

IN THE LIGHT OF INTROSPECTION: MANIK BANDOPADHYAY'S 'BOU'

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In Achintya Kumar Sengupta's language, Manik Bandopadhyay (1908 - 1956) was not just the epitome of 'Kallole's upward surge' ('A belated kallolean' in the language of Buddhadeb Basu); he was also the complete discoverer of the profound mysteries of the human mind in the world of modern Bengali literature. While Kallole's daring attempt was to determine the new values of male-female relationships and the new definitions of human love, they had made efforts in a way that did not compromise their desire. However, there was much unnatural curiosity. And we know that a great artist must be indifferent, impartial. He will be interested in the subject matter of art, but he will not be influenced by it. In Manik's harmonious achievement, there was the artistically appropriate restraint. By breaking the old spiritual explanation of love (in his words, 'Romantic Nakami'), he made human love the eternal in literature.

Love's expression is born from the world of lovelessness. Refusing to accept life as it is doesn't mean escaping into the mind; it's actually about seeing life through the prism of love. And it's through observing those nuances of life that delve deep into the human psyche that he crafted his stories in 'Bou'. Sometime between 1940 and 1943, during a certain period, this collection of stories, which portrayed different moods, was published (though there is some disagreement about the exact year of its first publication, Saroj Dutta has stated that the 'Bou' collection of stories was first published by Udayachal Publishing House in 1940). In the first edition, eight stories were published, and in the second edition, a total of thirteen stories were included, presenting a narrative that has rarely been explored in Bengali short stories.

The history of Bengali short stories will find many stories revolving around marital discord, among which the most prominent might be 'Nashtanir' (The Broken Nest). Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941) depicted the crumbling relationships of men and women, who appeared happy on the surface but were deteriorating internally, in this story. In his words, it was "fearless literature". When Amol and Charu's pure love encounters the sight of destruction, they emphasize 'life's purpose' over 'mental peace', it leads to the expression of boundless pain in the void hearts of the protagonists, through a self-proclamation: "For so long, I haven't found love, and I can't even realize it." It is this exploration of the "chamber of the mind" that Manik attempted. He sought to explore the light and shadow of post-marital relationships between men and women! Even when the old values of society, tradition, culture, and religious beliefs were being questioned in the aftermath of the First World War, he was searching for the element of eternal art within the contemporary and immediate. In his comprehensive study, he examined the stories of Manik's 'Bou', attempting to understand the human psyche.

In one's own family, a constant struggle seems to be going on between opposing forces against each other, as portrayed in 'Dokanir Bou'. Shambhu's wife Sarala is constantly at odds with him (and sometimes without words). She often puts him in trouble. Shambhu, entangled in debts, fights Sarala, who refuses to accept money from her father for the shop and, on the same condition, separates herself from the joint family of her three brothers. Sarala cannot easily accept it when Shambhu speaks to the beggars who come to the shop in a friendly manner. Shambhu gives her a saree as a gift to appease her. But Sarala finds no peace of mind. The description of her mental state in the story reads: "For some days, as if she has been rising, the adjacent state seems to be hers, she does not realize it, but the eyes and ears understand and help move all these incomprehensible situations and events towards transformation." Gopal Halder's comment could be used to understand Sarala's mental state: "That omnipotent power beyond all rules and regulations seems to be itself the only rule, the inevitable one. It is not just beyond social policies and rules. He who relies on it envelops his entire physical and mental life, achieving his singular goal."

With Shambhu constantly occupied with his relatives on the other side of the bed, Sarala's close relatives are often busy advising her. Sarala becomes restless. She tries to listen to their words. She becomes anxious. Shambhu, who is trying to open a new shop with the help of three hundred rupees brought by her father, comes to know about it and returns the money. Sarala assures him that she will bring back the money again with her skillful acting. Sarala wants to keep love alive in the world of lovelessness!

Why did Sarala behave this way? Did the aftermath of the First World War somehow awaken a sense of insecurity in her amidst economic decline? Was there a similar reason behind breaking up the joint family? Or could it be linked to Freud's notion of ego (moi), even though Jacques Lacan (1901 - 1981) states, "ego (moi) is sharply separated from the id..." Which is the subconscious. Always striving to satisfy its desires by conquering the material world. It constantly struggles

to maintain its existence. Isn't its connection to the hostile forces outside also an integral part of the driving force in discussable stories! Manik's 'Dokanir Bou' presents us with such questions.

