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Dwijendralal Roy's Historical Dramas : Representation of Women

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Abstract
Dwijendralal Roy (1863–1913) emerged in Bengali dramatic literature during the period of Girish Chandra Ghosh's dramatic activity. From the late nineteenth century, educated women in India began to participate in political activities, and this development was also reflected in the Bengali literature of the period. In his nationalist historical dramas written in the first half of the twentieth century, Dwijendralal Roy therefore incorporated the transformation of women within the political context of India. While highlighting a sense of patriotism in his female characters, he also represented traditional gender roles and the development of female identity. This essay discusses how Dwijendral Roy attempted to portray female characters in his historical plays as active, independent, and strong.

Discussion

Dwijendralal Roy (1863–1913) demonstrated exceptional skill in writing historical dramas in Bengali literature. His historical plays— Pratap Singh (1905), Durgadas (1905), Nurjahan (1908), Mewar Patan (1908), Shah Jahan (1909), Chandragupta (1911), and Singhal Vijay (1915)—reached an extraordinary level of popularity, surpassing, in many respects, the historical dramas of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Jatindranath, Girish Chandra Ghosh, and Amritlal Bose. Among these plays, Chandragupta and Singhal Vijay depict the history of the Hindu period, while the remaining works deal with the history of the Rajputs or narratives from the Mughal period. In Rana Pratap Singh, Mewar Patan, and Durgadas, Dwijendralal highlighted the heroism and patriotic ideals of the Rajput community. His dramas depict the decline of a nation caused by the absence of unity around the ideals of justice and truth, as well as the possibility of renewed resurgence through the restoration of unity. At a time when the conflict between Mughal and Rajput powers provided a historical background against which patriotic consciousness in Bengal was taking a pronounced form, Dwijendralal's historical dramas added a new dimension to the patriotic consciousness of Bengali audiences and readers. In Shah Jahan and Nurjahan, he rendered memorable the elements of family and political conflict, hostility, and violence characteristic of the Mughal period. Although Shah Jahan achieved greater popularity through its human appeal, despite both works being artistically successful, Nurjahan did not win the same degree of public affection. In Nurjahan, the conflict between femininity and power is compelling, while in Shah Jahan the tragic conflict between the emperor's paternal affection and longing, and his responsibilities and duties as a ruler, is particularly moving.

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Dwijendralal created the female characters of his historical dramas under the impetus of nationalism. He gave literary expression to the nationalist consciousness that had spread around the anti-Partition movement. It seems that the dramatist Dwijendralal also attempted to compensate, to some extent, for the emotional emptiness caused by the loss of his wife through external excitement and intense activity. The predominance of songs sung by female characters in his historical dramas also bears some evidence of this. In this context, critic Pramathanath Bisi has offered a remarkable observation on the changes in Dwijendralal's creative consciousness –

> "Except for Tarabai, all of his popular historical dramas were created after the death of his wife. From the very beginning he had an inclination toward reading plays, watching performances, and writing plays. Yet the distinctive feature of the dramas of this period is that they were written according to the demands of the stage. There may have been several reasons for this. First, there was a demand for performable plays. Second, there was the spread of nationalism resulting from the Partition of Bengal. There may also have been another reason. After the death of his wife, he needed some external excitement to fill the sudden emptiness of his household and mind. It is quite possible that, hoping his close association with the theatre might fill that emptiness, he became increasingly interested in writing plays suitable for the stage."[1]

This suggests that, alongside nationalist enthusiasm, female characters and songs possess particular significance in his historical dramas.

Dwijendralal Roy was born on 19 July 1863 in Krishnanagar, in the Nadia district of present-day West Bengal, India. His father, Kartikeya Chandra Roy (1820–1885), was the Diwan of the Krishnanagar royal family. His home was a gathering place for many distinguished people. Kartikeya Chandra himself was a noted khayal singer and literary figure. This intellectually cultivated environment greatly assisted the development of young Dwijendralal's talent. His mother, Prasannamayi Devi, was a descendant of Advaita Acharya.

