life through it.

The Chitrangada of Rabindranath Tagore and the Chitrangada of the film of Rituporno Ghosh educate us on gender binaries. The intellectual exercises of these great men have brought out the character of Chitrangada from myth to reality where they have newly reconstructed womanhood.

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Socio-Political Status of Women in Ancient India

Gita Rani Goswami

Introduction

Women play a crucial role in the dynamism of human society. According to Alektar, studying the history of the role and status of women is one of the best ways to understand the essence of the society, to recognize its excellences, and to realize its limitations. (Alektar 1933).

Despite the fact that many texts on the status of women in ancient India have been centered on women's visibility and historians have created some spaces for women within definite parameters while reconstructing the past, in terms of Indian culture, studies on women have had a tendency to concentrate on the broad terminology of women's status, using a restricted array of questions. These questions, as well as their parameters, aim to examine women's roles and positions in the country like ours with its varied socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres. (Sharma 2014).

The effect of Indian societal structure on gender has varied widely over time and space due to the differences in socio-cultural traditions and practices (Chakravarti & Roy 1988). This paper attempts to evaluate women's roles and positions in ancient Indian society after studying readings on ancient Indian manuscripts and on texts such as the Védas, the Great Epics, Rámáyana, and Mahbharata; readings on Buddhist texts such as the Smritis, the Purnas, and the Dharmastras. The paper critiques the Nationalist reconstruction of history and puts to question such reconstruction.

The status of women has been divided into two distinct periods: The Early Vedic or Rig Vedic era (1500 BC–1000 BC), and the Epic or Later Vedic period (1000 BC–600 BC).

History is interested in the women question. As a student of history we have seen much emphasis on the status of women in ancient Indian societies. It is said that in the primitive age women's position was respectively high but later when agricultural society was formed their position declined, also we must note that texts that I have considered do not give much evidence about this at any point. In the context of India, we find the same saying. In this paper we are specially

discussing the position of women in the Early Vedic or Rig Vedic era (1500 BC–1000 BC), and the Epic or Later Vedic period (1000 BC–600 BC).

There are limitations of the sources for revisiting women's history. We have to depend on some ancient Indian texts such as Vedas, Upanishad's, Smritis, Buddhist literature etc. We can also know the position of women of a particular period through the study of existing society. The position which women occupied in Hindu society at the dawn of civilization during the Vedic age is thought to be much better than what we ordinarily expect it to have been. This paper engages in a brief discussion regarding women's position in Indian societies in early Vedic period.

Early Vedic or Rig Vedic era (1500 BC–1000 BC)

Max Muller, a famous Indologist said that there were two kinds of women at the Rig Veda times - one *Sadyovadhume* the one who married and led family life and the other *Brahmavadini*, well-educated and commanding respect in *Pandhitha Sabhas* and congregation.¹ Some women received similar education as men and often took part in philosophical debates. Gargi's debate with Yajnavalka on philosophical issues is much discussed. From the 'Malatimadhava' of Bhavabhuti, written in the 8th century A.D., we learn that the nun Kamandaki was educated along with Bhurivasu and Devarata at a famous centre of education. Names of 23 brahmavadins are found in Rig Veda. They are Gargi, Romasa, Ghosha, Viswavara, Atreyi, Lopamudra, Vasuhvepati, Indrani, Apala, Seaddha, Vaivasvati, Yami, Powlami, Surya - Swasthi, Sikhandini, Oorvasti, Sachi, Devayani, Indradoota, Sarparagni, Vak and Godha. 26 Slokas of Rig Veda were composed by these women. *Gargi* is the most famous among them.

Ancient Indian society followed a patriarchal model of society. But a girl probably had the right to protection in her father's family. After marriage all the money and gifts received by a woman in the ritual belonged to her. What was given to the bride was called *Streedhana*.

Manu has prescribed six kinds of *Streedhana* to the minimum extent. According to Manusmriti, after the death of an issueless woman her relatives are entitled to get her *Stridhana*. If the marriage has been performed in the form of Brahma, Daiva, Gandharba or Prajapatya, the husband of the deceased issueless woman is entitled to get the *Stridhan*. But in case of Asura, Rakhyasa and Paisacha form of marriage, the *Stridhana* of issueless deceased woman will be taken by her father or mother.

A girl had rights to choose their life partner. Though the marriage was considered as *Samskara*, it was not compulsory for everyone. She could remain unmarried for a long time. According to Rig-Veda "The women gently in nature and graceful in form, select from among many their own loved once as their husbands." The happy and beautiful bride chooses (vanute) by herself (svayam) her own husband" – (bhadrā vadhūr bhavati yat supeśāḥ svayaṃ sā mitraṃ vanute jane cit – Rig Veda 10. 27.12).

Monogamy was generally observed but rich and royal families could practice polygamy. R.C. Majumdar opines that women are the pivot in the family. The word *Dampati* indicates that the wife and husband constituted one unit. She could exhibit her talent in public places but had to work within a framework of rules. A woman was not confined behind purdah. Women used to move freely in the society, often even in the company of their lovers as seen in old plays. Devadasi system was also found in that period. The episode of "Paruchapa" in Rig Veda supports that view. There is no mention regarding widow marriages anywhere. The sati system was also absent in that period.

Women enjoyed an equal status in many ways to the men in the eye of religion. (Roy 1999) They participating in many fields of activity and some were also worshipped as *devis*. Some of the deities were Aditi, *Pridhvi*, *Bharati*, *Indrani*, Usas etc.

Later Vedic period (1000 BC–600 BC).

Marriage became compulsory for every women in that period. Manusmriti is variously dated to be from the 2nd century BCE to 3rd century CE says that:

One shall give his daughter in the proper form, even though she may not have attained (the age), to a bridegroom who is of exceptionally distinguished appearance, and her equal.—(88)

The age was not mentioned. But Manu describes 8 forms of marriage (III.20-34).

- (1) Brahma form of marriage:
- (2) Daiva form of Marriage:
- (3) Arsha form of Marriage:
- (4) Prajapatya form Marriage:

- (5) Asura form of Marriage:
- (6) Gandharva form of marriage:
- (7) Rakshasa form of marriage:
- (8) 'Paishacha' form of marriage

For a girl who remained unmarried life became unbearable.

Recognised marriage procedure was similar to the Rig Vedic period. Several vows were made at the time of marriage.

Importance of a girl child was on the decline during the later Vedic period. In the 11th *sloka* of *Atharva Veda* there is a prayer that in the womb of his wife should not be a girl. If all born child are girls, then it was considered a greater sin. A son is necessary for relieving parents from *Punnama naraka*, it was believed. To beget a son, a man was allowed to marry any number of times. That is how polygamy was justified.

The hymn below has been interpreted by some as O.P. Gupta as a permission for widow to remarry. *Adharva Veda blesses the widow to have a happy life with present husband as expressed by:*

This is thy husband: joyfully receive him and let him mount into the world of Svarga.

The speed of rivers craving heaven and cane, thou, Agni, art the waters' gall.

Cool, Agni, and again refresh the spot which thou hast scorched and burnt.

Here let the water-lily grow, and tender grass and leafy plant.

Here is one light for thee, another yonder: enter the third and be therewith united.

Uniting with a body be thou lovely, dear to the Gods in their sublimest mansion..
AV (XVIII.3.4)

But there is no historical evidence of widow remarriage.

But during the later Vedic period women were forced to live within the four corners of the wall and her main purpose of life became begetting sons and her life was controlled by men. Women were restricted in their movement. They were not allowed to attend any assemblies. This sort of restriction was found

mentioned for the first time in *Aitareya Brahmana* and *Mytrayani Samhita*. *Brahmanas* reveal that many of the religious ceremonies formerly left to the wife were now performed by the priests. Women were considered as *Asuchi* during certain days of the month and during such days she was not eligible to perform religious acts. Polygamy became common in that period. In some *Brahmanas* it is described that a king had four kinds of wives. First wife was *Patta Mahishi* (*dharmaoatni*). *Parivartaki* was wife without children. *Vivata* was the most loved wife of the king. *Pingali* was the daughter of head of the *dashav*. These positions indicate further decline of a women's status.

Findings

From the above discussion we can't exactly say what women's status was in Vedic Period because the sources which we have are not enough to reconstruct their whole history. We find that men controlled most historical records so women were often refused and where they were included it was frequently a narrow section. But there is a romantic reconstruction of history that looks at the status of women as indeed very high in Vedic period and a little declined in later Vedic period. The traditional writing on the position of women is based entirely on Bhraminical sources. But the interpretations are under doubt. They carry the problem of an inherent bias towards the *Brahmanas*, reflecting the precepts of the *Brahmanas* rather than the actual practice of people and a confining of themselves to the upper castes or elitist positions.

The analysis of the position of women in ancient India has also been colored by the fact that almost all the works have been written by scholars who would fall within the nationalist school of history. (Chakravarti, 1999) The scholars of this school tried to show that the position of women had been high in the ancient past, that the British were responsible for the contemporary evils, such as sati, purdah, female infanticide etc. reflecting that the rigid model of patriarchy of Hinduism was not so much responsible for the low position of women and the Hindu sense of inferiority was only in relation to the British. As a reaction to colonialism they glorified our past and said that the position of women was very high in Vedic period. There is an effort at the establishment of the fact that after the coming of the Muslims the condition of the women became degenerated and the circumstances resulted in the development of some social evils as already mentioned. Shakuntala Rao Shastri writes in his book *Women in the Sacred Laws*,

The tenth and the eleventh centuries saw the advent, and later, the firm establishment of Muhammadans in this country. When Hindu culture came into clash with a culture far different from its own, the leaders of society began to frame rules and laws to safeguard their interest - specially the position of women. Rigorous restrictions were placed on them... We find at this stage child marriage firmly enforced. The death of a widow was preferred to her falling into evil hands. Hence self-immolation of a widow was enjoyed by the law codes giving the unfortunate victim the hope of heavenly bliss. Such and several other customs were introduced which curbed the freedom of women to a very large extent. This was done perhaps to save her from the foreigners and to preserve the purity of the race. (Shastri 1953)

Similarly, according to R.C. Dutt, "Absolute seclusion and restraint (of Women) were not Hindu customs. They were unknown in India till Muhammedan times... No ancient nation held their women in higher honour than the Hindus." (Chakravarti 1999)

Alteker surveys the condition of women in ancient Greece, Rome and Palestine and then restated that the position of women was much better in Vedic period than in later Vedic period or in other eras. The nationalist historians selectively focus on certain aspects of the ancient text to view the lost glory of Indian womanhood. Historians give much of importance on *Gargi-Yajnavalkya* debate. This has become the most popular example of women learning.

As a nationalist viewer Alteker's study on *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day* is a popular work. But his work is based on Brahmanical sources whose evidences should be appropriately questioned. Although his presentation explores some new possibilities of study in the area his approach is problematic. Alteker's sources were very limited and his approach is orthodox and traditional. The study surveys the position of widow, women in public life, property rights and general position of society (within a confined area). The types of opinion he provides is steeped in the nationalistic understanding of the women's question. Further, his overwhelming concern is with women in the context of the family and one almost gets the feeling that the status of women needs to be raised in order to ensure the healthy development of the future race of India. In this Alektar was reflecting the opinion

of nationalist writers from the second half of the nineteenth century who placed tremendous importance on the regeneration of the hindus.

A study of Alteker's work will indicate the limitations inherent in his approach. His theoretical framework is spelt out in the very first page of his work. According to him,

One of the best ways to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate its excellence and realise its limitation is to study the history of the position and status of women in it... The marriage laws and customs enable us to realize whether men regarded women merely as market commodities or war prizes or whether they realized that the wife is after all her husband's valued partner in life . The rules about sex and morality enable us to know the ethical tone of the society and ascertain how far men were prepared to be themselves judged by the standard they set for women. ...the best way to begin our enquiry is to study the condition of women during their childhood and find out the general arrangement made about their traning and education. (Alketar 1)

Alteker's own genuine commitment to reforming women's status led him to make quaint statements sometimes which he intended as positive and progressive. Thus he suggests that although

The daughter on the other hand had no fighting value whatever. It is no doubt true that women have potential military value, by giving birth to sons they contribute indirectly to the fighting strength and efficiency of their community." (Alketer,3)

In Altaker's programme of reformation enough education was to be extended to women but in doing so one had to ensure that no undue strain was placed upon them He express his fears thus

As things stand to-day, girls have no passed the same examinations as boys and to learn house-keeping at home as well, all the while having less physical strength than their brothers. This certainly puts too much strain upon them and injurious to future well being of the race. (Alketer 33)

Alteker did not accept the work *A History of British India* (1817) by James Mill which is a "critical history," that critiques Hindu customs and a "backward" culture which notable for superstition, ignorance, and the mistreatment of women. Mill found much of the Hindu Civilization to be a barbaric. So Alteker was obliged to provide explanations for existing biases against women. He attempts to explain the Hindu preference for a son over a daughter by advancing a psychological argument as in the passage below.

