

# A Tri-Generational Odyssey: Ashapura Devi's Trilogy: Reading *Pratham Pratisruti, Subarnalata and Bakulkatha*

SANJUKTA DASGUPTA

Ashapura Devi (1909-1995) an extraordinarily prolific Bengali woman writer and interestingly a close contemporary of French feminist philosopher and writer Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) however needs an introduction outside India.

Born in colonial India in 1909, self-taught Ashapura Devi went on to write one hundred and eighty nine novels and around a thousand short stories and also four hundred stories for children. Ashapura never went to school but became literate by merely watching and imitating her elder brother practice reading and writing as his school exercises. But unlike many Bengali girls in those days Ashapura had the privilege of having for her mother a literate middle class woman whose pastime was reading. Ashapura too became a compulsive reader but mere reading did not satisfy her. She began her literary career by publishing her first poem in the Bangla children's journal *Shishusaathi* at the age of thirteen. The editor wrote to her encouraging the young teenager to write stories for the journal. Ashapura readily agreed and thus began a literary career spanning almost seven significant decades of Bengali social culture. Ashapura died on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1995, having secured an undisputed position for herself as a pioneer of twentieth century Bengali women's writing. She received many awards and prizes in her lifetime including the Sahitya Akademi award and the Jnanpith award.

The site of her fiction has most often been a semi-rural or urban one. The urban site that recurred in her fictional representations has been specifically the city of Calcutta. One of the most interesting features for the social scientist and the historiographer about Ashapura's texts is the representation of the changing Bengali social culture from colonial to postcolonial times. From this point of view of course it is her trilogy, *Pratham Pratisruti* (1964) *Subarnalata* (1966) and *Bakulkatha* (1973) that documents society and culture in Bengal. The authenticity of

Ashapura's fictional representations is beyond question for she is one woman writer of twentieth century Bengal who was not readily contaminated by English language and literature. As she never went to school and was therefore unacquainted with formal English education, looked upon by the Bengali as initiation into the charmed precincts of power and prestige, Ashapura's Bengali is not interspersed with English loan words, a common weakness in many Bengali writers. The Bengali idiom that Ashapura chose to express herself in was derived from the well-known and well-worn contours of the domestic space of the indigenous Bengali milieu. Dialogues of her characters belonging to various age groups incorporated the resonance of the region specific spoken rhythm redolent of a home spun idiom, a remarkable peculiarity of illiterate and semi literate Bengali women's speech of the colonial times. Naina Dey had observed, "standing at the crossroads of time, when the history of the world was fast changing, Ashapura Devi concentrated essentially on the family, especially on the women in the family."<sup>1</sup>

Ashapura's trilogy is often cited as resistance literature. So, in *Pratham Pratisruti*, Satyabati leaves her marital home of 30 years after the great betrayal by her husband Nabakumar and mother-in-law Elokeshi who surreptitiously marry off her daughter, nine-year old Subarnalata, by taking advantage of Satyabati's absence. Satyabati resolves to leave home permanently and settle in Varanasi, where her father had settled for quite some time. In a distinct advancement in purpose from that of Ibsen's *Nora (Doll's House)* and Tagore's *Mrinal (Streer Patra- The Wife's Letter)* Ashapura informs her readers that Satyabati plans to start a girls' school to fulfill her dreams of women's education, a project that would also simultaneously grant her financial independence. She says, "Why should I become a burden for my father? I will set up a school, this will grant me livelihood." Her

---

Sanjukta Dasgupta is Professor of English at the University of Calcutta

sister in law exclaims, "You will run your own life by fending for yourself? You are leaving home and you dare to do this. I can only fall at your feet, you are such an example."<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Ashapura critics somehow do not seem to notice the trilogy's repeated emphasis on women's education as the best way in which women can gain social and cultural identity and freedom. Tharu and Lalita remarked on the rather conservative stance of her short stories and novels in contrast to her trilogy, a reason that perhaps led to her being classed as a popular novelist and not worthy of critical acclaim. But Tharu and Lalita also noticed that not unlike Jane Austen Ashapura chose to concentrate totally on the domestic; the inner space inhabited by women- "The setting of her well-crafted stories is the family; her principal characters women; her themes, most often their struggles-subterranean, indeed invisible, if one has not lived the life of a middle-class woman."<sup>3</sup>

The first two parts of the trilogy are set in colonial Bengal. In the second volume we find Subarnalata's experience of marriage was even more bitter than her mother Satyabati's. If her father Nabakumar was an irresolute person guided by his mother, almost the effeminate Bengali male of the mid and late nineteenth century, Prabodh was crude, callous and insensitive. Subarnalata had the urge not unlike her mother to be empowered through education. At middle age when she gets her monograph published in a rickety press run by a relative, the typographical errors in the publication become the topic of mockery and hilarity among her sons and husband. It is only her daughter Bakul who watches through a slit in the shut door of the terrace how her insulted and humiliated mother makes a bonfire of the 500 copies of her cherished publication along with every scrap of paper on which she wrote. Needless to add, the shattered Subarnalata falls ill soon after and dies and in the third part her daughter Bakul, under the pseudonym Anamika Devi becomes a recognized writer who fulfills her mother's and grandmother's dream of education as power but remains a rather pensive and less vibrant woman than the two women who inspired her to perform.

But one cannot forget how Bakul makes the promise to herself that she will realize her mother's frustrated dream of becoming a writer as the second part concludes, "Ma, My Ma your burnt, lost writing or those words that have remained unwritten, I'll discover them all, I'll write every lost word in a new form. I will inform the radiant world about the dumb and painful history of darkness."<sup>4</sup>

In the last part of the trilogy, *Bakulkatha* (Bakul's narrative) Anamika Devi the celebrated writer recalls the story of an aspirant woman writer named Sabita. She too

like Subarnalata had burnt her published slim volume of her memoir as her husband was infuriated that she had sold her jewellery for getting the book published. He said a woman who could dare to do such a thing was capable of having an adulterous relationship, an extra-marital affair.<sup>5</sup>

If Ashapura had written nothing else, the trilogy that tracks three generations of mothers and daughters would have made her reputation as a dominant voice in Indian literature. The repeated emphasis in her narratives about women, marriage and family as constituting the dynamics of the inner space and the new patriarchy however also raises the issue of economic class and caste. Western education and culture had not penetrated into the rural and urban middle-middle class households of Satyabati and Subarnalata. Though marriage practices in colonial Bengal and their literary representations have been referred to in great detail by Rochona Majumdar in her book *Marriage and Modernity*, the inclusion of selective references to Ashapura's fiction or reference to the life of Ashapura, who is a significant text by herself could have been considered as Ashapura wrote powerfully about colonial Bengal in her trilogy that can be read as a social document.