When Dwijendralal Roy was born, his family home seemed almost like a gathering of the nine jewels. His father, Kartikeya Chandra Roy, was the Diwan of the Krishnanagar royal family and a renowned singer and writer of classical music. The family enjoyed the affection and patronage of figures such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Ramtanu Lahiri, and Dinabandhu Mitra. In Dinabandhu's Suradhani, Dwijendralal's father is referred to as 'Amatya-Pradhan.' His grandfather Madan Gopal Roy is mentioned in Bharat Chandra's Annadamangal, where Raygunakar describes the court of Maharaja Krishnachandra as 'Rai Bakshi Madan Gopal Mahamati.' This Madan Gopal Roy was Krishnachandra's military commander. These details suggest two things: Dwijendralal's family was aristocratic, and his ancestors were steeped in Vaishnava devotional sentiment as well as martial and royal culture. Perhaps this is why Dwijendralal's kirtan could simultaneously evoke the desire to dance and weep, while also drawing him toward the composition of sword-clashing, music-filled historical dramas.

It was, however, his father who had first begun to move beyond the martial temperament. Apart from his profession, his mind was devoted to melody and language. His works Geetmanjari, Bengali-Hindi songs, and Atmajiban-Charit provide evidence of this inclination. Alongside his studies, Dwijendralal continued to compose poetry and songs and to immerse himself in classical music. While staying in Britain, he wrote a book of poetry in English entitled Lyrics of India. Although Western music initially startled him, he later began to practise it. At the same time, he developed an interest in Scottish-Irish songs and began translating them into his mother tongue. An unusual synthesis emerged—something that also occurred in Rabindranath. Both were well versed in Sanskrit; both, at that age, were deeply attached to Indian music; both were drawn to their mother tongue. Both were also attracted to foreign songs and engaged either in translation or in composing songs influenced by them. The new current that emerged from this process would later transform the structure of Bengali lyrical song.

Dwijendralal Roy passed the Entrance Examination with distinction from Krishnanagar College in 1878 and received a scholarship of ten rupees. He completed his F.A. from the same college and subsequently obtained his B.A. from Hooghly College. In 1884, he completed an M.A. in English from

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Presidency College, Calcutta. In April 1884, he went to England on a government scholarship to study agricultural science. From the Agricultural College and the Agricultural Society there, he obtained the FRAS, MRAC, and MRAS qualifications in agricultural science. He returned to India in 1886 after approximately three years. Consequently, Western influence can be observed in his dramas and songs. Dwijendralal himself acknowledged this. While describing his dramatic career, he expressed his indebtedness to Shakespeare and wrote –

> "After returning from Britain, I repeatedly read Wordsworth and Shakespeare, and I memorized those passages of Shakespeare's plays that I considered the finest poetic passages."[2]

Dwijendralal Roy was one of the five major poets of Bengali literature. He was simultaneously a poet, dramatist, lyricist, and musician, and was also known as D. L. Roy. His celebrated song 'Dhan Dhanye Pushpe Bhara' resounds in his historical play Shah Jahan. Songs such as 'Bangla Amar! Janani Amar! Dhatri Amar! Amar Desh' remain equally popular today. He composed approximately 500 songs, which are known in the Bengali musical world as Dwijendra geeti. He wrote numerous plays, which critics classify into four categories: farce, poetic drama, historical drama, and social drama. Among his notable plays are Ekghare, Kalki-Avatar, Biraha, Sita, Tarabai, Durgadas, Rana Pratap Singh, Mewar Patan, Nurjahan, Shah Jahan, Chandragupta, and Singhal Vijay. Pratap Singh was staged at Star Theatre under the title Rana Pratap.[3] Among his poetry collections, Aryagatha (Parts I and II) and Mand, published during his lifetime, are notable. His famous satirical poem Nandalal remains familiar to Bengali readers and listeners. Nandalal represents an everyday social reality and is therefore highly enjoyable.[4] He was a brilliant figure in the literary and cultural sphere of Bengal.

The study of literature centred on female characters has existed in Bengali literature since the ancient and medieval periods. Even in the Charyapada, we encounter the identity of a female poet. Women in ancient and medieval literature were bound by social and familial customs, and contemporary literature reflected their joys and sorrows within family and society. In the Mangalkavya tradition, this was expressed through the form known as Baromashya.[5] Thus, from antiquity to the medieval period (650–1800 CE, according to Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah), Bengali literature— from Charyapada, Sri Krishnakirtan, Vaishnava Padavali, Mangalkavya, translated literature, literature of the Arakan royal court, and puthi literature to Mymensingh Gitika—repeatedly presented ordinary female characters through various conflicts and experiences. Although women possessed social dignity, they had no independent role. Two principal reasons for this condition were -

