

## Ashapura Devi's Famous Trilogy Novels: Mirror Of Endless Struggles Of Bengali Women For Self-Assertion/ Empowerment

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**Abstract:** *Ashapura Devi (1909-1995), one of the most eminent litterateurs of the Bengali literature, was an outstanding personality, who did not receive any conventional education, but was able to produce almost two hundred novels and many collections (total 30) of stories in spite of being confined within four walls of home following patriarchal norms as a middle-class housewife. According to Buddhadev Basu, she desired /tried her level best to establish herself just like a male author through her literary world. Even Rabindranath Tagore described Ashapura as 'sampurna' and she was famous for her trilogy novels- 'Pratham Pratisruti', 'Subarnalata' and 'Bakul katha'. Perfect depiction of flaws of Bengali middle-class household, ability to change thought-process with changing patterns of social values, both power and simplicity in expression, capability to establish herself not only as a feminist, but also a humanist author, made her illustrious in creative arena of Bengal. Her amazing character Satyabati defied patriarchal rules and discarded her life as a wife and mother when her husband Nabakumar betrayed her faith by marrying their daughter Subarnalata keeping her in dark about this child-marriage ceremony. Subarnalata in her whole life, fought with her abusive husband Prabodhchandra and terrible in-laws and finally became successful in establishing her separate home, even wrote her autobiography also, but died a tragic death because her sons also vehemently criticised her as per societal norms. Bakul, the heroine of the last novel of the reputed trilogy, emerged as an eminent author entitled 'Anamika Devi' and never married after becoming unsuccessful in her love with neighbour Nirmal in a tender age due to his family's conservatism. In this article, I will try to unfold the journey of pioneering women from Satyabati to Anamika/ Bakul reflected in Ashapura's writings.*

**Keywords:** *Bengali women, empowerment, feminist author, patriarchy, social realism*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Ashapura Devi, born in a Baidya family on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1909 in North Calcutta, was deprived of formal education due to contemporary social conservatism and orthodoxy of her own family, but her immense urge for continuing studies in home survived for influence of her mother Sarala Sundari, an ardent book-lover. She, considered as an outstanding author of Bengali literature in the post-Rabindranath and Saratchandra era, was married in a very tender age with Kalidas Gupta of Krishnanagar, but continued her literary works within confinement of her household. Her first book (novel) for adult people entitled 'Prem o Prayojon' was published in 1944. Before her death on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1995, she produced total 176 novels, 30 story-books (collection of short stories), 47 books

for children, 25 collections of other writings, 63 translations etc. but her most famous creations were the Satyabati trilogy- 'Pratham Pratisruti' (1964), 'Subarnalata' (1967) and 'Bakul katha' (1974). Dr. Debesh Kumar Acharyya in his book entitled 'Bangla Sahityer itihās' [Adhunik Yug: 1800-1960] had rightly stated that- '*Sriramakrishna, Rabindranath o Ashapura tinjoni tathakothito vidyalaya shiksha grahon na koreo swa-swa khetre dikpal. .... Tero bachhar bayase kalam dhore, chhiyashi bachhar bayaseo jar kalam thameni, sei Ashapura Devi Bangla sahitye ananya, swayansiddha, ek bismaykar lekhika.*'

Ashapura Devi (awarded the Jnanpith Award, the Rabindra Award, Padmashri, D.Litt. by several Universities, Deshikottam, the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship) had amazing power of reconstructing and regenerating her thought-process

and style of expression, immense knowledge about society and contemporary middle-class life of Bengal, capability of creating several flavours for production of fruitful literature, freedom of identity from hypocrisy and market-driven commercial mentality, both feminist and humanist spirit, social realism (*stri-purusher jivansanghat, prem-pranoy-pritighrina, bhanga-gora prabhriti*); spontaneous flow in her writing pattern etc. According to Bhudev Chowdhury, Ashapurna had strength and competitive attitude for successfully establishing herself in contemporary male-dominated literary world and she can be compared with Anurupa Devi. Srikumar Bandopadhyay in his notable book entitled 'Bangosahitye upanyaser dhara' had mentioned that as women litterateurs/ novelists, there were several well-established names such as Pratibha Basu, Mahashweta Bhattacharyya and Bani Ray besides Ashapurna Devi, but Ashapurna – '*...upanyaser sankhyadhikye o jivan-parjalochonar bishishtatay... agrabartini.*'

