BRINGING FORTH THE 'FEMALE': A RE-READING OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S *THE BROKEN NEST*

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Abstract

Introducing Rabindranath Tagore in English academia is easy, but, at the same time, no frivolous job to be conjured up. Rabindranath Tagore was a Bengali polymath who reshaped his region's literature and music. His English translation of a set of poems titled Gitanjali won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. The Broken Nest (Nashtanir,1901), one of Tagore's greatest stories, has been viewed in many lights of criticism till date. An argument can also hold foot on the female protagonist Charulata's imagined 'masculinity' and fantasizing the male 'rescuer' in her brother-in-law Amal. Imprisoned in her boredom with her repressed sexuality and self, Charu finds her release in this young man. The recent discourse of masculinity that is loosely aligned to certain attributes of men, such as boldness and physical strength are well reflected in Amal. Tagore contrasts these masculine annexure with the husband Bhupati who is meek and docile. Charulata willfully succumbs to these inequitable tyrannies of a 'man', who demands, patronizes, and protests if his demands are not fulfilled. The contention in my paper is to examine how gender is scripted in life and text, and visualize those nuances which can conglomerate this early Twentieth Century Indian text within a much recent critical acronym.

Rabindranath Tagore's *The Broken Nest* (Nashtanir, 1901) created quite a sensation when it came out, not only for its bold theme of a love-triangle, but also owing to a belief that the tale had an autobiographical flavour. Tagore's closeness to his sister-in-law Kadambari Devi had been a recurrent theme taken up by critics while discussing *The Broken Nest*. Initially serialized in *Bharati*, a family magazine launched at Jorasanko in 1877, it was categorized as a novella or a long short story during its publication. But later in 1909, Tagore included this story in a volume of his selected short stories. Critics have considered this story to be "one of the best works of fiction" (Lago 416). This much talked novella for his literary fortitude and the theme of 'love-outside-marriage' has been viewed in many lights of criticism till date. An argument can also hold foot on the female protagonist Charulata's imagined 'masculinity' and fantasizing the male 'rescuer' in her brother-in-law Amal. Imprisoned in her boredom with her repressed sexuality and self, Charu finds her release in this young man. The recent discourse of masculinity that is loosely aligned to certain attributes of men, such as boldness and physical strength are well reflected in Amal. Tagore contrasts these masculine annexure with the husband Bhupati who is meek and docile. Charulata willfully succumbs to these inequitable tyrannies of a 'man', who demands, patronizes, and protests if his demands are not fulfilled. Following Elaine Showalter's thesis in *Toward A Feminine Poetics*, the 'female' stage (1920 onwards) in the history of women's literature is the one of self-discovery. In this phase women "reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" (139). The contention in my paper is to examine how gender is scripted in this text, and

visualize those nuances which can conglomerate this early Twentieth Century Indian text within a much recent critical acronym.

Rabindranath Tagore's amicable relationship with his brother, Jyotirindranath Tagore's wife Kadambari Devi, had been an inspiring source of his writings during the early years. She was only a couple of years older than Tagore and held a great taste in contemporary Bengali literatures. Her sincere criticisms laid a constant inspiration in his heart to write well and better than his contemporaries. This 'Muse' suffered with melancholia due to her loneliness, and died young by committing suicide in 1884. After Kadambari's death, the poetic fancy in Tagore's life was transformed into the deepest truth in his life and being. Tagore speaks on certain occasion about her death in 1884 and its impact upon him:

> One of the greatest blessings of life is the power to forget what cannot come back. This power being fresh and strong in childhood, no wound festers unhealed for long and no scar is left…. But my encounter with death at the age of twenty-four was a lifelong one, its memory linking itself to each succeeding bereavement in an ever-widening rosary of sorrow…. I had not realized till then that there could be gaps in life's familiar patchwork of smiles and tears, to which I had clung, unable to see anything beyond it. When death came and what had been there as part of life became suddenly a gaping void, I felt utterly lost. Everything else had remained the same, the trees, the soil, the sun, moon and the stars; only she who was as real as they, for I had felt her touch on every aspect of my being—only she was not there, she had vanished like a dream. This terrible paradox baffled me. How was I to reconcile what remained with what had been? (Kripalani 117)