1. The absence of widespread female education.
2. Various social and familial customs and superstitions.

In nineteenth-century literature, however, women gradually became more independent through female education and freedom from superstition, a development made possible through the efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. The social reform movements of the nineteenth century created profound social upheaval, and one of their principal objectives was the improvement of women's lives, because social progress was considered impossible without the advancement of women. From Rammohan Roy to Vidyasagar, major issues such as sati, the Kulin system, and widow remarriage were addressed through works including Kulin-Kula-Sarbaswa (1854), Bidhaba Bibaha (1856), Ekei Ki Bole Sabhyata? (1860), Buro Shaliker Ghare Ro (1860), Nil Darpan (1860), and Sadhabar Ekadashi (1866), which portrayed women's social condition.

Dinabandhu Mitra's Nil Darpan (1860) expressed a sense of national consciousness in the Bengali public mind, and the play also revealed the tragic social condition of women.[7] The first National Theatre in Bengal (1872) was established on the basis of Nil Darpan. Later, in 1873, the participation of four female actresses— Jagattarini, Elokeshi, Gopalsundari, and Shyamsundari—through the Bengal Theatre, and the public appearance of these courtesan actresses alongside respectable gentlemen, deeply challenged Bengali society.[8] Before the Partition of Bengal, women characters in Jyotirindranath Tagore's Kinchit Jalayog (1872), Amritlal Bose's Bibaha-Bibhrat (1887), Babu (1893), Girish Chandra Ghosh's Prafulla (1888), Rabindranath Tagore's Raja O Rani (1889), and Bisarjan (1890) increasingly sought to establish their rights and dignity and, when necessary, stepped beyond the domestic sphere. Women were also participating in literary activities alongside men. In the latter half of the nineteenth

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century, the journal Banga Mahila was being managed by women, and books by four female writers were published through it; one of them, Kaminisundari Devi, also wrote plays. Such developments had not been seen in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although women faced numerous obstacles in education and social advancement, some aristocratic families of the period were able to embrace new ideas and consciousness, among them the Tagore family.

The seeds of nationalism had existed in Bengali literature from the early nineteenth century. In the writings of Ishwar Gupta and Rangalal Bandyopadhyay, one could hear a note of hostility toward the British and love for the homeland. This current later became more developed in literature. From the late nineteenth century, a section of women from educated aristocratic families became involved in women's emancipation movements and nationalist movements. At the fifth session of the Indian National Congress (1889), five women representatives, including Swarnakumari Ghosal, Rammabai, Kadambini Ganguly, Bidya Gourileelakantha, and Srimati Nikash, participated. Women played an important role in the Partition of Bengal movement. Dwijendralal Roy belonged to this particular social milieu. Influenced by the newly developing self-consciousness and individuality that he observed among educated aristocratic women, he constructed his female characters.

The Partition of Bengal (1905) was taking effect when Dwijendralal was composing his historical dramas. In 1906, Bal Gangadhar Tilak established the Shivaji Festival. People took to the streets in protest against the Partition of Bengal. Dwijendralal wrote his historical dramas amid this turbulent situation. At the same time, Girish Ghosh and Kshirodprasad Vidyabinod were also writing patriotic historical dramas. Kshirodprasad's Chand Bibi (1907), Nandakumar (1908), and Palashir Prayashchitta (1907) were written in response to the political emotions of the period. This indicates that Dwijendralal composed his dramas amid considerable competition. One of the reasons for their success on the stage was the construction of female characters that corresponded to the spirit of the age.[11]

In 1905, against the background of the Partition of Bengal movement, Dwijendralal Roy wrote Pratap Singh, drawing upon James Tod's narratives of Rajasthan. One of the three notable female characters in this play is Ira. Ira is essentially a fictional creation of the drama and becomes a symbol of an ideological position. In Ira, humanity, altruism, and universal love are more prominent than patriotism. These qualities repeatedly emerge through her character. Some have also suggested that Ira anticipates the character of Manasi in the later play Mewar Patan. The other two significant female characters are Mehrunnisa and Daulatunnisa. These two characters are opposites. While Daulatunnisa is steady and unwavering, Mehrunnisa is lively and outspoken, and both are attracted to Shaktisingh. Ultimately, however, Mehrunnisa approaches her father with an anxious heart to plead for the marriage of Shaktisingh and Daulat. From a rational perspective, Mehrunnisa appears in the play as a luminous example of humanity. The dramatist's higher ideals elevate these characters beyond ordinary flesh-and-blood figures.

