distance between the desired state of the nation from the actual chaos.

Similarly, the moral degradation of women in Tagore's novel is described in the prose language, but when he draws the conclusion, and locates the ultimate source of the moral downfall of the females, he delves into the realm of the ahistorical where the essence of *maya* and its uncontestable authority in the realm of the mythical provides a justification for the violent treatment of female sexuality.

Tagore's overall justification for isolating the feminine to the realm of the ahistorical is part of his larger project of aesthetic rebellion to the West, which is pronounced in one of his last plays *Rakta Karabi* (1926). It is one of Tagore's last pieces of work, and it focuses on the inherent struggle between agriculture and industrialization.

The play is set up in a place called *Jokkhopuri,* controlled by a ruler who is completely isolated and out of touch with the community. The air is heavy, and the inhabitants dig the earth all day long in search for minerals. Nandini is brought into the scene as the ultimate sign of force that can free the shackles of *Jokkhopuri*, diminish its evils of riches and intoxication, and restore freedom and foster closeness to the earth through agriculture.

Nandini, however, is established as a character who is always happy, and concerned about others. There is no personal wish that she attempts to pursue, except for the well-being of the community and waiting for her lover Ronjon who would eventually free the community. In Nandini's case, her innocence, and feminine spirit of caring is enough to shake the foundations of the ruler who is supported by his network of power.

Tagore in *Rakta Karabi* objects to the lust of the enormous power structure by resisting it with the character of Nandini, who carries the spirit of individual freedom and creativity; but the problematic aspect lies in Nandini's overly dramatic passion of sympathy towards the community.

As I have mentioned earlier, according to Chakrabarty, sympathy is crucial in creating a modern subject who is capable of feeling a universal position and, therefore, acting rationally towards others in the community. Another important aspect of the modern individual that Dipesh Chakrabarty points out is the interiority of the subject. This interiority is born out of the struggle between reason and individual desires, emotion and passion. Even though we see the expression of Binodini's interiority in *Chokher Bali*, Nandini's interiority is completely lacking in *Rakta Karabi.*

It was important for Tagore to show Binodini's interiority because, by the virtue of being a widow, she had already committed a social oddity. The only way she could ever render herself acceptable in the society was by fighting her passion, greed, and sexuality with the tool of reason, which opened up her mind to sympathize with Asha, Rajlakhsmi, Bihari, and even Mahendra in realizing the evils of her passion that ruined this family.

Nandini, being a virgin, is pure and less complicated. The spirit of womanly traits as identified by Tagore: spiritual love, spirit of service, passion for self-sacrifice are already present in Nandini, whereas in Binodini's character these qualities were burdened by the ills of her sexuality and passion to practice it. Binodini is Tagore's attempt to internalize the degeneration of the society, and offer a literary solution to the problem, whereas *Rakta Karabi* is completely set in a mode of poetry, in the poetic realm of ahistorical reality.

If Binodini was a problem and the nationalistic agenda had to seek a solution for her, then Nandini was the ideal iconification of feminine sexuality that was desirable as the foundation for India's nationalistic movement. Tagore's discussion of *Rakta Karabi* confirms that it is a "vision" that had come to him "in the darkest hours of dismay."[3]

By 1926, the first world war, growing communalism in India, proposals for partition, violence in the nationalist language prepared the ground of Tagore's poetic humanism to seek for an alternative solution that was to realize the "divine essence of the infinite in the vessel of the finite."[4]

This aesthetic journey ended in the complete objectification of feminine sexuality in the timeless, spiritual, ahistorical, transcendental, self-sacrificing realm of nationalism: "This personality, the divine essence of the infinite in the vessel of the finite -- has its last treasure-house in a woman's heart. Her pervading influence will some day restore the human to the desolated world of man."[5]

It is this heavy burden of embodying the true essence of the infinite in the vessel of the finite that caused Tagore's daughters to be sacrificed for the "traditional cause" of early marriages.

Locating this alternative spiritual superiority in the women enabled nineteenth century Bengali nationalism to impose clear double standards on its women. It is under this framework that women became the bearers and redeemers of the culture.

Rabindranath Tagore, who previously protested the practice of child marriage, opposed the Age of Consent Bill 1891, which raised the age of consent for sexual intercourse from ten to twelve. Nationalism and winning the ideological battle with the British was clearly far more important than saving young girls from marital rape.

The Bengali men did not want the British officials setting the rules in the bedroom too. The British had already been ruling the public sector for hundreds of years. The private sector was for Bengali men to lay down their own rules and brew the nationalist emotions to ultimately overthrow the British rule. The "women's issue" could wait until then. After all, women were spiritual beings.[6]

Clearly, it was more necessary for Rabindranath Tagore to create a social revolution in the public sector than to offer better lives to his daughters and his wife. However, this phenomenon does not seem to bother any of us, does it? After all, Bengali women are hailed for their ultimate power to self-sacrifice, both for the cause of the nation and for their men.

1 Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000.

2 Sarada, M, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Study of Women Characters in his Novels*, Bangalore: Sterling Publishers, 1988.

3 Tagore, Rabindranath, Rakta Karabi, Kolkata, Viswabharati: 1998.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 See elaboration of this argument in, Chatterjee Pratha, *The Nation and its Women* in Guha, Ranajit, *Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995,* Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

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