The major human thrust that was foregrounded in the story *The Broken Nest* was the conflict of love; more particularly, love-outside-marriage, condemned both socially and morally. Tagore's biographer Krishna Kripalani discovers the reason to deliberate upon such an issue and comments, "…strangely enough, during this period his mind was occupied with the problem of women's destiny and the tragedy of her frustrated love" (202). Another novel that had grappled with the same ideas and bore the imprint of this same preoccupation was *Eyesore* (Chokher Bali, 1903). Kripalani has found these two novels to be the harbingers of the modern Indian novel which concerns certain psychological or realistic crises -- altogether different from the historical romances or the social melodramas being written by Bankimchandra Chatterjee or by Tagore himself.

The Broken Nest recounts a tragedy of a busy editor Bhupati, and his lonely wife Charulata, who enters into an impermissible relationship with a male cousin of his husband. The story is situated in somewhere towards the later nineteenth century, when girls were married young and grew up, largely without the companionship of the husband. Bhupati being no exception, absconds his domestic duties and has little time to spare for his young wife; while she finds solace and stimulus in the company of Amal, the lively and versatile young cousin-brother of her husband. The gulf emotional gulf between the husband and wife widens as Charu and Amal inspire and instigates each other playfully in their literary pursuits as emerging writers. The impermissible relationship is dissolved when Amal leaves for England, and Charu- Bhupati's conjugal abode is ravished and wrecked down tragically.

Deliberating upon the cultural efficacies of languages, firstly I shall explore the abasement of meaning that the translated title *The Broken Nest* brings upon the actual title *Nashtanir*. In her book *Radical Rabindranath,* Prof. Sanjukta Dasgupta forsakes the existing translation of '*nashta*' as 'broken' in her discussion of Satyajit Ray's filmic projection vis-à-vis the original text by Tagore. She rather confers some synonyms of '*nashta*' in English as 'spoilt', ruined, stigmatized or tarnished' (254). While semantically the translation may not seem self-evasive or totally constrained, yet it lacks that poetic intensity that Tagore creates in his original text. The prosaic expression 'broken' perhaps cannot deliver that pessimistic note of an absolute melancholia caused by irretrievable relationships,

as the original Bengali version suggests. Whereas, the much potent phrase '*nashtanir'* brings about a sense of eternal aloofness and infinite pain, as depicted among the three main characters in the story – Charulata, Bhupati and Amal. Besides, Tagore never suggests any definite breaking down or shattered relationships in his story. Nor does he deduce any composite idea like who or what may be responsible for the 'broken' state of the 'nest', which the translated title naturally confides.

What the word *'nir'* or 'nest' roughly connotes, is the idea of a shelter and a secured space where a sense of belongingness permeates. The other derivatives include a shared comfort zone with a liability to return after a willy-nilly day's work. But Charulata and Bhupati's conjugal abode cannot be exactly defined as a snug retreat. Any consensus regarding the perfect communion between this married couple seems to be redundant as Tagore states the loneliness of Charulata while she blossomed needlessly from a girl-wife to matured womanhood. Moreover, the fragility engrained in the word 'nestle' seems to be prerogative to the affluent household of Bhupati, with the indictment of being spoiled easily. While '*nir*' or 'nest' suggests one's private space where one keeps an actual and undivided self, I find Charulata and Bhupati not sharing a 'nir' in conventional terms. This proves true at the very onset of the story, where Tagore portrays the inability of Bhupati in recognizing Charu's gradually blossoming 'self'. His foolish attempt to amend her emotional and intellectual loneliness by employing Mandakini, the coarse wife of his brother-in-law Umapati, shows how little he understands her wife's needs. Moreover, when his cousin-brother Amal comes into the house to stay with them, he feels relieved from the charges of Charulata and his responsibilities towards her. The huge gulf between them is never deciphered by Bhupati, nor does he take any initiative to make any communion. Thus, the very title can be reviewed in the light of ineptitude, except semantically.