If a cruel fate inflicted widowhood upon the daughter, the calamity would break the parent's heart. Remarriage being no longer possible, parents had to see the heart-rending pain of seeing their daughter wasting herself in interminable widowhood... parents had often to pass through the terrible ordeal of seeing their daughters burning themselves alive on the funeral pyre of husbands. To become a daughter's parent thus became a source of endless worry and misery... As a natural consequence ... passages about the undesirability of the birth of daughter became more numerous.

Alteker is particularly weak in his attempts at relating the status of women at a given point of time with social organization as a whole. Thus early Vedic society which did not as yet have noticeable concentration of power, or a well developed institution of kingship, is the context for Alteker's unnecessary explanation for the absence of queens. Since Alteker is convinced about the high status of women in the Vedic period, he feels he has to account for why we do not hear of women as queens. Thus he is constrained to suggest that

Aryans were gradually establishing their rule in a foreign country surrounded on all sides by an indigenous hostile population that considerably outnumbered them. Under such circumstances queens ruling in their own rights or as regents were naturally unknown. (Alteker 1859,339)

Alteker also explains why women did not own property. According to him, "Landed property could be owned by one who had the power to defend it against actual or potential rivals and enemies. Women were obviously unable to do this and so could hold no property".

Likewise others Alteker was reflecting a deeply internalized belief in biological determinism and therefore in the physical inferiority of women.

Alteker discussed about the causes for the fall of the status of the Aryan women. He said that The Aryan conquest of the indigenous population and its loose incorporation as members of a separate Varna had given rise to a huge population of semi - servile status. In such a situation Aryan women ceased to be producing members of society and thus lost the esteem of society.

Alteker has thus focused only on the Aryan women. He regards Sudra women as a threat and in his raciest view Sudra women counted for nothing. The most important consequence of Alteker's imitated repertoire of biological and psychological explanations was that the logic of the distorted social relations between men and women is completely obscured. The kind of explanation offered by Alteker might appear to be astoundingly trivial to us today but it is important to remember that, by and large, nationalist historians were content to restrict historical explanations to cultural factors while writing about ancient India. This was in contrast to their focus on economic and social factors while discussing British rule in India". (Chakravarti 1999)

Conclusion

The study regarding the condition of women in Vedic period is a very controversial issue. We can't depend only on the nationalist historians' work because history writing should be impartial. Just as Alteker displaced Mill in his work, it is time we realized that despite Alteker's substantial contribution, we must try to think afresh on the subject. There is an urgent need to rewrite the history of women, a history that does justice to women.

Note 1 The Sanskrit text brahmavadini is the female of brahmavadi. According to Monier-Williams's Sanskrit-English Dictionary, "brahmavādīn" means 'discouring on sacred texts, a defender or expounder of the Veda, one who asserts that all things are to be identified with Brahman'. It doesn't mean "one who speaks like God".

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Love Marriage: Women in Sri Lankan Civil War

Sanghamitra Mookherjee

The tiny, tear-drop shaped island of Sri Lanka has been the home of the majority Sinhalese and the minority ethnic Tamils for centuries. This co-existence was not always peaceful and Sri Lanka became the site of one of the bloodiest civil wars in South Asia in the 20th century which lasted for nearly three decades. The contemporary events of the Sinhala Tamil conflict that began in the early 1980s and formally ended in 2009 have been chronicled in the literature of the island for literature is very frequently used as a means of chronicling ancient and contemporary events as it lends itself as a fluid historical and literary interface.

This article aims to examine one Sri Lankan civil war that transformed the feminine agency within that context of violence and how the survivors chose to bear witness to it. For this purpose, I have taken up *Love Marriage* (2008) [LM], a novel written by V.V. Ganeshanathan. She was born in a Sri Lankan Tamil family in the United States (Ganeshanathan, *Biography*). She belongs to the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora and her family had left Sri Lanka and settled abroad because of the disturbances back home. Her debut novel, *Love Marriage* published in April 2008 had appeared on the long list for the Orange Prize.

The novel is narrated by the daughter of the family and focuses on how the women experienced war, love and exile through the three decades of the Sri Lankan civil war. There is a compelling need for these stories to be told in order to understand how the violence possibly brought about a permanent change in their traditional gender roles and the how the conflict foray into public arenas and roles they were previously barred from.

Through the novel, the author discusses the profile of the LTTE female cadres, direct and indirect combatants, and what motivated those women and girls to take up arms against the government and die a violent death as suicide bombers. The novel portrays how the non-combatants or the propagandist, who did not participate in the war aided the movement in their role as propagandists and while others bore witness and chose to tell their story so that the world could learn about their pain and suffering. The women caught in the civil war in Sri Lanka have been deeply affected and their lives have been transformed in multiple ways. Thus there is an urgent need to produce reliable knowledge expressing

their experiences. The narrator journalist acts as a feminist researcher or advocate who is extremely vigilant and seeks the untold and unheard stories. The listeners of these stories help the women to bear witness to the trauma, they work like therapists and in the process help them reclaim their feminine agency since the most private experiences of the women need to be viewed within the larger socio-political patterns.

The Sri Lankan government's attitude towards the Tamil minority is cited as the primary reason for the rise of the LTTE. The LTTE emerged with a thousand heads, like the mythical Hydra and became one of the deadliest terrorist organisations with its own army, navy, and air force wings that aimed at nothing less than a separate Tamil Eelam at whatsoever possible cost. They had an executive committee, an administrative unit, naval and air units, a propaganda section and a suicide unit making them one of the most structured terrorist organisations in history (South Asia Terrorism Portal, *Liberation Tigers*). The female LTTE soldiers could be categorized as combatants and non-combatants. While the combatants who become suicide bombers were engaged in a more direct front of conflict, the non-combatants who became propagandists aided the movement in various other roles highlighting the way men and women participated in the propaganda machinery of the LTTE and how the movement helped in transforming the lives of women.

Velupillai Prabhakaran, the founder of LTTE, claimed that only women with a revolutionary consciousness could become a revolutionary force and "Only such a revolutionary force can destroy the shackles of oppression" (qtd. in Allison 45). He acknowledged the importance of the women within the organization and considered the development and rise of the women's military wing as one of the greatest accomplishments of the LTTE (de Mel, *Women and the National* 208). But this idea of an empowered female terrorist is countered by Malathi de Alwis who questions the nature of such empowerment of women during times of crisis, since it was unclear whether the female combatants were liberated or subjugated, or agents of change or victims themselves ("Changing Role" 682; Abeysekera 89-90).

The women who had joined the LTTE movement were empowered in a certain way because they were encouraged to fight along with the men in emancipating Eelam. In reality, the LTTE encouraged women's active participation because it needed fresh cadres for its ranks and thus, they supported the empowerment of women, but within the bounds of patriarchy. There were two types of female

participants in the LTTE movement, the active combatants and the non-combatants who, nevertheless, undertook challenging missions. Female cadres like Janani, in *Love Marriage*, who felt active service in the LTTE had the option of helping the movement in their capacity as non-combatants. Traditional gender roles were reversed with the participation of women in the civil war as combatants, and it "created a perception of equality that empowered women to believe in themselves" (Herath 172). The movement helped in changing the contours of the lives of women in Sri Lankan society.

A fictional narrative like Ganeshanathan's *Love Marriage* (2008), can be seen as an interplay between fact and fiction; the collective memories of the communities are actual historical facts while the personal recollections of the characters are the fictionalized accounts of the Sri Lankan civil war presented from a Tamil perspective.

In *Love Marriage*, Kumaran and his daughter Janani were former soldiers of the LTTE who left their lives of direct combat and took up non-combatant roles of propagandists and fund-raisers for the LTTE. *Love Marriage*, blends the first person account of Yalini, a Tamil girl, with the political narrative of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Yalini became aware of how the Sri Lankan civil war had really affected her family when Kumaran and his eighteen year old daughter, Janani, came to live with them. They came to live with Yalini's family since Kumaran was suffering from terminal cancer. Kumaran had been allowed to leave the LTTE with the permission of the leadership and "...They let him go and, in doing so, made him promise not only his loyalty, but also ours. *They let him go only in body* [emphasis mine]. (LM, 35).

Yalini's cousin Janani was also a Tamil Tigress like her head mother. According to Yalini's description, Janani had "strongly muscled arms. Her bearing too, was slightly military... Janani did not follow me but rather walked alongside me... Her eyes darting around, assessing everything carefully. She was not nervous, but her eyes were watchful.... She did not look disoriented or confused" (LM, 39). Janani's face was blank and cold because she had "not yet accustomed herself to the idea of a future" (LM, 261) since there was no future in the place where she came from.

In the past, increasing discrimination and violence against the Tamils had forced people like Vani and Murali, Yalini's parents, to leave the island, while Kumaran and others stayed back and in this process changed the course of their lives and

that of their children. Kumaran and his un-named wife joined the movement to seek redress for the Tamils while his daughter Janani was "educated as a radical ... because she had grown up inside the movement" (LM 260). He had named his daughter Janani, meaning 'mother', possibly because the LTTE had reconstructed the ideal Tamil mother as the "warrior mother" and linked the issues of national liberation with women's liberation (de Alwis, "Changing Role" 682; de Mel, *Women and the Nation* 216-217).

Women like Kumaran's wife broke the "shackles of social constraints" and their militant patriotism blossomed as they joined the armed struggle (Balasingham). Alexander points out that the gendered reconstruction of womanhood helped women to transcend the social barriers and they were not confined to the house during wars but ventured into the battlefield and gained some "control or authority over some aspects of their lives in society" through militarization (1). Since women, like Janani's mother, had symbolic roles as nurturers of society, their active involvement with the LTTE signaled an ultimate moral sanction for the violence.

In describing her silent and reticent cousin Janani, Yalini said that "She was eighteen years old, but so much older. She had done all sorts of things that I did not want to ask her about; she was going to be married. She had never been to college, but she had fought in a war, probably held a gun and knew how to assemble and disassemble it" (LM 151). Female LTTE combatants like Janani broke new grounds by undertaking work that was previously done by men as they learned to use and maintain communication equipment, handle explosives, learned weapon technology, electronics and use the of heavy weaponry (Balasingham).

Janani had secured a passage to Canada for herself and her farther " ...But she claimed none of the escape for herself " (LM39-40). Suthan was a drug dealer who funded the LTTE (LM 147). Yalini realized that the violence precipitated in Sri Lanka was not a part of her Sri Lankan past, but of her present as well. Janani had faith in the LTTE and agreed to the marriage with Suthan because she believed that "They [LTTE] would not send me into something I could not do. This is something that is good-for me for him. *For them* (emphasis mine)" (LM 173). Further, she would remain closely associated with the LTTE by marrying "Suthan, and his politics" (LM 152). This marriage was an LTTE mission as well. Suthan was "someone the Tiger chose" for her and she "let them" (LM 172). Although she had left Sri Lanka and ceased to be an active combatant, her ties

with the LTTE were cemented through her marriage to Suthan. She became a part of the LTTE propaganda and funding machinery even after she ceased to be an active combatant.