Ashapura Devi's daughter Pushparenu Roy recently published her reminiscences about her mother in her book titled *Ashapura Ma* (My mother Ashapura) published in 2010. Among various memorable moments that Pushparenu records is the fact that for her sons and daughter Ashapura remained a gracious and gentle mother, she never made the children feel she had an independent life and mind. Moreover Pushparenu recorded that after attending to all the domestic chores Ashapura would devote herself to writing only at late night, when the other family members had fallen asleep – "when everyone at home had fallen asleep that was the time that mother wrote."<sup>6</sup>

## II

In this connection but on a different note, I can't help but add an observation about a significant cross-cultural parallel, leading to reflections about the possibility and impossibility of the euphoria about global sisterhood and feminist internationalism. I refer back to the first paragraph of this essay, where I had stated that Ashapura Devi and Simone de Beauvoir were close contemporaries. In 2009 we celebrated the centenary year of Ashapura Devi (1909-1995) who was just a year younger than Simone de Beauvoir (1908- 1986). Ashapura Devi died in 1995, nine years after Simone passed away. But despite similar support for cultural freedom and rejection of

gender stereotyping, the two women writers from France and India, who consistently represented women's issues in their narratives, were absolutely poles apart in their lifestyle choices and educational qualifications. The Frenchwoman Simone De Beauvoir had taught philosophy at the Sorbonne University among her other professional engagements as a public intellectual, while Ashapura Devi had not received any formal education and was self-taught. Simone de Beauvoir did not marry though her "open marriage" with Sartre is still regarded with awe by the world. Ashapura had a traditional arranged marriage and played the role of a good wife and caring mother throughout her life. Ashapura Devi may have known about the writer Simone de Beauvoir but it would be highly unlikely if Simone de Beauvoir had read Ashapura's novels even in translation. Maybe Simone de Beauvoir had not even heard of her third world sister Ashapura Devi, the creator of such inspirational iconic figures as Satyabati and Subarnalata, among others.

### III

Therefore, we need to remind ourselves about the status of women writers in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An interesting study is the comparative career graph of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and his elder sister Swarnakumari Devi (1856-1932). Swarnakumari was older than Rabindranath by about four years. She was a very talented writer and wrote many poems, short stories, essays and twelve novels and some of these were even available in English translation in England between 1907-1914. In fact, Swarnakumari had herself translated her novel *Kahake* into English in December 1913 and it was published in London by T.Werner Laurie Ltd. A second edition was published in 1914, signifying the popularity of the book.

Swarnakumari had asked Tagore to help her in finding publishers for her translations. On January 28, 1914, Tagore had written to Swarnakumari, "Your book reached me at the railway station as I was leaving for America. You don't know how difficult it is to publish a book here. Of course self-funded publications are not a problem, but unless the publisher is sure of positive reader reception he would not want to invest in publication. I know that your endeavour to get your book published here will not meet with success. Moreover, the translation is not of a good standard- this means that it falls short of the high standards of the English language."<sup>7</sup>

But his rather harsh letter to Rothenstein about Swarnakumari's literary ambitions suggests that women writers even from the distinguished Tagore family were not regarded with much seriousness. However, the letter

suggests sibling rivalry too and Tagore's lack of empathy towards his sister who had emerged as a writer of some reckoning, seems strange, for very soon he would be writing the path-breaking, women-centric short stories such as *Streer Patra* and *Aparachita* in the literary journal *Sabuj Patra*, Tagore wrote to Rothenstein, "she is one of those unfortunate beings who has more ambition than abilities but just enough talent to keep her mediocrity alive for a short period of time. Her weakness has been taken advantage of by some unscrupulous literary agents in London and she has had her stories translated and published. I have given her no encouragement but I have not been successful in making her see things in their proper light. It is likely that she may go to England and use my name and you may meet her and be merciful (sic) to her and never let her harbor in her mind any illusion about her worth and her chance. I am afraid she will be a source of trouble to my friends who I hope will be candid to her for my sake and will not allow her to mistake ordinary politeness for encouragement."<sup>8</sup>

We need to isolate the following phrases:

I have given her no encouragement. . .

she is one of those unfortunate beings who has more ambition than abilities but just enough talent to keep her mediocrity alive for a short period of time.

I am afraid she will be a source of trouble to my friends who I hope will be candid to her for my sake and will not allow her to mistake ordinary politeness for encouragement."<sup>9</sup>

This was Tagore's viewpoint about his sister's writing. Is it an impersonal literary assessment? Is it sibling rivalry? Or is it a more generational and generic rejection of a woman who aspires to be an accredited writer known at home and in the world?

But what makes Ashapura Tagore's daughter or even the daughter of Swarnakumari Devi? In her reminiscences Ashapura had written that she and her sister after much effort in procuring all the tools for writing and posting a letter, wrote to Rabindranath Tagore asking him to write out their names at least on an envelope addressed to them. Tagore obliged. Ashapura's mother admired the confidence of her daughters in writing to Tagore, when he was looked upon as an icon not just locally but internationally as well. Ashapura's mother had said, "So, you could do it? I had only dreamt of writing to him."<sup>10</sup> Ashapura's mother's statement of resignation encodes generational advancement, what her daughters had done, she had only dreamt of doing but could never muster up the confidence to translate a dream into reality.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, women's slow but steady progress in search of themselves became an irreversible process, which was enabled through literacy, education and corresponding intellectual curiosity and social empowerment. If Ashapura had asked Tagore in her letter whether she should aspire to become a litterateur could Tagore have responded to her as Robert Southey the poet laureate had done when Charlotte Bronte : "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation."<sup>11</sup>

Much later, in a memoir essay Ashapura had referred to Tagore's view that since the roles of women are restricted to domestic chores such as food, clothing and other physical needs of family members women have not been able to participate in intellectual activities and interactions with the male members, and this lack Tagore described as one that expressed the cruelty and irreverence towards the female family members. Ashapura had supported Tagore's views and had added that, "Women can easily become lovers (Preyashi) but they cannot become an iconic personality (Sreyashi)."<sup>12</sup> The English translation unfortunately cannot claim the witty impact of the alliteration of *Preyashi* and *Shreyashi*, but that is about the politics of translation and not relevant for this essay.