On the other hand, 'Sahityiker Bou' in Amala's literary creation becomes entangled, unable to reconcile Suryakanta the literary figure with the real Suryakanta, so much so that Amala became angry as she advanced towards the year of marriage. Love, or rather, the affair of the heart, about which "Man, event, object, reality, imagination, and intricacies of life" are experienced with such naive enthusiasm that one can't help but keep a distance - barely able to hear a word or two amidst the noise. Suryakanta's life lacks intense inhibition. Can one meddle with such a person! Amala and we notice signs of 'simple inhibition' in Suryakanta's behavior. The 19-year-old Amala's heart, filled with such tendencies, cannot reconcile them. The separation of the two leads Amala into melancholy. We find in our minds that apart from Charles Darwin (1809 - 1882) and Sigmund Freud's (1856 - 1939) abandonment and repression, Freud was deeply influenced by his thoughts and ideas, from which he concluded that hysteria is a nerve disease and the decision comes from Freud - hysteria is a mental illness.

Unable to merge the world of imaginary love with reality, Amala's love became incomplete. And from the desire for idealized humans, love in real life became fragmented ('Bipatniker Bou'). But as a sublime man, Paramour Ramesh's second wife becomes a shadow of the former, Manasi. Even though she came into Ramesh's household as his second wife, she had to constantly compete with Manasi, his first wife. But the human heart of the carnal being keeps no secrets. Obstacles arise in their normal married life. Nevertheless, "How much fun it was for the paramour, how many imaginations there were, everything is destroyed by an unexpected conflict with self-control, not just in duty, not just in play, but in the restricted necessity of living" (page: 61). Manasi becomes distressed trying to love the child of Manasi. But Ramesh cannot love her either. Because, "Unspoken jealousy towards the heavenly wife deprives the paramour's simple attainable happiness of life of the path" (page: 60). Marrying Paramour Ramesh was not for Manasi's sake, but to forget the pain of losing Manasi. In the crisis of existence, Manasi's sweetness fades away. She feels, "Her fundamental truth remains undisturbed in this house, a new form of Manasi, - like the image of an intangible, undefined deity, she, too, is an incorporeal symbol of the living sorrow of all" (page: 58). In time, even though Pratima becomes acceptable to everyone, Pratima may no longer remain normal. It allows Manasi to be kept alive in her own mind. Does she want to survive herself! The emotions are the only valuable thing in physical life, according to Freud. Ideas are only represented because they are connected with the release of emotions that are not to come to light. Manik's debatable story is a beautiful example.

As Greek Demosthenes (384 BC – 322 BC) said, 'The work of women is only to bear children and perform household chores.' How Sumati ended up falling prey to the tyranny of that rule, and even in a loveless marriage, she was forced to keep the flame of love burning – 'Teji Bou' presents a beautiful illustration. Sumati had a big fault – Tej (spunk). Yet, why this lightness in her? Where? No, "she can't afford someone else's so much injustice, she can't bear her head down to anyone; she thinks, "how much hurt she can cause someone, her stubborn selfish nature has taken shape in her face like camphor" (page: 65). So when the mother-in-law insists on going to her father's house, Sumati surrenders alone. But when she becomes ill, first hospitalized, then when she comes back to her in-laws' house, she appears to be glowing like camphor. Sumati's outward defeat may seem, but not holding back the disposition to policy or discipline, Sumati has actually triumphed by bringing out the natural propensity of her personality.

In addition, the unconscious emotions of women's minds due to the unrestrained grief of children's mourning can raise strong objections, where love-pure (!) After twelve years of married life, even after the premature death of two children, there may be a trace of sorrow in Gurupadar's mind ('Pujarir Bou'). When she (Kadambini) perceived her son's sorrow for the third time, she perceived it as the sorrow of her own son. When her maternal instincts would return the third time, Gurupadar's mind didn't just have a trace of sorrow even during the day but gently nurtured that sorrowful mind in the darkness of night. As a result, when her son's sorrow is perceived, Gurupadar doesn't see her husband's face; she only sees the distortion of your view; she felt that the ruthless nature of her selfishness had taken shape in his face" (page: 92). As a result, she begins to move towards the farthest land of semi-consciousness, where one is attacked by the emotions of helplessness and solitude, leaving behind the reality of consciousness. In the end, "when she perceives the shadow path of those worries in the light of day, she gets up to lift it, now in the darkness of night, she nourishes that troubled mind with care" (page: 91). In view of this distorted gaze, we are attracted to the introspection of human emotions and feelings.

'Like the real representative of the princess of the fairy tale' Yamini, when she first proposed marriage to the prince of the Avantipur Raj Estate ('Rajar Bou'), "that day she was immersed in her imagination, with mysterious marble palaces, peacock and deer-filled flower gardens, a golden throne adorned with fur, and a group of brightly dressed, dignified, and harmonious ladies and gentlemen. And in the lap, a charming young prince riding a horse." (Page: 97). After marrying that prince, "that night she enjoyed herself, but the next day she began to feel uneasy again in the disorderly chaos of life." (Page: 97). In the midst of this inconsistency of day and night, Yamini caught Bhupati. Bhupati, too, may have been secretly struggling within himself amidst the intense desire of his heart to take her into the world of love. But even in the

presence of the enchanting nature illuminated by moonlight, Bhupati may have been struggling internally. So, taking advantage of the opportunity to have a child, Yamini sought refuge in the outside world. But Yamini? "For her husband's intense love, a fierce insatiable hunger for existence has become independent, transformed into a separate religion" (Page: 106) whose - this time to discover her husband's same intense love world, she found a void. Taking refuge in the world of imagination, she had embellished the real world; this time, she took refuge not only from the real world but also from the world of imagination for the fulfilment of her 'impulsive desire'. From now on, her nights were spent in the contemplation of memories.