A few months before the publication of Mewar Patan in 1905, another historical drama by Dwijendralal Roy, Nurjahan, had been published. In the history of Bengali drama, Nurjahan is regarded as the first fully successful tragic female character. Many had previously attempted to portray the tragedy of women, but few achieved the same degree of success as Dwijendralal.[13] Although the dramatist primarily relied on history in constructing this character, a close reading of the entire play shows that he retained the historical framework while colouring Nurjahan's character with considerable imaginative invention. Nurjahan is not merely the supreme ruler of India; she is also a vulnerable woman wounded by the conflict between emotion and conscience. The extent to which the pain of deprivation makes her intense and agitated is captured in Dr. Ajit Kumar Ghosh's assessment: throughout Nurjahan, we seem to witness the open movement of an angry storm.[14] Nurjahan herself is also aware of her deviations and shortcomings, as revealed through several of her dialogues in the play.

Alongside Nurjahan, the dramatist created the character of Reba as a contrasting figure. Although Reba is an empress of India, she is capable of renouncing the honour and power of sovereignty. She is even prepared to give everything to Nurjahan. Therefore, Reba says to Nurjahan -

> "Listen, Meher! If you wish, you can become Empress. Not merely any empress— the chief Begum, the Empress of India, bearing the very honour that I carry today."[15]

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Nurjahan is astonished by Reba's self-sacrifice and indifference toward power. Where Nurjahan is ambitious and desirous of power, Reba is the dramatist's self-sacrificing, contrasting female character. Through the construction of these contrasting characters, the dramatist primarily attempted to reveal the flaws and inconsistencies of Nurjahan's character. Dwijendralal Roy could not support this kind of female ambition. Her tragic fate in Nurjahan suggests this.

Through another female character, Laila, the dramatist further clarifies the conventional position of women—that a woman is expected to remain confined to her home and household rather than govern an empire. This becomes especially clear through Laila's final statement in Nurjahan, spoken while standing beside her husband and mother –

> "Come, Mother; come, my husband. Let me wash the wounds of your sorrow with the tears of my sympathy. This is a daughter's duty. This is a woman's realm."[16]

Through Laila's statement, the dramatist sought to convey the limitations and conventional sphere of women's lives. According to Paramashree Dasgupta, the final two lines of Laila's statement are particularly significant. In the penultimate line, when Laila says that standing beside her mother and husband is a 'daughter's duty,' the sentence ends with an exclamation mark. In the final line, when this is called a woman's 'realm,' a full stop is used. The dramatist intended to suggest that a woman's fulfilment lies in standing beside close family members, expressing sympathy, and practising self-sacrifice.[17]

This indicates that the dramatist did not intend to challenge the socially sanctioned conventions governing women.

In 1908, Dwijendralal Roy wrote Mewar Patan deliberately, for he himself described the play as 'purpose-oriented.'[18] His aim in this drama was to foreground the principle of universal love. For this reason, he conceived Kalyani, Satyabati, and Manasi respectively as embodiments of conjugal love, national love, and universal love. It may be inferred that the dramatist was sufficiently conscious of the shortcomings and internal defects of the Swadeshi movement. He therefore gave greater prominence to universal love than to communal or patriotic love. In this play, humanity was placed above patriotism. This suggests that the character of Manasi was created in order to formulate the dramatist's own position within the context of the Swadeshi movement.

Drawing upon the conventional consciousness of women represented in Nurjahan, the dramatist created Jahanara in Shah Jahan (1909). He endowed this character with a form of heroism appropriate to the age. Jahanara is rational, resolute, impatient, and morally conscious. She lacks Nurjahan's ambition; rather, Jahanara represents a benevolent form of womanhood. Caring for, protecting, and showing sympathy toward her father Shah Jahan appear to be the central purposes of her life—what critics have described as 'feminine tenderness and affection.'[19] This constitutes the conventional gender identity of women that was absent in Nurjahan.

The other characters in this play were also, to varying degrees, created from the same conventional conception of womanhood. Another notable character is Piara, Suja's wife. She shines through conjugal love, chastity, and devotion. A truly loving woman, Piara restrains Suja, who is consumed by war and wounded pride, from remaining absorbed in the intoxication of battle. Suja understands this and says, 'She makes me forget my thoughts of war.'[20] Piara is fully conscious of this tendency. Yet when the King of Arakan demands Piara in exchange for granting Suja shelter, Piara urges him to fight and, like a heroic woman, declares that she will remain beside her husband and that they will face death together.