At fifteen Ashapura Devi was married. In her reminiscences she records, "Within two years of the publication of my first pieces I got married and had to move out of the city of Calcutta which interrupted my writing. The reason of course being that marital home (*Sasur-bari*-Father in law's house in Bengali translation) was not a bed of roses. Moreover, it was more convoluted than the restrictive purdah process of the parental home. Absolutely behind the iron curtain. But what caused me the greatest inconvenience was the lack of books in the marital home located in a suburban area. I felt like a fish out of water."<sup>13</sup> Much later she looked back on her own writing and stated not unlike Jane Austen that she never ventured to narrate the lives of people whom she had not ever seen or heard of, "My writing is fertilized by people around me. Nature descriptions by authors who are nature lovers attract me, generate joy and surprise, but such descriptions are beyond my capabilities. Within my capabilities lie just people. Middle-class, domesticity with which I am intimately familiar. I have not ventured to reach out beyond the known territories."<sup>14</sup>

When Tagore wrote that letter dismissing his sister's creative talents as fanciful in 1914, Ashapura Devi was then about five years old. What were Ashapura's disadvantages? Born in the middle-class family, she did

not receive any formal education but became literate by sheer perseverance and curiosity. She made supreme efforts to learn from her elder brother's books and school lessons and when she was around nine, she published her first poem in a children's magazine, *Shishu saathi*. That was the beginning and the crucial turning-point. Ashapura persisted in writing fiction and essays throughout her life. Married at fifteen, mother of three children, a home maker who diligently attended to all domestic chores, Ashapura nevertheless created some timeless fictional narratives that could be categorized as resistance literature in the oeuvre of Indian women's writing.

However, it would be an error to state that all the writings of Ashapura Devi prioritise women's resistance, protest and non-conformism. As a matter of fact, many of her novels and short stories are stereotypical, in which the roles of men and women follow the known traditional binaries of dominance and subordination. Ashapura herself was very conscious that the trilogy was her *magnum opus*. Referring to the trilogy and the representation of the three women in three successive generations Ashapura had stated, "The most distinctive contribution in my literary career has been the portrayal of the three daughters representing three generations."<sup>15</sup> Further when asked which of her books would she regard to be her very best, Ashapura had stated, "In response, I can state supporting my readers' views that *Pratham Pratisruti* (First Promise) was my best creation. But since *Subarnalata* was written about a time that I had directly perceived I have a lot of weakness for this second part of the trilogy."<sup>16</sup> In the same memoir essay Ashapura had referred to the last volume of the trilogy *Bakulkatha* in which she stated that the role of Bakul was that of an observer not a protagonist or heroine. Selective close reading of the three novels will bear out that Ashapura Devi's trilogy can be included within the haloed shelves of timeless classics of twentieth century Bengali literature.

#### IV

##### *Pratham Pratisruti* (First Promise)

In his essays "The Nation and Its Women" and "Women and the Nation" Partha Chatterjee argued that during the colonial period the dichotomous tensions between the home and the world, the public and the private, the inner and outward were mutually exclusive. The inner space of the domestic that was also the space inhabited by women as daughters, wives and mothers was

sacrosanct where the winds of change such as westernization, female education, women's health issues were all regarded as violation of traditional norms and blasphemy against religious rules and practices. From this fiercely guarded inner space of societal rules and culture, resistance literature emerged in the form of women's memoirs and diaries which were distinct from men's autobiographies according to Chatterjee. Chatterjee cites the memoirs of Rassundari Debi (1809-1900), Saradasundari Debi (1819-1907), Kailasbasini Debi (1830-95), Prasannamoyi Debi (1857-1939) and Binodini (1863-1941). Most of these narratives were instructional manuals for younger women aimed at fortifying them about negotiating with the norms, customs, social expectations and changing times that defined Bengali society and culture. So Partha Chatterjee commented, "The genre, in short, did not require the author to express her "self" or examine the development of her personality. It was not a telling of an exemplary life, not even of a life of any importance: to this day, it is useful to remember, there are fewer biographies of Bengali women writers written by others than there are autobiographies. The genre required the writer only to tell her readers, mainly women of a younger generation, how the everyday lives of women had changed."<sup>17</sup>

If the scope of the memoirs of the nineteenth century women writers was limited and restrictive in their span and imagination as a deserving daughter of that rich though limited past legacy, Ashapura Devi stands alone due to the striking similarities between the writers of the memoirs and her own narratives. Ashapura's trilogy spans the past, present and future as the texts situate themselves within the immediate past of the late nineteenth century and both colonial twentieth century and postcolonial twentieth century. If the women-authored memoirs as Chatterjee argued elided issues of the self and identity, the fictional narratives meticulously graphed the emotional history of women's evolution in Bengal. The severe marginalization and determined resistance are represented through the dominant voices of resistance as the three women protagonists, Satyabati, her daughter Subarnalata and Subarnalata's daughter Bakul etch their road maps. It is obvious that such road maps are not about highways, but lanes, by-lanes and paths strewn with rocks, boulders and barbed wires. So the journey of the three women as narrated by Ashapura Devi is a path breaking journey conducted through three generations. As a matter of fact, the contribution of Ashapura Devi in terms of documenting the historical time in her narratives and her incisive comments about the strangulating effect of customs and rituals that annihilate women's initiatives needs to be read with

serious engagement not as gendered narratives alone but as narratives that represent the inner space of a nation. As we are aware, all social advancement can be possible only when the members of the inner space are included and enabled to reciprocate in their individual ways to the demands of the changing times. After all, women of India constitute approximately one half of the entire population and their empowerment or powerlessness resonates through decisions made at home or in the parliament.