Unlike the rebellious protagonist, Mrinal in *The Wife's Letter* (Streer Patra, 1914), Charulata's husband Bhupati is seen to be conspicuously encouraging her in literary pursuits. While Mrinal had to write poetry stealthily, Charulata got constant encouragement by her reformative husband Bhupati, who even engaged Amal to mentor her creative projects and keeps her company. The companionship between Charu and Amal who were quite close by their respective ages, became more of friends than a respectable sister-in-law and her younger brother-in-law (*boudi-devar*). Even today in average Bengali households the sisters-in-law share quite amiable relationships with their brothers-in-law who are younger than their husbands. So Charulata and Amal's closeness didn't raise any eyebrows in the family, and their companionate emerged to be effective and fruitful to their literary pursuit.

Tagore's mnemonic vivacity finds its way in the naming of his female protagonists, and Charulata is no exception to this. Where 'mrinal' refers to the anecdote of support and solidity, the Bengali word 'charulata' stands for a clinging vine ('charu'=beautiful, 'lata'=forest creeper). Bhupati's psychological aloofness by his personal preoccupations and his much cherished notion of an 'Angel in the House', crippled her talented individuality and the firmness in her 'self'. Virginia Woolf explained this coinage in her essay "Professions for Woman" (1931) in the following terms:

> You may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She was excellent in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily… in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always, with the mind and wishes of others. (Bhattacharya 20)

As long as Charu posited a benign fidelity, she was never taken into serious consideration by Bhupati. The world of news-papers was more dear and appealing to Bhupati than his young wife, sitting alone in the house and "blossom into full bloom, with no effort and apparently to no purpose, just as a flower does automatically regardless to whether anyone admires it or not" (*Three Novellas* 4).

The name 'Bhupati' signifies the 'bearer of the land' ('World' in a larger sense) which, quite paradoxically, can be associated with the conventional notion of the conventional Indian husband. But unfortunately he ends up rootless and is left without any emotional or financial support after he meets disaster both at his workplace and home. His absorption in the newspaper and his easy acceptance of 'the common belief that no one need earn his claim to his wife' left him incompetent to decipher his loss till the end of the story. He constantly had claimed to be a realistic man and bereft of any poetical imagery. Very paradoxically Tagore projected this fact only to reveal at the end that he was not realistic either:

> Charu took away the magazine from Bhupati's hand, and asked, 'Then what does make any sense to you?'
>
> 'The realities of the world. Its people.'
>
> 'Does not literature speak about people?'
>
> 'Yes, it does, but wrongly. At any rate, when people are physically present, where is the need for them in fabricated stories.' (15)

But later when he lost all preoccupations and met the bitter realities of treachery and bankrupted, he took recourse into literature. He sought solace from the poetries of Tennyson, Byron and novels of Bankim. Mary M. Lago finds this 'foolish insincerity' towards one's wife as an assumption on the basis of traditional social and religious ideals, that the stability of the home is an 'article of received doctrine' (419). Bhupati's vain postulation crumble down when challenged by the realities of emotional need—both his and Charu's. Lago also draws upon the impetuosity in Bhupati's unconscious self, when he feels an urge to sustain Charu prevails for a moment, 'but the instinct for self-preservation is stronger' (421). And 'the moment passes, and Bhupati and Charu are left facing their empty futures' (Dasgupta 117).

The word Amal means a 'pure', 'guiltless', 'unadulterated' soul. He identifies the name when he takes the right conduct to leave the house, once he understood the situation. Though Tagore did not carry his account any further after Amal leaves the home to get married. His childish gaiety and immaturity does not seem culpable till it becomes an instrument of destruction. Though he was the only one who almost comprehended the situation and took the necessary steps to escape the situation, thus keeping himself 'pure' and aloof from the whole situation.

