

Tribhuvan University

Exploration of Self: A Third World Feminist Reading of Tagore's *Chokher Bali*

**Thesis Submitted to Central Department of English, T.U.
In partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of Masters of Arts in English**

By

Rupa Phuyal

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Central Department of English

Kritipur, Kathmandu

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Letter of Recommendation

Rupa Phuyal has completed her thesis entitled "Exploration of Self: A Third World Feminist Reading of Tagore's *Chokher Bali* " under my supervision and guidance. I, therefore, recommend her thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

.....

Mahesh Paudyal

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This thesis entitled " Exploration of Self: A Third World Feminist Reading of Tagore's *Chokher Bali*" Rupa Phuyal, submitted to the Department of English, Tribhuvan University has been approved by the undersigned members of Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Internal Examiner

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Head

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Date:

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Rupa Phuyal

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Abstract

This paper argues women's identity in Tagore's Chokher Bali. It explores women's self through identifying different exploitations and aims to strike back at them. It explores the idea of searching position amidst the traditional society and by opposing any specific forms of exploitation propagated by male ideology and female submission.

Binodini tries her best to oppose man made social norms, thereby resisting the exploitation of male culture and hegemonized female supporters. She feels that all males see her from eyes of lustfulness. For them, her innocence and fragility can be an easy target. In these backdrops, she develops her value of freedom and self to the extent that she refuses to give in to any sort of male domination whatsoever. The method of this study is on a theory called Third world feminism. It studies the biases, and prejudices of the ethnocentric orientation of the Western.

Key words: Domesticity, Third world countries, Feminism, Julia Rigg, Primitive Passion

This study aims to gain perspective of why women remain single, what pressures single women face, and how a woman's life satisfaction and self-concept are affected by being single. Results showed that women remain single for a variety of reasons and feel pressure from family, friends, and media about their singlehood. The majority of the pressure is internal and indicates that women need a romantic relationship that will eventually lead to marriage to be satisfied with their life.

Woman is endowed with passive qualities of chastity, modesty, devotion and power of self-sacrifice in a greater measure than man and these very attributes that

feminists regard as impositions on women by the patriarchal systems. Woman's self suggests that these attributes are weaknesses, which should rather be replaced by stability that is inherent in woman's nature. All her forces instinctively work to bring things to some shape of fullness for that is the law of life. It is the nature of humankind to act according to principles. Hence, for all her deeds should not only be done morally but in respect of every social link.

It is part of the social order. Women give birth to offspring, hence they are great of soul, objects of worship, and the shining light of the home. The love of man and woman cannot be lasting or beautiful if it is barren, if it remains constricted within itself, if it does not give birth to beneficence. The man-woman relationship is restrained and confined by stem enjoinders. It is fashioned from the ingredients of beauty, radiant with the light of comeliness, modesty and beneficence, fulfilled through renunciation and gratified through suffering.

A woman's self is a contested identity complicated by issues like class, ethnicity and sexuality. It is, therefore, impossible to generalize women's experiences across cultures, ethnicities and histories as gender roles are socially constructed. Representing women as powerless, exploited, sexually harassed based on the notion of universal sameness of oppression creates an overarching purview of female victimhood. This kind of cultural imperialism tends to rob women of their local, historical and cultural contexts. Self exploration feminists object to portrayals of women of non-western societies as passive and voiceless victims as compared to the portrayal of other privileged eastern white, upper class women as modern, educated and empowered.

As *Chokher Bali* draws to its end, it is no longer the specter of the long-dead husband that Binodini drags into moments marked by passion or the possibility of

passion. Critic Rigg focuses squarely on the corpse of the widow itself, the raw reality of the female body that has lived and died in deprivation, something Binodini must look at up close, as ominous as that may be to her. For it is not so much her understanding of the cause but her confrontation of the female body that bears the effects that moves her towards validating passion all throughout the film and at its end. Such an understanding enables her to reject the confines of the domestic realm in which she had largely been situated.

Thus, even as Rigg portrays her as someone who is fully cognizant of the odds stacked against her, in transferring Binodini's story in the early-twenty first century. When feminist struggles have left and still leave their mark in most world cultures, Rigg presents this protagonist as willing and able to manipulate the "immobility" of the "mark" that is her widowhood. Looking at how such social commentary works in fiction novel, critics draw on a Bakhtinian concept of art and discuss the ways novel is social. They argue that with novel, what is more important than its representation of a preexisting truth or reality is that it is "an act of contextualized interlocation.

For instance, in the same carriage part that he discussed earlier, long before their arrival in Kashi. Binodini tells Mahendra that she left home for Kalighat saying, "[Today] is my husband's death day. For the first time, I have been able to take advantage of my widowhood." (25)

Uma Narayan is not clearly interested in upholding the value of patriarchal constructs that prove to be generally constrictive or detrimental to women. Narayan makes Binodini "use" her widowhood to gain erotic pleasure illustrates Benjamin's concept of "a shattering of tradition." In a similar kind of critique, Shohat and Stam note that in Third World novelist simply "the exaltation of the national, provides no criteria for distinguishing what is worth retaining in the 'national tradition.' A

sentimental defense of patriarchal social institutions simply because the `ours' can hardly be seen as emancipatory" (27).

However, it is more than an aspect of Bengali and Hindu cultural tradition that Third World Theorists challenge by giving Binodini this kind of subversive agency in this novel. It is quite likely that they also attempt to reverse broad global perceptions about the Indian widow, as they mentioned earlier. Not only does Indian culture have traditional perspectives on widowhood, but an international perspective often objectifies third world women as well. In addition, theorists also have to deal with the objectification that characterizes the international culture of mediated visuality.