It needs to be underscored at this juncture that though Ashapura was born in 1909, that is precisely, a hundred years after Rassundari Debi who was born in 1809, we realize the stagnation in Hindu middle class society and culture as we discover to our surprise that both Rassundari and Ashapura never received formal education, did not go to school, and were child-brides in extremely traditional marital homes. In both cases, the two women were self-taught in the sense that they learned to read and write by imitating, copying, replicating. But there the similarities end. Ashapura Devi's mother was a literate woman and an eager reader of Bengali literature who encouraged her daughter to read and write. Ashapura became a writer at the age of nine with her first published poem with a rather symbolic title (*Bairer Daak- Call of the Unknown*) that can be used as an anticipatory metaphor of her career graph. Denied formal education in school Ashapura Devi's ideas, imagination, reading and writing circled around Bengali literature exclusively. She did have access to translations in Bengali of literature from other parts of the world, but overall she remained a monolingual reader and writer. The contamination or influence of non-local literatures, cultures and linguistic styles were absent or minimal in her writings. As a result Ashapura's narratives capture not only the times and social customs of the times past and present but also the use of the Bengali language, the home-grown idioms, symbols, images, metaphors that were part of women's speech, and from a socio-linguistic point of view these convey and record the customs and culture of the domestic space that had not been invaded by Western education and its concomitant influences that had discernible effects on speech, social and lifestyle practices such as clothes, food, recreations, music among others. Though cultural colonization became internalized in the lives of the educated, cultured men, the same did not happen in the lives of middle class Hindu women though some of them may have been literate.

On the other hand, we must keep in view that Bengali women who were born in urban Brahmo and Christian families were more liberated in their lifestyles and were educated enough to pursue professions as did Kadambini

Ganguly (1861-1923) and Chandramukhi Basu (1860-1944). While Kadambini was a practicing doctor despite being a mother of eight children, Chandramukhi was the first woman Principal of Bethune College. Both of them graduated from Calcutta University in 1883. Therefore the life story of Ashapurna Devi as text may not be completely representative as an overall reading of Bengali women's lives of her times but it can be representative of middle class Hindu Bengali women of her times. This is the crucial defining feature and in Ashapurna's own life some changes had been remarkable but the overall environment was stubbornly traditional. Her daughter Pushparenu was married at an early age, did not receive college education while her sons were upwardly mobile professionals and her younger son's wife had a PhD degree in English and retired as a professor of English. Nupur Gupta taught at Jogamaya Devi college, an undergraduate college for women under Calcutta University. Moreover Nupur Gupta has translated Ashapurna Devi's fiction and has written often on her mother-in-law's life and career.

*Pratham Pratiruti* (First Promise) begins with the author Ashapurna distancing herself as the creator of the text. She reposes all the credit of the narrative to Bakul, the third generation representative of this tri-generational novel. As if to create a riddle regarding authenticity and documentation and the fictionalization of the factual, Ashapurna begins the novel with the following remark – I haven't written Satyabati's story. This story is taken from Bakul's diary. Bakul had said, "You can call this a story, you can also call it truth."<sup>18</sup> Later Ashapurna commented, "Bakul had never seen Satyabati, but she had seen Satyabati in her dreams and imagination, in her feeling of care and respect"<sup>19</sup>. (ibid 4). In other words, Ashapurna is referring to the feeling of empathy, (*sahhridaya*) which consolidates the sisterhood of women through centuries and cultures. Interestingly, Sumanta Banerjee situates the nineteenth century Bengali women in the socio-economic context, "Women of nineteenth century Bengal, like women in other regions, were not economically or socially a homogenous group, their life style and occupations, according to a contemporary observer, varied depending on whether they were "women of rich families", "women of the middle station" Or 'poor women." While woman of the "rich" and "middle station" stayed in seclusion in the andarmahals, the majority were working women.<sup>20</sup>

But the authorial voice-over is irrepressible, Ashapurna therefore observes as a preamble in the very first page of the narrative, "There has been a history of many years of struggle behind the numerous Bakuls and Paruls of Bengal of the present times. It was the history

of the struggle of the mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers of the many Bakuls and Paruls. They were not many in number, they were one among many. They had gone ahead alone. They have advanced leaping over ponds and pools, by crushing stones and uprooting prickly bushes. As they cleared their own paths they may have been confused, perhaps sank on the path that they had cleared themselves. Then another followed: Taking up the work to continue with what the other had left behind. In this way the road was constructed. The Road on which Bakul and Parul and their peers are advancing."<sup>21</sup>

Satyabati is first introduced to readers as an eight year old sari-clad girl who was married the year before but had not been sent to her marital home as she was too young. Satyabati is presented as a tomboy of the area, she is the leader of all the young girls and boys who are around her age. Her zest and energy are considered as alarming traits by her grandmothers, mother and aunts but Satyabati remains unperturbed. Her pert repartees, candid queries about gender inequality, her sensitivity towards oppressed women who become objects of domestic violence sets her apart from most young girls of her time. Satyabati's sympathy for her cousin Jata's wife and her manner of retaliation is indeed remarkable.

In fact, the experience of domestic violence that Satyabati is exposed to by observing her cousin Jata's wife makes her understand the humiliation and abjectness of rural women of nineteenth century Bengal. This becomes more apparent when Satyabati discovers with great astonishment Jata's wife's dread about taking medicines as her husband and mother in law would not approve, even though the medicines were free of charge and sent by Satyabati's father who was a renowned Ayurvedic doctor whom everyone respected. Not unlike Tom Sawyer Satyabati was the ring leader of the children in the locality. She composed a satiric verse about wife-beater Jata which the children chanted whenever Jata was sighted on the village lanes. Ashapurna was very conscious that after all the rhymester was a eight year old semi-literate girl, so the verse was crude, candid and hard-hitting-

"Jata dada, swollen legged  
Like a foolish elephant  
On the wife-beater dada's back  
Let the frogs kick"<sup>22</sup>

Expectedly, Satyabati also learns that women make humiliating compromises with their lives just to survive and remain domestic slaves. So Satyabati watches Jata's wife pampering her husband and flirting with him with

great indignation. When she tries to remind Jata's wife about the fact that he had kicked her so hard a few days back that she had almost died, Jata's wife reprimanded Satyabati instead. She told Satyabati that after all it was her husband who had beaten her up, why should Satya be bothered and why should she compose rhymes and persecute Jata, after all he hadn't done anything to Satya.

Another episode also struck Satyabati deeply, and this time it was her own father Ramkali Chattopadhyay who had made a gesture that was overtly commendable but had devastated his elder brother's son's wife. When Ramkali met the groom on his way to the bride's home he instantly understood that the groom was very ill and may die soon. He urged the groom's family members to return home. But the severe Hindu laws ruled that the bride intended for a wedding must be married at that designated auspicious hour or she would be doomed to remain unmarried throughout her life. Nothing could be more disastrous for a young woman than to be stigmatized as *lagnabrashta*, the woman who could not get married at the auspicious designated time period (*lagna*) of marriage.