The LTTE had created the concept of Ah-hu-maior 'empowerment' (Herath 196). The Puthumai Pen was the masculinized virgin warrior re-christened as the 'Armed Virgin'. LTTE promoted these two powerful gendered symbols—the armed virgin (armed Janani) and the warrior mother (like Kumaran's wife) to appropriate women within its cause. These 'Armed Virgins' who projected the image of sexual purity were readily accepted by the patriarchal Tamil society (Herath 170). The newly recreated combatant woman of the LTTE was presented as an alternative role model for the Tamil women and it was the greatest change from their traditionally gendered image. But in reality, the LTTE presented the old patriarchal values in a new mould so that women would join the movement as it appeared as a means of empowerment to them. The idea of equality and empowerment was used to persuade women and girls to join the movement. As Rita Manchanda says that women were pawns in such movements since their "liberation is accepted only in so far as it fits the contours of the nationalistic project" (115). This proves that the LTTE supported the cause of women's empowerment to the extent that it served to strengthen the terrorist movement, so even if Janani was the 'new woman' who took the decision to marry Suthan, the groom was chosen by the LTTE.

A close scrutiny of the novel shows that the movement had reconstructed Janani's gender identity to a certain extent and led to a limited empowerment. She was very confident about her decision to marry Suthan even though the match had not been arranged by her father according to Tamil Traditions.

Zuzana Hrdlickova says that the new women of the LTTE were self-confident, self-reliant, active in public sphere and took important decisions for themselves and their families (89). Janani was an empowered woman who chose the course of her life, both as a soldier (direct combatant) in Sri Lanka and as a propagandist (indirect combatant) in Canada. However, the nature of this empowerment was very ambivalent since she too reverted to the role of a traditional Tamil girl by settling into a state of matrimony and the LTTE reinforced its patriarchal stance by choosing a groom for her. She agreed to this marriage because she was loyal to the LTTE.

Yalini decided to write down the information she gathered from Kumaran since the act of writing was not only a therapeutic act, but it was also an act of resistance to the oppression, subjugation, repression and trauma inflicted upon the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Transforming Yalini's worldview was Kumaran's last act of propaganda. She acknowledged that she was "A noncombatant, but complicit nonetheless if ... silent" (LM 276).

A close reading of *Love Marriage* shows that Janani and Yalini are used as foils for each other. Ganeshanathan shows how Janani, who had grown up within the LTTE, conformed to Tamil traditions because they were fighting to establish a Tamil Eelam where their traditions could be preserved. On the other hand, Yalini grew up to

question those very same traditions. Yalini was an empowered women and not bound by the traditional norms of Sri Lankan culture because her parents had left their country due to the civil war and her westernized upbringing made her question the Tamil traditions. Through Yalini's questions the novelist has put under inquiry the conventional Tamil traditions and norms. In contrast to Yalini, her cousin Janani had a very difficult life in Sri Lanka. When Janani got married to Suthan she was "SMILING" (LM 273) and Yalini felt that Janani chose to marry Suthan because he was "able to dream the two of them into new selves, living in a happier Sri Lanka." (LM 276). The marriage itself was not based on their love for each other, but for their common love for Eelam. Kumaran too had married a Tigress and they too shared their love for a common cause.

With the "end of the ceremony" begins the marriage of Janani and Suthan. Her life as a combatant ends and she enters the life of a propagandist. From a soldier with a military bearing, she becomes a demure and "proper" bride. This transformation is symbolic of the transformation that she actually undergoes - from a combatant soldier to a non-combatant propagandist. As a civilian she blends among the Tamils of Canada and can carry on her work for the LTTE.

At the end of the novel Yalini is transformed as well. She consolidates her Sri Lankan Tamil identity and thereby comes to terms with her American identity as well. The identity crisis that she suffered in the beginning of the novel disappears in the end. Through her character Ganeshanathan shows that there is "no precedent" for people of her generation and that some of them would not travel down the path of their parents since they had "entered other countries in which the rules ... do not always apply" (LM 290). Yalini concludes that "The story

cannot always end in marriage. Sometimes it goes beyond that. And sometimes we live our lives alone. This might be my future, but I have learned to live with what is mine and imperfect" (LM 289). She accepts her own imperfect life gladly and hopes that "Someday, I will be able to walk into that country again, because they [her parents] walked out of it" (LM 289).

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A Warrior with a Pen: Traversing the Feminist Perspective of Ashapura Devi's *Pratham Pratishruti*

Debolina Biswas

Literature is judiciously a periphery where human beings have the liberty to express their misery, exultation, protest, moan and laugh irrespective of their race, gender and religion. In simple words through literature every individual gets the power to express her/his own point of views. Literature provides voice to the suppressed and to the vanquished ones too. It is very important for women to have access into the world of literature where they can express their views with the help of ink. If we peep through the windows of history, we will encounter many women writers who were forced to hide their real names in their respective published works as it was a considered a 'crime' or a 'sin' for women of those era to write. Due to this irrelevant dogmatic prejudice many women used the refuge of pseudonyms. The phenomenal novelist Mary Anne Evans had to take the pseudonym of George Eliot in order to publish her novels. Even the Bronte sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Ann the three sisters who are now considered among the greatest novelists of Nineteenth Century first published their works under the male pseudonyms; Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell.

In my country, in India the situation was quite disparate. Here in old era women did not have any access to education, though there are names of women from ancient India who achieved quite a feat. In spite of many majestic women in ancient times whose significant contribution to literature is commendable, women suffered due to lack of education and a notion that women will become widows if they learn how to read and write was prevalent during the colonial period.

Ashapura Devi is one of the foremost Indian writers. She has written more than 2,000 stories, 240 novels and 62 books for children. Besides these, she has many unpublished essays and letters. She was born in Colonial India in 1909 and she lived until 1995. Her journey as a writer is a stimulus to every women, specially to women who writings explore the condition of women in the society. Ashapura Devi implicitly criticized the patriarchal social norms through her writing.

To readers like me, she is a great warrior who fought her battle with her pen against the rigidity of patriarchal society. Though her most of works revolve around Indian women, their appeal is universal. It is surprising to learn that this gifted writer never went to school. Her childhood was spent in an extremely conservative family. In her early childhood she was dominated by her grandmother who was an advocate of old customs and traditions. The girl children of their family were not allowed to go out and girl children's schooling was prohibited. On the other hand male children had the access on education. Teachers were employed only for the boys. But Ashapura Devi's love for study was indomitable. It is said, when she was a kid she used to listen her brother's reading and by only listening attentively she had memorized the alphabets. Here learning of alphabets reminds us of those ancient Indian students who used to memorize Vedas only by listening to the readings of Veda. Ashapura Devi's struggle as a learner, a reader and finally a writer is reflected in her writings.

In her writings she advocates women's emancipation from the obsolete and meaningless bondages of patriarchal society. Most of her female characters are strongly and fight against the illogical and sometimes evil fundamental concepts and practice of male dominated society.

Ashapura Devi, a prolific Bengali women novelist explores women's innovation and enlightenment during the colonial and post -colonial period in Bengal. Through her short stories and her trilogy - *Pratham Pratisruti* [The first Promise] (1964), *Subarnalata* (1967) and *Bakulkatha* [The story of Bakul] (1974) she tried to articulate the struggle of women of her era. The trilogy expresses the life of three generations of a same family - Satyabati, Subarnalata (the daughter of Satyabati) and Bakul (the daughter of Subarnalata). And through the character of Bakul she eventually establishes a victory over women's emancipation.

In this paper I would like to focus on *Pratham Pratisruti*. The main character of this novel, Satyabati is a burning embodiment of true feminist, who, throughout the entire novel, remonstrates against gender discrimination and against the irrelevant norms of patriarchal society.

Devi has painted the character of Satyabati, the protagonist of *Pratham Pratisruti*, with the colours of fearlessness and rebelliousness. In this novel we can see that Satyabati is not like other women and children. She is different. She always raises her voice against the oppression of women. She questions each and everything and her mind is full with curiosity since her childhood. She always

tries to break the chains of preconceptions of patriarchal society. In the very beginning of the novel we find her having a debate over her willingness to catch fish using a fishing rod because according to her grandmother, it is prohibited for a girl child to catch fish with a fishing rod. But she denies following this kind of irrelevant rules blindly and asks her grandmother that who has written this kind of illogical rules .

“গামছা দিয়ে ধরলে দোষ হয়না? ছিপ দিয়ে ধরলে দোষ ? ...তোমাদের এইসব দোষের শাস্তার কে লিখেছে গো ?(12).

[Isn't it wrong to catch with a gamcha? Is it a fault to catch with fishing rod? ...Who has written these fault rules of yours?]

Satyabati is not like those docile women who mindlessly follow ancient rules and conducts in the name of convention. Instead she tries to comprehend everything with her own logic. In the entire novel in each and every step she challenges every unjust rule formulated against women. As the novel progresses we again see her rebel intonation when Rashbehari , Ramkali's nephew brings second wife at their home , Satayabati a girl of only eight years , raises her voice against this wrongful act of polygamy . She tells her father that the pain of having a " Satin " (husband's another wife) is really pathetic for women . "

“সতিন মানেই কাঁটা বাবা আর কাঁটা থাকলেই তার জ্বালা আছে বড় বৌ এর প্রাণে এখন তুমি সেই জ্বালা ধরিয়ে দিলো”(68)

Ashapura Devi has herself written - "I have ... written mostly about women because I have seen their helplessness and that is what I know best. Over the years, great clouds of protest have accumulated unexpressed in my mind and Satyabati, the heroine of my novel is the expression of that protest." So, from her own assertion, we come to know the fundamental structure of Satyabati's character. Satyabati was the daughter of Ramkali, a priest and an Ayurveda doctor, her bonding with her father was good but her grandmother was an advocate of orthodox conducts and traditions. It is because of her that Satyabati was compelled to marry at the age of eight. After her marriage she has to face a lot of humiliation but nothing was enough to demolish her uprising entity.

In *Pratham Pratisruti*, Devi has also given us the pathetic view regarding widowhood through the character of Sankari. As the story line progresses we can find that Sankari elopes with her lover Nagen but eventually she is betrayed by him and her entire life is shattered. Sankari also has an illegitimate daughter,

Suhasini. But eventually Suhasini gets the access to education with the help of Satyabati which is the only way to rescue women from the dark well of patriarchal society. Satyabati is well acquainted with the value of education. She is well aware of the fact that only education can provide freedom of thought to women. But despite all her efforts, she fails to educate her daughter, Subarnalata. Nevertheless, this failure of hers fails to kill Satyabati's rebellious spirit and towards the end of the novel as the symbol of protest, she leaves her family and does not keep any contact with anyone as long as she is alive. It was her ultimate answer to all who were involved in the conspiracy.

Ashapura Devi was a victim of a male dominated society, like other women of her time. But instead of following the conventions mindlessly or complaining, she protests through her pen. Her first adult novel, *The Husband's Lover*, was published in 1937, and it dealt with men's shifting and conflicting views of women - as conservative, faithful wives and, at the same time, as stimulating, exotic lovers to flaunt to everyone. Devi has a reputation for portraying powerful female characters. Some critics had dismissed her work by calling her the "kitchen witer." I first fell in love with her in 1968, when I read *Pratham Pratishuti*, the first book in her famous trilogy, which was followed by *Swarnlatha* and *Bukul Katha*. This award-winning trilogy from India's National Sahitya Academy chronicled the lives of three generations of women in Bengal's transforming rural and urban environments during the twentieth century.

To me she is a warrior with a pen. She has produced many rebel women with her ink. Through her women characters she has tried to break the shackles of patriarchal society.

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A Study on the Occupational Status of Women of Matigara Community Development Block, Darjiling District, West Bengal

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&

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Introduction

Occupation or work basically shows the means of earning. *An analysis of a population's economic composition unfolds the diverse economic, demographic and cultural attributes of an area, which form the basis for region's social and economic development* (Chandna, 2012). Occupational status of a woman reveals her purchasing power, affordability of better educational and health care services and also the ability to maintain better standard of living. A woman can participate in any kind of work, be it trade, service or business. Her participation in economically productive activity has a significant role to play in her empowerment. A financially independent woman can take her own decisions in a better manner. *Labour force participation of females depends on, among other factors, their marital status, the number of children born to them, social customs, as well as the attitude of society towards female participation in the labour force* (Bhende & Kanitkar, 2011). A study of female workers helps us to understand the employment pattern and status of economically empowered women in any area.

Objectives

This study aims to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To find out the occupational status of women of Matigara Community Development Block;

2. To find out the rural urban disparity of occupational status of women of Matigara Community Development Block.

Database

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected through household survey while secondary data has been collected from Census of India.