Self exploration sets the terms of the current equality and difference debate, agreeing that the liberal political slogan equal but different mystified the fundamental fact that masculinity is always valued over femininity, and men are guaranteed a form of sanctioned domination over women. Claims are that the appropriate values to replace those present in, and perpetuating, the system were those associated with femininity. Their characteristics associated with femininity are themselves by product of the system to be replaced. Although any description of as simply essentialist betrays the complexity of the principal arguments, underpinning almost all arguments is a real belief in the moral equality and value of men and women. This belief in metaphysical equality exists alongside beliefs that the two sexes are biologically different and that, because social systems change over time, the type of human subject also changes. Significantly, the idea of a changing human subject inaugurates a break from `abstract individualism, typical of the self, but it is this which was carried over to give substance to the self notion of emancipation.

Different theorists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sara Suleri, Ketu Katrak, Uma Narayan along with others have criticized

western feminism because of its ethnocentric orientation and neglect of the unique experiences of women from third-world countries or the existence of feminism(s) indigenous to third -world countries. According to Chandra Mohanty, women on "internal racism, classism and homophobia" (*Third World Women* 49).

Third-World Feminism is that branch of attitude, which deals with the inimitable experiences of the women in the so-called Third world countries. The feminists who are involved in such deeds are known as Third World Feminists. They see scapes of Western Feminism in its failure to address the history and heritage of the Third world culture thereby analyzing different types of suppression and marginalization of women in different consequences of global and local patriarchy. It also sees the brutal of matriarchy that function as a unique involvement of Third culture. Third- World Feminism launched as a response to perceived failures of western feminism in the early 1990s. It seeks to meet the essentialist definitions of femininity of western feminism, which are over-emphasized and generalized versions of the experiences of upper middle-class white women.

Critic Trinh of such objectification is always present in *Chokher Bali*, particularly with its parallel narrative of other widows' lives and the possibility of what Binodini would become in the absence of her dynamism. Yet Trinh also unhesitatingly provides a new or alternative representation of the Bengali widow, one that foregrounds her desire for pleasure rather than her submissiveness to social forces that work to efface that pleasure. Further, he brings us Binodini's "exploitation' of the static aspects of Hindu widowhood. Binodini opens up for question any single or dominant world perception of a Bengali widow.

This research analyzes Tagore's novel *Chokher Bali* in the light of Third World Feminism thereby exploring self of the protagonist Binodini. The term "Third

World Feminism" designates the experiences of the third world women that are quite contrary to the experience of western women. Third World Feminism emerged in the early 1990s thereby challenging the essentialist definitions of femininity of western feminism.

Tagore's *Chokher Bali* ventures breakdown of the Binodini's psychological and mental state amidst the fault line of patriarchy supported by females themselves. Her father continually forces her to an unwilling marriage and relationship with an old man which results to her widowhood at an early age. Binodini's suffering of widowhood contributes to degenerate her psychosis. In this context, the present research studies Third World women's suppression through native patriarchy, thereby, analyzes the exploration of Binodini's widowhood in relation to Third World women.

It presents a story of a newly-married couple, Mahendra and Asha, who are passionately in love until this love is temporarily tarnished by the arrival of a young, intelligent, and educated widow, Binodini. Binodini, is portrayed, not as a widow accepting of her fate but as an intermittently angry, resentful woman who interrogates all the injustices in her life. Binodini addresses the numerous restrictions experienced in the life of a Bengali Hindu widow and is distinctly Modernist in its exploration of psychological motivations of characters. At that movement, she compares herself with wasteland:

Binodini was consigned to live in that wasteland like a wild flower, leading a joyless existence. She came to meet Rajlakshmi, her aunt-in-law, devotedly touched her feet, and before anyone knew, she took charge of looking after Rajlakshmi. She dedicated herself wholeheartedly in taking care of Rajlakshmi. She was never idle for movement, supremely efficient in everything he did, an excellent

cook and above all, a girl of engaging temperament. (34)

She merely becomes a puppet in the society. The strife between aunt and niece is vital in this case. Though she is less suppressed by males in patriarchal system, the female subordination has become a dehumanizing effect in the Indian society. The women are suffering from non- representation, misrepresentation and under-representation in patriarchal society.

The artist subverts the conventional belief regarding widowhood and treats it as a matter of celebration bringing it in the foreground of her canvas. First everyone dislikes Binodini but since she is graceful and loving to her aunt, she comes to support her aunt. Mahendra resents allowing keeping a young widow in their home. In this situation, they are just making her an inferior status. She compares herself with second-rate who is going to be forfeited in the society. She says, "Look, I am a small fry, a person of inferior status, who has to conduct herself carefully to avoid creating unpleasant situation" (54).