Unexpectedly, Bhupati's illness and weather changes brought Yamini closer to Bhupati again. Bhupati also wanted to find Yamini again through the influence of the lazy silent days of the bomb. Now "What Bhupati wants is in her, their unpredictable unsatisfied love. But Bhupati has not been able to find his serpent. Perhaps one day Yamini's imagination will stop, perhaps agitated, today she will search for this real Bhupati in the dark, but Bhupati may not be awake then" (Page: 109). So close to each other - yet one cannot find the other's serpent. Love gets lost in confusion. In this context, Freud said, "the careless way in which languages uses the 'Love' has its genetic justification.... Love with an inhabited aim was in fact originally fully sensual love, and it is so still in man's unconscious."

In the routine of married life, what a couple desires is often left unspoken; yet, what happens is for the best, even if it remains unspoken. In other words, the archetypes of love create a world within their minds, and when these fail to materialize in their daily lives, a subtle dissatisfaction creeps into the realm of affection. Simple incidents weave intricate complications between two hearts, sometimes transforming expressions of love into resentment or lingering thoughts unspoken. It is in these moments that tales like 'Sarbabidyabisharader Bou' or 'Jurarir Bou' are born.

In the story of 'Udarcharitanamer Bou', we observe, who, in the external world, battles an enigmatic dominance in Jatin's psyche. Though his wife Krishna comprehends everything in the outside world with her discerning eyes, internally, she rebels against Jatin's dominance. She contemplates rebelling against Jatin's oppression. Readers hear her representative saying, "Today, it seems she has gathered courage; she needed more courage than Krishna's to defy societal norms, policies, and religion" (Page: 121).

The realities of life are repeatedly examined through the laboratory of the characters' minds. In the initial stages of the narrative, Manik pondered, 'In the grandeur of virtuous life, why does triviality, vulgarity, degradation, selfishness, and corruption find favor in this falsehood that virtuous life is merely beautiful and grand?' It is precisely this contradiction in the inner sanctum of virtuous life that he ardently portrays. Manik believed that when love is between two individuals, it should pulsate in both body and soul. 'Love' doesn't mean just worship. Love doesn't solely rely on physicality or solely on emotion. Love must be reciprocal. The attraction between a man and a woman, the harmony and union, sustains love; the opposite leads to its demise. This concept is applicable even in the realm of human emotions.

In the story 'Kusthorugir Bou', when Jatin is afflicted with leprosy due to ancestral sins, his wife is responsible for his plight. Yet, in the aftermath of marriage, Jatin does not allow Mahashweta to relinquish her duties. Mahashweta comprehends all of her husband's afflictions. She finds solace in her infirm husband, while Mahashweta, in her silent contemplation, begins to resent Jatin. Gradually, she directs Mahashweta towards the path of hopelessness. Although the first four years of their marriage were filled with love, now, "Jatin remains solitary, abandoned, while Mahashweta tirelessly searches for life's support in an empty bed" (Page: 81). The disease-stricken Jatin is drawn to Kamakhya, while Mahashweta turns towards Kali Ghat. It is on that day that she brings five leper's home. And what if "She has loved her healthy husband for so long, she now despises those afflicted with the disease of the road. Today, she despises her husband for it, loves the lepers of the road" (Page: 85). Is this action Mahashweta's reaction to her 'hidden self'? Though Saroj Mohan Mitra views Jatin's leprosy as a consequence of societal sin and adultery, we find support for our interpretation in Soumitra Lahiri's statement: "The complexity of Mahashweta's character, the transformation in her psyche, the vacillation in her character is all far simpler than Jatin's character".

Manik sheds light on the intricate fabric of life by exploring the monologues of thirteen female characters in various socio-economic environments in his notable collection of stories. By delving into the lives of these women, he seeks to unearth the foundation of their relationships, which have evolved through changing eras and ideologies. In the backdrop of two devastating world wars and the erosion of values, amidst the complexities of time, Manik portrays the conscious and subconscious minds of individuals, revealing how the complexities of life have either unfolded or were destined to unfold. These narratives reflect the intricate tapestry of life, woven through the annals of time, where the conscious and subconscious minds of individuals have played crucial roles in shaping their destinies. Manik skillfully portrays these aspects that one may not necessarily wish to see, yet are essential in understanding the intricacies of human existence.

References:

1. "Bou" by Manik Bandopadhyay, M.C. Sarkar & Sons Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata - 73, Fifth Edition – 1406.