Methodology

Relevant literatures were studied, objectives were formulated and questionnaire was framed in the pre field stage of the study. Following Yamane's formula (1967), 396 households were selected as sample households from Matigara Community Development Block. Random Sampling without Replacement Method was applied to select the households. To acquire the requisite information, women of the households were selected as respondents. After collecting the data, it was tabulated, analysed, presented and interpreted. Statistical techniques were applied and maps were prepared. Data was represented using cartographic techniques like bar diagram and pie graph.

The following methodologies were adopted for the study:

1. Percentage to Total = $\frac{\text{Individual Value}}{\text{Total Value}} \times 100$
2. Female Work Participation Rate = $\frac{\text{Total Female Workers}}{\text{Total Female Population}} \times 100$

The Study Area

Matigara Community Development Block is spread over an area of 143 km². There are 72 villages in the block out of which 59 are inhabited villages. The study area has six Census towns. Matigara CD Block has five Gram Panchayats namely, Atharakhai, Matigara I, Matigara II, Patharghata and Champasari. Matigara Community Development Block has a total population of 197,278 out of which 1,01,023 are males and 96,255 are females, (Census, 2011). The study area has a rural population of 1,35,583 and 61,695 urban population (Census, 2011). Siliguri is the nearest city.

Results and Discussions

Female Work Participation Rate:

Female Work Participation Rate represents the percentage of female workers in total female population. Higher FWPR in any region means presence of higher percentage of economically independent women in that area. The highest female work participation rate is found in Mohorgon tea garden (45.80%) whereas Galmakhari has the lowest female work participation rate (3.57%). Among the Census towns, Tari has the highest female work participation rate (28.30%) whereas Kalkut has the lowest female work participation rate (13.85%).

Table 1: Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR) of Villages of Matigara Community Development Block (2011)

Sl. No.	Village	FWPR	Sl. No.	Village	FWPR
1	Sevoke Hill Forest	22.29	31	Mahatram	32.72
2	Sevoke Forest	17.83	32	Udaysingh	22.56
3	Kamala Barir Chhat	10.00	33	Salbari Chhat Pratham Khanda	9.26
4	Khok Long Chhat	13.64	34	Dhukuria	23.53
5	Khoklong	12.47	35	Nichitpur	39.05
6	Bara Adalpur Dwitiya Khanda	42.40	36	Baniakhari	29.92
7	Khaprail	22.46	37	Guria	16.31
8	Patan	19.18	38	Nimai	28.06
9	Fulbari Pataner Chhat	40.54	39	Jugibhita	9.44
10	Ruhinir Chhat	21.43	40	Panchakulguri	15.72
11	Khopolasi	12.04	41	Gouri	39.70
12	Jhauguri	23.63	42	Lalsara Chhat	16.49

13	Jhauguri Chhat	23.29	43	Dumriguri Chhat	22.46
14	Rajpairi	28.32	44	Bataliguri	10.29
15	Chamtaguri Chhat	21.66	45	Lachka	6.35
16	Chamta	37.50	46	Rangia	29.12
17	Panchanai	18.44	47	Nengtichhara	37.19
18	Nunu bairagi	20.00	48	Kawakhari	12.71
19	Mohorgon Tea Garden	45.80	49	Pelku	7.99
20	Purba Karai Barir Chhat	10.74	50	Thiknikata	13.71
21	Galmakhari	3.57	51	Kauakhali	17.48
22	Champasari Chhat	3.92	52	Kalam	14.72
23	Karaibari	8.67	53	Patiram	20.02
24	Sisabari	20.75	54	Tomba	15.32
25	Rupan Chhat	28.04	55	Matigarahat	18.85
26	Palash	14.12	56	Gaurcharan	20.86
27	Kalabari	8.94	57	Bara Gharia	8.67
28	Malahar	15.76	58	Daknikata	29.03
29	Mahishmari	32.96	59	Ujanu	54.38
30	Jadubhitar Chhat	14.10	Source: <i>Computed from Census of India, 2011</i>		

Table 2: Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR) of Urban Centres of Matigara Community Development Block (2011)

Sl. No.	Census Town	FWPR
1	Kalkut	13.85
2	Tari	28.30
3	Bairatisal	16.80

4	Jitu	18.00
5	Mathapari	24.21
6	Bara Mohansingh	15.07

Source: Computed from Census of India, 2011

Occupational Status:

Table 3: Female Workers in Matigara Community Development Block

Residence	Total	Percent
Rural	110	21.44
Urban	21	11.60

Source: Field Survey, 2021

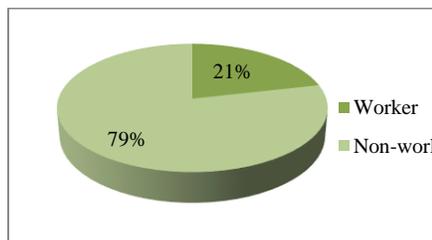


Fig 1: Female Workers (Rural) in Matigara Community Development Block

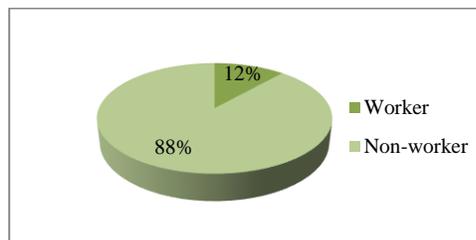


Fig 2: Female Workers (Urban) in Matigara Community Development Block

In Matigara Community Development Block, percentage of women engaged in any economically productive activity is greater in rural area (21%) than the urban area (12%). This may be due to the fact that the poor economic condition of rural households leads the women to find any work that will help them in fulfilling the monetary needs of the family. Women of households where the male members are working as carpenters, painters or labourers engaged in any type of work to augment their household income.

Caste Wise Occupational Status

Table 4: Caste Wise Occupational Status in Matigara Community Development Block

Caste	Rural		Urban	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
General	17	15.45 %	6	28.57 %
Scheduled Caste	46	41.82 %	8	38.10 %
Scheduled Tribes	26	23.64 %	3	14.29 %
OBC	21	19.09 %	4	19.05 %
Total	110	100 %	21	100 %

Source: Field Survey, 2021

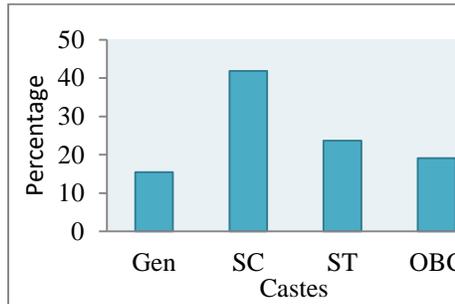


Fig 3: Caste Wise Occupational Status

(Rural) in Matigara CD Block

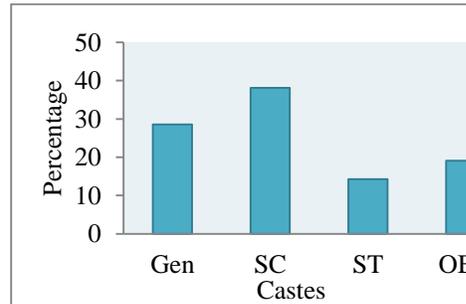


Fig 4: Caste Wise Occupational Status

(Urban) in Matigara CD Block

Caste wise analysis of female workers shows that in rural areas of the study area, out of the total female workers, 41.82% are Scheduled Caste (SC) women, 23.64% are Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 19.09% and 15.45% are OBC and general category women. In urban areas, 38.10% female workers belong to SC category, 28.57% belong to general category, and 19.05% and 14.29% are OBC and ST women.

Occupational pattern:

The type of economically productive activity the women are associated with shows the occupational pattern of the female workers. In both rural and urban areas, one can find numerous types of occupation. We can find female workers

belonging to various ethnic or social groups engaged in variety of occupations. The range of earnings however is very high.

Table 5: Occupational Composition of Women of Matigara Community Development Block

Categories of Occupation	Total	Percent
Business	32	24.43
Service	7	5.34
Labourers	31	23.66
Pottery	16	12.21
MGNREGS	30	22.90
Others	15	11.45
Total	131	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 5 shows the occupational composition of women of the study area. Highest percentage of the female workers (24.43%) are engaged in business involving those working in grocery shops, tailor shops at own home premises and eateries. 23.66% of the female workers are labourers.

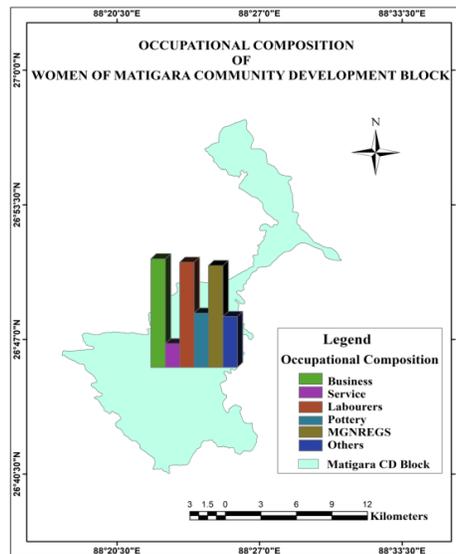


Fig 5: Occupational Composition of Women of Matigara Community Development Block

This group constitutes those who are working as tea garden labourers, local factory workers and workers engaged in local construction works. 12.21% of the women were found to be engaged in pottery in their own home. 5.34 % women were engaged in service which included jobs as office helper and clerk in local private schools and colleges. In others, those are included who work as helpers in shops, tutors, maids and insurance agents.

Level of Education and Occupational Composition:

In determining the type of economically productive activity a worker is associated with, his/her educational level or level of educational attainment is a major factor. A person can shift his/her activity from agricultural to non-agricultural one by attaining higher educational level. Illiteracy and low level of education act as a hindrance whenever any person tries to get a skilled job.

Table 6: Level of Education and Occupational Composition (%) in Villages of Matigara Community Development Block

Occupation	Illiterate	Below Primary	Primary	Secondary	HS	Graduate
Business	0.00	5.71	9.09	53.85	40	0
Service	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	60	0
Labourers	36.84	34.29	36.36	0.00	0	0
Pottery	15.79	20.00	9.09	0.00	0	0
MGNREGS	36.84	28.57	45.45	46.15	0	0
Others	10.53	11.43	0.00	0.00	0	100
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 7: Level of Education and Occupational Composition (%) in Urban Centres of Matigara Community Development Block

Occupation	Illiterate	Below Primary	Primary	Secondary	HS	Graduate
Business	0	100	83.33	60	0	0
Service	0	0	0.00	20	0	60
Pottery	100	0	16.67	0	0	0
Others	0	0	0.00	20	100	40
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

The study between education and occupation shows that illiterate women are engaged as labourers or pottery making or depend on the MGNREGS for contributing additional income to the family income, but as they attain a higher level of education to secondary level, they are engaged in their own business and those who have studied till the Higher Secondary level are also engaged in the service sector. The scenario is similar in the census towns, as the uneducated women are engaged in pottery making while the women who have completed their education at the secondary, higher secondary level or are graduates are engaged in their own business or engaged in services or other work sectors.