Extremist politics during the Swadeshi / Anti-Partition Movement of Bengal (1905-1911), the Gandhian Satyagraha of 1920s, revolutionary terrorism of 1930s, the Progressive Cultural Movement and literary debates connected with it in 1940s and 1950s, The Naxalite Movement of 1960s and 1970s had imprint on the psyche of Ashapurna Devi and that impact had been reflected in her renowned trilogy novels.

'Pratham Pratisruti', termed as Ashapurna's magnum opus, was a 1964 novel (Feminist novel) based on life-story of Satyabati, who fought her whole life against child marriage, polygamy, abusive conjugal relationship/ domestic violence and barriers of social conservatism thwarting women's education, financial independence and empowerment. The first promise was indeed that particular promise made by the undaunted heroine Satyabati for educating her youngest child Subarnalata and she could not translate that dream into reality due to stiff opposition from her orthodox husband Nabakumar and conspiracy of cruel mother-in-law Elokeshi arranging child marriage for Subarna keeping Satyabati completely unaware of it. Satyabati left her household voluntarily to search for answers regarding the position of helpless women in traditionalist society, right to education and choosing life in their own terms / earning their livelihood. Satyabati, cherished daughter of a wealthy Ayurveda doctor Ramkali, was married to Nabakumar when she was only eight years old and in spite of her courageous nature, had to withstand physical violence inflicted by mother-in-law Elokeshi. Later she obtained control in her husband's house and managed to take help of a British doctor during critical illness of husband Nabakumar defying her in-laws. She protested against her father Ramkali for his support towards the system of polygamy ruining life of Sarada, established separate household with Nabakumar and two sons with help of Bhabotosh master in urban Calcutta and obtained touch of western education through sheer determination. She used to teach in a small girls' school in Calcutta, arranged marriage of Suhasini, the illegal daughter of her relative Shankari with enlightened Brahma Bhabatosh, demanded strict punishment for abusive in-laws and especially cruel murderer husband of Bhabini's young sister through foreign judiciary system's intervention, and finally left home when husband betrayed her regarding issue of child marriage

of her beloved daughter Subarnalata, whose forced marriage was nothing but *putulkhela* to Satyabati.

'Subarnalata' novel (1967) was the second part of Ashapurna's classic Feminist trilogy and it highlighted the traumatic but rebellious life of Subarnalata, a defiant and fiercely progressive woman fighting against patriarchal tyranny, verbal and physical abuse in domestic life, agonizing conjugal space, and stiff orthodoxy of colonial Bengal of early 20<sup>th</sup> century for basic human dignity, emancipated identity with space. She educated herself, continued battle against over-possessive, suspicious and abusive husband Prabodhchandra for freedom from domestic imprisonment, tried to continue propaganda supporting the Swadeshi/ anti-imperialistic endeavours among children of her household defying her harsh and cruel mother-in-law Muktakeshi, in later part of her life arranged for separate household freed from the clutches of the conventional joint family, wrote autobiography and injected the spirit of women's emancipation through education in her two daughters namely Parul and Bakul against opposition of her conservative sons. She was deprived of minimum support from her coward father Nabakumar while facing torture in house of in-laws and so she could not take the decision of leaving marital household like her mother Satyabati. Subarnalata tried to commit suicide many times but failed and at last survived through her beloved daughter Bakul, who emerged as an epitome of liberated womanhood.