Being ahead of his time, Tagore advocated in favour of 'companionate marriage' in his writings, which was quite unknown to the contemporary middle class Bengali readership. He believed that the unequal marital relationship between a man and woman stemming from the differences in their ages as well as education might put an effect on their traditional beliefs and social conducts, thus standing as a hindrance in the way of their companionship. While the prescribed role for a woman was house-keeping and motherhood, the prospective area of work for a man was the outer world from where they had to earn to keep his family. Neither of the parties knew anything about their respective differences, nor could they comply with it. Even the nationalist ideology of the early twentieth century proclaimed the duty of a woman—to be a good wife who would help and support the husband with 'motherly' care and 'wifely' emotion, to achieve success (Mukherjee 38). Tagore tried to deconstruct this mother/wife binary to some extent by his idea of companionate marriage. Although he did not succeed well in this endevour, as he himself believed in the need of an education that would teach women to become 'womanly', thus making himself vulnerable to the issues of gender inequality. He unwittingly laid the fundamental difference between man and woman, while at the same, trying to reconcile it with 'ideal companionship'.

Tagore's conception of 'companionate marriage' failed viably in *The Broken Nest*. Charulata and Bhupati lived in two islands in their minds, where the two could hardly match each other's interest; though Bhupati occasionally suffered pangs of conscience, sometimes by himself or chided by some female relative. His revelation leading to a feeling of guilt, gave ways to intermittent

thoughts: "Poor Charu has nothing to do. She must have a companion." (*Three Novellas* 4) The expression 'poor' revealed his compassionate feelings towards his wife laid Charu far below him in all manners. Whereas it was essential for both husband and wife to be share equal stature in the household in a companionate marriage. Love and sympathy also build the basic stratum in conjugality to bind the two parties. But their conjugality lacked the romantic fervor that refuses to accept the confinement of both in relation to time as well as propriety. Since "Charulata had no much opportune break, and in no way was it possible for her to penetrate the editorial armour and come close to her husband"(4). Tagore decidedly conferred due importance upon the need of mutual love and respect for the either party in a marriage. Married at an early age, Charu was bereft of any qualities that could lead Bhupati's respect, and the difference in their ages could only arouse Bhupati's indulgent affections:

> No one, neither Charulata nor Bhupati, savoured that golden moment when the first flush of love makes life so splendidly blissful and glorious. It tragically passed them by, unawares. Having missed out the experience of young love, they just became used to each other as old acquaintances. (4)

Language also became a barrier between the two. Bhupati's involvement with the English language made him culpable in slipping his domestic duties and his cultural moorings. Mary M. Lago argued this preoccupation with the colonial language as Tagore's sly contention to brood over the contemporary political realities (421). She interrogates the political implications of the literary invasions upon the natives through Tagore's remarks at the very onset of the story: "Bhupati did not have to toil for a living, being sufficiently endowed with worldly goods. Besides, the sultry climate of the country was not exactly conducive to physical exercises." (*Three Novellas* 1) Apart from the hot climate which might wear out rich nobles in their work, Lago finds Tagore's allusions complying with subsequent ironic references to Bhupati's journalistic participation in politics, and indicating that India's political atmosphere was as hot as the climate. Though Bhupati could neither be entirely aware of T.S Eliot's cadence and emotions of a foreign language forming a supplementary personality in the reader, as Lago suggests, nor about Shakespeare's 'calibanism', but the new wind from the West made him restless and gave him direction to his otherwise aimless life. Eliot also referred to the limitations, along with the benefits of learning a foreign language. He warned against too deeper commitment to another language, as it might make one lose the ability to think and feel in the mother tongue. Bhupati's fascination towards English language thus moved him away from his mother tongue, and subsequently his young wife. By the time he would discover this adrift, he could not find his way back to either one. On the other hand Charulata, as most of the women in her time, could not understand English and laid a deeper foothold on the modern colloquial language. She found a *Guru* in Amal, who imitated the Sanskrit classicists in his intricate rhetoric and preposterous metaphors and borrowed his style and symbolism from the great writers of the past. Although her own literary alignments were modernist in their approach—both in matter and manner, and conducive to the ordinary events and ordinary lives; her independent self is reflected in deeper colours.