Age Specific Occupational Status:**Table 8: Age Specific Occupational Status in Matigara Community Development Block**

Age Group	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65	65-70	70-75	75-80
Rural	0	14	21	19	23	13	9	6	3	0	1	1	0
Per cent	0	12.73	19.09	17.27	20.91	11.82	8.18	5.45	2.73	0	0.91	0.91	0
Urban	1	2	4	7	1	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
Per cent	4.76	9.52	19.05	33.33	4.76	9.52	9.52	0	4.76	4.76	0	0	0

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

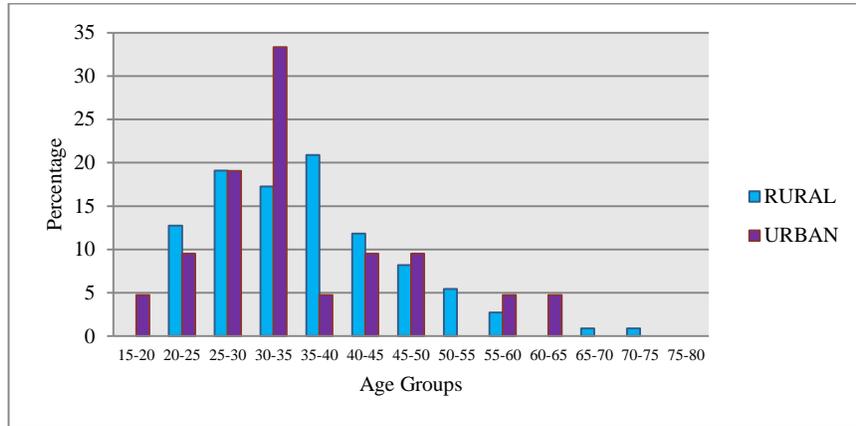


Fig6: Age Specific Occupational Status in Matigara Community Development Block

Table 8 showing the age specific occupational status reveals that the percentage of working women is the highest (20.91 %) in the age group of 35-40 years in rural area where they are working as construction workers, grocery shops, tutors and as office helpers in schools. In the age group of 15-20 years, 60-65 years and 75-80 years, there are no female workers. We find highest percentage of female workers in the age group of 30-35 years in the urban area where they work as nurse, tutor and insurance agent or has own shop. In the age group of 50-55 years, 65-70, 70-75 and 75-80 years, there are no female workers.

Income:

A worker’s income level varies from place to place. Factors like the type of occupation, demand of the work, place of the work and sometimes the experience of the workers too has an impact on the income level of workers. Standard of living of workers is determined by his or her income level.

Table 9: Income Level (Rural) in Matigara Community Development Block

Income (Rs.)	<5000	5000-10000	>10000
Rural	71	30	9
Per cent	64.55	27.27	8.18

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 10: Income Level (Urban) in Matigara Community Development Block

Income (Rs.)	<5000	5000-10000	10000-15000	>15000
Urban	2	8	9	2
Per cent	9.52	38.10	42.86	9.52

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

64.55% of total female workers in rural area of Matigara Community Development Block have a monthly income of less than Rs. 5000. It includes those working as maids, construction workers or tea garden labourers whereas 27.27% fall in the income group of Rs 5000-10000 and the rest i.e. a mere 8.18% fall in the income group of more than Rs. 10000. Highest percentage of female workers (42.86%) in the urban area fall in the income group of Rs 10000-15000 followed by 38.10%, 9.52% and 9.52% in the income group of Rs 10000-15000, less than Rs 5000 and higher than Rs 15000. Here, it can be observed that, majority of female workers in rural area belong to the lowest income group whereas, most of the women (42.86%) in the urban area belong to the considerably higher income group of Rs 10000-15000.

Decision Making Power:

Decision making in family matters include issues related to financial matters, health issues, personal expenses, children's education, purchasing power. A woman's educational status, occupational status and her experience affects her decision making power. Women of the study area were found to prefer joint decision making i.e. decisions taken jointly along with the other family members.

Table 11: Occupational Status and Decision Making Status of Women in Matigara Community Development Block

Working Status	Included		Not included		Total
Worker	125	94.55%	06	5.45%	131
Non-worker	470	79.85%	92	20.15%	562

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

To see if there is an association between the occupational status of the woman and her decision making the above table shows that there is a very strong association between the occupational status of the woman and her decision making power. The women who are educated and earn a higher income has more say in the family matters than a woman who is simply a housewife.

Reasons for Working:

Table 12: Reasons for Working

Rural		Urban	
Economic Help	Self-Satisfaction	Economic Help	Self-Satisfaction
103	7	16	5
93.64%	6.36%	76.19 %	23.81%

Source: Field Survey, 2021

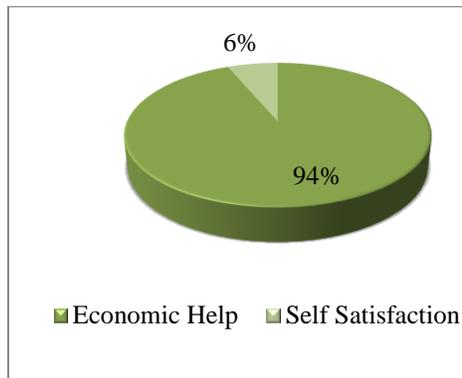


Fig 7: Reason for Working (Rural)

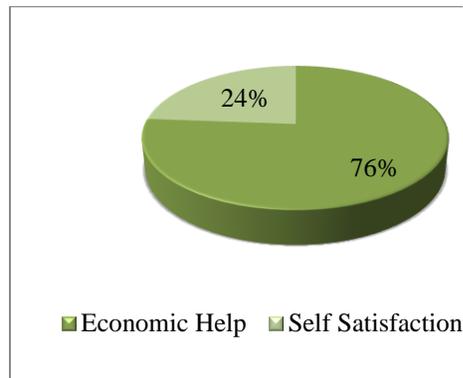


Fig 8: Reason for Working (Urban)

For augmenting the family income, 94% of the female workers in the rural area are engaged in any kind of economically productive work. Rest 6% of the female workers work for self-satisfaction though financial need is also there. 24% of the urban female earners work solely to fulfill financial needs and majority of them (76%) work for self-satisfaction. However, for female workers both in rural and urban area, maintaining balance between household and outside work is a

challenging task. Hindrances faced while doing so is increased if the women do not receive family support. The married female workers sometimes face challenges from their husbands and sometime from their in-laws. As told by the respondents, discouragement from family members is a major reason of them not continuing their job.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above discussions that the problems of female workers need to be addressed so that there is an increase in the share of female workforce and more women take part in economic activities. Not only by the Government, but initiatives taken by the NGOs and all the sections of the society will help in improving the occupational status of the women of Matigara Community Development block. There is a need to generate employment opportunities so that those willing to work are able to find a job. Proper monitoring is required to ensure timely payment of wages of those working under MGNREGS. To increase the number of female workforce, vocational training and skill development centres should be established. Those families discouraging working women need to be identified and should be made to understand how the income of women will lead to the increase in household income.

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A Step towards Liberation: Re-Visiting the English Writings of Begum Rokeya

Dr Dahlia Bhattacharya

The Subaltern voices came to be heard and visible in the South Asian post-colonial literature and theory since 1980s. Many reputed scholars of South Asia have undertaken important works, research and role of the subaltern in the course of history. In the study of post colonial history the term subaltern identifies “the man, the woman and the social group who is socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and of the colonial Mother Country”.ⁱ Women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century far from the power structure were practically subdued in the *andarmahal* without education and rights can be well categorised as subalterns. Education was denied to women irrespective of religion. However, the Hindu women were in the nineteenth century in ‘Renaissance’ Bengal was constantly under focus of debates of Hindu orthodoxy, British Government, the reformists and later the nationalists. But the Muslim women were largely forgotten in the British period and “simply disappear from public discourse” in compared to their Hindu counterpart. Education was denied to the Muslim women in Bengal. They were to receive some elementary education at home and their movement was restricted within the four walls of the house. A rigid boundary was drawn and their world and outside. The voices of the Bengali Muslim women seemed to be ‘invisible’ in the late nineteenth and twentieth century historical discourse. Having becoming objectified and ossified symbols of the community honour, Muslim women were confined within the walls of patriarchal household and their voices silenced. They were frequently spoken of but never allowed to speak about themselves.ⁱⁱ In this background the present article aims to look into some of the writings of Begum Rokeya which became an expression in Bengali against patriarchy, creating new identities and redefining the social structure of the Muslims in Bengal. It tries to focus on the courage taken to overcome the hurdles of the society and on the step taken towards emancipation and freedom.

Rokeya ’s efforts to learn and write

Begum Rokeya was born in the village of Pairaband in Rangpur on 9 December 1880 in a conservative Muslim family where she was tutored in Arabic and Urdu.ⁱⁱⁱ She grew up in a family where she was to observe purdah and as she

mentions later , “I had to observe purdah even from woman from the age of five. I did not understand why it was improper to meet somebody, but I had to observe purdah. The inner side of the house was out of bounds for the menfolk; so I did not have to suffer by their presence. However, women freely entered the house, and I had to hide myself before they could see me. As soon as any woman of the locality would come, somebody of our house would give a signal with the eye and I would run pell mell and hide myself anywhere—in the nook of the kitchen, within the rolled up pallet of the maid-servant and sometimes under the bedstead. I had to run and hide myself just as the chicks do when their mother gives them the signal against a kite. But while the chicks had a definite place—their mother’s wings—to hide, I had no such place. Moreover, the chicks understand their mother’s signal instinctively. I had no such instinct, and if I failed to understand the signal of the eye and came across somebody, the well-wishing elders used to say “How shameless the girls have become!”^{iv}

Gender roles were strictly defined and education was classified for boys and girls. Her father Zahiruddin Saber although learned was particular about the education of his sons in Government schools and colleges and did not provide any formal education to his daughters chiefly for the fear of social stigma associated with female education.^v Female education and “girls with education at that time were regarded as being as abominable as those without purdah”.^{vi} The nineteenth century had social taboos against female education, child marriage and *purdah* among both Muslims and Hindus , which rendered their formal institutions of learning “devoid of female students”. It is true that there were no proper educational institutions for Muslim girls in Bengal in the nineteenth century. J.E. Drinkwater Bethune established an educational institution for girls in 1849 called Bethune School which later became Bethune College in 1879. The Muslim girls received access to the school after 1885. Initially it was known as “Hindu Female School, as it was set up exclusively for educating middle-class Hindu pupils”^{vii}.

Rokeya’s father permitted his daughters to read only Quran in Arabic. Rokeya was primarily self-educated and home-taught, she knew at least five languages: Bangla, English, Urdu, Persian and Arabic. Initially, she learned Bangla mostly from her elder sister Karimunnessa and English from her brother Ibrahim Saber. Her elder brother Ibrahim Saber taught her English secretly.^{viii} Shamsunnahar Mahmud, her first biographer describes: “They had to wait for the dead of the night to be able to conduct their clandestine studies since the family objected to

such untraditional learning for girls.”^{ix}With a deep sense of gratitude, Rokeya dedicated a paragraph of her only novel called *Padmaraga* with the following words: “You have moulded me from childhood...your love is sweeter than honey which after all has a bitter after-taste; it is pure and divine like *Kausar* [the stream of nectar flowing in heaven mentioned in the Quran]”.^x

At an early age of 16 she was married to a magistrate, Khan Bahadur Syed Sakhawat Houssain whose encouragement and official connections widened her exposure to the western world. She got an opportunity to communicate with educated women and it helped her to become “perfect in English.”^{xi}Shamsunnahar Mahmud mentions that: “Later, her husband actively fostered her education and encouraged her to write. Consequently, in spite of never having been to a school to learn, Rokeya grew into an exceptionally knowledgeable woman. Her struggle to achieve this feat indicates the strength of prejudice against female education in her culture.”^{xii}Besides this he had set aside 10,000 rupees for Rokeya to start a school for girls. Upon his death in 1909, Rokeya inherited riches worth 50,000 rupees (a big amount of money at that time) and immediately started a girls’ school first in Bhagalpur in 1909 and then in Calcutta in 1911, named it after him and employed all her knowledge, wealth and energy for its progress. That school is still functioning as Sakhawat Memorial Govt. Girls’ High School, in Kolkata, India.^{xiii}

Literary Activism

Rokeya’s literary activities started with the support of her husband. She wrote that, “If my dear husband had not been so supportive, I might never have written or published anything”.^{xiv}On the insistence of her husband, Rokeya continued with her writing skills and eventually, in 1903-1904, published articles in journals in Calcutta on the oppression of women. She was aware of the fact that women in all patriarchal societies are exploited and oppressed, but felt a need to shed light on women of her group. After losing two children in infancy, Hossain faced deep loss. But she was persuaded by her husband to continue her intellectual pursuits. With continued support from her husband, she published and wrote extensively. She garnered attention when *Sultana’s Dream* was published in 1905 in *The Indian Ladies Magazine*.^{xv}

The Muslims in colonial India had some political and educational organisations like the All India Muslim League, the Central Mohammedan Association and the All India Educational Conference largely for men. There was no platform from which Muslim women could raise their voices and become engaged in the public spheres of power and influence. The central Indian Muslim women's organisation, Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam founded in 1914 in Aligarh and under Rokeya's initiative and untiring work, Anjuman's Calcutta branch was launched in 1916.