'Bakul katha' novel (1974) was the widely acclaimed concluding part of the reputed Satyabati trilogy. Bakul, the youngest daughter of Subarnalata, was the protagonist here, famous as a successful and popular author entitled as Anamika Devi, questioning what should be the line of demarcation between true empowerment and egoistic anarchical trend diluted with women's liberation. Bakul wanted to carry legacy of her grandmother Satyabati and mother Subarnalata in true sense and deeply admired her elder sister Parulbala, who was a poet, continuously criticised by her possessive and conservative husband Amalbabu. Bakul silently used to censor her successor generation and discovered that women like Satyabhama, Namita/Rupachhanda, Rekha all went to the negative path of indiscriminate imitation of the westernised culture, loss of moral values and sexual promiscuity had been amalgamated with women's newfound freedom. Death, tragic suicides and traumatic divorces causing a generation of rootless children were the ultimate outcome of this destructive trend of 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengal (2<sup>nd</sup> half). According to Bakul, her beloved Shampa (daughter of her brother) was the real successor of her rebellious grandmother and mother who always wanted to establish women's choices regarding issue of life-partners and propagated gender equality, right to formal education and financial independence. Shampa, a determined young lady, maintained her love affair with Satyaban, a poor man belonging to lower strata, against all obstacles and parental pressure and later got married with him in her own free will in spite of knowing that he became crippled permanently as a result of the Naxalite violence. She became the earning member of her small family and refused help offered by her parents because they wished to keep Satyaban as a *ghar-jamai* but cherished emotional support of aunt Bakul, an unmarried author famous in pseudonym of Anamika Devi.

## II. EVALUATING SATYAVATI OF 'PRATHAM PRATISRUTI' NOVEL AS AN EMBODIMENT OF POWER AND COURAGE

Satyabati, daughter of a wealthy rural kaviraj Ramkali Chatterjee, was the dominant protagonist of 'Pratham Pratisruti' novel and she established firm control on youngsters of her age in neighbourhood of her parental house. The author described that- *'Aat bachharer Satyabati... biye hoye gechhe bachharkhanek age- ekhono gharbasat hoy ni... Satyabatir ma thakuma jethi pishi ete uthte pare na oke. Pare na hoyto Satyabatir jathechharer opar or baper kichhu prasroy achhe bole.'*

Satyabati was always rebuked by her elderly relatives like widow grandmother Dintarini and aunt Mokshada for her courage and steadfast straightforwardness which according to their version, was not at all suitable for an ideal woman especially after her marriage. But Satyabati was undaunted and she supported jata's wife when the helpless woman was terribly beaten by her abusive husband by providing medicine supplied by Ramkali for the wounded woman. Later Satya criticised the same woman as 'meyerjater kalanka', because she shamelessly defended that cruel husband against Satyabati, daughter of her saviour Ramkali. Satya always admired her father Ramkali as embodiment of ideal masculinity, but when Ramkali supported polygamy and arranged for second marriage of Rasu with Patli ignoring Sarada, the first wife of Rasu, Satyabati openly sided with Shibjaya who condemned Ramkali defying Mokshada, the dominant widow controlling Ramkali's joint family with an iron hand. Satyabati criticised Shankari, a deprived widow, when she left Ramkali's household with her so-called lover but later gave shelter to her illegal daughter Suhasini and arranged for Suhasini's education and marriage going against husband Nabakumar. Satya dared to defy social conservatism to establish women's right over education by saying that- *'Boli swayang ma Saraswati nije meyemanush noy ? Sakol shastorer sar shastor char Ved ma Saraswatir hate thake na ?'*