The workaholic husbands like Bhupati in *Nashtanir*, Aditya in *Malancha*, Sasanko in *Dui Bon*, Madhusudan in *Jogajog* are found to be self employed entrepreneurs, who work more for passion than necessity. Their *kaaj* (job) were more like obsession, not necessarily shared by others in their household. Tagore's unabashed depiction of Bhupati's occupation gave a clearer view:

> Political addiction and editorial addiction are both very potent intoxicants, particularly for a young man, and he lacked no sycophants to whip him into frenzied devotion to his new-found profession. While he was thus deeply immersed in the affairs of his newspaper, his child wife Charulata had matured meanwhile into a comely young woman. This significant domestic transformation went unobserved and unknown to the editor as he was then intensely

focused on the devious policy of the Imperial Indian Government relating to the frontier problems, which were getting out of hand. (3)

And 'in her opulent home Charulata had nothing to do, neither did she lack for anything.'(1). Though Bhupati did not lack anything as well in the same 'opulent home', his pre-occupation with the nonprofit newspaper had been a business worth to be counted as a *kaaj*. This also laid as a primal deficit in Charu-Bhupati's conjugal life, making Charu lonely. One might be reminded of the sub-title of Satyajit Ray's filmic translation (William Radice considered the film narrative as a wonderful translated text (in *Desh* 2011) of *Nashtanir*, as *Charulata Or The Lonely Wife).* Another pretext of this loneliness of wives might be the discouragement that women found in society while looking for paid jobs. As mentioned earlier, even if women were encouraged to be educated, they were eerily meant to produce competent wives better mothers. It was only after 1930 that middle-class Bengali women evinced their desire for gainful employment. Though the pioneering voice was heard from Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932), who made a public plea in favour of women employment as early as 1905:

> Why should we not have access to gainful employment? What do we lack? Are we not able-bodied, and endowed with intelligence? In fact, why should we not employ the labour and energy that we expend on domestic chores in our husbands' homes to run our enterprise? (Three Novellas xxix)

Though there had been a handful of women who actually made this true during the time Tagore was writing *Nashtanir*, such as Kadamdini Ganguly (1861-1923) the first woman doctor, Kamini Ray (1864-1933), the famous poet and Kumudini Khastagir (b.1865) the teacher in charge of the Bethune College. However, Tagore hardly approved of this and 'felt that women's roles and responsibilities were primarily attuned to domesticity' (Dasgupta xxix), and decidedly did not choose to frame Charulata as one of them.

In comparison to Mrinal's situation in her husband's family, Charulata certainly held in a higher stratum. Part of it might be because Charulata lived in a nuclear family consisting of the husband and wife along with a few distant and dependent relatives, whereas Mrinal is a typically middle-class wife whose husband is second-eldest in the family of many. Moreover, Charulata's 'opulent' home which never irked to give shelter to distant relatives providing for their livelihood along with studies, whereas, Mrinal's avaricious family could not but dispose off the orphan girl Bindu to a insane husband. The anonymous husband of Mrinal who had often been referred throughout, showing his annoyance in lieu of Mrinal's unconventional actions, was the person to whom the letter was intended. This signified the fact that neither Tagore ever deliberated upon the conjugal aspect of Mrinal's life in *The Wife's Letter*, nor did he tried to explore feminine desire or sexuality; which was the major point of departure between Charulata and Mrinal. Written far before *The Wife's Letter* (1914), *The Broken Nest* (1901) had been written in an age when Tagore started writing with women as the central protagonist. The conception of 'New Woman' was being made, though not in bold strokes, in Tagore's writings. The women protagonists were given both space and individuality to express their views on love, marriage and even relationships outside marriage. They voiced themselves against the patriarchal control over women that might take fatal turns, and even curved their own niche in the world asserting their respective choices. These women had started fashioning their ways and shaping their individuality by asserting their independent ideas. *Nastanir*'s Charulata designed a world for herself even in her husband's absence and his oblivious behavior towards her. Tagore unravels her psyche and implores: "… the truth was that she was in desperate need of someone who in turn needed her, depended on her, and whom she could spoil affectionately conceding to his claims, however extortionate" (*Three Novellas* 5). She chose Amal as a companion, read and wrote and engaged herself in some constructive issues. But this transition from the traditional notion of womanhood to the perception of 'New Woman' was not an easy task even for