Binodini, who comes to live temporarily in Mahendra and Asha's family as discussed above, attempts at first to satisfy vicariously her (repressed) desire for love by composing love letters for her friend, the little-educated Asha to send to her husband. Mahendra. Shortly after this, during Asha's absence from home, Binodini is portrayed as not averse to receiving romantic attention from Mahendra and she creates possibilities for romantic moments as well. Following the family's discovery Mahendra's growing attraction for her, she has to leave his household but because of a combination of difficult circumstances, she is obliged to take shelter and travel with Bihari. However, she remains committed to Bihari, and when that man finally encounters her in her travels and proposes marriage, she accepts his love and respect but spares him the social censure of marrying a widow. She offers to engage herself in

one of his philanthropic missions instead. At that movement, she compares herself such as drinking tea:

Her willingness to help other widows partake of pleasures that are taboo (such as drinking tea); and her unhesitating use of her widowhood to further her own ends. This value of tradition in the cultural heritage and cultural tradition, drawing us into the "fixed" space of the widow as defined by this tradition and showing how mobilization in and out of this space is possible. (67)

Binodini is as quite the opposite of the generally voiceless and acquiescent traditional Bengali widow. She comes across as almost malevolent as she refrains from pouring the water that will help her *soi*, Ashalata, wash off from her face the soap and excess *sindoor*-the red powder, worn on the parting, that is the most explicit traditional marker of marriage for Hindus. As the bewildered Ashalata pleads for the water with eyes closed, the reader sees an apparently wicked smile flicker over Binodini's face, but this, of course, could be more than pleasure that Binodini derives from her friend's pain. Inhabiting a space where all things desirable are withheld from her, despite her youth and remarkable beauty, this gesture could be read as one of Binodini's first attempts to draw the pampered wife into that unredeemed zone of denial that was the widow's reality. It is as significant element for widow's identity and celebrates power of female body and sensual and sexual joy of women's experience.

Males sometimes glorify female by comparing her with other abstract thing like flower. They give the false notion of beauty and delicacy to the female and the women are considered to be shy, naive and beautiful. Males keep relationship with widows but they do not marry them. It is indeed a great taboo in the society. Asha occupies the center of the frame, while Binodini is positioned to her side. The extract

makes us focus on the easy mobility of Asha's fingers as she quickly soaps and rinses her face, though Binodini's gestures are deliberately presented as slow and meditative, drawing the witness's gaze towards her face and its expressions. It is also noteworthy that Asha's face is often covered in this part while we are never allowed to lose sight of Binodini's. Thus even as the framing of the act situates the privileged wife at the center, it is Binodini, one of the peripheral figures in the prospect, who ultimately commands our attention through her expressions and temporary act of denial. In such context, she questions herself with consideration of her widow' identity. Her friend and aunt's carelessness about her freedom let her meditate upon the search of herself. She observes:

But Binodini herself was troubled, with a gnawing sense of unrest in her mind. All these days, she had been laying traps for Mahendra and darting flirtiest arrows at him. His absence left Binodini utterly restless. She was sorely deprived of her source of intoxication, and Asha without Mahendra was too bland for her taste. In Mahendra's torrid love for Asha she had found a vicarious excitement that captivates her loveless and deprived heart. It was this Mahendra who had capriciously denied her a resplendent life, sacrificed such a jewel among women like herself for a creature like Asha, immature and of poor intellect. (91)

Being furious is such a humiliating and depressing situation, she wishes to break the conspirators against her freedom. There are, however, other instance in which if not Binodini, then the male himself calls for a crossover into the space of the widow. Thus, the picnic parts in *Chokher Bali*, in which Binodini swings and Ashalata pushes the swing, significantly picturizing. Binodini whose feet rise progressively farther

from the ground as she swings. Soon after, she begins to feel the illicit love for her husband's cousin. In a relationship in which there will be no physical consummation. Tagore foreshadows Binodini's emotional and imaginative transgression through the shot of her feet leaving the solid realm of the real. In contrast, involving Binodini and Mahendra clearly take the viewer into the area of physical passion that the characters will move beyond the prescriptive boundaries of a socially-sanctioned love or existence. She collects distressing experience and even pities her aunt that they even do not know what is happening inside her heart. They are very indifferent and careless toward her misery. Binodini feels:

Binodini got up, opened wide all the doors and windows turned up the oil lamp, and picking up her sewing, positioned herself at the far end of her bed. She looked at Bihari and said, "Look, I am not going to be here all my life. Please, will you promise me, to keep an eye on her when I am not here to look after her? She will need protection." She turns her face away as if she was trying to hide her emotions. (110)

She experiences prejudiced, marginalized, and superimposed behavior from everyone. Yet, if we go back to my earlier point, exactly how does the picnic turns encourage a crossover into the space inhabited by the widow, point to the sharp difficulties in communication between a wife and a widow. Binodini and Asha did not know each other before so there is no question of a separation. It goes beyond the simple meaning of longing for union between friends (or lovers) temporarily separated.

The novel focused on Binodini's desire that remains largely unspoken and unrealized due to the constraints of her household; because of Mahendra's hasty departure without letting Binodini know; and because of Binodini's own sense of commitment to the society. Just as Tagore uses the swing to bring together the

transgressive desires of Binodini, he also uses the refrain to evoke possibilities of communication between women (such as Binodini) who are thwarted and repressed in a normative culture.

The creation of icon through the imbrications of race and gender forms the Third world women's identity, which is inappropriate. In this hybrid space, there is the formation of identity, which is arranged in an overlapping manner and there is a chance of subsuming Western notions. Sara Suleri thinks that 'Radical Subjectivity' frequently translates into a low-grade romanticism that cannot recognize its discursive status. In this context, she opines:

When feminism turns to lived experiences as an alternative mode of radical subjectivity, it only rehearses the objectification of its proper subject. While lived experience can hardly be discounted as a critical resources for an apprehension of the gendering of race, neither should such data serve as the evacuating principle for both historical and theoretical contexts alike. (*WSD* 761)

Suleri analyzes that structures of racial body and theoretical interventions becomes minimal into the category of lived experiences. According to her, the body serves as testimony of lived experience. The very body receives the sufficient questions from different perspectives on the dialogue between race and gender.