This association gave women a chance to assemble and discuss on important women's issues. She especially reached out to women of the poor class and offered financial assistance to poor widows, rescued and sheltered wives that were victims of domestic violence, and provided matrimonial and educational services.^{xvi}

Through her writings, Rokeya challenged long-standing notions about women and argued that providing education for women would be advantageous for society. She strongly believed that an educated woman would be beneficial to her community and her family. Her writings are a reflection of her thoughts on the plight of the Indian woman. Her literary activities spanned three decades, from 1903-1932, in which she became an influential speaker for the rights of women and living example of her works. She mainly focused on women's issues and discussing and solving social problems relating to Bengali Muslims. One of these issues was a woman's right to

education. Rokeya placed great importance on education and addressed antiquated attitudes from

Muslim men here: "Most of the people are so prejudiced against female education that the very term makes them shudder with all the possible evil effects. The society might forgive the pitfalls of uneducated women, but the slightest mistake—real or imaginary—on the part of a woman with some education is magnified hundredfold, and laying all the blame at the door of education they shout in one voice "down with female education".^{xvii}

She also believed that education was a necessary mental exercise that was important for a woman's development. In her words, "God has given us hands, feet, ears, mind and ability to think. If we strengthen our hands and feet through exercise, do good work through our hands, make use of our ears and develop our ability to think that is true education"^{xviii}. Rokeya would often focussed her

writing to address the immediate need for women's awakening, Muslim awakening in Bengal and Bengal's awakening in matters of women's rights. Rokeya writes about the degraded status of women in *Stree Jatir Abanati*, about the evolution of man into a being who subordinates women through intellectual and physical prowess.^{xix} In a series of reports, Rokeya also depicted the degraded status of women in Griha (Home), Ardhangi, Muktipal, Aborodhbhasini, Padmarag (Ruby), Bhrata bhagni and Nari Sristi.

Her main concern was the stress and change of Indian Muslims under colonial rule. In 1903 Rokeya published five articles titled: Strijatir Abanati (The Degradation of Women), Ardhangi (The Female Half), Sugrihini (The Good Housewife), Borka (The Cloak), and Griha (Home)—which discussed purdah and seclusion extensively. These works were later collected into a book in 1908 titled Motichur. Other works included Pipasa (Thirst), Murder of Delicia, Padmarag (The Ruby), Sultana's Dream and Abarodh Bashini (Those Behind the Curtain). Rokeya in her writings stood against patriarchy and conservatism in Muslim society. She wrote mostly in Bengali and much less in English. Among her writings which have been much talked of Sultana's Dream was written in English, a Utopian feminist novel and two essays in English on women's education namely, God Gives, Man Robs and Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl.

Sultana's Dream: A Feminist Utopia

Sultana's Dream was one of Rokeya Hossain's English-language publications. Published in 1905, Sultana's Dream was featured in the Indian Ladies Magazine that was based in Chennai, India. Kamala Saththiandhan started The Indian Ladies Magazine in July 1901 and its audience was primarily women in India who could read in English and wanted to keep abreast of women's issues.^{xx} For Rokeya Hossain, to write in English was an anomaly. She acknowledges her brother in teaching her English and consistently tutoring her in language. Yet *Sultana's Dream* became a pivotal and famous work in her career. Rokeya Hossain originally wrote the piece to pass the time until her husband would come home. When her husband did come back, she did the following: "When Sakhawat came back after two days, the first thing he did was to ask casually what she had been doing in his absence. Rokeya then showed him the story and, wrapped with

curiosity, Sakhawat read the whole piece without caring to sit down. When he finished, he mumbled, "A terrible revenge."^{xxi}

Sultana's Dream was a simple story of a woman that is dreaming and happens to visit a land which is called "Lady land," where there is law and order. The land is devoid of violence, corruption and crime. The people of "Lady land" have learned to appreciate Nature and treat each other with respect and love. In "Ladyland," child marriage is banned and education is encouraged amongst women. Rokeya Hossain wanted to motivate Bengali Muslim women towards a process of self-realization and lift the obstacles away that hindered women and society. *Sultana's Dream* captures many issues regarding women's rights, and reflects a relentless and lifelong battle against people in her society that limited women from being able to control their fate. "Lady land" is Rokeya Hossain's ideal of a place where women are free to be a part of society and innovate to their hearts' content. It is a place where men are put in the zenana [seclusion] and where Rokeya Hossain addresses the contrast of personality between men and women.^{xxii}

Rokeya narrates the story through three main characters: Sultana, Sister Sara and The Queen. The first important part in *Sultana's Dream* is the description of "Ladyland." The setting in *Sultana's Dream* is quite important as the main character is slumbering in a zenana [seclusion]. Sultana wakes up to find Sister Sara and follows her outside. This is where "Ladyland" is introduced to readers: "Where In their proper places, where they ought to be. Pray let me know what you mean by 'their proper places.' O, I see my mistake; you cannot know our customs, as you were never here before. We shut our men indoors".^{xxiii}

The setting of "Ladyland" is of a place where women have successfully freed themselves from the control of men. She has envisaged a society for women where women are free to practice scholarly pursuits. Rokeya is argues about the narrow customs of the society and the custom of women kept in seclusion. It is been shown in a dialogue between Sister Sara and the Sultana :

"But, dear Sultana, how unfair it is to shut in the harmless women and let loose the men. Why? It is not safe for us to come out of the zenanas [seclusion], as we are naturally weak.

Yes, it is not safe so long as there are men about the streets, nor is it so when a wild animal enters a marketplace. Of course not. Suppose some lunatics escape from the asylum and begin to do all sorts of mischief to men, horses, and other

creatures: in that case what will your countrymen do? They will try to capture them and put them back up into their asylum.

Thank you! And you do not think it wise to keep sane people inside an asylum and let loose the insane? As a matter of fact, in your country this very thing is done! Men, who do or at least are capable of doing no end of mischief, are let loose and the innocent women shut up in the zenanas [seclusion]! How can you trust those untrained men out of doors? We have no hand or voice in the management of our social affairs. In India man is lord and master. He has taken to himself all powers and privileges and shut up women in the zenanas [seclusion].”^{xxiv}

It is interesting to note how Rokeya discusses the issue of power and how men hold dominion over women. The terms “lord” and “master” is a kind of a crusade against the subjugation of women and the status of women during her time. She brings to attention the issue of power and privileges. Another aspect that Rokeya Hossain discusses how men unfairly use their power to keep women secluded physically, but also mentally. She argues this creates a situation for women where they cannot contribute to society and become burdens to their families. Rokeya Hossain uses an accusing tone that questions the practice of seclusion as being too steeped in superstition.^{xxv} The indignation present in Sister Sara and Sultana’s dialogue is present as if Rokeya is arguing the unjust system of seclusion. Rokeya is sympathetic to the plight of the women, but also a critic in the following excerpt below:

Why do you allow yourselves to be shut up?

Because it cannot be helped as they are stronger than women.

A lion is stronger than a man, but it does not enable him to dominate the human race. You

have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves, and you have lost your natural rights by

shutting your eyes to your own interests.^{xxvi}

Rokeya draws an analogy between the human and lion reveals two things: strength does not equal power and believing one is weak is walking away from the duty of pursuing self-interest. Another way of discussing this passage is that Rokeya Hossain is holding women accountable for their misery. Rokeya Hossain continues this style of conversation between Sister Sara and Sultana. When

Sultana asks about the creation of “Ladyland,” Sister Sara provides a brief history here:

‘The Queen circulated an order that all the women in her country should be educated. Accordingly, a number of girls’ schools were founded and supported by the Government. Education was spread far and wide among women. And early marriage also was stopped. No woman was to be allowed to marry before she was twenty-one.’^{xxvii} In the passages above, Rokeya Hossain emphasizes her interest in educating girls and women, but also terminating the practice of early marriage. In “Ladyland,” Rokeya Hossain sets the marriageable age at 21.

The idealism of “Ladyland” as a place where women can innovate comes into question by the men. The men belittle the achievements of the women and Rokeya Hossain describes the men of “Ladyland” as those interested in “increasing their military power” and being dismissive towards the achievements of the women in Ladyland.^{xxviii} Intentionally, Rokeya Hossain created “Ladyland” to be an antithesis to her homeland of India. As Roushan Jahan, a biographer of Rokeya Hossain, notes:

Women in Ladyland are powerful, but to portray a society where women are in position of power, Rokeya did not find it necessary to eliminate men or to propose anything so drastic as Charlotte Perkins Gilman did a few years later in *Herland*, in which pathogenesis was the means for continuing a unisex society. In Ladyland, men are part of the society but are shorn of power, as women were in Rokeya’s India. They live in seclusion and look after the house and the children, again, just like the women in Rokeya’s India. Women, the dominant group in Ladyland, do not consider men fit for any skilled work, much as Indian men thought of women at the time.^{xxix}

Indeed, Rokeya Hossain wanted “Ladyland” to portray women at their best and at the same time exact revenge on a male population that had taken delight in shutting women indoors. Rokeya Hossain purposefully removes men from power to show that the power in women’s hands can be used more efficiently than by men. This role reversal is intriguing, and it is not shocking that Rokeya Hossain chose to write *Sultana’s Dream*. She wanted it to be a feminist utopia that elements of fury, cynicism and revenge. Despite her scathing portrayal of men in *Sultana’s Dream*, Rokeya Hossain’s revenge on men was not to get rid of them. Instead, Rokeya Hossain subjected the men of “Ladyland” to the same conditions they placed on the women of “Ladyland.” Hence, it came as no surprise that

Rokeya Hossain chose to include the clash between the men and women in “Ladyland”.^{xxx}

In Sultana's Dream, women emerge as superwomen through education. They have the caliber to use science and technology for the best of their country. The basic theme of Sultana's Dream is education and adaptation of science. Rokeya distinguishes feminine and masculine technology very clearly. Musai supports her saying: “Feminine technology is related to solar energy and is environment friendly. On the other hand, masculine energy is based upon the power of muscles and weapons.”^{xxxi}

God Gives, Man Robs

God Gives, Man Robs was published in ‘The Mussalman’ on December 6, 1927. In this essay Rokeya criticizes the male-dominated society for depriving women from their rights. She criticizes her Mussalman community for their lag- behind attitude towards education, and Hindu communities for banning widow marriage. In words this essay speaks of the deprivations of the women in the society, especially their deprivation to get education which brings emancipation from the restriction of humanity and slavery. Rokeya writes, ‘The best crime our brothers commit against us is to deprive us of education.’ In Islam it is said that, “It is the bounden duty of all Muslim males and females to acquire knowledge”.^{xxxii}

Rokeya gives her personal opinion that , God who is the Giver while it is man who is the robber. She goes on to say that God has created men and women with same animal instincts such as hunger, thirst, and the necessity to sleep. Rokeya further states that as per Islamic statute, both men and women are dictated to pray five times a day. Therefore, there is no dissimilarity that has been divinely sanctioned upon men and women. In the essay “God Gives, Man Robs”, Rokeya touches on the core of Islamic teachings; according to her, leave no room for gender injustices which were clearly prevalent in her society. Rokeya critiques patriarchal, mainstream interpretations of Islam and re-examines them by using the hermeneutic tool of ‘ijtihad’, critical thinking and reinterpretation of the Qur’an and prophetic teachings, in order to restore the egalitarian message of Islam and to get rid of misogynist elements mixed with it in her social setting.^{xxxiii} Thus, she pointed her finger at those who thought themselves the custodians of Islam and abused this position to promote patriarchal authority at the expense of women’s sufferings. Rokeya asks for the true values of Islam: “In Arab society,

where women were being oppressed and female infanticide was widespread, the Prophet Muhammad came to their rescue. He not only promulgated some precepts but also set an example how to treat women with respect. He showed how to love one's daughter by demonstrating his love to Fatima [his daughter]. That love and affection for one's daughter is rare on earth. Alas! It is because of his absence among us that we [women] are in such a despicable plight! Rokeya did not go against her religion or cultural values.^{xxxiv}