Tagore. His women of this phase were caught in between the traditional values and independent outlook. So Charulata could not recognize her love for Amal all through the story, and bore the burden of an 'unnamable' pain in her heart since Amal's departure. The 'woman' in herself was caged and constantly vanquished by two major forces of the contemporary society – the '*antahpur*' or inner-house where women were entrapped, and the specific roles that were socially ascribed. The more she accepted her solitariness and Bhupati's disclaimer as an ideal companion, the more she lost her spontaneity.

> The sexuality that is dormant in Charuata was never awakened or watered by any outer force. Neither did the child-wife have any opportunity to grow up in full bloom and attain consciousness. No one, neither Charulata nor Bhupati , savoured that golden moment when the first flush of love makes life so splendidly blissful and glorious. It tragically passed them by, unawares. Having missed out the experience of young love, they just became used to each other as old acquaintances. (4)

Staying together like co-inhabitants Charu and Bhupati did not possess anything new to give, nothing unexpected to surprise each other. But Amal's lively gaiety ushered new things in Charu's life. In that opulent home there were never any demands made on Charu to do anything for anyone. Only Amal succeeded in making her do things for him, and such voluntary labours of love provided Charu with an outlet for much satisfaction and fulfillment. The poised Bhupati was a sharp contrast to this, who expected absolutely nothing from her. For he thought this behavior to be burdening the freedom of his wife, and his obtuseness about Charu's emotional an intellectual needs, as a model of broadmindedness. The loveless Charu craved for attention and companionship till Amal, the young, gay and insouciant cousin of Bhupati came as a rescue and provided her delightful company. Playfully and innocently Charu drifted towards an inevitable romantic passion which she failed to recognize till the end of the story. Though Tagore never discussed anything but Charu's longings for Amal in an almost inarticulate voice, nevertheless, her potentially transgressive sexuality got hinted with a plausible 'incestuous' note by the relation 'cousin', and by the norms of Indian families, the husband's cousin eventually became the cousin of his wife and vice versa. In this context, one might be reminded of Eliot's pivotal work *The Waste Land*, and A. K. Ramanujan's poem "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing". This surmise attained momentum in the garden episode, when Charu and Amal laid their uninhibited imagination and childish fantasy to create a 'marvellous garden' on a small and messy piece of land. Critics presumably found an allusion of the Garden of Eden in Tagore's two page elaborate depiction of the planned garden, thus predicting the impending 'corruption'. Moreover, Charu and Amal, tried to maneuver the garden and by setting up great paraphernalia, which might indicate the sovereignty they wanted to exercise upon their Paradise. Charu did not want to share this solemnity with anyone, not even with her husband Bhuapti, whom she might have considered the 'outsider'. In his film *Charulata* (1964), Satyajit Ray had used both the tropes—swing and the garden, with Charu sitting on it and casting her eyes through a pair of lorgnettes—first on a mother holding her child, then Amal lying on the ground. The pair of lorgnettes brought her those things nearer, which laid far away in reality. Moreover, both the texts give stark contrast to Charu's emotional efficacies by Manda's obtuse sexuality. Though Ray's film does not imply enough evidences of the burgeoning but innocent companionship between the two, and Charu's erotic longings had also been traced quite hastily, nonetheless the explicating sexual consciousness in her could not been otherwise portrayed more efficiently.