Suleri realizes that hitherto reality is Eurocentric and patriarchal, which cannot represent disparate cultural and ethnic realities. Therefore, she advocates for the radical feminism which can be able to provide an alternative perspectives. The very alternative strategy can be a radical strategy thereby responding the situated experiences. She says:

[. . .] If realism is the Eurocentric and patriarchal of adjudicating

between disparate cultural and ethnic realities. then it is surely the task of radical feminism to provide an alternative perspective. In the vociferous discourse that such a task has produced, however, the question of alter nativism is all too greatly subsumed either into the radical strategies that are designed to dedicate the course of situated experience, or into the methodological imperative that impel a work related to Woman; Native, Other such as bell hooks' *Talking back. Thinking Feminist and Thinking black.* (WSD 763-64)

In such context, we see Third world feminism as radical feminism, which provides an alternative perspective representing different disparate cultural ethnic realities. That is why, it is inclusive and egalitarian activities to raise the different socio-cultural realities of the then marginalized Third World Women.

In her book, *The Rhetoric of English India (1992)*, Suleri has observed the function of narrative has become a great issue in the Third World view point, because as a tool it let them to be ruled for a long ages. She observes:

The narrative of empire do not match merely "mess" with colonial subject, but are in themselves encoded with a dubiety that requires the function of intransigence to protect the myth of colonial authority. This absence of authority is most readily discernible in the colonial will to cultural descriptions, which demonstrate an anxious impulse to insist that colonized peoples can indeed be rendered interpretable within the language of the colonizer. (7)

Her analysis of narrative of empire is equally important for Third World feminism. Third world feminism avoids myth of western feminism like avoiding the myth of colonial authority. Such absence of authority entails cultural

descriptions of the history and heritage of Third World scenario.

If contextualized within the specific concerns of *Chokher Bali* itself, the refrain calls for fullness of dialogue between the wife and the widow; between Bengali women who occupy two distinctly different spaces within the socio-cultural matrix, one replete with privileges while the other merely indicating deprivation. And yet, through its third verse, quoted and translated above, the song also adumbrates the rift between Binodini and Asha once the former becomes the object of Asha's husband, Mahendra's erotic desire. Further, instead of just expressing a wish for re-union of friends parted for unspecified reasons, in this novel, the jingle looks ahead to the last part in which Asha, despite clear knowledge of what can be seen as Binodini's betrayal, asks if she has left any address behind. The internalized ethos of male culture is evidential in widow's psyche. Binodini experiences a woman who comes nearby her and suggests:

Rajlakshmi had scant regard for what people said when it suited her.

After her husband's death, her whole life and world revolved round her son Mahendra. Mahendra, to her, was paragon of all virtues, and there was simply no one else to match him. She was in fact, irritated with Binodini for her refusal to look after Mahendra as she perceived in it a hint of socially unacceptable conduct. As if her son was capable of doing anything wrong! In any case she could not be bothered - she had an inborn hubris to disregard how other people viewed her likes and dislike. (134)

In this way, her aunt and her allies begin to send relatives to scare or threaten her.

They induce her to surrender and subsume with the male power of Mahendra. Even their behavior changes a lot for her. She feels that her aunt and friends make fun

about her. They looked at her very strangely as if to taunt her. There are series of accusation on her part caused by her denial of the care.

Within the picnic scenes of *Chokher Bali* itself, the dialogue solidifies for the reader. Tagore concerns about charting the progressive increase in women's rights in early-twentieth century Bengal. Things that the characters talk about include Binodini's vocalized interest in attending meetings of nationalist protest; her mention of the radical Bengali activist and Mahendra's, albeit sarcastic, reference to both the cessation of *satidaha* and introduction of widow remarriage. The above moments in the dialogue also substantiate that the use of Tagore's refrain in this sequence connotes more than just a parting and re-union between any two people and is one of Tagore's endeavors to have us re-think the traditional space of the widow in Bengali (Indian) culture.

According to Binodini, Mahendra and Bihari are the reasons behind her psychological turbulences. She feels ridiculed and accused because of their behavior. Their accusation let her think that they are exploring her sexuality. She says:

As she kept massaging his temples, the force of her over powering restless youth with all its pent up desire drew her face closer to Mahendra's, when her untruly loose tresses brushed against his cheeks. That soft touch of her tresses, disarranged by the breeze, changed his whole being with torrid fire. He could hardly breathe then suddenly, his reverie snapped and he sat up. 'I have to go to college. I am already late.' he stood up as he spoke without looking at Binodini. (144)

It is in its unreserved exploration of sexuality, Tagore uses binoculars (field glasses) as a connotative device. Her alienation and frustration to gaze on the streets of Kolkata, but their particular significance is that they provide sporadic visual pleasure

to the housewife. In contrast, by having Binodini at her window use binoculars to search frantically for signs of sexual intimacy in Ashalata and Mahendra's room, Tagore recharges this sign not only to underscore the severe limitations in the widow's existence. But to also make clear that Bengali society has moved to a point where a serious and unreserved addressing of her (repressed) sexuality is in order.

