

2018-19

Literary Magazine AIKER JODHAN
Reg. No. 53625 :: ICA Approved :: Postal Reg. No. WB/ASL/127
36 Year, Rangla Nababarsa, Special Vol., April-2019
ISSN 0871-5819

Price Rs. 50.00

UGC Journal Details

Name of the Journal: Aker Jodhan

ISSN Number: 08715819

e-ISSN Number:

Source: UGC

Subject:

Publisher: Kolkata

Country of Publication: India

Broad Subject Category: Arts & Humanities

Print

Owned Printed & Published by Basudeb Mondal from Paschim Rangamati,
Rupnarayanpur, Bardwan-713386, Ph. (0341) 2532831, Printed at Bani Art
Press, 50A, Keshab Chandra Sen Street, Kolkata-9, Phone : 930899720,
Email : baniartpress07@gmail.com, Editor : Basudeb Mondal,
Mobde : 9832764825, E-mail : deshpreni.sm@gmail.com

বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় সঞ্জুরি আয়োগের অনুমোদিত তালিকাভুক্ত,
যার পত্রিকা তালিকা নম্বর-8০৭৪২ ● ISSN 0871-5819

রূপনারায়ণপুর পশ্চিম বর্ধমান থেকে প্রকাশিত দ্বি-মাসিক পত্রিকা

আজকের

যোখন

৩৬ তম বর্ষ, বাংলা নববর্ষ, বিশেষ সংখ্যা
বৈশাখ-১৪২৬ / এপ্রিল-২০১৯

মন যোগায় না, মন জাগায়

ISSN 0871-5819

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আজকের যোধন

(বর্ধমান জেলা লিটল ম্যাগাজিন সংঘের সদস্য)

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সম্পাদক
বাসুদেব মণ্ডল

সহ-সম্পাদক
কালাঁচাঁদ ঘোষ, রমাকান্ত মণ্ডল,
নমিতা ভট্টাচার্য, সমীর প্রসাদ, সুজিত মণ্ডল

Ajker Jodhan

*Multi-disciplinary, Dwimastik, Refereed with Peer-Reviewed Journal
36th years, Bangla Nababarsa, Special Vol., April-2019*

সহযোগিতা

প্রদীপ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, উৎপলেন্দু মাল, অভিজিৎ চৌধুরী, সুব্রত হালদার,
বৃন্দাবন মণ্ডল, কল্পনা মিত্র, প্রশান্ত মণ্ডল, বিধনাথ চক্রবর্তী

প্রচ্ছদ

মৌমিতা প্রসাদ

মুদ্রক

বাগী আর্ট প্রেস, ৫০/এ, কেশবচন্দ্র সেন স্ট্রীট, কলকাতা-৯

ISSN 0871-5819

UGC SL.No. 40742

যোগাযোগ

বাসুদেব মণ্ডল

রূপনারায়ণপুর, পশ্চিম বর্ধমান-৭১৩৩৮৬

মো: ৯৮৩২৭০৪৮২৫, Email- deshpremi.sm@gmail.com

মূল্য: ৫০/-

আমাদের কথা

প্রতি বছরের মতো এবছরও আমরা ছয়টি সাধারণ সংখ্যা এবং চারটি বিশেষ সংখ্যা প্রকাশ করব-এই আশা ও ভরসাকে সামনে রেখে আমাদের এই বাংলা নববর্ষের বিশেষ সংখ্যাটি প্রকাশিত হল। আর আমরা আশা রাখলাম যে,—প্রতিটি সংখ্যার মত এই সংখ্যাটিও পাঠক বর্গকে মুগ্ধ করবে এবং আনন্দ প্রদান করবে।

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Hemanta Bala Devi : An Emancipated Woman in 20th Century Bengal.



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Hemanta Bala Devi is no stranger to the readers' of Bengali literature. After the publication of Ninth volume of letters in 1964, the curiosity about the recipient of the letter was awakened by many. The words of Rabindranath's heart are profound beliefs, philosophy of life, and discussion of castetism of Hindu- Muslim relations. Politics, even the intimate thoughts of particular moments of his mind, have long been published in the pages of the longest letters. The letter of the ideology was thirty-seven years old, mother of two, the husband, the mother-in-law, the father-in-law, the bride of one of the noble enlightened families.