She wrote poems also and in her endeavour for obtaining education, was supported and encouraged by the affectionate father Ramkali. Ramkali did not want to send her cherished daughter Satyabati to her in-laws' house before completion of twelve years but Satya herself was adamant to go because she comprehended that staying in her parental home for a long period would tarnish her father's image in the orthodox rural society. She was initially abused in her husband's home due to the atrocious behaviour of mother-in-law Elokeshi, but soon became able to gain control over her husband Nabakumar especially after his recovery from critical illness by the non-indigenous doctor due to intervention of the brave wife Satyabati, disregarding even medicine sent by Ramkali himself for his son-in-law. She did not hesitate to criticise her characterless father-in-law Nilambar Banerjee, after knowing the truth of his illicit extra-marital affair with Ullasi Bagdini. She made arrangements for her separate household in urban Calcutta with husband and two sons with help provided by Bhabatosh master, her admirer and later husband of her adopted daughter Suhasini. Satya never compromised with her high standard of morality and so after discovering tendency of unwanted advancement from Nitai, friend of her husband

Nabakumar, she strongly decided to ask Nitai for immediately leaving her household in Calcutta. Her sense of self-respect was strong and so she could not compromise with the resourceful and arrogant Duttoginni in whose house, Satya became tenant. Satya stated without hesitation that- *'Jorhasto korbi bhagobaner kachhe, korbi manusher moton manusher kachhe, paysar kachhe korte jas keno morte ?'*

Satyabati was not an ardent supporter of widow remarriage but was sympathetic enough towards traumatic fate of women in widowhood. She even became teacher in a girls' school established by Bhabatosh. Satya could not provide heartfelt support to Soudamini, when she decided to return to the household of Mukunda Mukhujje, who once left Soudamini and married another woman. According to Satya's version, Mukunda now wanted Soudamini back for getting a maid-servant without responsibility of payment but became sympathetic towards Sadu who took decision by her own choice to go with her once abusive husband. She tried her level best for punishment of murderer husband of Bhabini's young sister and cruel mother-in-law taking help of the British police officer defying own husband and sons but failed to save her youngest child Subarnalata from the curse of child marriage. Nabakumar, husband of Satyabati, being misguided by Elokeshi, the harsh and cunning mother-in-law of Satya, arranged marriage of his child daughter Subarna with Prabodh, son of friend of Elokeshi, keeping Satyabati completely unaware of the incident. Satya arrived in the village of her in-laws and witnessed the event when the ceremony was already over and then out of hatred for betrayal, left her husband's household forever. She decided to visit her father Ramkali in Kashi and was determined to earn her livelihood as a teacher without depending on anybody as a burden. The author depicted undaunted Satyabati at the end of the novel perfectly- *'Satya... ektu hese bole,... 'Anekdin age Subarna jakhon janmay ni, pathshala khule porano-porano khela kortam ... abar dekhbo, se khela bhule gechhi na mone achhe? Ekta meyemanusher bhatkapor chole jabe na tate?'*

Undoubtedly the character of Satyabati was product of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (colonial Bengal) when the concept of the 'New Woman' emerged (Geraldine Forbes- 'Women in Modern India') and then educated Indian males connected improvement of women's conventional status with their cherished agenda of bringing modernity. But dream of gender equality could not be translated into reality. Geraldine Forbes in her famous book entitled 'Women in Colonial India' explained rightly that - *'That Indian women were unlike Western feminists is true.'*

## III. SUBARNALATA: A CHARACTER REFLECTING TRAUMA AND TRIUMPH OF WOMANHOOD

Subarnalata was Satyabati's daughter, who suffered in house of her husband Prabodhchandra and mother-in-law Muktakeshi from the very beginning of her forced marriage because the rebellious mother Satya dared to cut all ties with her husband Nabakumar who arranged this child marriage of Subarnalata without informing Satyabati, supporter of women's education and financial independence. Subarnalata tried her level best for adjusting in her conjugal life and