In several sequences of *Chokher Bali*, two elements that Tagore reiteratively yoked together are the force of desire and the spectral presence of the dead husband. Even in the first part of passion between Binodini and Mahendra, Binodini makes straight, and what appears perverse, reference to her dead spouse. "My husband died of tuberculosis," she tells Mahendra, who draws back immediately from caressing and kissing her. However, she is testing more than his courage about contagion as she laughs in his face. Throughout *Chokher Bali*, Tagore clearly presents Binodini as supremely skeptical of Mahendra's ability to break with tradition and do what is daring or unconventional. Further, by repeatedly bringing the dead into the realm of the erotic, Binodini mocks and yet underlines the stubborn persistence of specters that define the widow's existence. The dead husband is on specter, of course, also the innumerable restrictive stipulations of orthodox Hinduism that will not be put to rest and which vitiate or obstruct the erotic in the life of a widow. This haunting of *eros* by *thanatos* seems endless to Binodini.

The critics Dimple Punjabi explicitly depicts passion between the two characters: Binodini again drags her dead husband into her conversation with Mahendra. As she deliberately smears his shirt with the *sindoor* from *Kalighat* that he has accidentally gotten on her forehead during an embrace, he chides her affectionately because it will be difficult to erase the red powder. In response, Binodini says undeterred:

Is it possible that you will meet with me [the Bengali word *songo* — 'meet' is not an exact equivalent for this-is alternately translatable as 'keep company with me'] but leave no sign? Don't you see, so long ago, I kept company with [or 'was united with'] [my husband] who is dead and a ghost, and yet, for all these years, I bear with me that sign [or 'mark']?" (21)

Within the context of early-twentieth century Bengali masculinist culture, the two predicaments are not comparable. In general the agents or even more passive elements, of such a culture would facilitate Mahendra's erasing of the "sign" of his illicit involvement with Binodini but would unrelentingly uphold the necessity of her austere existence, which signified Binodini's widowhood until her death. Even as she determinedly "marks" Mahendra with the "sign" of their passion. Binodini is aware that this passion cannot compete with the force of the "sign" that makes her captive to her spectral husband. In the cultural context of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal, her widowhood has always already won over that what might enter her present or future life.

In one of the later part of *Chokher Bali*, when Mahendra leaves home to come to Binodini who has moved to her native village, en route to Kashi, she says to him as he is about to sit on the bed.

That is my marriage bed. It is on that bed that he [my husband] died
Binodini's reply took Mahendra by surprise. Forgive you for what? I
have no problem with what you did. What other think do not bother
me, neither do I care for them. Who are they to me, who push me
away and hurt me? On the other hand, surely they, who wish me to
stay even going to the extent of physically stopping me, are my true

friend." (147)

Once again, she deliberately introduces the dead husband into a context charged with intimacy. However, what is more interesting is that through this act, she seems to forestall the possibility of passion between herself and Mahendra, almost instinctively guarding against any future disillusionment when Hindu society itself would stand against it.

Other than through the character Binodini, as a critic Julia Rigg uses different strategies to juxtapose romance/passion in the widow's life with death. Once they are in *Kashi*, for instance, talk about a child between Binodini and Mahendra are followed by a sequence in which Binodini is visible agitated by the death of a widow on the banks of the Ganges. Furthermore, who confirms this death is Bihari, who Binodini believes has a romantic interest. The two stare at each other, across the widow's dead body. Bihari informs her that Mahendra's mother (another widow in the novel) has passed away in Kolkata and reiterates his query about Mahendra.

Rigg brings Binodini's face as she seems to block out the signifiers of deal all around her on this burning ghat. In quick contrast, the shots of Bihari's face convey beautifully the duality of his experience of bringing bad news and the unexpected pleasure of seeing Binodini. What is also noteworthy about this sequence is that although Bihari sits very close to the corpse as he stares at Binodmi; the body of the dead widow is always kept out o frame during the exchange of glances. This invisibility yet proximity of death in a 1 sequence of *Chokher Bali* underscores once again for the reader that the possibility of romance in a widow's life is framed by obstacles that are not always explicit. In such context, she feels quite frightened with mixed aim of revenge and fear. Everyone sees her sexually passionate eyes. Binodini continued,

I guess the husband and wife must have had again some minor tiff, and he wanted me, perhaps, to mediate immediately. Whatever may be the virtues of your precious son, patience is not one of them, and that is why both of us fight so much. (179)

When Bihari finally proposes marriage, Binodini, is intermittently lit up by funeral pyres, one of which happens to be that of the widow whose death Binodini has recently witnessed. This is evident to the witness because the red shawl that had covered the body of the dying widow is now worn by another widow who limps around the funeral pyre, possibly in hopes of getting exactly such discarded items before the body is set on fire. The Indian viewer understands that the red shawl is used, in both cases, only for purposes of providing warmth; it is not appropriate attire for the Hindu widow. It is supremely ironic that Binodini had previously, in *Kashi*, asked Mahendra if he would buy her a red shawl that she liked. Mahendra expressed his disapproval, red being associated with brides in the Hindu context and white with widows. It signifies the utter futility of such desire as Binodini's by using a red shawl to cover the body of an unconscious widow about to exit life or by transferring it to the body of another aged widow whose existence seems to revolve around seeking disposable goods around funeral pyres. No more an object of desire, the red shawl finally figures as shroud for bodies marked by deprivation.

