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Title of the Book: *Binodini*
Bengali Title: *Chokhar Bali*
Author: Rabindranath Tagore
Translated by: Krishna Kripalani
Publisher: New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi
Publication year: 1959
Pages: 247
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Set in the milieu of the 19th century Indian society, *Binodini*, a novel written by the Nobel laureate Dr Rabindranath Tagore, tells the tale of a well-to-do middle class family of Calcutta. Originally written in *Bānglā* with the title *Chokhar Bāli* (literally meaning ‘sand in the eye’), the novel has been translated into English by Krishna Kripalani. The translator in his foreword to the novel opines, “It centers round the problem of human relationship and tells of what happens behind the staid facade of a well-to-do, middle class Bengali home of the period, where a widowed mother lives with her only son on whom she dotes”. Apart from telling the story of the family, the novel revolves around two main characters or rather say protagonists – Binodini, a young, talented, educated and beautiful widow; and Mahendra – a spoilt brat of his foolish mother.

Binodini is written, taking the backdrop of contemporary society of Calcutta. The novel portrays the 19th century society and people. Although many conflicts, misunderstandings, and disturbances are witnessed in the course of the novel, it ends happily with the reconciliation of Mahendra and Asha. But it does not say much about Binodini. Although she has decided to dedicate her life for charitable services, still the readers could not know if she worked upon her decision or not. Moreover, the fact behind her relation with Mahendra remained in veil. Except Bihari, none could get to know about it. Her image remained as same; impure till the end.

The 19th century India has witnessed a number of social reforms. Although, widow remarriage act had already been implemented in India with the initiation of Pt Ishwar Chandra

Vidyasagar, it was not come into practice properly. Binodini represents the 19th century women who revolt against the contemporary social dogmas that force them to forget all their emotions and lead a secluded life after the death of their husbands. As a young widow, Binodini does not know what life is! She is forbidden of the love which she is supposed to enjoy as someone's wife. This results into her revolt against the rules and restrictions framed by the orthodox Indian society, especially for women. As a victim of the contemporary social stigma (child marriage), Binodini ties her connubial knot at a very young age to a sickly man who dies soon after the marriage leaving her alone to face the society.

Binodini is blamed for bringing storm in the happy life of Mahendra and Asha. Once, a trusted and affectionate so called daughter of Rajalaxmi (Mahendra's mother), she turns to be her eyesore. While the readers gradually proceed in the novel, several unanswered questions pop up in their mind. Is Binodini really responsible for everything? Can't Rajalaxmi be blamed who has given her the charge of taking care of Mahendra in the absence of Asha? Is Mahendra a small kid who can easily be lured? Isn't he equally responsible for the tragedy of his life? Neither Rajalaxmi nor Asha ever blame Mahendra and he is easily accepted back in the family. Binodini is kept responsible for everything. No one stands by her side to defend her.

Rajalaxmi's obsession for her son Mahendra reveals a typical example of Oedipus complex. For her, males are always brazen. They are not to be blamed as it is their inborn nature to go astray. But females are like earthen pots that lose their sanctity easily and it is also their duty to keep their men in control without letting them to go into the clutches of others. While explaining the duty of a wife to Asha, she says, "Men are always prone to go astray and it is the duty of the wives to keep them to the straight path by hook or by crook" (Tagore 1959: 194).

Along with the intricacy of the sophisticated towns life and people, Tagore has excelled in portraying the typical mentality of rustics as well as the natural scenes of the countryside that makes one nostalgic. The typical rustic flavor can be found in the description of Binodini's stay in her village. "Watching the landscape from window of the deserted 'ladies compartment' as the train swept past cultivated fields and villages with shady groves, Binodini felt a nostalgia for the peace and calm for the country life" (Tagore 1959: 166).

Dr Tagore has very skillfully portrayed each of his character. His characters grow with time. May it be timid Asha, or cunning Binodini; they change themselves with the change of time. Asha becomes matured and gets aware of her existence, duties and rights. Binodini too evolves from a mere enchantress to a trusted woman. Still, none except Bihari believes her. Bihari, from just a faithful friend of Mahendra turns into a rational person. Rajalaxmi is presented as a typical mother who loves her son more than anything else and he is always the best for her irrespective of his activities.

Some people categorize Dr Tagore as a feminist. But the end of *Binodini* does not attest him as an advocate of female rights. Binodini, although belongs to the 19th century society, rebels against the stringent rules and restrictions of the society formulated for women, especially widows. Had Dr Tagore been an advocate of females and their rights, he would have done justice with Binodini. He could have given her in marriage with Bihari, supporting widow remarriage system which had already been initiated by that time. But unfortunately, the author has not allowed the consciousness of his protagonist to remarry and enjoy her life completely. In this regard it is not apt to categorize him in the list of feminists.

It is true that the original flavor of a literary work is lost in translation. But the translator has tried his best to maintain the flavor with the use of some Bengali or Indian words like *Thākurpo*, *Bouthān*, *Māshi*, *Dal-roti*, *Ekādashi*, *Koel*, etc. and he has succeeded in his effort to a greater extent.

“We identify a person with that facet of personality which a particular set of circumstances happens to reveal. The true being is known only to the Creator” (Tagore 1959: 66). This opinion of Dr Tagore has been pertinently attested with the character of Binodini. She is a mysterious but misunderstood character. She used to be adored by everyone till the time her real self was behind the screen. But the moment Mahendra declares his inclination towards her openly, she is unveiled and became an eyesore for others.

Binodini like its author requires no recognition. It leaves a lasting effect on the readers by making them aware of its contemporary social scenario.