Hossain notes: "When Rokeya looked for role models to show that emancipation was possible, she turned not to Western women but those of the subcontinent or the Muslim world." She promotes 'idealised Islamic values' and highlights Islam's emancipatory aspects by looking at Qur'an and Hadith through the prism of justice and jurisprudence of gender equality. She also expresses her anger towards Calcutta Corporation for not establishing a safe environment for girls' education. She ends the essay with a hope to convert Shakhawat Memorial High School to convert into a one congenial for girls' education.^{xxxv}

"Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl"

Her second essay written in English deals with the criticism of the existing educational system in India, its evolution history, and how it transformed into a hotchpotch after getting blended with the western ideals for education. She emphasizes on the importance of planning an education for the girls that will in the long run cause intellectual and moral development of the girls. Here we get a glimpse of how advanced Rokeya was in terms of thinking about the female education and how serious she had been about the advancement, education, emancipation and after all the good of the girls. She writes, "We should by all means broaden the outlook of our girls and teach them to modernize themselves." For this the needs of education is immense and Rokeya understood this at the advent of twentieth century. She believes, "The future of India lies in its girls." She ends her essay hoping that Indian girls will attain education and education will broaden their outlook, will make them sensible, will refine them. Indian girls will not only pursue University degrees but also become obedient daughters, loving sisters, dutiful wife and instructive mother.^{xxxvi}

The essay reveals her intense desire for educating women. Rokeya says that girls should broaden their outlooks and modernize themselves. Girls should be taught how to carry out their duties “commendably” and focus on long term plan, which is not “superficial” but pragmatic because the future of India “lies in its girls”. Rokeya invites all women to come forward and educate themselves to challenge this onslaught on them. She wanted to see Indian women educate through awakening their consciousness, self-confidence, and self-respect about their own right which should drive them forward. She talked about women’s educational advancement in relation to men’s interest in it and argued that if the mothers remained ignorant their sons would never be brave and bright.^{xxxvii}

Conclusion

For centuries, Muslim women in Bengal region have lived solitary of *abarodh* or seclusion. Their seclusion provided an opportunity to develop patriarchal domination and prevent the question of male dominance. The Muslim elites in the twentieth century were drawn to the British educational system and British institutions but it did not address to women’s liberation. The upper class women had no economic and social role in the public domain, led to a total separation of the public and private spheres in the *sharif* society. The writings of the Rokeya raised the question of patriarchy and seclusion. It brought in the fore front the voice of a woman who through their personal experiences and obstacles moved towards emancipation. Her writings brought to the forefront the ideas of female education and women’s social rights. Social subjugation, social obstacles, inequality and patriarchy were reflected in her writings.

Begum Rokeya became a standing pillar followed by many Muslim women writers like Shamsunahar Mahmud, Fajiltunessa, Sufia Kamal who inspired for arousing the women from darkness of seclusion, illiteracy and ignorance. Her writings in English were liberal and sometimes bold and courageous against oppression of patriarchy and took step to change the mindset of the contemporary society towards women. Her writings bear a similarity with feminist philosophers of the other parts of the world. As Simone De Beauvoir, an eminent feminist philosopher writes, “When man makes of woman the other, he may, then, expect her to manifest deep-seated tendencies towards complicity. Thus, woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity,

and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the other”.^{xxxviii} Similarly Rokeya wrote: A Cow owner perforates the nose of the bullock to put the harness; our masters in this country have made us wear a nose ring set with a pendant. That nose –ring is the symbol of the master’s being and presence.”^{xxxix} Hence the thoughts and writings of Begum Rokeya in the twentieth century were in the form of protest against patriarchy and was a step towards liberation of Muslim women in Bengal.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Hossain Al Mamun, ‘Begum Rokeya ‘s English Works:Relevance to Women’s Education’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Hum.)*, Vol. 60(2), 2015, p-232

^{iv} H. Joarder, *Begum Rokeya, the emancipator*. Dacca: Nari Kalyan Sangstha :distribution, Bangladesh Books International, Dacca, 1980, p-6

^v Md. Mahmudul Hasan, “Marginalisation of Muslim Writers in South Asian Literature: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s English Works.” *South Asia Research* 32.3 (2012).p-193

^{vi} Yasmin Hossain, “The Begum’s Dream: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and the Broadening of Muslim Women’s Aspirations in Bengal.” *South Asia Research* 12.1 (1992), p-6.

^{vii} Srabashi Ghosh “Birds in a Cage: Changes in Bengali Social Life as Recorded in Autobiographies by Women.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 21.43 (1986), p-91

^{viii} Hossain Al Mamun, op cit , p-46

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^{xi} Md. Mahmudul Hasan, Commemorating Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Contextualising her Work in South Asian Muslim Feminism, *Asiatic*, Vol. 7, No. 2, December 2013, p-46

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- ^{xvi}Md. Mahmudul Hasan, op cit , (2013)p-47
- ^{xvii}H. Joarder, op cit, p-12
- ^{xviii}Ibid , p. 24
- ^{xix}Ibid , p. 20
- ^{xx}R.S. Hossain & B. Bagchi, *Sultana's Dream: And Padmarag : Two Feminist Utopias*: Penguin 2005, pp. 30-31
- ^{xxi}Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, “Bayujaney Ponchas Mile: Safol Swapno”, (Fifty Miles in the Air: A Dream Came True), In Abdul Quadir (ed.) *Rokeya Rachanabali*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2006 [1932], pp. 252-53
- ^{xxii}Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, op cit , pp. 1-2.
- ^{xxiii}Ibid , p-8-9
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- ^{xxvi}Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, 1988, pp. 8-9
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- ^{xxxii}Roushan Jahan (ed.), “Rokeya: An Introduction to Her Life”, New York: The Feminist Press, 1988, p. 42
- ^{xxxiii}Hossain Al Mamun, op cit, p- 238
- ^{xxxiv}Md. Mahmudul Hasan, *Op. cit.*, p. 189-90

^{xxxv}Yasmin Hossain, "The Begum's Dream: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and the Broadening of Muslim Women's Aspirations in Bengal", *South Asia Research*, Vol. 12, 1992, p. 4

^{xxxvi}Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "Education Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl", In Abdul Quadir (ed.) *Rokeya Rachanabali*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2006 [1931], pp. 494-95

^{xxxvii}Hossain Al Mamun, op cit, p-239

^{xxxviii}Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Translated by H.M.Parshley, Penguin, 1972.

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Women , Leisure and a Room of Their Own : a Brief Appraisal

Dr Zinia Mitra

Serious study on leisure can be said to have begun in the west with historians like Ruby Koshar and Peter Borseley who explored the profound inter-relationship between leisure and culture. P. Bailey who studied history and leisure and recreation has made a significant intervention on the subject in his “Leisure, Culture and the Historian: Reviewing the First generation of Leisure Historiography” (1989).

Some solicitous scholarship has been done in western academia with women’s leisure as a serious theme of feminist analysis. Some serious feminist scholarships on leisure include: *Women's Leisure, What Leisure? A Feminist Analysis* by Eileen Green, Sandra Hebron and Diana Woodward (1990); “Gender, Work and Leisure in the Eighties - Looking Backwards, Looking Forwards” by Rosemary Deem (Sage Journal 4:5,1990); “The Politics of Women's Leisure” by Rosemary Deem (Sage Journal 33;1, 1985); “All work and no play? The Sociology of Women and Leisure” by Karla A. Henderson (Annals of Leisure Research, Routledge , 19:1, 2016) ; *Gender and Leisure : Social and Cultural Perspectives* by Cara Charmichael Aitchison (Routledge, 2003); “The Promise and Problems of Women’s Leisure and Sport” by Jennifer Hargreaves in *Leisure for Leisure* ed. Chris Rojek (Palgrave Macmillan 1989).

In modern studies on leisure, Charlotte Brundson has explored the history of female involvement with soap opera, from program ads to interviews with leading soap opera scholars. She has shown how a feminist soap opera scholarship was a significant reading into the persona of a woman in conversation with her imaginary other. Her book acknowledged the soap opera as a legitimate object of research and incorporated intimate autobiographical accounts into a wider narrative that traced the transition from women's early thoughts of emancipation to feminism (Brundson 2000). In "The Housewife Mass Communication Research in the 1940s" Arnheim, Kaufman, and Herzog explored classic radio soap opera research in the U.S. during the late 1930s and early 1970s. They analyzed how this genre, its heroines and listeners are represented in literature and addressed some of the most interesting papers that have been published in this genre during the time.

Feminist leisure analysis has made women's lives visible, documented power imbalances within social institutions and cultural spheres and addressed the need for equality and freedom of choice in all spheres of women's lives which includes the choice of leisure. (Henderson et al. 1996)

Women's leisure studies have engaged with the ways in which women have compromised spaces and also carved out spaces for themselves in the face of the power and censorship of patriarchy. The studies have stressed the changing connotations of the concept for women, over time and space, and also on the shifting lines of demarcation between work and leisure. In India, critical research on the area of leisure is comparatively new.

The present paper focuses on the development of the concept of leisure in the upper middle-class and middle-class women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. The paper attempts to study, in its brief ambit, the patriarchal strategies that endeavored to structure and control women's everyday lives, their time and their activities, prescribed and proscribed pleasures and the women's contentions with these strategies and their struggle and search for freedom in the realm of creative imagination.

The ideas of 'work' and 'leisure' have undergone many shifts in meaning in any given society. The concept of 'quality time' is a twentieth century concept with earliest records of the phrase found in print in *The Capital* in January 1973, in an article titled "How to be Liberated".

My readings into the everyday lives of Bengali Hindu middle and upper middle-class women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal reveal their love for stories and poetry, from oral renderings of religious texts and hagiographies to gossips, perhaps as a respite from the unsatisfactory realities of their own domestic captivities.

The nineteenth century women working outside their homes in Bengal, in the few professions that were available to them, or involved in committees, public readings (or movements) were likely to be heavily engaged in housework and childcare back home and not have time for leisure. The little time they found after their dedication to housework might have meant for development and preparations for professional purposes, which was seldom taken seriously by others in the household. Affluent women, had time for music and sang them in elaborate rituals observed in their houses, and also did some embroidery.

Housewives involved in cooking or supervision of household staff, if married to affluent men, and serving in-laws and children, also found time sometimes for singing and embroidery. Separation of work and home were experiences of only the middle-class and rural men. Rich men more often had offices at home and managed their accounts from home-office with sporadic visits to estates or property they owned. Most of the upper and middle-class women were cut off from public life altogether. Women's leisure, therefore, was more privatized.

Like in all other aspects of life, masculine and feminine duality was evident in leisure. While kings and the rich men went hunting, fishing, travelled, or gambled, their wives stayed indoors with supervision of housework and rituals. Women did not participate in drinking parties or watch the performances of courtesans, which were parts of masculine entertainment. Girls had no organized sports. They were supposed to help in the household chores; help the mothers bring up other siblings before they barely grew up themselves. The middle class women stayed indoors with domestic work or were engaged in giving instructions to servants. During the colonial period, elite Bengali went to *paschim* for change of weather for health purposes. Sometimes they built or bought houses in the fashion of the British. Women accompanied them along with a retinue of maids and servants.

Leisure was considered an evil, especially for the economically dependent, and therefore, to be controlled and shaped by the powerful. The nineteenth and early twentieth century women were involved in housework throughout the day till they went to bed, presumably after everybody else, engrossed in the roles of ideal mothers and ideal housewives, they cooked and served the husband, children and the in-laws dutifully. In the absence of kitchen appliances like mixer-grinders or microwaves, or refrigerators or even gas-burners cooking took up much of their time and left them with little time for leisure. Cooking was a detailed and exhausting exercise for the middle-class women, with little or no domestic help and with the varieties of dishes to be prepared at every meal. Regular *pujo* and *sandhayarati* for the Hindu women, and observing of different rituals like *sasthi*, *itupujo*, *punnipukur* or *pous parban* or other such observations kept the women within the framework of a constricted schedule while allowing them a carved space of entertainment only within the framed rituals.