An impression that might emerge out of the readings of Tagore's gendered narratives was the inherent norms of Victorian culture and the resultant sexual repression that had infiltrated the indigenous culture. In Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, in a section titled "We, Other Victorians", he stated that the westerners had internalized Victorianism. He might not consider the effects of cultural-colonialism that the British hegemony laid upon the ethnic groups; though they had

been variant in their manifestation by the process of localization and re-appropriation. In the opening paragraph, Foucault reproachfully writes: "For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today. Thus the image of the imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute and hypocritical sexuality" (1). He admittedly complies with the binaries of Eastern and Western responses to sexualities and the interplay of truth and sex as concepts. Along with the credible overlappings, Foucault comments that the Western *scientia sexualis* that involves confessions and narration is different from *ars sexulis* that is a more sacred, internalised and perhaps secretive, fiercely guarded concept (Dasgupta 100) Tagore's representation of sexual desire and gendered sexuality can be studied in this light.

An argument can also hold foot on Charu's imagined 'masculinity' and fantasizing the male rescuer in Amal. As a sociological concept 'hegemonic masculinities' derives from the theory of 'cultural hegemony' by Antonio Gramsci which analyzes the power relations among the social classes of a society. Initially theorized by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell in his celebrated book *Masculinities* (1995), the study of 'masculinities' has now been widely accepted and regarded within the broader locus of Gender Studies. The conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity represented the culturally idealized form of manhood that was socially and hierarchically exclusive; concerned with protecting/ bread-winning; also abjectly brutal and violent, pseudo- natural and tough, psychologically contradictory, and thus crisis-prone. Imprisoned in her boredom with her repressed sexuality and self, Charu finds herself the Muse of Amal's literary adventures. And her happiness and contentment lay on the fact that Amal's writings are something that belongs to the two of them in their 'private' domain—Amal as the writer and Charu is sole reader. The recent discourse of masculinity loosely is aligned to certain attributes to men, such as boldness and physical strength. Amal's uninhibited boldness is reflected presumably in asserting his whimsical demands to Charu. Tagore contrasts this to the husband Bhupati: "Bhupati made no demands to his wife, but just for providing a few lessons Amal exploited Charu through his many unreasonable caprices" (*Three Novellas* 5). Charu willfully succumbs to these inequitable tyrannies of a 'man', who demands, patronizes, and protests if his demands are not fulfilled. Charu's passion for Amal is unveiled for the first time when she is aggravated towards Manda's intrusion. The foreplay of colossal passion intensifies and reaches its orgasm when Manda is enamoured by Amal's charm and Charu vehemently confers with Bhupati to turn her out of the house. To assuage Amal and bring him back to her, Charu submits her independent style of writing and takes up imitating Amal. She even casts away her wifely duties and cannot decipher Bhupati's emotional and financial crisis, thus assaulting the first blow to their ephemeral home. Quite paradoxically Tagore depicted Bhupati's desolated and vacillated state of mind:

> The world around Bhupati collapsed. This new aspect of life, now unmasked, shook him terribly. Like a panic-stricken person facing a sudden onslaught of flood rushed to seek shelter at the highest point, Bhupati assailed by the perfidies of the world around him sought refuge at the only secured place he knew, his home. 'Whatever happens, Charu will never deceive me,' he believed. (35)

His belief turns out to be wrong as he finds Charu incapable of providing him solace or comfort. And "the rigid muteness of both congealed into a dense gloom."(38). Her undivided attention and adoration for Amal is laid uncouthly on this occasion and he is left in utter shame for his childish and irresponsible behavior. Realizing Charu's passion for him, he tries to retrieve the situation by leaving abruptly as he is unable to accept that Bhupati's trust in him has been vitiated. Amal also tries to comply with the situation by accepting the marriage proposal that would lead him to England to become a barrister. All of a sudden his frivolous self grows up with the 'knowledge' that he has trespassed in a restricted place, and is finally left "dazed like a traveller who, walking along a hill track discovers without warning, as the mist unexpectedly clears, that he was about to step into a bottomless abyss" (36).

