

**BANKIMCHANDRA
CHATTOPADHYAY'S
*RAJMOHAN'S WIFE***

A KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE MAJOR THEMES AND ISSUES

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VIDYASAGAR EVENING COLLEGE

COURSE MATTER FOR CC3

SECOND SEMESTER

FACTS ABOUT THE NOVEL



- The novel is Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's first novel and the only one he wrote in English.
- The novel was first serialized in 1864 in a weekly periodical called *Indian Field*.

NARRATIVE COMPONENTS OF THE NOVEL

- The novel has an episodic plot.
- The setting is rural Bengal in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.
- The characters are flat with little or no complexity in them.
- Narrative Technique is third person, omniscient , with the point of view located close to Matangini's consciousness.
- The characters of Mathur and Madhab have been developed as foils to each other; also Madhab's urban education makes him a sophisticated liberal whereas Mathur's lack of polish and education makes him a regressive conservative.
- Resolution appears to be contrived and hurried.
- Matangini's character has been idealized and sentimentalized.

Matangini: The central character



- Matangini is the title character and a woman of beauty and grace.
- Married to the unscrupulous and suspicious Rajmohan, her wifely devotion is set out in sharp contrast to Rajmohan's abusive behaviour.
- Matangini, though married to Rajmohan has always been in love with her Madhab, her brother-in-law.
- Though her passion is illicit, she never transgresses the boundaries of her marriage to consummate her passions.
- Matangini's moral fortitude is perhaps the most redeeming aspect of her character, since she does not shy away from going against her husband. Later she remains unyielding when Mathur abducts her with a design to make her the object of her sexual adventures.
- Matangini's nobility and purity make her a rather larger than life character. But in her bold decision to contest her husband and later to leave him, she anticipates Bankimchandra's later heroines who were clearly social rebels.

The two aspects of Bengali gentry

Madhab Ghosh



Madhab is educated in Calcutta and is clearly a progressive man with liberal ideals.

Mathur Ghosh



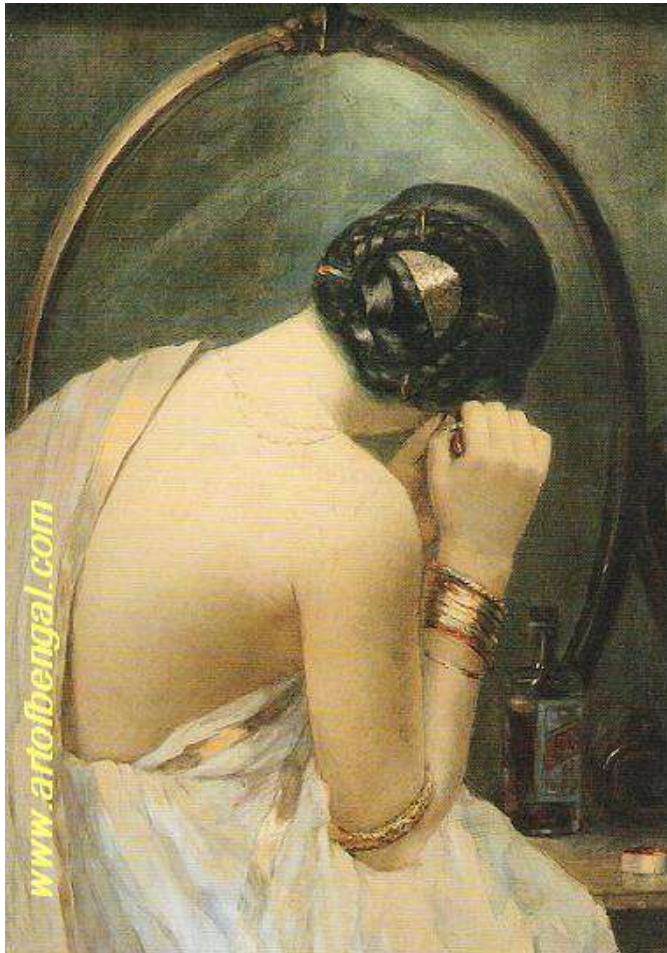
Mathur lacks Madhab's refinement and his promiscuity and avarice gives his character a negative cast

Key Areas of Discussion



- The text as a colonial novel: Bankimchandra's use of language, using the colonizer's language to write a novel in a subject which was totally Indian
- Documentation of the Bengali gentry and their lifestyle
- His attitude to the patriarchal practices of rural Bengal.
- Man –woman relationship both within and outside marriage: is he just documenting or criticizing.

The New Woman



- Matangini as the New Woman: is she progressive or just an idealized version of Bengali womanhood which idealized wifely suffering?
- How does she compare with the other women in the narrative? Is there a scale of values along which Bankimchandra locates his characters?

Further Reading

- A CONCISE HISTORY OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH BY ARVIND KRISHNA MEHROTRA
- HINDU WIFE, HINDU NATION BY TANIKA SARKAR
- WOMEN AND SOCIAL REFORM IN MODERN INDIA: SUMIT SARKAR AND TANIKA SARKAR , VOLUMES 1 AND 2.