Aware of this severe stricture on the young bride to be, as her would be husband had been detected with an imminent terminal illness, Ramkali magnanimously prevails on his married elder brother's son Rashbehari to marry Potli and save her from lifelong ostracism.

But in the process Ramkali forgets the agony that he subjects Rashbehari's wife Sarada to bear. When Sarada was married to Rashbehari she was twelve years old, now she is a mother and sixteen years old and she is forced to accept her husband's second marriage. Questions regarding monogamy, bigamy, the Hindu patriarchal system can be raised in this context. Multiple marriages and having several wives was not regarded as a social or legal offence in the mid-nineteenth century. In a deft art of juxtaposition Ashapura brings together the misery of two young women, the young widow Sankari who had come back to the Chatterjee household after her husband's death, and Sarada who feels abandoned by her husband, now that he gets married a second time. There was a time when the world of these two young women revolved around very different orbits. But now Sankari could feel sympathy towards Sarada. When Satyabati asks Sankari why she looked so despondent, Sankari told her that she was ruminating about "death" (*Maran*). Satyabati then comments, "All women seem to react in the same way, "I'll die", "I am dying", "I wish I was dead."<sup>23</sup>

In all these sequences regarding the plight of young helpless woman as wives, mothers and widows and the domineering senior women of the family, mostly widows

or mothers Ashapura underscores women's total lack of agency and dependence on the approval of senior family members, senior male decision makers in rural Bengal. Satyabati boasts of her skills of reading and writing and talks about the women of the city of Calcutta who went to school and received formal education. When Satya's cousin cross-questions her that women were not expected to read and write Satyabati asks, "Wasn't the goddess of learning Saraswati herself a woman?"<sup>24</sup> Women's longing for knowledge, at least acquirement of basic literacy has been well described by Tanika Sarkar, "All varieties of women's writings unanimously identified and condemned two problem spots within the Hindu woman's existence—the pain of patrilocality and the longing for knowledge. Whatever the format and whatever the basic political stance towards patriarchy, women's writings at this time agreed on these points of criticism."<sup>25</sup>

Soon after, there was a message from Satyabati's marital home, urging her father Ramkali Chattopadhyay to send their daughter in law to her marital home. Ramkali felt Satyabati needed to come of age to go to her marital home, but Satyabati persuaded her father to let her go. During a rather innocuous sequence, with Satyabati's mother in law Elokeshi braiding Satya's hair and the braiding failing to stay in place, Elokeshi feels her efforts to tie Satya's hair had gone to waste as Satyabati deliberately upset her efforts by shaking her head. So in great irritation Elokeshi strikes Satyabati on her back with her fist. At once, Satyabati freed herself from Elokeshi as she held her hair. She stood up and asked Elokeshi why she had hit her. Elokeshi taunted her saying that she needed to be beaten up with a firewood shaft, then she would learn the lesson of her life. Satyabati tells her mother in law, "Ok, hit me, let me see how much firewood you have". Elokeshi feels as if she has struck by lightning as her son also feels when he enters the courtyard suddenly to see his wife and mother facing each other, the wife staring straight into the eyes of the mother in law. Such a scene was unthinkable to which the young husband Nabakumar was now witness. Seeing her son, Elokeshi asks Nabakumar to beat up his wife, urging him to batter her face with the shoes on his feet. Nabakumar is too petrified to be able to even say a word. Then Elokeshi sets up a lament that her daughter in law has hit her and her son is unable to stand up to his wife and throw her out of the house.<sup>26</sup>

This sequence is indeed an unprecedented one in Bengali literature, where the young child-wife stands up to the middle-aged mother in law and her son remains silent instead of beating his wife to discipline her and thereby pleasing his mother, convincing her and the

community about his manhood and roused virility. The second such *revolutionary* sequence was when Satyabati tells her husband that she wants to go and live in the city of Calcutta, Expectedly Nabakumar tries to dissuade her but Satyabati tells him, "I am telling you clearly, I'll go, I'll go, I'll go to Kolkata, I want to see if lightening strikes me for going to Kolkata just because I am a woman."<sup>27</sup> However, the authorial voice informs the reader that Satya's resolve does not yield results immediately. Instead time flows and Satyabati becomes the mother of two sons.

The third such path-breaking sequence in a Hindu Brahmin middle class rural Bengali family takes place when Satyabati asks the local schoolteacher to bring in a white male doctor from Kolkata to treat her husband Nabakumar. Nabakumar had taken ill and as Satyabati's father was unable to visit Baruipur at that time, Satyabati sold off her heavy gold necklace and entrusted the schoolteacher to escort the white doctor to her marital home. Needless, to say, this was another revolution that a rural woman had caused in a conservative village in rural Bengal.

The fourth sequence is of course Satyabati's initiative to move house to Kolkata. After many years of vacillation, Nabakumar does agree to take up a job in the city. On arrival, helped of course by Bhabatosh, the local schoolteacher, Satya realizes the freedom of running her home all by herself. She perceives the liberation of women in a nuclear family. However when she had planned the move to Kolkata Satya had little expectation about any benefit to her own self—"She can work in any way she chose to, no one would notice, no one could find fault, What a strange feeling! What supreme happiness! Satya had never battled for freedom thinking of such happiness. She had merely wanted to move to such a place, where there would be doctors for illness, good schools for her sons and good jobs for men,

For her own self what could be good, she hadn't ever tried to figure out. She just knew there was criticism and spite. Now she noticed there was much more. So this was the joy of freedom? Instead of a sword poised over one's head there was a radiant sky high above one's head?<sup>28</sup>

The fifth sequence is Nabakumar and his friend Netai's suspicion about Satyabati's disappearance in the afternoons. They learn about the meetings of the brahmo samaj from Satyabati who even visits the Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen's house, the evening when Ramkrishna Paramhansa visits Sen's house. Satya also informs them that she goes every afternoon to a women's organization and teaches the women who assemble there how to read and write. This voluntary bid becomes institutionalized as Bhabatosh Master who had become