Early life : Hemanta Bala Devi was born in the year 1894 at 26-Bechu Chatterjee Street, Kolkata. Her father, Brajendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury a land lord of Gouripur at Maymonsingha, and mother Ananta Bala Devi were liberal and admirer of poet Rabindranath Tagore. As a first child, she was developing very well and independently. The way the daughters of that times were celebrated in the conservative surroundings, the neighbourhood, Hemanta Bala's fact was much more than that. Seeing Hemanta Bala's written 'Nijerkatha' (Owns words), she went to Bhagalpur with her father and went on to 'dholoke'. Even, she used to taking flower in the garden with her father. Like the boys, chalking in her hand is the day of Saraswati Puja. While travelling to Madhupur with her father, gave him the bat, wicket and leg-pad to Hema. She used to play cricket with boys. At one time Bengalarir's vow, cooking spell like her free movement was as false as she was. She used to lie in the form of 'babu', acting master etc. She earned the character of modern 'Tom Boy'.

Advocacy in Hemanta Bala was a special part of her special love affair. She liked the beauty of girls in Brahma household. She used to cry bitterly to her mother, especially in the energetic spots. Natural beauty attracts her most. Grandiose Durgapuja create more question in her mind. She never realized that, how can see accept the idol as Maa Durga? So, she asked several types of questions and her mother reduce her. She used to ride palanquin at the time of Vijaya Dashami and this marginal behaviour compelled her to think as equal as her father.

From very childhood she wrote several types of poetry, songs etc. She wrote several types of essays on different idols. After a very movement when she initiated in Vaisnava Dharma, she wrote many songs of God Radhakrishna, ordered by her Srithakur and Sreema. She wrote versatile notes and journals about her religious concept, named as 'Satyabani Devi'. She wrote 'Urbashi', 'Mohila', 'Mohilamahal', 'Ghoroya', 'Golpobharati' etc. She also wrote essays, short stories with her own. It is unfortunate that, her works were in vain because more remain in rough sketch.

Before marriage she heard that Rabindranath set-up a school named 'Brahmacharya', where the wicked children became good. She started her study in Gouripur but at that time she was seven only. Her teacher was Gurudas Chakravarty. Her tyrannous work revealed her childhood and her works "Nijer Katha" (Owns voices) established her words. She wrote,—"এ শিক্ষক মহাশয়ের কাছে পড়বার সময় একটা জিনিসের দিকে দৃষ্টি পড়ে আমার পড়ার ব্যাঘাত হত বলে সেটি তিনি সরিয়ে রাখেন। পরে অনেক আকুতি-মিনতির পর সেটি যখন আমি ফিরে পাই। পরের দিন না তার পরের দিন, এবং সম্পূর্ণ নিজে করে পাই, তারও পরে, এবং তার পরে ভেঙে দেখি, ওর রহস্যভেদ করতে পারি কিনা—তখনও বস্তুটির সুদূর রহস্য ও স্বপ্নময়তা কোথায় চলে গেছে। বস্তুটি হচ্ছে মোটা কাঁচের গোলাকৃতি একটি কাগজচাপা। তার ভিতরে লাল, সাদা, সবুজ নানা রঙের মত দ্রব্য ঘেঁষাঘেঁষি করে থাকে।"¹

This is not only girlhood character but also her curiosity of that time phrase.

Married Life : Hemanta Bala got married at the age of ten with Brajendrakanta, son of the land lord of Rongpur and nephew of Jagadindranath Roy, king of Nator. From her in-laws she had a distant relation with Tagore family. The relationship between Hemanta bala Devi and Rabindranath Tagore was grandfather and granddaughter. Hemanta

Bala had a troubled married life, starting from age of ten to end of her life. Married in a traditional zamindar family, her movement was restricted in the andar mahal only. The born rebel Hemanta Bala could not adjust with her husband.

At the age of fifteen years she became mother and the age of twenty she took initiation in vaishnav dharma from a sadhu, name Kishorananda. By then she was separated from her husband. For some period of time separation and again reunion continued throughout her life. From her 'teen' she was familiar with Tagore's writings but after her Guru's death Hemanta Bala became more closer to Tagore's writings and took refuge in Tagore. In her restless mental situation she read "Jogajog", "Sheser Kobita" and identified herself with the heroin Kumu of "Jogajog" (Tagore's Novel). Hemanta Bala could see a lot of resemblances with 'Kumudini'. Not only in literature but also in real life she would think of a lot of Kumudinis in our society. Even, we come to know about Hemanta Bala's liberated self in her various works and literary practices. Though, Hemanta Bala was not educated in general sense of the term, she was educated in a special sense and openness of her mind and love for literature finally made her a poet and a writer.