wanted to establish beauty, cultural refinement, perfection of taste in all relationships but failed miserably. Her insensitive, suspicious and conservative husband Prabodhchandra always used to abuse her physically and psychologically destroying dreams nourished by Subarnalata mercilessly because he hated to be termed as *'straino'*. Subarna in her whole life dreamt of a veranda, because deep desire for enjoying freedom with minimum human dignity was inherited by her from her enlightened and courageous mother Satyabati. So she, though a commonplace middle-class housewife, did not hesitate to declare- "*.... baranda amar chai- i chai. .... Bangalir gerosto gharer bouer mukher ei bhasa! .... 'aspoddata'ta tahole oi janmosutrei paoa ?'*" Subarnalata despised her husband Prabodh, because his only love- language was nothing but aggressively demanding physical pleasure ensuring complete subjugation of wife in conjugal life. Even sense of humour of the beautiful young wife Subarnalata could not be tolerated by the harsh, over-possessive and cruel husband.

During childbirth, Subarna wanted minimum neat and clean clothings and maintainance of basic hygiene, but this desire was also thrashed by the mother-in-law Muktakeshi. Subarna's sister-in-law Biraj always tried to harass her, but Subarnalata was great enough to give her ornaments for successful marriage of Biraj and even after being beaten black and blue by her husband Prabodh, she did not change her decision. Prabodh tortured her terming her as a characterless woman, attracted towards Kedarnath, the liberal husband of her sister-in-law Sushila but Subarna confronted the abusive spouse bravely keeping her head high and declared that widowhood would be much better than such hellish married life. -"*Subarnalata jane na akaron gal kheye chup kore thakte hoy, Subarnalata jane na ahetuki khosamod ar toyaj korte.*"

Subarna's self-respect was strong and so when the coward father Nabakumar was hesitant about giving her shelter for her protection from the abusive in-laws' house, she decided to leave the parental home without touching water. In her whole life, many times she wanted to commit suicide for making herself free from the lustful clutches of Prabodhchandra and the fate of forced motherhood, but could not become successful in her attempts. Her desire for studying books and making herself enlightened was always criticised by her husband, brother-in-laws and mother-in-law Muktakeshi, guardian of the orthodox joint family. She deeply admired the ideology of the leaders of the Anti-Partition/Swadeshi Movement of Bengal against the British government but could not gather minimum support or sympathy from her life-partner and so-called near and dear ones. Gandhian satyagraha could not attract Subarnalata like the revolutionaries of Bengal.

Ashapura compared fate of conjugality of Subarnalata with Satyabati skilfully without any mask- "*Satyabatir swami asar apadartha chilo kintu asabhyo ashilil chilo na. Satyabatir ajogya hote pare, tabe se atyachari noy. Kintu... ajivan Subarnake ekta asabhyo, ashilil ar atyacharir ghar korte hochhe !*"

Subarnalata, with her determination and steadfastness, obtained a separate home with *'dakshiner baranda'* in later half of her life. She tried her level best for educating her beloved daughters Parul and Bakul and ultimately crossed the barriers of opposition raised by her insensitive husband and

obstinate sons. In this life-long struggle, Subarna herself lost all her beauty and tenderness, but never compromised. Her mother Satyabati's last letter before death reached Subarnalata and the daughter felt quite inspired. She wrote her autobiography also but could not gather appreciation / acknowledgement from her so-called near and dear ones. Only her most cherished daughter Bakul felt her agony and became determined to translate all her dreams into reality. Her rebel mother Subarnalata did not want to perform any shastric rituals after death of her parents because she was quite conscious of the fact that during lifetime of her parents, she was not allowed to meet them, especially her mother Satyabati, due to her extremely orthodox in-laws. The heartless husband Prabodh even thwarted her journey to Badrinarayan shamelessly.