Satyabati's mentor opens a school for women—"Sarbamangala Vidyapith". When her husband Nabakumar asks her how could she dare to teach when her own learning was so limited, Satyabati complacently remarked that her own knowledge would improve as she went on teaching. Satyabati's husband is astounded and declares that his wife now inhabits a sphere to which he has virtually no access. Earlier when Nabakumar had reprimanded her for wanting to learn English, Satyabati had remarked, "I just expressed the wish to learn English, I didn't say I wanted to wear a gown and eat in a hotel?"<sup>29</sup> Also when Netai's wife Bhabini's younger sister becomes a victim of domestic violence, killed by both her husband and his mother, Satyabati writes to the police officer who comes over to conduct an enquiry. This episode makes family members think that Satyabati is de-feminized, "In her body of a woman there is actually a dangerous man."<sup>30</sup>

The sixth and final sequence that may be termed revolutionary is Satyabati's voluntary leaving of her marital home. This crucial decision of rejection of the primary space of security that patriarchy promises to women is unique on many levels. Satyabati's rejection and departure, referred to in first page of this essay is more path-breaking than that of Nora in *A Doll's House* and Mrinal in *The Wife's Letter (Streer Patra)*. Satyabati feels shattered when she finds that taking advantage of her absence her mother in law in tacit collusion with her husband has married off her nine year old daughter Subarnalata. Nine year old Subarnalata was a school student but too young and helpless to protest against her grandmother's decision. Satyabati had earlier nurtured Sankari's daughter Suhash and inspired her to get educated and looked upon Suhash who had become a schoolteacher as her elder daughter. But she failed to protect her own daughter from her mother in law and husband. No situation in the politics of the family and the familial could be more ironic.

This great act of betrayal that destroys all her dreams of making Subarnalata a complete human being makes Satyabati understand that she will have to sever ties with the system that honours customs more than individuals. Satyabati decides to turn away from such a relentless conservative society that destroys women's identity. Nabakumar curses Satyabati for her decision, saying that because her rich father had left her some property she had become so conceited. Satyabati tells her husband that she had not even remembered she had indeed inherited some property. On being reminded about it she tells Nabakumar that with that money her sons Sadhan and Saral should set up a school in the name of their grandmother and name the school, *Bhuvaneshwari*

*Vidyalyaya*. As she leaves she tells Sadu that she will set up a school and earn her own living, reminding the reader that before the birth of Subarnalata she had taught elderly women for a while. At that time it was a voluntary activity, now she would opt for teaching as a profession that would sustain her life. Sadu just falls at Satyabati's feet saying that she could do achieve what other women have been terrified of even dreaming about. Ashapura uses the ultimate symbol as the first part ends.

The cinematic description frame by frame as it were is indeed remarkable. Satyabati was leaving the village in a bullock cart. The entire village had come to plead with her to give up her resolution to leave. But Satyabati remained firm in her decision. The narrative mentions the turning wheels of the bullock cart and the restlessness of the bullock. But Satyabati would have to change to a horse carriage in order to reach a new life. The last line of this part of the trilogy uses an appropriate symbol of a definitive turning point in the road map of Satyabati—"Suddenly there was silence. The bullock cart stopped slowly at Hat-tala. The bullock-cart lane ended here."<sup>31</sup>

### **Subarnalata (1966)**

As in *Pratham Pratisurti* or the Journey of Satyabati, in the second part of the trilogy that sketches the journey of Satyabati's daughter Subarnalata and also uses the name of *Subarnalata* as the title of the second part, the emphasis is once again on women's education. The trilogy registers Ashapura's passionate conviction that the ordinary Hindu middle-class woman trapped in the double bind of gender and caste could only be liberated if education is made available to her.

When Subarnalata dies her daughter Bakul was seventeen years old. In the very second page of *Subarnalata*, Ashapura makes a caustic abstract of Subarnalata's life since her marriage and till her death—"In that house Subarna had spent thirty years of her life, she bore eight children, wept, laughed, worked, rested, participated in all the aspects of family life, yet the torment of feeling engaged had made her writhe in agony all her life."<sup>32</sup>

This was probably what Betty Friedan had so famously expressed in that one-liner in her *Feminine Mystique* – 'the problem without a name' that inexplicably oppressed both global and local middle-class women. The second part of the trilogy commences with Subarna's excitement about having a hanging balcony to herself in the new house that was being constructed by her husband and his brothers. Initially, her husband Prabodh had mocked her and had remarked that it wasn't that Subarna wanted to watch the world from her south facing balcony, she

was eager to be watched by other men. Fourteen year old Subarna however fell for the wiles of her husband, who told her that he was indeed including her much desired balcony in the construction of the house. However, on the day of house-warming when the entire family moved to the new house, Subarna ran up to the first floor in search of her balcony. Instead, she just came across more and more walls. She rushed towards the second floor and terrace, but that part hadn't been constructed due to lack of funds. Furious Subarna told Prabodh that she was taking an oath that are sons would build a house with a balcony for her to avenge the insult of their mother. But then the authorial voice intervenes, "But what about her previous oath? Hadn't she said that if the house didn't have a balcony she would not even stay there! Alas, wife of a Bengali household, oaths were meaningless for her."<sup>33</sup>

When Subarnalata recalled her days with her parents in Kolkata, the only lingering image in her mind was her mother waiting for her to get back from school, carrying a bag of books. She recalled how her mother Satyabati would keep on insisting that women must be educated, that was the key to their freedom.<sup>34</sup> When Satyabati's letter to Subarna, delivered after her death according to her wishes, reached Subarna, in that letter Satyabati had written the only cherished image of her beloved only daughter in her mind was that of her nine year old daughter going to school with a school bag full of books). Much later, Subarna paid a surprise visit to her uncle in law's home. She had learnt that her brother-in-law Jaganath had started a printing press. Subarna brought out her manuscript with great hesitation, but when Jaganath read a few pages he could not believe that Subarna herself had composed those poems, stories and essays. Subarna had to mostly steal time to write or else her husband and sons would make insinuations about bad cooking, and that Subarna was engaged in thesis writing.

But Subarna continued writing her memoirs or confession. In that scripted confession was embedded Subarna's freedom. Freedom from the prison of the exercise book to the radiant mainstream.<sup>35</sup> But as referred to in page one when the manuscript was printed as a book, the typographical errors were the only bits that her sons and husband noticed. Subarna found their mockery intolerable. As referred to in the first page of this essay, when Subarna's sons and husband doubled up with laughter at the errors in printing, Subarna suddenly advanced like a tigress and as she roared with rage she snatched her book from the grip of her eldest son and tore it into pieces. Then she went off to the terrace with all the 500 copies of her memoirs along with every scrap

of paper on which she had written for many, many years, and burnt them all, till nothing of her writing remained. Every word that she had written turned to ashes. Only her daughter Bakul remained an eye witness to the destruction.