The leisure of women has been cast in a variety of ways in male narratives. Sometimes we find them elaborately dressing draping beautiful saris. Makeup

and hairdo by upper-class women occupies their leisure-time. If women were allowed in *kirtaan* or *padavali* songs or *jatra*, they were seated behind curtains. Sometimes we see them portrayed as gossiping in their leisure -time, and yet sometimes, when the British culture was filtering in, we see women portrayed as playing cards, playing pianos and singing, sometimes also stealing their way to watch theatre performances. The leisure of Charulata portrayed by Satyajit Ray in the film *Charulata* will remain a classic example.

Taking all matters into consideration, the poor woman of this country should be an object of compassion rather than of our contempt. The stimulus given to India by British example, and capital employed for the education of Indian females, is not among the least of her beneficial operations. The time will come when their worth shall be duly appreciated by the daughters of India; and then, should this work chance to be perused by them, they will sigh at the follies of their ancestors, smile at their own good fortune.

(Capt. N. Auustus Williard 2)

Sumanta Banerjee begins his “Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal” with a quotation from N. Augustus Willard’s “A Treatise of the Music of India”(1834).The Englishmen who came to Bengal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, carried two burdens (along with their political motives), the 'burden of white man' to educate the unenlightened indigenous people, and also the 'burden of man' to emancipate indigenous women from what they perceived as socio-cultural condition of gross ignorance and impurity. The educated Bengali *bhadralok* who associated with the British on professional and also on personal levels shared their concerns about educating women and moved towards framing a common behavioral and cultural norm.

The instituting of a model of female education in Bengal was primarily fashioned by contemporary English missionaries, educators, and administrators. The concept of the emancipation of women by the Bengali *bhadralok* was derived from the English but was significantly modified by the patriarchal norms of traditional Hindu society. It was a conceptual framework that women across families shared over time.

Bengali women of the nineteenth century, like their companions in other regions, were not a homogeneous group. Their lifestyles and daily occupation varied according to whether they belonged to the rich or middle-class or were poor. While the women married to affluent families and not-so affluent families stayed indoors in seclusion in the *andarmahal*, the women of the lower-class and caste, like that of the wife of a barber or a weaver, or the domestic help, or the rural women employed in pottery or basket making or other agricultural works were mobile. The rural women and the lower-class women participated in popular festivals and also sang in chorus in weddings and in other local rituals. With the fall of the rural economy there was a regular exodus of men and women into the city. The indigenous women brought with them a rich folk culture and their own dialects. For the vast number of women in the cities who stayed indoors secluded, it was the lower-class women who worked as cooks or domestic help or the barber's wife or the weaver's wife who helped in pedicure or decorated the feet of upper-caste women with *alta* during pujas were the only link to the outside world. They were the bearers of local news and gossip.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the education system created a new race of women in the educated Bengali homes who through their engagement with books and writings cultivated new behavioral habits that replaced the earlier popular women's leisure altogether.

Earlier, women were often clubbed together with the lower classes as participants in various popular genres. Sumanta Banerjee refers to issues of *Somprakash* (23 Nov. 1863, 10, and April 1864, *Chaitra*, 23, B.S. 1270) where there are references of 'vulgar masses' comprising of women, lower-class, and children as spectators of performances in pantomimes, lampooning and farces, and a reference to the decline in the popularity of *kathakatha* amongst the educated men. The women, however, continued as its admirers. The attitudes of educated Bengali *bhadrolok* reformists influenced the conceptual framework of women's emancipation and their tastes for leisure. Attempts were made to disassociate women and children from existing popular cultures. With the initiation of social reforms such as women's education, widow remarriage, ban on child marriage, ban on *Kulin* Brahmin polygamy, efforts were made to ensure greater participation of women in new socio-cultural milieu. The denunciation of popular culture was concurrent with the formation of a new educated culture.

The vacuum produced by the repression of popular culture in women's regular lifestyle was quickly filled up by the novel. This genre of prose constructed as a long fictional story was a new introduction in Bengal in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The novel known by various names as *upannyash*, *akhayika* also *upakhan* became immensely popular in Bengal during the latter half of the nineteenth century (Chakraborty 1963). The emergence of the press made printed books easily available. The serialized novels became the chief attraction in monthly or bimonthly journals.

Like the novel, the women readers were a new emergence in Bengal. The missionaries, reformists, some educated families who arranged for women's education at home, and the newly established schools, increased the literacy rates among women. The English had opened a number of women's schools but several of them gathered a reputation of having a hidden agenda of conversion. The Hindu or Muslim families, therefore, refrained from sending their girls to such schools. It was John Drinkwater Bethune who established the first school for women's education in Calcutta in 1849 with a strong mandate for secularism. Other influential schools for women's education that enrolled a significant number of girls and young married women students are Mahakali Pathshala established by Mataji Maharani Tapaswini in Calcutta in 1893 and Sister Nivedita Girls School established by Sister Nivedita in 1898. But soon enough the advocators of women's education began to dictate the kinds of books women should read. They preferred that women should confine themselves to religious books and books with moral teachings. An overarching fear that women under the influence of novels were turning indolent, growing careless in household tasks, turning uncaring towards elders, hysteric, immoral, and also sexually deviant was recurrently voiced by Bengali intelligentsia during the time. This anxiety sometimes found its way into the pages of journals and periodicals. Once the leisure was structured and provided and approved as refined, attempts were made to control that leisure.

Apart from novels, women also turned to read plays, poems, and with the enlightenment filtering in, some families allowed women to watch play performances, giving rise to similar anxieties in general. However, recourse to pleasure outside the domain of household was a luxury shared only by a handful.

Reading remained the predominant leisure-time engagement for women in Bengal even after the introduction of the radio post World War I with the

popularity of programs like *Galpo Daur Ashor*, *Sangeet Sikhar Ashor*, and *Mahila Mahal* and the radio plays and even after the introduction of the TV with Saturday and Sunday movies and popularity of serials like *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, *Buniyaad* and *Ramayan*, and *Mahabharat* in DD National or *Tero Parban*, *Satyajit Ray Presents*, *Bomkyesh Bakshi* in DD Bangla in mid-1980s. The shift was slow. Gradually even the elderly women, who had hitherto ventured only a little into secular texts gradually succumbed to the charm of the TV and like the old-time radio, TV became a companion of the old. But reading habits persisted. By then *Desh* magazine (published since 1933) had already become a household name. *Rabibashoriyo*, the Sunday supplement of *AnandabazarPatrika* was equally popular. Women's magazine *Sanandawas* introduced in 1986 with Aparna Sen as its first editor. *Anandalok* was first published in 1975. These magazines, along with some others, have made their permanent place in the Bengali household.

Some women during the colonial period had defied the societal proscriptions that threatened them with impending widowhood if they learned to read and write. They learned to read and write. We have the famous example of Rasusundari Devi (1809-1899) who taught herself to read and wrote the first autobiography in modern Bengali. The women writers used the little time they could save after their busy domestic schedule to try their hands at writing novels, stories, plays, and poetry.

Several of Tagore's short stories depict this endeavor with sympathy, and show how the women have received support or sometimes hindered by their families and husbands. In *Nastaneer* Charulata is encouraged to write by her husband Bhupati and brother-in-law Amal. In 'Khata' the young girl is ridiculed by her husband and in-laws when caught at writing.

Secretiveness marked the entrance of Bengali women into the realm of literary creativity. They wrote from their confinement like their English counterparts.

That is what Jane Austen, too, chose to do when she ironically defined her work-space as two inches of ivory, what Emily Bronte chose to do when she hid her poems in kitchen cabinets (and perhaps destroyed her Gondal stories), what Christina Rossetti chose when she elected an art that glorified the religious constrictions of the "convent threshold". Rich's crucial pun on the word *premises* returns us, therefore, to the confinement of these

women, a confinement that was inescapable for them even at their moments of greatest triumph, a confinement that was implicit in their secretness.

(Gilbert and Guber 2000, 83)

Many women did not have the confidence to engage publicly in literary practices. Some have used pseudonyms to conceal their true identity.

In order to achieve male recognition of their academic seriousness, Mary Ann Evans most famously used a male-impersonation. The three Bronte sisters, too, hid their femininity under the masks of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, names that Charlotte Bronte disingenuously claimed they had selected for androgynous neutrality.

Anurupa Devi (1882-1958) who wrote some bestsellers of her time did not reveal her initial literary endeavours to anyone except her elder sister, Surupa Devi (1879-1922), who was a novelist herself and wrote under the pseudonym Indira Devi.

Anurupa Devi once had to show the manuscript of her novel to her husband on his insistence. A well-placed man, he was not known to be hostile to his wife's literary pursuits, yet he is known to have thrown her manuscript into river Ganga. Later she published her works under pseudonym, Anupama Devi. Interestingly, it was Swarnakumari Devi, who persuaded her to discard her pseudonym and expose her true identity. Nirupama Devi (1883-1951) who initially published as Srimati Devi, also adopted the pseudonym Anupama Devi later, and even won the Kuntalin award consecutively in 1904 and 1905 under the pseudonym. It is worth noting that Anurupa Devi was Nirupama Devi's friend (*gangajal soi*) and she also used the same pseudonym 'Anupama' in her literary ventures. Masuda Khatun (1885-1926) was a pioneering Bengali feminist and secularist. She used the pseudonym Mrs. M Rahman. Ashapura Devi (1909-1995) wrote with her own name but nobody knew who Ashapura Devi actually was for a long time, because she remained confined within the *andarmahal* till the age of thirty-eight and chose to send her manuscripts to the editor by post or through trustworthy hands of her husband or brother-in-law (Bandopadhyay 2016-17). Like Helen Graham of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), they used their art both to express and camouflage themselves.

The handful who could leave their marks in the literary world was not always the luckily placed ones, but, sometimes the ones who had struggled more. These acts of subversion of women could only be compensated by perfect and flawless domestic roles. Some women who created names for themselves like Nirupama Devi (1883 – 1951) who was educated at home and has nine novels to her credit, Sarasibala Basu (1886–1929) the novelist, story teller, and poet writing during the Bengal Renaissance who produced more than twenty novels numerous short stories and plays which made a great impact on Bengali literature, or Ashapura Devi (1909-1995) who began writing in the 1940s served her family and performed every ritual to please her sisters-in-law and wrote during the night (Ghosh 2008, 11-12), did not necessarily have a smooth river to sail on.

Leela Majumder (1908-2007) whose literary oeuvre includes immensely popular novels and short stories wrote in her autobiography *Pakdandi*

Writing much at a time was not possible. Women like me remain perpetually submerged in all kinds of domestic responsibilities. My conscience would start hurting if I neglected those, and people at home would be displeased. It is difficult for a woman to engage in creative pursuits unless she is less encumbered. The creative potential of many a woman has thus suffered a miscarriage. Women who have worshipped goddess Saraswati in face of criticism are rare...

(Majumdar 2008, 295)

Indeed, only a few women writers had a room of their own to sit with a pen and paper in hand and ponder. They had to constantly struggle with themselves to engage in their literary pursuits and remain focused. For all their work and sacrifices for keeping a smooth home, ironically even the most devoted of the housewives never had a home. A woman's premarital and post-marital status in both the father's and the husband's homes was uncertain and tenuous, completely at the mercy of those who controlled her life. (Rokeya Hossain 2006,46-54)

For instance, Ashalata Singh's literary career began with her debut novel *Amritar Prem* (1938) written at the age of sixteen. It was appreciated by critics and even by Rabindranth Tagore. She wrote till little after twenty- six because while her own parents had encouraged her, the in-laws relentlessly opposed her literary efforts. Sashibala Ghosejaya similarly had to grapple with insensitive in-laws and

a mentally ill husband. Jyotirmoyee Devi (1894-1988), a widow confined indoors was denied outside contact. (Bandopadhyay 2014)

Spatial images of boundary and enclosure seem to proliferate whenever we find writers coming to terms with Jane Austen, as if they were displaying their own anxieties about what she represents.

(Gilbert and Guber 2000,109)

In a book not unfittingly pronounced North /Anger [Northanger Abbey], Austen rewrites the gothic not because she disagrees with her sister novelists about the confinement of women, but because she believes women have been imprisoned more effectively by miseducation than by walls and more by financial dependency, which is authentic ancestral curse, than by any verbal oath or warning. (Gilbert and Guber 2000, 135)

Women were confined within spaces and also within texts by representations and language. That calls for a detailed discussion in a separate paper.

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