Came under the influence of Rabindranath Tagore : "Puranodiner Katha" (The voices of old era of Hemanta Bala) which was written by Hemanta Bala. There has she also discussed about her birth, childhood memories, marriage and marriage life, cultural activities, religious matter etc. In the second chapter, named "Rabindrasmriti" introduced us the first meeting between Rabindranath and Hemanta Bala, several events of her life. Apart from those the essay entitled "Rabindranath O Harokumari Pici Maa" disclosed the secret meeting between Rabindranath & Hemanta Bala Devi, which was very interesting and funny. In the end of this chapter, "Amar Moner Katha" (Owns Voices of Hemanta Bala) we discovered the character of Hemanta Bala, who was very open minded practical in life and free from any religious orthodoxy.

While engrossed in reading the Tagore's writings, Hemanta Bala found solace and there grew a desire in her to write letters to Tagore to get acquainted with him. Tagore was famous for replying letters of his admirers and this proved to be true in Hemanta's case also. She received reply

within a few days. Then started flow of letters from both sides. Tagore wrote 264 letters Tagore to Hemanta Bala, and may be a greater number of letters from Hemanta Bala to Tagore. Hemanta Bala was one of the four women recipients of Tagore's large number of letters. The others are Indira Devi, Ranu Adhikary, later she became Lady Ranu Mukharjee and Rani Mahalanbish. These exchange of letters between two lasted for eleven years. Starting from 1930 to 1941 the last days of Tagore. From these letters we find different sides of the myriad minded poet.

These letters were mostly on religious issues. Hemanta Bala was a staunch Hindu a devotee of vaisnava faith, believer and follower of all kinds of rituals. On the other hand, Tagore was against all ritualism. A liberal man his religion was the religion of man, a true lover of humanity. The letters between two opposite characters are interesting. Some letters are humorous, and personal in nature, some letters are related with the critics of Tagore. The first four letters of Hemanta Bala carry her pseudonym 'Jonaki' and 'Daksha Bala'. And interestingly in santiniketan these were kept in 'Pagla file'. Gradually, poet realized the potentiality of Hemanta Bala and the letters of 'Pagla file' were shifted to another file "Hemanta Bala and Rabindranath correspondence".

Hemanta Bala was neither a family member of Tagore nor a devotee in the strict sense of the term at the beginning. But, gradually through exchange of letters and meetings she came closer to Tagore. Descriptions of her meetings with Tagore show the condition of the then Hindu society. Her reminiscences of meeting with Tagore were really interesting and hilarious. From this correspondence the religious idea of Tagore becomes clear and distinct. His revolt against untouchability pomp and grandeur of Hindu worship are clearly expressed. Hemanta Bala's debate with Tagore was interesting. But more interesting is the transformation of a woman under 'Purdah' and her blooming into a flower. At the end of her life she turned to be a non-believer of any ritualistic orthodox religion. In her lonely days in the last lap of her life in Puri (Swarnachol) her only companion was Tagore's 'Geetabitan' and 'Santiniketan'. We find in her letters and appeal to poet to be her 'Guru', show her the path of realization. We know that Digambari Devi (wife of Prince Dwarakanath Thakur) was a fully devoted Vaisnava. And considering this trail we can see the influence of Vaisnava

religion on Rabindranath. On the other hand, Hemanta Bala Devi is an indoctrinated Vaishnava devotee. Rabindranath Tagore was not only 'Jiban Devota' of Hemanta Bala Devi. But she was highly influenced by his idealism. She established 'Rabibortika' (a Centre for practicing literature & music) to spread Tagore idealism thought out the nation. We can see find all these aspects in their letters. Even, Hemanta Bala wants to free from all kinds socialistic burden. She was informing these own words to Rabindranath. We can see her many letters which are send to Rabindranath. One of these is,—"আপনি আশীর্বাদ করুন, আমি যে গভীরে নিজে বাঁধা, ঠাকুরকেও বেঁধেছি, একদিন মেন তার থেকে মুক্ত হতে পারি,—জোর করে বাঁধন ছিড়ে নয়, পাখি যেমন করে আপনা আপনি ডিম থেকে মুক্ত হয়, তেমনি করে।...দাদা, আমার গভীরে খুবই সঙ্কীর্ণ। একমাত্র উদ্দেশ্য নিয়ে নির্দিষ্ট কটি প্রার্থী তার মধ্যে নিজেকে দান করেছে। বাহিরের কোনো কিছুর সঙ্গে যোগ রাখা তার নিষিদ্ধ।"