Rey Chow in *Primitive Passions* has taken up this problem at length, understanding that non-Western. Chow writes:

What is needed, after the ethical polemic of Said's *Orientalism* is understood, is the much more difficult task of investigating how visibility operates in the postcolonial politics of non-Western cultures besides the subjection to passive spectacle that critics of orientalism

argue What does it mean for non-Western intellectuals to live as "subjects" and "agents" in the age of `the world as exhibition? (13)

Looking back to Edward Said, Chow understands that the East is *not* just a spectacle but also involved in the "dialectic of seeing". Here we are, of course, reminded of passages in *Orientalism*. In one such passage, as he discusses Arab literature. Said speaks of how a literary text might combat orientalist objectification:

Its force is not that it is Arab, or French, or English; its force is in the power and vitality of words that, to mix in Flaubert's metaphor from *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, tip the idols out of the Orientalists' arms and make them drop those great paralytic children-which are their ideas of the Orient-that attempt to pass for the Orient. (291)

Although Said, here, speaks of a literary text (somewhat than a text), again his argument is that the East has its own agency, its own "dialectic of sighted."

As such Binodini with the help of her body, cultural roles and act of remaining silent or sobbing not only challenges the nation of patriarchy which is prevalent in our society but also seeks widow's identity by mocking the male who treat widow according to their need and desire. Hence, Binodini seems to be advocating for the freedom and independent identity of widow in the society. She revolts against Mahendra who is only sexual passion to her. She says:

Binodini' s voice rang out. What have you done? Mean and cowardly, a worthless creature is what you are. Not only are you incapable of giving your love, you are incompetent as well in discharging your obligations. In the midst of all this you are also giving me a bad name. (181)

She is determined to rebel rather than be docile follower of social values established by male culture. She thinks that a widow should choose disaster than compliance. According to her, self-confidence is not a subject of buy or sell. It should be achieved through struggle. In her case, the very struggle leads her to psychosis. But she thinks that widows are hegemonized about their inferiority. So the critic wants to convey the message regarding widow identity.

Instead, she is ready to reverse and re-writer her own given predicament as well as to some extent that of others in a similar situation. She says:

Binodini spoke in a firm voice, "If you wished you could have stole me. I do admit that shamelessly Mahendra may love me, but he is so foolishly blind that he does not really know me. I have a feeling that you came to understand me. There was also a time when you had some respect for me. Is it or not true?" (187)

Her resistance and revenge is so wholesome she is determined to give more torment and agony in their lives. She satisfied herself with such act. By this act, she is being sadistic and masochistic at the same time. She torments herself so that others can feel the torment and ill environment. She finds herself in the situation of self-destruction.

It is not surprising that Binodini's last letter to Ashalata, delivered to the latter by Bihari, after her disappearance from Kashi, urges Ashalata to conceptualize a world beyond the interiors of the second floor of Darjipara Street-those domestic spaces encompassing kitchen, half-eaten food, courtyard, and shutters in which the two had pledged friendship to each other. And because Mahendra was the one man both had known, they both tried to fulfill their desire through him. But of course, this ruptured their world, leaving their little "country," as Binodini calls it, in pieces. Binodini reminds Asha to look further than that and that once she stood on the banks

of the Ganges in Kashi, she understood that there was a world beyond the interiority of Darjipara Street.

In this section of *Chokher Bali*, critic Julia Rigg foregrounds once again Binodini's awareness of India's (and, in particular, Bengal's) political predicament. For in the letter to Ashalata, Binod warns Asha of the British Viceroy Lord Curzon's plan for the Partition of Bengal, this would separate the eastern part of Bengal, from the province itself, and add it to Assam. If put into effect, Binodini and Asha would live in different "countries," because, it is to be assumed, the former would no longer be in the vicinity of Kolkata, located in the western section of Bengal. To recapitulate the relegation of the Hindu widow to prescribed social spaces, devoid of the possibility of passion, not only intensified Binodini's desire but also caused the rift with her soi. Asha. However, she shows how the position of the female subject in early-twentieth century Bengal was just determined by a national patriarchal vision. For the rupture in the bond between her and Asha seems deeper and more ominous to Binodini because not only there also looms the possibility of a permanent geographical hiatus between them.

The internalized ethos of male culture is evidential in a widow's psyche. They are rigorously submitted to male patriarchal culture. Binodini experiences a widow who comes nearby her and suggests:

As Binodini watched the passing landscape from railway carriage, she rediscovered her past linkages with rural life. She tried to persuade herself that she would find peace at last in the tree shaded village grove away from the scarred memories of her life in the city. Looking at the vast fellow land scorched by the summer sun, she wanted to forget the past and so find an anchor at a quiet corner in the village after her

storm-tossed life. A passing mango grove. profusely blossoming brought home her the blame expectation of peace and quiet. She was trying to come to term with her coming rural existence. She would go back old life and live like other village women. (199)

She compares herself with the villager Binodini, and find completely different. She feels her beauty of the past, dream like memories in village and so on. It does not give her solace because such a widow is changed into a murderer and an inhuman and cruel being. She even becomes desperate when her friend gets a letter of threat of ultimatum from Mahendra.

Yet, just as Ashalata, by asking if Binodini has left any address behind, remains open to the possibility of communication with her. Binodini in this last letter to her *soi* suggests to Ashalata that they should move beyond their sense of insults, sadness. and deprivation that they both had felt, confined within the (prescribed) women's spaces of Darjipara Street. For, if situated in their potentially separate[d] countries." they still focused on these incidents, then they already could have lost their battle to Lord Curzon. If. however, they looked at the "country within" and stood by their pledge of eternal friendship to each other, it would be impossible for Lord Curzon to teach them a lesson.