Bhupati's silent perusal becomes doubly poignant in Tagore's short story. After the newspaper business sinks for the first time in his conjugal life, Bhupati feels romantically and overwhelmingly attracted towards his wife. He painstakingly teaches himself a flare for writing literary Bengali, so that he can coax her and become an intellectual companion. But Charu does not respond to his fancies and goes deeper into her solemn mourning for Amal. To encourage Charu in her literary pursuits and resume her back in her writings Bhupati even writes some trashes with much enthusiasm and hands her those for her comments. But the final blow comes upon him with the revelation that Charu has pawned a piece of her jewel to send a cable to England to enquire Amal's well being. This abrupt behavior and her secrecy lead Bhupati to sense that his apparent domestic bliss is all but an illusion. Moreover, Charu can no longer hide her despair for Amal. Bhupati feels befooled as he has always mistaken Charu's household duties as an expression of love towards him. Abhorring the idea of trying to replace Amal's presence by his own, all the same Bhupati cannot help but feel compassionate to Charu's pitiable state. He introspects Charu's suffering from a distance and concludes:

> What could be more tragic than this untiring effort of Charu to look after me and at the same time carry on with this clandestine hypocrisy? These perfidies cannot be put down as mere despicable transgressions of a temptress, for the luckless woman had to go through horrendous sufferings in this process, and each day, each, each moment her sore heart must have bled for such delinquencies. (55)

To get away from his 'broken' home and his 'silent and grief-stricken' wife, Bhupati secures a job as an editor at Mysore. But Charu cannot bear with the thought of an impending loneliness and reproaches Bhupati to take her with him. However, moved deeply by the pathos on Charu's face, he ruefully undergoes a change in his mind and suggests her come along with him. But, perhaps sensing his inner disapproval and the seeming pity, Charulata realizes that their home cannot be mended to resume to an immaculate state. And the story ends with her brief and frozen response '*Thaak*'. Critic Swati Ganguly claims in one of her scholarly articles "Finding frames for the 'new woman': Transforming *Nashtaneed* into *Charulata"* that no translation can capture the poignancy of the rueful single Bengali word '*thaak*' that Charu utters, though it is often quite imperfectly translated as "No. Let it be" (57).

Krishna Kripalani, while discussing *Broken Nest*, alluded towards the ontological derivatives of the term *devar* from Sanskrit as 'the second husband'. He also mentions some ancient Indian custom of marrying the deceased husband's brother, which is still prevalent in some parts of the country (203). Such a speculation may offend the traditional conformists. But many stories of Tagore have such foreground of extra-marital relationships. Moreover, Tagore's open-ended stories play upon the binaries without suggesting any single or definite meaning.

In conclusion it can be said that the totality of Tagore's own views runs counter to the above critical reading. His huge bulk of literature can answer all probable indictments and doubts. Still the researcher's mind never stops inquiring. The above discussed matters are but a few trajectories that are borne out of a researcher's spirit and put forward by contemporary readings on Tagore. While commenting on Tagore historian Bharati Ray has argued in the "Introduction" of the book *Three Novellas,* that creative literature is a form of history and records history in its own style. Though literature depends on imagination to much extent, but so does the writing of history; since it is rather impossible to know what happened in the past, or even what is happening in the present. So both history and literature must be reconstructed by the means of imagination, leaving apart Aristotle's notion of 'particularity' and 'universality'. Ray's conjecture seems to be quite apprehensive as literature too is a product of socio-economic and politics conjectures and ideological ensembles. Also it 'enters social relations, enacts or filters social tensions' (xxxii) and itself is a force that shapes and

alters social consciousness. This is very much pertinent for the two above discussed stories. On one hand they represent social beliefs and expectations, dominant conventions and emergent challenges to them at a very crucial point of Bengal's history—both social and literary. While on the other hand, they venture to become the harbinger of a social change, by shaping the social consciousness and marking the conflict that was aroused among a handful of women in contemporary Bengal.

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