In Shah Jahan, the character of Mahamaya appears as a symbolic representation of Rajput history. Mahamaya is the wife of Yashwant Singh, ruler of Jodhpur. This heroic woman could not tolerate the return of her husband after his defeat in battle. She therefore closed the fort gates and prevented him from entering, because welcoming a defeated husband was contrary to the ideal of a Rajput woman. Through the name Mahamaya, Dwijendralal seems to have symbolically identified the Motherland in an embodied form. The portrayal of Mahamaya's Rajput courage was intentional and emerged from Dwijendralal Roy's patriotic consciousness.

Joharatunnisa is Dwara's daughter. We repeatedly encounter Joharat at emotionally charged moments in the play. She is a young girl whose character is consistently marked by exuberance. In the

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third act, third scene, we see Joharat hungry, thirsty, and asleep with her parents in the desert landscape of Rajputana. At the end of the play, the curse that Joharat directs at Aurangzeb reveals her spirited and forceful character.

In Dwijendralal's dramas, female characters sometimes appear loving, sometimes emotional, and at other times speak out in radiant and assertive voices. Thus, the female characters become distinct and spontaneous individuals in their own right.

The use of songs in Bengali literature dates back to the ancient period, beginning with the Charyapada, and has developed continuously in different forms across different periods. The multifaceted intellectual awakening of Bengalis in the nineteenth century, arising from their encounter with Western civilisation, produced this remarkable modern form of song. Instead of merely imitating the established practices of Hindustani raga music, these songs displayed an impulse toward creative composition. The musical exuberance found much earlier in the works of the Vaishnava poets assumed an even more originality-oriented form in Bengali songs during the second half of the nineteenth century. Jyotirindranath Tagore was a major pioneer of this current. Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendralal Roy, Rajanikanta Sen, Atulprasad Sen, and Kazi Nazrul Islam likewise belonged to this contemporary stream of composers. The greatest phase of Bengali song can be witnessed in this period.[21]

In both the West and India, drama has had an intimate relationship with music from the very beginnings of theatrical expression. Music was one of the principal elements of Greek drama. Indian literature, too, developed drama through the combination of dance, song, and speech, although the importance and abundance of music in drama declined in later periods.[22] Nevertheless, music retained a place in Western Romantic drama, particularly in the plays of Shakespeare. The relationship between music and Bengali drama is also profound. At the time when Dwijendralal's historical dramas emerged, Bengali theatre was influenced by Jatra, and because Jatra was highly musical, Bengali drama adopted music strongly.[23] In addition, the humid and gentle climate of Bengal naturally encouraged emotionality and a lyrical temperament among Bengalis.

Dwijendralal's Rana Pratap Singh contains a total of nine songs: four sung by Mehrunnisa, two by Reba, one by Prithviraj and the singers, one by an unnamed ascetic, and one by the chorus of performers at the fair. The four songs sung by Mehrunnisa express her mental hesitation and the outward manifestation of love. Her character possesses a tendency toward judgement, and through her voice the triumph of humanity over social and religious convention is celebrated. The first song appears in Act I, Scene VII ('Sitting in the lonely forest, spreading the edge of my garment'); the second in Act II, Scene VI ('The more I bind my heart and resolve not to love him, the more this life falls at his feet'); the third in Act III, Scene II ('Who knew that love was mixed with poison?'); and the fourth in Act V, Scene IV ('Why does that face return again and again to my mind?'). Reba's two songs express the emotional experience of love: the first appears in Act I, Scene V ('O, tell me, do you know where he is, where he is… in the corner of flowers, beside the moon'), and the second in Act V, Scene I ('I love the one whom I love; if he loves me, I shall remain his forever'). An unnamed ascetic sings one song, expressing the joys and sorrows of life; it appears in Act I, Scene II ('Do not speak of happiness anymore').