At the close of *Chokher Bali* then, Ram Ray looks to the solidarity of women not only as a force against the stipulations and injustices of Hindu patriarchy but as a shield against the divisive strategies. Binodini writes to Ashalata that The Mahabharata says that Abhimanyu grew to be a considerable warrior in his mother's womb, and the child Ashalata carries bathed everyday in the Ganges with her. The implication is clear that blessed by the sacred waters of the Ganges, Ashalata's child could grow up to be a warrior, a fighter undeterred. Ram Ray changes fluidly between

concepts of threatened geo-political spaces and empowering women's spaces at the end of *Chokher Bali* as Binodini concludes her letter, pleading with Asha not to keep her child confined to the interiority of Darjipara Street, whether it is a boy or a girl.

She replies trenchantly to the extremity of Mahendra. She says:

You may not me but we are not unrelated. Your mother is a daughter of this village, and I am a sort of an aunt of hers. May I ask you, what has gone wrong with you? You have a wife at home, your mother is still alive, and yet you have chosen to carry on in this mad shameless manner. How can you ever show your face to your people. (206)

After her saving, he becomes furious and forward his step to control her. But she revolts him. She is ready to ignore him but he flees from there with constant fear and intimidation. Then triumphantly she replies, "I do not know what bother you. What more have you to lose?" She shut the door of the carriage, and asked the coachman to drive her to the rail-way station (207).

The text of Binodini's letter conflates nationalist imperatives with issues of urgent importance for women. It is difficult to not hear in it a sub-text: Bengali anguish over partitioning of land; warnings against native (individual) schisms; calls for unity and a militant spirit; also a marked patriotism, particularly in the repeated use of the word country. However, despite its mammoth and devastating economic and political effects, in this letter, colonialism is used as a springboard to move to issues that affect Bengali women's everyday lives in a more immediate sense. In prioritizing the female quotidian realm over the colonial predicament, critic Judith Butler effects yet another reversal in *Chokher Bali*. Even though the national political conversation, especially as filtered through the character of Bihari, remains a

persistent strain in the film, it is situated as peripheral to Binodini and Ashalata's lives.

As mentioned earlier, Binodini is interested in the freedom struggle and very cognizant of how Bengal is threatened by Curzon's plans. However, at the end of her letter to Asha, she focuses on Bengali women's freedom from confining domestic spaces and the concept of a nation that is both an independent India and a more liberating terrain for women. Her message to Asha that the latter's child could grow to be a warrior together with her closing thought "You will see, s(he) will teach you what 'country' is"(249) illustrate simultaneous notions of a freedom fighter and a subject who will bring to her (his) mother a sense of a fuller world for women. It is no accident that critic has Binodini attempt to frame nationalist concerns and women's issues within a maternal perspective, a perspective that she herself, in all likelihood, will never be able to concretize. The director's use of the lens of motherhood at the end of *Chokher Bali* brings us back squarely to the spaces of the female quotidian. For critic a vital area to explore in novel. It is widows like Rajlakshmi who still believe that 'the real relief was when Widows were immolated with their husbands' (245). Women's mind also is dominated by male norms. At that situation Binodini realizes:

When she was at Mahendra's home hardly observed the rigidities prescribed for widows, but now she had resorted to the practice of austerities of a widow, had only one meal a day, wore coarse clothes, and her spontaneous sense of humour and laughter had, so it seemed dried up. The present Binodini was the image of a gaunt, isolated and unapproachable person. (261)

Males have made some rule and regulation for widows and if they would go beyond

that norms, for the society, it is a terrifying mistake because she has crossed her boundaries of patriarchal system.

The final point critic like Dimple Punjabi wants to raise with regards to *Chokher Bali* concerns the ending, which is different from Tagore's happy ending in which Binodini goes on to lead a life as an ascetic because that was, at the time, the right thing for a widow to do. Rather than have Binodini suddenly return to the structures of social institutions and conform to cultural conventions. This is in fact quite an emancipatory act, a fleeing gesture which suits Binodini's character- she is a woman who cannot and will not conform to the strictures of patriarchal conventions imposed upon her. Her fight for freedom coincides with the widows' freedom struggle and in her letter to Asha. Binodini speaks of her own country, a world beyond the kitchen, courtyard and shutters and petty rules of home life. She sees the possibility of rebellion in the case of marriage. Two men propose to marry her but she doesn't go against her moral principles. She says:

You do a lot of good work away from the public eye. Let me help you in some such work yours, which will be my route to serve you. In no way can you marry a widow. Your generosity may make this possible, but if I destroy you by agreeing to marry you. I shall never be able to hold my head high. This must not be allowed. (278)

This is the part when Binodini goes to Bihari's house to ask him to marry her. Binodini still wearing her widow's sari but adorned in jewellery which is hidden under her shawl, performs the role of the archetypal seductress dressing up to seduce her lover. As Bihari closes the door; she unveils herself to him. Again Binodini is crossing the demarcated spaces of social identity via the strategic use of clothing and adornments. In doing this she expresses elements of her own self that is not ruled by

social convention. This is emphasized by Binodini's assertion that she has three identities- that of a young woman, educated woman and a widow but all have eclipsed her real identity that she is also a human. Although Binodini is a widow she is also a young woman, who has passion for life and lustful desires, yet, also desires a family and motherhood and it is this intermingling of all conflicting aspects of femininity that stands to question the 'purity' and homogeneity of the female ideal. Through her 'body work' critic Rigg shows Binodini actually engaging with and challenging the moral and sexual social codes that repress her and thus establishes Binodini as a complex and rebellious character.