We also know that the crisis time of Hemanta Bala after death of Rabindranath from their letters. She depicted the picture of her life which was full of poverty, though she was daughter and daughter-in-law of rich land lord. We came to know about her last days of life which was pathetic. Through reading their letters, the prominent feature which we can stress is the conflict of ideas of Tagore and the ideas of Hemanta Bala Devi. One that is constructed by society and other which is self-judgment of Hemanta Bala Devi that grew up within herself. We have a particular belief in an ideology that is guided by the person. For this context, each woman has an individual religious belief which is inherent in her. For this reason, she can differ herself to other. But in the patriarchal system of our society, this inherent quality of woman is considered as valueless. However, the main focus of my argument is that the creative ideas of woman are cramped by the rules and regulation that is created by patriarchy. So, we don't allow their own thoughts rather we are imposing the rules and laws that already created by our society. So, we can say that this kind of system is a very obstructive to woman's emancipation and also equally harmful to their empowerment, capability and development. Above all this subject matter focuses the point of paralysed condition of woman in society.

It is not true that the patriarchal system of our society is responsible for absence of all-round development and empowerment of woman.

Because, so many countries where development of woman had not been possible in spite of matriarchy of those country. The similar picture of woman's development does not found still in India where matriarchy is going on. So, I will discuss about this issue elaborately to my research work. Here, I am talking about the relevance of exchanging letters between Rabindranath and Hemanta Bala. Because, Hemanta Bala is a woman who belongs to the category of an ordinary woman. In this context like an ordinary woman of our society, sometimes she accepts all the barrier and restriction of societal norms. Most of the times she rejected to accept the rules and restrictions imposed upon her. Those rules became obstruction to her, she can't freely express her personal view. In this context we can differ her from other woman. She was free minded and freely expressed her opinion without any hesitation. But it is very interesting to point out that she was not radical thinker or autocratic. She was self-guided and was not orthodox free to accept the others' view and opinion. We know that there are three levels of power of women's development. Firstly, in the stage of maidenhood she acquires the potential accumulation of power. Then comes womanhood where we noticed development of their power. At the last stage they achieve the realization of motherhood and where they flourish their power. From this perspective we can judge Hemanta Bala Devi explored her through self-development among these three levels. It is very clear that Hemanta Bala Devi (1894-1976) came at the ultimate level of women's empowerment relating to societal norms and barrier religion-literature. And thus, she came to the very close proximity of Tagore.

In spite of being daughter-in-law and daughter of a land lord, she had to face many struggles in life and has to cross the hardship of life. So, as per as she can be considered the pioneer of woman emancipation. Neither she was confined within curtain system nor was she truly entrapped into familial bonding. She became bride in early childhood, was devotee in womanhood and the last stage of her life, the religious curiosity made her restless. And she began to lead her life like a nun. We can portray the picture of women's condition of the the then society through her way of life. Side by side devotion in literature pursuit in music and love towards birds are the subject matter which will be another important focal point of my research. So, the main point of my research is the empowerment,

respect, the all-round development of woman which traditionally comes from the last two and half decades of centuries. Hemanta Bala Devi is pioneer of this kind of tradition.

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10. বাগচী, যশোধরা, এবং সেন, অভিভিজিং, "হেম স্তবালা দেবীর রচনা-সংকলন", দেবী, হেমন্তবালা, কলকাতা, দে'জ পাবলিশিং, কলকাতা, নভেম্বর, ১৯৯২।
11. ভট্টাচার্য, নরেন্দ্রনাথ, ভারতীয় ধর্মের ইতিহাস, জেনারেল, কলকাতা, ২০০০।
12. রায়, বিনয় ভূষণ, অন্তঃপুরের স্ত্রীশিক্ষা, নয়া উদ্যোগ, কলকাতা, ১৯৯৮।
13. সান্যাল, জয়ন্তী, কবি ও জোনাকি, এবং মুশায়েরা, কলকাতা, জানুয়ারি, ২০১২।