Durgadas contains a total of thirteen songs: seven sung by Raziya, one by a Baul/ascetic figure, three by dancers, one by villagers, and one by women of the household. Raziya's first and second songs occur in Act III, Scene I ('O Sun, take me with you somewhere, brother' and 'O beloved, what more can I say?'); the third and fourth in Act III, Scene II ('How shall I pass the whole night?' and 'I conceal my heart'); the fifth in Act III, Scene IV ('Dense clouds, come and surround the sky'); the sixth in Act V, Scene III ('Come, come, beloved, let us bind our arms together'); and the seventh in Act V, Scene VII ('Why should the southern breeze blow any longer?'). The dancers' first song appears in Act III, Scene VIII ('Ah, how sweetly it reigns'), the second in Act IV, Scene IV ('If you have come, then come, please, beloved'), and the third in Act V, Scene I ('Blue sky, moonlight, O stars!'). A song sung by the women of the household appears in Act IV, Scene II ('Go, chaste one, go to your husband'). None of the songs in this play is properly connected with the central conflict of the plot. Raziya, the daughter of Aurangzeb, sings the largest number of songs; six of her songs are songs of grief. Her character has little connection with the main flow of events, and the songs likewise have little dramatic value. Most of the remaining songs are sung by dancers and similarly possess limited dramatic significance. It may

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be said that songs were used in this play largely from the perspective that the drama would not feel complete without music.[24]

Nurjahan contains a total of ten songs. The first is a duet by Laila and Khadija in Act I, Scene I ('O incomparable, eternally enchanting one, beautiful abode of melody'). Laila sings two solos, one in Act I, Scene VI ('Why does the rain fall, O dark-hued one, as the clouds pour?') and the other in Act III, Scene VI ('What arrow has pierced my heart?'). Khadija also has two solos, one in Act III, Scene I ('Why is the moon so beautiful?') and the other in Act I, Scene V ('He is entirely mine, yet somehow he is not mine'). The dancers sing three songs together, including one in Act II, Scene VI ('Today, adorned with new jewels and ornaments'), and two in Act IV, Scene II ('The drum beats with a deep roar' and 'We come floating along just as we are'). Nurjahan is one of Dwijendralal's notable historical dramas. Music does not play a major role here either. There are songs by the dancers, songs by Khadija, and a song by Laila, the daughter of Meherunnisa/Nurjahan. Laila's song expresses her inner anguish and is therefore connected with the dramatic conflict. There is also a relationship between the song and Laila's transformation through Meherunnisa into Nurjahan. Khadija's song expresses her personal emotional state and has no direct connection with the plot. The dancers' songs are entertainment songs, yet they contain an indication of Nurjahan's cruelty; in this sense, they possess some functional value within the drama.

Mewar Patan contains a total of eleven songs, six of them sung by Manasi. The first appears in Act I, Scene VI ('Come, come in the guise of a beggar'); the second in Act II, Scene II ('The whole world is beautiful and thrilled at your sight'); the third in Act II, Scene I ('In love, a person loses himself'); the fourth in Act IV, Scene I ('Unseen, light plays upon her face'); the fifth in Act V, Scene I ('How much I love her, yet it was never said'); and the sixth in Act V, Scene VIII ('Why do you grieve, brother?'). Satyabati and her chorus have two songs: the first in Act I, Scene II ('The hills of Mewar, the hills of Mewar'), and the second in Act V, Scene VI ('The enchantment of my dream has been broken'). The women celebrating the Holi festival sing one collective song in Act IV, Scene I ('A new wind has risen; come, let it move').

Among these songs, the songs expressing Indian national feeling and patriotic emotion possess the greatest value. They are sung by Satyabati and the chorus. Because they were written against the background of the Partition of Bengal movement, they became highly popular at the time. The songs of Mewar Patan possess not only dramatic value but also considerable artistic quality. A remarkable harmony between words and melody can be observed, and the songs are also closely related to the dramatic progression. Songs such as 'Mewar Pahar,' 'The Enchantment of My Dream Has Been Broken,' and 'The Country Is Gone, Yet There Is No Grief' are sung by Satyabati and the chorus. These songs are also accomplished poetry in language, rhythm, ornamentation, and subtle imagination.

Shah Jahan contains a total of nine songs, five of them solo songs sung by Piara, Suja's wife. The first appears in Act I, Scene III ('The desire of this life has not been fulfilled'); the second in Act II, Scene IV ('For the sake of happiness I built this home'); the third and fourth in Act III, Scene II ('I sat throughout the whole morning' and 'With what have you bound and held my heart?'); and the fifth in Act IV, Scene I ('Friend, who heard the name of Shyam?'). The chorus of female singers has one song in Act I, Scene IV ('Where he has gone to battle'). The dancers have one in Act II, Scene I ('Today I have come, I have come, O beloved'). The adorned courtesans have one in Act III, Scene IV ('The day passes away').