Rigg has described as "shackles of the norm in her search for freedom and for life. Her body, as we have seen, is not maintaining the 'correct body' of society, it is not "in the service of 'docility' and gender normalization" rather her 'body work', her manipulation of her clothing and jewellery allows her to negotiate these values and express herself.

The final point critic wants to raise with regards to *Chokher Bali* concerns the ending which is different from Tagore's happy ending in which Binodini goes on to lead a life as an ascetic because that was, at the time, the right thing for a widow to do. Rather than have Binodini suddenly return to the structures of social institutions and conform to cultural conventions critic has her completely disappear. This is in fact quite an emancipatory act, a fleeing gesture which suits Binodini's character- she is a woman who cannot and will not conform to the strictures of patriarchal conventions imposed upon her. Her fight for freedom coincides with the country's freedom struggle and in her letter to Asha, Binodini speaks of her own country, a world beyond the kitchen, courtyard and shutters and petty rules of home life.

Critic Rituparna, opines that what Binodini speaks of is better interpreted and

understood as 'space'. He did not specify what this space signified as he wants to leave this interpretation open for the viewer to decide. For him this space is freedom. A woman like Binodini, questioning herself, her, identity, relationships and the nature of her whole existence finds no socially sanctioned spaces in which to live. In Tagore's ending, in order for her to be able to return to social life she must lose her sense of passion and thirst for life. Which is perhaps Tagore's regret, in having Binodini disappear? Rituparna is making a statement not only about the state of society in the early twentieth century but also commenting on contemporary society. Women can be independent, they can find this 'space' but it means breaking free of restrictive and unitary homogenous identities. Binodini remarks that "I know you will never be able to forgive me. Do not even try to do so, but at the same time do not be afraid of me, not at all. In the few days that are left to Pishima I would like to look after her and I shall all promptly melt away." (285). At last Binodini finds her identity and she says:

Binodini intervened sharply. "What nonsense! What will you do with a bunch of my lifeless trees? I cannot subscribe to this awful custom but I can give you something that can be of use to you, in your work. Will you accept it." (295)

By talking about the society, he is referring to the custom, where there is the prevalence of male culture. A male is discounted for his every vile behavior, whereas a widow is not. In this discount of male behavior, even widows like Binodini's aunt support and play with her own niece's life. In the eyes of law, it is considered illegal, but again being backed up by his position, a man like Mahendra would definitely control the authority. In this context, a widow is sizzled within the backdrop of male patriarchy.

This haunted memory of the past follows her everywhere. Though she wants new life she cannot begin it because of her haunted memory of the past and sense of revenge. She completely wants to forget the past to lead a new life but cannot do so. She describes "That is all I ask, and forget everything else" (296). Within her great aspiration for freedom, she becomes a victim of the past.

Binodini becomes the victim of the patriarchal system. Binodini tries her best to oppose the proposal of marriage. This resistance is the very source of exploration of her identity. Then her opposition of her marriage takes the big shape of revenge. This sort of resistance to male ethos is severely practiced by her.

This research analyzes Tagore's novel *Chokher Bali* in the light of the Third World Feminism thereby exploring self of the protagonist Binodini. Third World Feminism is that branch of philosophy, which deals with the unique experiences of women in the so called third world countries. The feminists who are engaged in such activities are known as third world feminists. It locates the suppression and marginalization of women in different scenarios of the global and local patriarchy. It also sees the vicious functioning of patriarchy that functions as unique experiences of the third world. Native patriarchy, and local patriarchal ethos are the backdrop upon which it lays special focus on unique experience of the third world women.

Indeed Third World feminism is a challenging domain, which criticizes the dominating, coercive, and denigrating ethos of Western Feminism and Third World male culture. Third World feminism tries to explore widowhood by opposing any specific form of exploitation propagated by male ideology and female submission to them. In this context, Tagore's *Chokher Bali* is well taken the issue of a women protagonist Binodini, who explores self by opposing male norms, and creates certain level of strong anger and madness to violate the existing norms of patriarchy.

Binodini's case is not only an individual case but it is insignia of the several domestic violence and forceful marriage around third world countries.

Tagore's *Chokher Bali* projects the breakdown of Binodini's psychological and mental state amidst the fault line of patriarch supported by females themselves. Binodini's father married her to an old man against her will. She eventually becomes a widow at a very young age. Binodini's suffering as a widow leads to her psychosis. She meets two men in her life: Mahendra and Bihari. Both have the strong sense of male nature. The matriarchal ethos carried by society women subsumed with the male patriarchy. Old women are matriarchal in their family and therefore decide everything by their own. Binodini's friend Asha supports male's decisions. They are just docile follower of male patriarch. In exploring self, she becomes desperate with the notion of revenge.

In our society, a man is discounted for his every vile behavior whereas a woman is not. In this discount of male behavior, even females like Rajlakshmi and Asha supports and play with Binodini's life. According to the law, it is considered illegal. but again backed up with positions, a man like Mahendra controls the authority and law. In this context a widow is sizzling within the backdrop of patriarchy. The internalized ethos of male culture is evidential in women psyche. They are rigorously submitted to male patriarchal culture.

To wrap up, Binodini explores 'self' by opposing to become a victim of the domestic violence caused by the patriarchal system backed up by males and women themselves. Binodini tries her best to oppose society norms and resist any exploitation of male culture and hegemonized female supporters. She develops her value of freedom and eventually her value of self.

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