Soon after Subarna was taken seriously ill. The funeral rituals after her death were quite spectacular though her sons did worry about sticking to a "budget." But the one who did not accompany Subarnalata's body to the burning ghat was Bakul. She had seen another funeral pyre on the terrace. She would never know what exactly turned to ashes that afternoon. Bakul had searched through all her mother's personal belongings, in order to locate at least a scrap of her handwriting. Ashapura comments, "That Subarnalata was literate, that impression Subarna had totally blotted out. Bakul sat down on that part of the terrace where Subarnalata had lit the funeral pyre."<sup>36</sup> When Bakul finds that even the manuscript given to the printing press was untraceable she makes a promise to herself that she will recover her mother's lost and burnt narrative and hold it up to the world. This resolution is the concluding sequence of the second part of Ashapura's trilogy.

### ***Bakulkatha* (1974)**

In *Bakulkatha* the third and final part of the trilogy, Ashapura creates a distance between Subarnalata's daughter Bakul and the narrator Anamika Devi, the successful awarded novelist, though they are one and the same person. The narratorial style separating the person as text and the author as creator of the text and the created text complicates the narration but conflates the intention of creating reader consciousness about the author, the created text and place, persons and situations that may have initially triggered authorial interest in creating the text.

The time period of this third part is Kolkata in post-colonial twentieth century. Unlike the earlier narratives about Satyabati and Subarnalata, the role of Bakul as Anamika Devi is that of an informed observer, a scribe sensitively recording the changing times and the changes in the value system. The narrative exudes a sort of regret and disappointment as the fast paced city life and the changes that have happened in the lives of women seem to be more frenetic rather than creating a sense of mature fulfillment. Anamika Devi as writer and recorder of her times therefore repeatedly asks herself and queries in her created texts as well whether the present really marks women's freedom and gender equality.

Though *Bakulkatha* harps on Anamika Devi's neutral mind, her capability of empathy, but despite all the

liberation of her mind inspired by the modern inclusive spirit of Rabindranath Tagore, the very subtle but unmistakable conservatism of Anamika Devi ( alias Ashapura Devi) comes to the fore.

The third part of the trilogy also tells us that Anamika feels a sense of culture shock and moral outrage about young women who seem to have, according to Anamika lost the sense of tolerance, care and patience and the graciousness of surrendering self-interest for loved ones. The inability of husband and wife to live a shared life of peaceful interdependence mortifies Anamika. Therefore, repeatedly in the narrative there is a refrain of a lament that this emancipation for women was not what she had dreamt of. This again, perhaps was not what the resistance of Satyabati and Subarnalata had aimed at. The sense of romanticism and nostalgia for traditional values of Asian families in term of foregrounding women's roles as caregivers and nurturers as angels within the domestic space, is perhaps the sub-text of Anamika the narrator's disillusionment with the changing times and women's role playing.

The tug of war between the liberated mind of Anamika towards new ideas and her traditional response to lifestyle changes in the conduct of young men and women can be an interesting study. In fact, the most remarkable attribute of the narrative is that Anamika never quite writes a graphic tale of the life of Bakul, but offers to her readers brief but powerful vignettes of various situations, characters and episodes of the so-called modern age. Is this because Bakul alias Anamika though living with her brother's family remained unmarried all her life? Is the life of a single woman not as interesting as that of an adult married woman? Is the single woman just an observer of social values? Is the single woman's life one of social exclusion? Is the single woman not an active agent of social evolution but a social documentarian, just a passive chronicler of her times? These questions however are not addressed in the trilogy.

Did Ashapura construe that the life of Bakul was somehow a bare one as she was outside the charmed circle of belonging within the patriarchal system of wifehood, motherhood and perhaps widowhood? These have been the three stages of women's lives that Ashapura had represented with tremendous creative energy and incisive insight. As Anamika remains till the end of the narrative a single woman who had now grown old, narration of her own life was about abstract ruminations of the art of fiction, the role of the author in a created text and the record of the convolutions of time present enmeshed in time past, struggling towards the future. In a rather resigned mood of confusion if not despair Anamika as scribe of her contemporary times ruminates,

"I am trying to grasp the moments but these are eluding me. These moments are not leaving behind anything permanent, these are like soap suds, like colorful bubbles that disappear into thin air...Modern? No, I won't call it modern, I'd rather ask how can I pen down the present society? I get to hear, that unbelievably, unknown dangerous animals have invaded homes, they have aligned themselves with the householders and those creatures are not even trying to hide their nails, teeth or horns. Instead they are describing these as objects of pride. But I've merely heard about these thingsÖ"<sup>37</sup>

So in several sharply defined vignettes Ashapura through Anamika identifies several features that have rapidly changed the social fabric of the late twentieth century. These comprise the growing sense of intolerance, dissatisfaction and overly ambitious nature of women, as reflected in the life and suicide of charming Namita. Namita gained fame, money and power as a film star but she was lonely and insecure and was ultimately driven to committing suicide. The failure of the marriage of Shovan and Rekha due to their incompatibility was another case in point. Also, the recent exodus of children longing to reach distant shores in search of material comfort and fame, leaving their own kith and kin behind was also identified as a negative feature. Though their parents suffered, the children were motivated and in a performance-driven life, emotional attachments had to be compromised. Also Bakul/Anamika found it very difficult to accept the behaviorism of the youth of the present generation. The body hugging T shirts and trousers of the young men and hipster saris and brief blouses of the young women, their going off to picnics without any chaperone, listening to popular English songs all caused a sense of repulsion and violent culture shock in the mind of the daughter of Subarnalata.<sup>38</sup>

As a matter of fact, in *Bakulkatha* Ashapura reiterates the rhetorical question as she describes the contemporary times and social behavior of the young generations- was this the sort of world for women, was this the sort of freedom that Satyabati and Subarnalata had desired and dreamt about? The only positive source of modern life of the young that has met with the approval of Anamika is that of her niece Shampa marrying a working class young man Satyaban and both of them achieving their dreams through hard work and total dedication to each other through their playfulness and passionate care for each other. So despite the negative aspects, the third part of the trilogy ends on a positive note as it cites the shared happiness and gender equality in the life of Shampa and Satyaban. However, the refrain that lingers in the air as the trilogy ends are the queries that Ashapura inserts into the minds and voices of the three generations of

women that she represented, grandmother Satyabati, daughter Subarnalata and grand-daughter Bakul-