Subarnalata could not obtain peace and solace in her life but after death, she earned jealousy of her relatives because her husband and sons performed all rituals with much grandeur. The author sarcastically stated that- "*Mrityu sokolke udar kore diyechhe, sabhyo kore diyechhe.*"

#### IV. BAKUL'S EMERGENCE AS ANAMIKA DEVI : A BRILLIANT STORY OF SELF-ASSERTION OF WOMEN

Subarnalata's beloved daughter Bakul became triumphant in her life as a renowned author Anamika Devi who used to collect all resources of her creative literary world from the busy and turbulent urban life of city of Calcutta. So she termed herself proudly as *'janatar sahityik'*. She was strikingly different from her elder sister Parul, who cherished writing poems in a completely solitary situation enjoying solace and tranquillity. Anamika, though extremely popular among readers of Bengal and a famous personality in satiyasabhas as a progressive litterateur, always wanted to feel pure love from her near and dear ones and she was quite aware of the fact that this kind of love could not be gathered from the crowd. She was emotionally involved with her brother's daughter Shampa, a rebellious girl, who used to engage in multiple affairs but finally settled down with her beloved Satyaban, a poor man, not at all compatible with her financially and culturally. Bakul/Anamika, once always rebuked by her conservative father Prabodhchandra, later could enjoy freedom and space in her single life in parental house, mainly due to the will of that orthodox and unkind father, who gave a coveted portion of his big house to his so-called unwanted, unmarried daughter's name. Anamika witnessed the traumatic, caged life of her enlightened mother Subarnalata and she herself also became compelled by circumstances to leave the dream of a happy married life with her lover Nirmal due to conservatism deeply rooted in the contemporary patriarchal society where ignominy towards women's independence was a common practice. But later in her life, she felt that indiscipline and anarchy flourished in the name of women's liberation and that could not be supported by Bakul, a true successor of Satyabati and Subarnalata. Bakul/Anamika could not appreciate the tendency of indiscriminate marital separation/ divorce because that trend used to create a turbulent situation in life of children. She

understood the emotional abuse faced by her sister Parul in house of her sons and daughter-in-laws. Bakul could not support the Naxalite Movement also, because Satyaban, husband of Shampa, lost his legs due to violence promoted during that bloody movement and her close friend Madhuri-bou also became traumatised witnessing the partially crippled condition of the misguided youth, her grandson, as an outcome of the so-called revolutionary outburst. She deeply understood everything happening in the world of her own, but mastered the art of controlling emotions and so she was different from her mother Subarnalata. So Bakul was able to control her tears even after knowing the news of death of Nirmal, the love interest in her adolescence and married with Madhuri due to pressure of his orthodox joint family.

Anamika Devi could not swallow the bitter pill of indiscipline in name of modernity and gender equality but was sympathetic towards Namita, who emerged as a famous heroine Rupachhanda compromising with her chastity but could get freedom from the clutches of the exploitative joint family after departure of her husband from that household. Satyabhama, daughter of Apurva and Alaka, close relatives of Anamika Devi, also got her sympathy but Anamika was not capable of supporting Satyabhama's so-called financially independent life as a cabaret dancer in hotels.

Bakul's ideal successor and true embodiment of women's empowerment was Shampa. Ashapurna rightly opined that- "*Ekanto tapasya kokhono ekebare byartha hoy na. Tai Subarnalata der sansare Shampader abirbhav sambhav hoy. Jara sarbaswer mulye premke pratisthito kore jivan pabar dussahas rakhe.*"

#### V. COMPARISON AMONG CENTRAL CHARACTERS OF TRILOGY

Satyabati, the central character of her well-reputed novel entitled 'Pratham Pratisruti', acknowledged by Rabindra Puraskar (1372) and Jnanpith Puraskar (1384), was undoubtedly the most powerful and rebellious creation of Ashapurna Devi. The author had rightly opined that- "*Ajker Bangladeshes ajosro Bakul-Parulder pichhane royechehe .... Ma didima pitamahi ar propitamahider sangramer itihase. ... Tara ekla egiyechehe... abar esechhe ar ekjon; tar arabdho karmabhar tule niyechehe nijer hate. Emni korei to tairi holo rasta.*"

Subarnalata, daughter of Satyabati, was indeed '*bandhon-jarjorito kaler muktikami atmar byakul jantronar protik*'. For describing category of character of Subarnalata, the author upheld the truth that- "*...Kalke otikrom korteo thake boiki keu keu, noile kara egiye debe sei probohoman dharake? .....* Era bartamaner pujo kadachit pay, era lanchhito hoy, upahasito hoy, birakti-bhajon hoy. ...Tabu era ase... Apato-byarhotar glani hoyto parabartikaler jonyo sanchito kore rakhe shakti-sahos."