Dwijendralal created the character of Piara with complete freedom. In the play, we meet Piara as Suja's second wife. Suja says of her, 'Piara is a fountain of laughter—a river of meaningless words.'[25] Piara's songs are like wine to Suja; her singing makes him forget everything else. Through this ahistorical character, the dramatist gave free expression to his own love of music. In the way Piara is portrayed, there is a close correspondence between the songs sung by her and the dramatic progression of the play. Although the songs slow the movement of the drama to some extent, they add a particular sensibility and are highly consistent with the character.

A review of Dwijendralal's historical dramas shows that songs are used most extensively in female characters' voices. The following table presents the percentage of songs sung by female characters in five of his historical dramas -

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Play	Total Songs	Songs in Female Voices	Female Voice Percentage	Songs in Male Voices	Male Voice Percentage
Pratap Singh	9	7	77.78%	2	22.22%
Durgadas	13	11	84.62%	2	15.38%
Nurjahan	10	8	80%	2	20%
Mewar Patan	11	9	81.82%	2	18.18%
Shah Jahan	9	8	88.89%	1	11.11%

Dwijendralal Roy composed his historical dramas around the 'Partition of Bengal Movement' (1905). Yet female characters possess particular significance in his historical dramas.

1. "From the time of his return from Britain in 1886 until the death of his wife in 1913, the creative diversity visible in his writings was largely absent during the final ten years of his life (1903–1913)."[26] Nevertheless, toward the end of his life he particularly stimulated his dramatic talent, as demonstrated by a play such as Nurjahan. Moreover, an examination of the female characters in historical dramas such as Pratap Singh (1905), Durgadas (1905), Mewar Patan (1908), and Shah Jahan (1909) suggests how profoundly the death of his wife influenced Dwijendralal Roy.

2. It may be said that, before Dwijendralal Roy began writing historical dramas, Bengali dramatic literature was already experiencing a strong current of plays centred on female characters. Madhusudan, for example, wrote plays based on mythological and historical women, such as Sharmistha (1859), Padmavati (1860), and Krishnakumari (1861). Later, Girish Chandra wrote outstanding social dramas centred on women, such as Prafulla (1889). Through these plays, dramatists presented the social problems of their time to readers on a broader canvas. Dwijendralal Roy's historical dramas were no exception. Through his historical plays, Dwijendralal sought to present, alongside patriotism, various woman-centred images of the Motherland, and it may be inferred that through songs sung by women he attempted to make his female characters active, distinctive, and strong.

In Bengali dramatic literature, the two dramatists who came after Dinabandhu Mitra and Girish Chandra Ghosh and were contemporaries of Rabindranath were Dwijendralal Roy and Kshiroprasad Vidyabinod. Although both enjoyed considerable fame in Bengali drama, Dwijendralal Roy was one of its foremost figures. Dwijendralal entered Bengali theatre during the period when Girish Chandra was writing social dramas. The foundation of Dwijendralal's reputation as a dramatist lay primarily in his historical dramas.

The position of women in society during and before the nineteenth century has already been discussed above. Before the nineteenth century, women were not generally conscious of their education, social status, or independence. In the first half of the nineteenth century, however, with the support of some socially progressive men, women began to speak out in order to open paths toward dignity and education; by the latter half of the century, women were participating in various social activities and even in nationalist movements. By the twentieth century, at every stage of the women's emancipation movement, women increasingly struggled to establish their identities and achieve self-realization, and women's rights were increasingly recognized alongside those of men. Yet this path was not easy. At different times, various literary figures attempted through their writing to establish women's dignity in society. Dwijendralal was one of them.

In a nineteenth-century patriarchal society that sought to determine what women should write and how they should write, writers who followed the prevailing ideals received greater acceptance. Dwijendralal therefore constructed his female characters according to the broader ideal of humanity so that they would not directly challenge the social order of the time, while still challenging its conception of patriotism. His female characters did not break the socially protected notion of femininity; rather, they moved within the limited space that society allowed women. Dwijendralal fully supported women's participation in nationalist movements and their political thought, while remaining conscious

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of the socially defined concept of femininity. As a result, his female characters display a combination and balance of heroism and femininity that was socially acceptable. In the context of that period, this may be regarded as relatively progressive. Because high ideals and emotions form the core of his dramas, many of Dwijendralal's female characters are idealized. This constitutes a distinctive feature and significant achievement of his construction of women characters.

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