"Is this what we had wanted? You, I, our mother, grandmother, countless imprisoned women if this nation? Is this the manifestation of freedom? The freedom, for which the imprisoned women had beaten their heads against stone walls, had silently wailed and cursed their fate? Was this the light of freedom, the freedom for which women imprisoned within iron cells had prayed for, waited for? No Bakul- this is not what we had wanted."<sup>39</sup>

This authorial voice of reservation and disappointment that resonated through the third volume of the trilogy perhaps also indicates the difference between the middle class Hindu women that Ashapura represented in her trilogy and the more liberated women in Rabindranath Tagore's narratives. Charulata (*Nastanir*) and Bimala (*Ghare Baire*) belong approximately to the same historical time as Subarnalata. But there are no discernible elements that can bring Charulata and Subarnalata together. Moreover, in Tagore's novel the macro issues of nationalism, colonialism, communal riots, religious discord between Hindus and Muslims play crucial roles in the fictional narratives. In Ashapura's novels such issues are peripheral and do not inform the central discourse. As Partha Chatterjee had argued Ashapura Devi's narratives fall within the nineteenth century format of narratives, that consolidates the binaries between the home and the world, the inner space of the domestic and the outer space that was the masculine domain. But the trilogy is not a saga of defeatism, moral outrage and resignation. Each of the three parts end on a positive note of triumph marking social progress despite the fact that the last part expresses the author's reservations and censure about the manner and mode of the exhibition of freedom. Was Ashapura's youthful mind slowing down or was it that the overlap between the home and the world which had become inevitable with more and more working women taking decisions about all aspects of their lives seemed to her to be in excess of what had been her target regarding women's liberation? She had herself admitted in her memoir piece that she was now confined to her home, her mobility had slowed down due to age and so she felt she was unable to keep pace with the rapidly changing times, about which however she made no bones about expressing her disapproval.<sup>40</sup>

But then Ashapura had written in her non-fictional text that she had invariably written about women warriors and rebels, she had never been attracted to recording the lives of complacent average women who were compliant and complicit in the process of exploitation and marginalization of women. Therefore,

Ashapura Devi wrote, "Whatever I have written has been within the middle class society that I had directly observed. I haven't written about politics, I haven't quite written about social-activists. I have written about women within the middle-class households. But I have written about those who have not been able to accept the intolerable situations within the homes. If the situation demands- then they give up home or their husbands. All along within my mind there was an element of uncompromising rebellion, but that was never apparent. You may even call it the desire for women's liberation. But that urge was not a personal one. It was directed towards the progress of society and the community as such."<sup>41</sup>

### Notes

1. Sanjukta Dasgupta et al (Ed) *The Indian Family in Transition* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007, p.222.
2. Ashapura Devi, *Pratham Pratisruti*, Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1964, p. 435
3. Susie Tharu & Lalitha *Women writing in India* Vol 2, New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1995, p. 476.
4. Ashapura Devi, *Subarnalata*, Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt Ltd., 1966, p.396.
5. Ashapura Devi, *Bakul Katha*, Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt Ltd., 1973, p. 259.
6. Pushparenu Roy, *Ashapura, Ma* Kolkata: Avinava Prakashan, 2010, p.38.
7. Paul, Prasantakumar Rabijibani, Vol. 1-9 (vol 6). Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2001, p. 355.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ashapura Devi, *Aar Ek Ashapura* 1998 ( Posthumously published), pp. 37-38.
11. Winifred Gerin, *Charlotte Bronte: The Evolution of Genius* Oxford: Clarendon, 1967, p. 110.
12. Ibid., p. 16.
13. *Aar ek Ashapura* p. 7.
14. Ibid., p 8.
15. Ibid., p. 11.
16. Ibid., p. 12.
17. Partha Chatterjee, *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010 first published 1999, pp. 139-149, 116-157.
18. *Pratham Pratisruti* p. 3.
19. Ibid., p. 4.
20. KumKum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women* Delhi, Zubaan, 2006 first published 1989, pp. 128-129.
21. *Pratham Pratisruti* p. 3.
22. Ibid., p. 23.
23. Ibid., p. 69.
24. Ibid., p. 105.
25. Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001, pp. 47- 48.
26. *Pratham Pratisruti*, pp. 153-154.
27. Ibid., p. 190.
28. Ibid., p. 256..
29. Ibid., p. 259.
30. Ibid., pp. 394-95.
31. Ibid., p. 436
32. *Subarnalata*, p..2.
33. *Pratham Pratisruti*, p.11.
34. Ibid., p. 256.
35. Ibid., p. 308.
36. Ibid., p. 395.
37. *Bakulkatha*, p. 116
38. *Bakulkatha*, pp. 241-243)
39. Ibid., p. 303
40. *Aar ek Ashapura*, p. 18.
41. Ibid. p. 17.

### Works Cited

- Bhattacharya, Tapadhir *Ashapura Nari Parisar* Kolkata: Bangiya Sahitya Sansad, 2009
- Chakraborty, Rami *Ashapurnar Upanashey Nari* Kolkata: Bangiya Sahitya Sansad, 2007
- Chatterjee, Partha *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010 first published 1999.
- Dasgupta Sanjukta et al (Ed) *The Indian Family in Transition* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007
- Devi, Ashapura, *Pratham Pratisruti*, Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh publishers Pvt Ltd 1964.
- , *Subarnalata* Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh publishers Pvt Ltd., 1966
- , *Bakul Katha*, Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh publishers Pvt Ltd., 1973
- , *Aar Ek Ashapura* Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh publishers Pvt Ltd., 1998 (Posthumously published)
- Forbes, Geraldine *Women in Colonial India* New Delhi: Chronicle Books 2005 *Women In Modern India* New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1996
- Gerin, Winifred *Charlotte Bronte: The Evolution of Genius* Oxford: Clarendon, 1967
- Majumdar, Rochona, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* New Delhi: OUP, 2009
- Roy, Pushparenu *Ashapura, Ma* Kolkata: Avinava Prakashan, 2010
- Sangari, KumKum and Vaid, Sudesh *Recasting Women* Delhi, Zubaan, 2006 first published 1989
- Sarkar, Tanika *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001
- Tharu, Susie & Lalitha *Women writing in India* Vol 2 New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1995

*All Translations unless otherwise stated are mine.*