Bakul, daughter of Subarnalata, had established herself as a renowned litterateur Anamika Devi and witnessed that the dream of conjugal life based on love and mutual respect, nourished by her mother and grandmother, could be translated into reality through her brother's daughter Shampa, epitome of rebellious spirit against social conservatism. Bakul, through

her literary world, always propagated the mantra of liberation and self-assertion of women but could not justify immorality and indiscipline, often diluted with women's emancipation and indiscriminate trend of separation in marriages. She wanted to draw a line between *swadhinata* and *swechhachar* and firmly believed that her predecessors namely Satyabati and Subarnalata also could not allow that type of *swechhachar* because that was not the real definition of progressive culture.

Satyabati and Subarnalata both characters had to directly fight like warriors in their domestic spaces converted into ideological battlefield. Bakul remained unmarried in her whole life and so did not bear the heavy burden of establishing herself as an ideal chaste wife and perfect mother. Satyabati's husband Nabakumar was not completely insensitive towards his uncompromising wife, and so her life-struggle was indeed much easier than Subarnalata, married with Prabodhchandra, an abusive, indecent and vulgar husband. Subarnalata's husband used to believe that conjugal relations meant only physical proximity completely based on subordination of women as so-called dutiful wives. Satyabati after being established in her separate household in urban Calcutta, boldly enjoyed decision-making powers in her nuclear set-up and even gave shelter to Suhas, the illegal daughter of Shankari, her *kulatyagini* relative, took help of British police officer for punishing the barbaric husband of Bhabini's innocent sister, murdered by her cruel in-laws in a very tender age and planned marriage of her adopted daughter Suhas with Bhabotosh master, a Brahmo against wishes of husband Nabakumar. Satyabati voluntarily discarded her marital home after being betrayed by Nabakumar regarding issue of Subarnalata's forceful child-marriage and she could take this courageous decision only because psychological support-system provided by her father Ramkali.

Subarnalata could not defy tendency of surrender to death like Satyabati and Bakul but tried to commit suicide many times. Subarnalata's battles in her husband's home's joint family set-up was much more difficult than Satyabati's small domestic arena and her father Nabakumar did not allow her to stay in parental house, when she was rejected by her husband Prabodhchandra and mother-in-law Muktakeshi. Subarna, from the very beginning of her conjugal life, was continuously criticised for mother Satyabati's decision of disregarding her husband and going Kashi permanently to stay with father Ramkali. Subarnalata had to bear burden of several children against her consent and was also beaten mercilessly by her husband, always eager to dominate his wife's assertive nature full of self-respect. Subarnalata finally could obtain her separate house, free from the clutches of the conservative joint family headed by Muktakeshi, but was not successful to maintain her control there also due to vehement opposition from her own sons, adamant to demolish her endeavours of empowerment of her daughters namely Parul and Bakul. Subarnalata became a male-hater and here lies striking difference from Satyabati and Bakul/ Anamika Devi.

Finally one can quote from Kasturi Roy's article entitled '*Tin nari tin prajanmo*' [included in Purabaiyan – Bishesh Nari-oupanyashik sankhya., July 2001]:

*"Satyabati o Subarna je sadhanar path tairi kore gechehe ajivan- sei pathei sabolil swachhota peyechhe Bakul. Satyabatir drirahate ropito charagachhke Subarna klesh o*

*tyager rasasinchan kore baro kore tulechhe. Sei mahiruhher phul Bakul, jar saurabhe dhanyo hoyechhe Satyabatir srostar ahamkar, sarthak hoyechhe Subarnalatar jantronar asrupat.''*

## VI. CONCLUSION

Ashapura Devi through her sharp analytical gaze and courageous style of presentation meticulously unmasked the true reality of *andarmahal* of middle class Hindu Bengalees. The author herself declared about the story of Satyabati that- '*Bahirbishwer bhangagorar kahini niye rachito hoy bigato kaler itihash ! ... Kintu stimito antahpurer antoraleo ki chole na bhangagorar kaj ? .... Tabu rachito itihashguli chirodini ei antahpurer bhanga-gorar proti udasin. ... Bangladesher sei abagyato antahpurer nibhrite prathom jara bahon kore enechhen protisrutir swakkhar, e grahtho sei anami meyeder ekjoner kahini.''*

'Pratham Pratisruti' was enriched by several women characters like Bhubaneshwari, mother of the brave and upright heroine Satyabati, Elokeshi, Soudamini, Mokkhoda, Sarada, Subarnalata, Suhas and her mother Shankari, Dintarini, Muktakeshi etc. Ashapura had shown us skilfully that many times women obstructed advancement of their sisters more than male guardians.

'Subarnalata' reflected endless trauma and partial triumph of caged women who fought battles within their household for right of education, self-assertion and empowerment. Subarnalata's mother Satyabati rejected her domestic life herself but Subarnalata could not do that; she till her last breath, continued uncompromising struggle against her in-laws, husband and even against her sons within much-hated domestic sphere. Muktakeshi, Umasashi, Jayabati, Chapa, Chandan, Parul, Bakul, Subala, Shyamasundari were significant female characters of this novel highlighting the fact that sometimes women used to become the staunch pillars of patriarchal dominance.

'Bakul katha' depicted the story of amazing transformation of Bakul, the shy and introvert youngest daughter of Subarnalata into the dynamic Anamika Devi, an immensely popular author of contemporary Bengal. She remained unmarried and continued her literary works in her parental house. Parul, Madhuri-bou, Shampa, Ramala, Alaka, Satyabhama, Chandan, Namita/ Rupachhanda, Rekha were other significant female characters of this novel. Here Ashapura expressed the fact that she supported the cause of women's liberation whole-heartedly but despised the tendency of breaking morality and discipline.

Ashapura Devi could be compared with other eminent womanist authors like Jyotirmoyi Devi, Bani Basu, Suchitra Bhattacharyya and Mahashweta Devi. Jyotirmoyi also made propaganda for necessity of education and financial independence of women through her writings. Mahashweta Devi was undoubtedly much more advanced than Ashapura Devi because Mahashweta did not continue her literary works within four walls of household and she depicted atrocity and brutality of her male characters with a fierce style of expression. Domestic abuse, hypocrisy of the characterless husband, molestation/ sexual exploitation had been reflected with terrible honesty in Mahashweta's novels and stories.

Moreover Ashapura mentioned the Naxalite Movement in a thoroughly negative manner in 'Bakul katha' novel, but Mahashweta was at heart a supporter of the Naxal youth power with full admiration.

Bani Basu and Suchitra Bhattacharyya had similarities with predecessor Ashapura Devi, because they also primarily focussed on complexities of middle class life of Bengal and highlighted trauma of women during austere widowhood, domestic / marital violence etc. Barriers making hindrances in path of development of creativity of women within the domestic sphere were unmasked by both Bani Basu and Suchitra Bhattacharyya like Ashapura Devi.

Finally it can be concluded that Ashapura's trilogy novels must be studied again and again and also well-researched for obtaining a mirror of changing life of Bengali women during several turbulent movements like the Swadeshi Movement of Bengal upholding anti-imperialistic revolutionary terrorism, the Marxist Cultural/Pragati Movement and the Naxalite Movement.

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